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Seven Against Mage: Darius and His Co-Conspirators

In this article, we will focus on the turbulent year 522 BC, when Darius the Great became the King of the Achaemenid Empire. His ascension to the throne was not a simple hereditary matter, as he had to depose the impostor King, false Bardiya, and face many rebellions across the Empire. Darius eventually prevailed, but he was not alone in the rebellion, as he received help from six other Persian noblemen. We will study three sources that describe these events: the Behistun inscription by Darius, Herodotus' Histories, and Ctesias' Persica. The core of the story does not change much, but each one of the sources brings new details to the narrative. Our main goal will be to compare the lists of the nobles who helped Darius and how their roles (or even the conspirators themselves) changed throughout the sources.

Keywords: Achaemenid Empire, Behistun inscription, Herodotus, Ctesias, Darius, Gaumāta

1. Introduction

After the death of the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, Cyrus the Great, in 530 BC, his son Cambyses succeeded him on the throne. His younger brother, Bardiya, ruled in the north-eastern part of the Empire. Cambyses led the expedition to Egypt and was outside of the core of the Empire for several years. During this time, a revolt, starting in March 522 BC, took place there and Cambyses hurried back to suppress the rebellion, but he was injured on his thigh while travelling and died in Syria. His younger brother became the King in 522 BC. Bardiya, at that time impersonated by one of the Magi, ruled only for several months. His rule is described variously in the sources – either as good, or as a

rule of chaos and the Lie.¹ After only seven months, seven noble Persians went to the palace of the Mage and killed him. Out of the seven conspirators, Darius was the one who became the King afterwards. This is the core of the story, which appears in all sources, but there are many unknowns in the overall picture of that year. The sources disagree on certain details and a shroud of mystery and folktales later made their way into the narrative. Before we proceed to the lists of conspirators, we need to dive deeper into the chaotic year 522 BC.

Early in the year Cambyses was still campaigning in Egypt, but his rule lasting for eight years was going to end soon, as he died while travelling back to Persia. His death was an accident, although Herodotus puts it as a kind of divine retribution.² His younger brother, Bardiya, is more problematic person in the sources. Firstly, his name appears in several different forms. Bardiya is the original Old Persian variant of the name.³ In the Greek environment his name has many forms. Herodotus calls him Smerdis,⁴ Ctesias Tanyoxarces,⁵ other authors use derivatives of these two names such as Tanaoxares, Mardos, and Mergis.⁶ In modern literature scholars use both Bardiya and Smerdis following the Old Persian or Herodotus' model.

Bardiya's life before his ascension to the throne is almost not attested. He was appointed by Cyrus to be a governor in the eastern part of the Empire. His fate is also a matter of question. All sources agree that

¹ Herodotus describes a benevolent rule of Bardiya (Hdt. 3, 67) towards the subjects of the Empire (excluding Persians), while Darius, obviously, portrays him in an extremely unfavourable light (DB § 13–14). Aeschylus follows Darius' example (*A. Pers.* 774–775).

² As one can expect from Herodotus, divine and dreams play a part in the life of Cambyses. His brother went with him to Egypt, where Bardiya was able to draw a bow, while Cambyses failed to do so, then he promptly sent his brother back to Susa. Later, Cambyses had a dream, in which his brother was the ruler of the Empire and ordered his execution out of fear. Cambyses was also injured on the same spot, where he stabbed the sacred bull of Apis.

³ For example, DB § 10.

⁴ Hdt. 3, 30sqq.

⁵ Phot. *Bibl.* 72 § 8.

⁶ Tanaoxares is mentioned by Xenophon (*X. Cyr.* 8, 7, 11), Mardos by Aeschylus (*A. Pers.* 774), and Mergis by Justin (*Just. Epit.* 1, 9).

he was killed on the orders of his brother,⁷ but the real perpetrator is unknown. In Darius' version of the events, which the Greek sources follow to a high degree, a Mage impersonates Bardiya. However, this happens only after Bardiya is murdered by his brother Cambyses.⁸ The death of Bardiya is somehow kept secret and not even the governors and many courtiers are aware of it, let alone public. At this point, shortly before the death of Cambyses, the impostor enters the scene. The fake Bardiya deceives everyone into believing that he is the real son of Cyrus, which prompts Cambyses to return, only to die along the way. Just like in the case of Bardiya, this impostor has several different names in the sources. In the original Old Persian, he is known as Gaumāta, a Magian.⁹ He rebelled in March 522 BC in the city Paišiyauvādā and was killed by Darius in late September in fort Sikayauvatiš,¹⁰ located in Nisaea, a region famous for its horses. Darius does not give us much information about the Mage, he is simply an impostor, who claims that he is indeed Bardiya and a rightful king of the Empire.

The Greek sources give more detailed (and more fantastic) descriptions of the events. Herodotus mentions two Mages, who took advantage of the killing of real Smerdis. The first one, named Patizeithes, who was left in Persia to run the household of Cambyses, perceived, that King's brother was killed and convinced his own brother, also named Smerdis, who was Bardiya's look-alike, to rebel against Cambyses and to rule in the name of Smerdis. The revolt started, Cambyses

⁷ See BRIANT (2002: 98–99) for the variants of the narrative.

⁸ There are several accounts of how the murder was achieved. Darius does not give any details; Herodotus mentions a hunting accident near Susa or drowning in the Erythraean Sea (Hdt. 3, 30). In *Persica*, Tanyoxarces is poisoned with bull's blood (Phot. *Bibl.* 72 § 10).

⁹ The term Magus (μάγος) refers to the priests in Zoroastrianism, trained in 'anything connected to religious matters' (X. *Cyr.* 8, 3, 11). In the Greek sources, the word later gained negative connotations as a practitioner of magic, a magician/mage in the modern English language. Magians themselves were also a Median tribe according to Herodotus (Hdt. 1, 101), which could explain why the Mage set up his palace in Media. Also, in the Akkadian part of the inscription, Gaumāta is specifically identified as a Mede (DB § 10).

¹⁰ DB § 11–14. The only Greek source with the name derived from Gaumāta is Justin (Just. *Epit.* 1, 9) – Gaumāta appears as Cometes in his work.

died on the way back to Persia, as he knew the truth, and Smerdis ruled for several months exempting many tribes across the Empire from military service and taxes.¹¹ Ctesias pushes the plot even further. In his narrative, a Mage named Sphendadates was flogged by the younger son of Cyrus after some offence and started to plot against him. He eventually convinced Cambyses to kill his own brother and then the Mage started to pose as him, Tanyoxarces in Ctesias' work, since he looked very similar in appearance. Unlike in other sources, the Mage used disguise after the consultation with Cambyses. After Cambyses died, the Mage ruled in Tanyoxarces' name with the help of several eunuchs.¹² In the Greek sources, Gaumāta uses a disguise to act as Bardiya with some elaborate plan, which is not explicitly mentioned in the Behistun inscription. There are also differences in the chronology, when the killing of real Bardiya took place¹³ and when Bardiya was proclaimed the King.¹⁴

The disguise of the Mage worked perfectly for some time¹⁵ until his secret was inevitably revealed. The sources differ again in the case of revelation, also in the depiction of the killing of the Mage, and the events surrounding it. Darius does not give us many details, as his description is, to say, insufficient. We do not know, how Gaumāta was revealed to be the impostor, his rule is described as tyrannical, and only after several months Darius is chosen by Ahura-Mazda to depose the Mage, which he does with help of six other nobles. We will return to the problems surrounding Darius' version later.

¹¹ Hdt. 3, 61–67.

¹² Phot. *Bibl.* 72 § 11–13. The powerful role of eunuchs over the kings is a recurring theme in *Persica*. See LENFANT (2012).

¹³ Darius states that Bardiya had been killed before Cambyses went to Egypt (DB § 10), in *Histories* Bardiya was in Egypt for some time and was killed only after his brother had sent him back (Hdt. 3, 30), in Ctesias' account the murder took place before the Egyptian campaign (Phot. *Bibl.* 72 § 10). Justin even puts the murder and impersonation after the death of Cambyses (Just. *Epit.* 1, 9).

¹⁴ See BRIANT (2002: 101–103) for the problems surrounding the chronology of the events.

¹⁵ The murder was kept secret because the kings lived isolated in their palace (Just. *Epit.* 1, 9, 11). The sheer improbability of this long-lasting deception (the Mage was even able to fool the wives of real Smerdis) puts another unknown into the narrative of Darius and Greek sources.

A much more colourful story of Herodotus has very surprisingly a different protagonist. In his narrative, a Persian noble Otanes is the main conspirator against Smerdis and not Darius, who is, in fact, the last one to join the plot. It was the daughter of Otanes, Phaedyme, one of the wives of Smerdis, who noticed, that Smerdis is the impostor since he had no ears.¹⁶ Otanes invited Aspathines and Gobryas for a discussion, each one of them later brought one conspirator to their ranks. Darius joined them as the last one, but soon became the most vocal one. They entered the palace of Smerdis without any difficulties and carried out the killing. The following events are also at odds with Darius' version. According to Herodotus, The Seven had a meeting shortly after Smerdis was killed and discussed the future form of government. Otanes proposed a form of democracy, Megabyzus an oligarchy (or an aristocracy), and Darius a monarchy. After four members sided with Darius, they needed to settle who will become the King. They agreed on a competition: the one whose horse will neigh first on the following dawn will become the King. Otanes declined, while six remaining conspirators met the next day. Darius used a trick and became the King of the Achaemenid Empire. While in the Behistun inscription, Darius is an unquestionable leader and future King, Herodotus downplays his importance and adds many details to the events, although the eventual outcome and the main points of the revolt, including the names, stay the same. Main elements of Herodotus' story are rooted in the narrative of the Behistun inscription.

Ctesias' version is unfortunately not complete because his work is lost. The summary by Photius offers us a story similar to the one by Herodotus. Next to the problems with chronology and the role of eunuchs, the only difference is how the Mage was exposed. Here, one of the eunuchs told the whole army stationed in Persis the truth. The following events are the same as in *Histories*. The Seven attack the Mage in his palace, kill him, and Darius becomes the King after the morning meeting when his horse neighs first.¹⁷

¹⁶ A punishment issued by Cyrus (Hdt. 3, 69).

¹⁷ Phot. *Bibl.* 72 § 11–15.

Now that we know the outline of the events, we can proceed to the main topic of this article – the lists of the Seven.¹⁸ We have seen that the sources contain notable differences in the narrative, and the lists are no exception. In the next three chapters, we will examine each one of the sources and their lists. We will advance chronologically with the Behistun inscription as the first, continue with *Histories*, and end with *Persica*. It should be noted that each of the sources has its fair share of problems, and we may never know the truth surrounding the events of year 522 BC. From Darius' one-sided account and self-promotion to the Greek sources infused with folk stories and sometimes contradictions to the Behistun inscription we are left in a tough spot, because trusting Darius may not be wise, but Greek authors have their agenda as well.

2. Behistun inscription

This monument is located near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran. It was created by Darius shortly after his ascension around the year 520 BC. The trilingual text¹⁹ commemorates Darius' victory over Bardiya and various other rebels across the Empire, but it justifies Darius' right to the throne as well. It is the first and the longest of the Achaemenid inscriptions.²⁰ The first part deals with the ancestors of Darius before we get to know how he became the King. Most of the text then focuses on the revolts and usurpers across the Empire and how Darius successfully defeated them. The text itself is in some parts very problematic – Darius was personally involved in these affairs, but we cannot expect unbiased account and we get to know only the victor's point of view. The list of the seven conspirators as presented by him should be the most trustworthy one, although Darius could freely change the overall course of the events in his narration. When it comes to his helpers, he could possibly omit someone who was later a threat to him and we know one such an example from the Greek sources, but the conspirator, In-

¹⁸ For general studies of the lists and the conspirators see for example GSCHNITZER (1977); WIESEHÖFER (1978: 168–174); BRIANT (2002: 128–137); LENFANT (1996: 373–379); LENFANT (2004: LXXVII–LXXX).

¹⁹ Texts are in Elamite, Akkadian, and Old Persian.

²⁰ See ROSSI (2021) or KUHRT (2007: 10–11) for a general introduction to the Achaemenid inscriptions.

taphernes in this case, nevertheless appears in the inscription. While a deliberate omission of a certain individual is a possibility, the list of names mentioned by Darius should be accepted as the most trustworthy one. However, the involvement of other conspirators is heavily toned down and we will see the alternative stories in the Greek sources. Darius possibly did not even need to omit someone and change the conspirators, as he already reduced the power of other nobles and made them his followers in his narration. Darius mentions that some others helped him against Bardiya without giving any further details at first,²¹ only towards the end of the text he names those six nobles.²² He also states that the families of these men should be protected by the following rulers.²³ Save for the names we cannot gather much information from the text. Darius simply mentions the names of his followers (for he is the leader, the King, the chosen one), the names of their fathers, and that they are of Persian origin. In accordance with the Old Persian text, we will write the Persian forms of the names in this chapter with the Greek variants for Darius' relatives in brackets.²⁴

Dārayavauš – Darius does not go to great lengths when describing his ancestry and his person in general. His father was Vištāspa (Hystaspes), governor of Parthia, his grandfather was Aršāma (Arsames), the Achaemenid.²⁵ He then goes all the way back to Haxamaniš (Achaemenes), the mythical ancestor of the Persian kings. He is related to Cyrus the Great and his sons, because Cišpiš (Teispes), son of Achaemenes had two sons. Cyrus II belonged to one line, Darius to the other one. It is not very surprising that Darius' sparse details raise suspicion in the eyes of modern scholars. The lineage as presented by Darius is very likely fabricated,²⁶ nevertheless, it gives Darius the right to the throne, all the more, when he was supported by Ahura-Mazda. It is hard to imagine,

²¹ DB § 13.

²² DB § 68.

²³ DB § 69.

²⁴ For the Greek rendition of Persian names see SCHMITT (2011).

²⁵ DB § 1.

²⁶ BRIANT (2002: 110–111); FRYE (2005); WATERS (2004); SANCISI-WEERDENBURG (1995: 1038sqq); WIESEHÖFER (1978: 186). Also see STRONACH (1997) for other inscriptions issued by Darius.

that there was no one else in the whole family, who would not have closer ties to the family of Cyrus, because Darius would have been a distant relative of him, even if his lineage was real. Also, his father and even his grandfather were alive in 522 BC, but they were ignored in hereditary matters. As it appears, Darius simply created his lineage after he deposed Bardiya, real or not, to cement his right to rule, but as we will see, the Greek sources completely undermine his claims (it is not that they should be regarded as correct and trustworthy either).²⁷

We have already discussed what led to the rule of Darius above. Darius was the only one who was willing to oppose the false king Gaumāta, although the Greek sources contain alternative stories. With the help of Ahura-Mazda and six noble followers he challenged the Mage for the throne since Darius should be, as presented by the text, the rightful king of the Empire, which was taken away from his family by the usurper with no claim.²⁸ In the case of the Seven, Darius is the supreme lord, others are merely his followers, not a single one of them has any chance to become the King (contrary to what we know from the Greek sources). Problematic is also the insufficient description of Darius' rise to power, as he leaves many questions unanswered, and it looks like he omits some facts from his narrative.²⁹ Since he was victorious in the chaotic era after the death of Cambyses, he needed to link his person and his rule to the founders of the Empire. His sketchy lineage and a claim to the throne are combined with the mysterious figure of the Mage Gaumāta and instead of getting answers we would start to ask: Why did Cambyses kill his brother? Who was this Mage? How did he access the throne and fool everyone? What exactly happened to real Bardiya? The scholars started to question this account, and, in a twist, Darius could be

²⁷ Only Justin (*Just. Epit.* 1, 10) states that he was related to the royal family.

²⁸ In the end, there are two possibilities: Darius is telling the truth (and the Greek sources follow his narrative with some tweaks), or he is lying – Gaumāta was his creation and Darius was not the rightful king. SCHWINGHAMMER (2021: 418).

²⁹ See KIPP (2001: 186–229) or BRIANT (2002: 97–106) for the diverse views on the credibility of Darius.

the usurper himself, when he revolted against real Bardiya and retrospectively created a figure of the Mage.³⁰

The text itself is full of usurpers, Gaumāta is not an exception, he is not even the only one who claimed to be real Bardiya.³¹ There are more persons who claimed that they are sons or descendants of previous kings, for example, the Mede Phraortes (Fravartiš), who lied³² that he is the son of Cyaxares, the Persian Martiya, who rebelled in Elam, and two subsequent kings posing as Nebuchadnezzars, sons of Nabonidus, who rebelled in Babylon.³³ The rebellions started right after Darius killed Gaumāta. If Darius killed the despised tyrant, why would many parts of the Empire have revolted against him instead of showing him gratitude? The answer may lie in *Histories*, as Herodotus asserts that the revolt against the Mage was specifically a Persian affair³⁴ and even Persians themselves were not united as the revolts against Darius in Elam and Persis show. We can also imagine that many other nobles were not impressed by Darius' claim to the throne and were actively trying to rule themselves or to break away from the still recently founded Empire. On the other hand, even if Darius was the usurper, he already had many governors on his side since several of them helped him to crush the opposition.³⁵ There could be a wider circle of conspirators against the sons of Cyrus, not only seven brave men killing an impostor, but other factions existed as well.

Several elements of the inscription are heavily inspired by older ones, most notably the stele of Naram-Sin. Darius follows his example and similar motifs (nine rebels defeated in one year, iconography, etc.) are found in both inscriptions, while the fight against liar appears in the

³⁰ See DANDAMAEV (1989: 83–94); BALCER (1987: 150–166); SHAYEGAN (2006); DEMANDT (2004).

³¹ A Persian named Vahyazdāta rebelled against Darius directly in Persia itself after he proclaimed himself to be Bardiya, son of Cyrus (DB § 40).

³² All the rebels are liars as is stated in the inscription. See SCHWINGHAMMER (2021) for more details.

³³ The complete list of nine usurpers is mentioned in DB §52. For two Babylonians see ZAWADZKI (1994).

³⁴ See note 1; Herodotus' discussion of the nobles (Hdt 3, 67sqq).

³⁵ WATERS (2014: 69).

inscription by Nabopolassar.³⁶ Possibly the number of the conspirators is not a coincidence, as it could be symbolic only. There was a long-lasting tradition of the importance of seven throughout the sources.³⁷ While seven conspirators could indeed carry the killing of the Mage in person,³⁸ from the description it looks like Darius had many generals and governors loyal to him even before they attacked the Mage as we have discussed above. To briefly end Darius' role, it looks like he was one of the ambitious nobles, who tried to become the King of the Empire in an extremely chaotic period. The Empire was at the deciding point, will it belong to the sons of Cyrus (and the Achaemenid family if we trust Darius' lineage), or another noble Persian family (if we disregard Darius' lineage), or will it be even the Empire of Persians (rebels and various usurpers across the Empire)?

Vindafarnā – son of Vāyaspāra. He was sent by Darius to reconquer Babylon. In November, Vindafarnā defeated the rebel named Arakha, who posed as Nebuchadnezzar IV and was crucified after his defeat.³⁹ Vindafarnā is also depicted on the monument as Darius' bow-carrier, thus he had one of the most prestigious positions within the Empire.

Utāna – son of Thukhra. No further information.

Gaubaruva – son of Marduniya. After Elam revolted, Gaubaruva was sent by Darius to recapture the province, which he easily did. The leader of the revolt was executed.⁴⁰ Gaubaruva is depicted on the monument as Darius' lance-carrier (*arštibara*), one of the highest ranks within the Empire. He is depicted in the same position on Darius' tomb.⁴¹ He is also mentioned in the Persepolis fortification tablets several times.⁴² From the sources we can deduce that Gaubaruva was the second most important person in the Empire, Darius' most trusted helper.⁴³

³⁶ WATERS (2014: 73–75). For more information on the influences on Darius' monument see ROOT (1979: 202–226).

³⁷ KONSTANTOPOULOS (2015: 15–18).

³⁸ See BRIANT (2002: 113) for the possible battle outcome.

³⁹ DB § 50.

⁴⁰ DB § 71.

⁴¹ DNC. There we have a mention of his origin (a tribe) – Patišuvariš (Patischorian).

⁴² PF 353; 688; 1153; 1219.

⁴³ See Gobryas in the chapter focusing on Herodotus.

Vidarna – son of Bagābigna. He was sent by Darius to crush the rebel Phraortes (Fravartiš), who revolted in Media. Vidarna fought in the battle against him in January 521 BC, although the decisive point was the battle of Kundurush in May and Phraortes was not captured until June of that year.⁴⁴

Bagabuxša – son of Dātuva. No further information.

Ardumaniš – son of Vakauka. No further information.

3. Herodotus

As we have already seen, the narrative of Herodotus is much more detailed than the one of Darius. It is also different in some parts: Cambyses supposedly killed his brother out of jealousy, the Mage is a look-alike of Smerdis (he even has the same name), there are two Mages involved in the plot, the rule of the Mage is not tyrannical or bad, Darius is not the leading conspirator, the unlikely discussion about the future government took place, and other details. Herodotus wrote his work several decades after the described events, so some folk tales or alternative exaggerated stories were circulating around by that point and appeared in his account. We do not know where exactly Herodotus gathered the information, although the nature of his narrative suggests that it was someone close to the family of Otanes.⁴⁵ Herodotus himself was also born in the Achaemenid Empire, therefore he had the opportunity to meet someone from the court in the western parts of the Empire. Even with all the differences, the list of the Seven is not particularly problematic in the case of Herodotus. There are few inconsistencies compared to the Behistun inscription, but Herodotus mirrors the list itself quite well with one change among the ranks of conspirators, which can be easily explained. Seven conspirators appear in the third book of *Histories*. Naturally, Herodotus uses the Greek variants of the names, by which are the persons known in modern literature, and the names can be traced back to their Persian origin.

Darius – His ascension to the throne is much more complicated in the account of Herodotus. Here, Darius is no longer the undisputed

⁴⁴ DB § 25; 31. See DANDAMAEV (1989: 119–120).

⁴⁵ WATERS (2014: 77).

leader, the one destined to become the King, the one chosen by the god. In *Histories*, Darius became the King more by using a clever trick rather than leading the conspiracy from the beginning. In the Behistun inscription, Darius does not mention his role before his rebellion, while according to Herodotus he was one of the courtiers of Cambyses.⁴⁶ His father, Hystaspes, was a governor of Persia, which is a mistake on Herodotus' part, as Darius states that his father was a governor of Parthia.⁴⁷ We do not know Darius' lineage from *Histories*, so his claims have no power here, he became the King in a rather different way from the Behistun inscription. Darius joined the Seven as the last one after arriving at the meeting in Susa. At that time already, he thought that the Mage was an impostor. Then he urged the others to kill the Mage without any delays, contrary to the cautious approach of Otanes. With the help of Prexaspes, the murderer of real Bardiya, they hurried to the court and managed to kill the Mage. And it was Darius himself who slew him in a dramatic fashion.⁴⁸ Five days after the killing, the Seven met again and in the discussion over the future form of government, Darius proposed keeping the monarchy as the ideal form of rule, as it maintains stability in the Empire. He swayed four other members and the next morning they decided to wait for a divine sign, whose horse will neigh first at sunrise. However, Darius was not going to lose the rule to a random lot. He asked his groom Oebaras for help and with a trick his horse neighed first. Thus, he became the King, which was confirmed by thunder and lightning appearing from the clear sky.⁴⁹

This is the version of the events by Herodotus. While the main outline remains the same, there are notable differences in details. Darius became the King after scheming and for some time he is not the leading conspirator at all. Nevertheless, with his cunningness and determination, he succeeded in taking the throne. Fake Smerdis is also a different

⁴⁶ Hdt. 3, 139. Darius was δορυφόρος, one of the most important roles at the royal court, *arštibara*, a lance-carrier, although Herodotus asserts that he had no important role at that time – he was a 'private person'.

⁴⁷ Hdt. 3, 70. cf. DB § 35.

⁴⁸ Hdt. 3, 70–79.

⁴⁹ Hdt. 3, 80–87.

person from the Behistun inscription. In *Histories*, we have two Mages, one of them was even appointed by Cambyses to run his household in his absence. Smerdis was killed during the Egyptian campaign, but the time is not specified. Nevertheless, everyone is deceived by the Mage for quite a long time.⁵⁰ Fake Smerdis has the same name and the same look as the son of Cyrus, on the other hand, in the Behistun inscription he simply proclaimed himself the rightful King and no disguise is mentioned.

Herodotus also throws a different light on the Mage, something which is only hinted at in the Behistun inscription. Magi were one of the tribes of Medes and were associated with Zoroastrian religion.⁵¹ From the inscription we know the Mage resided in Media rather than Persia. In the Akkadian version of the text, Gaumāta is described as a Mede.⁵² Were the Persians afraid of the return of the rule of Medes as Herodotus points out in the speech of Cambyses?⁵³ The Median character of revolt is, however, rejected among modern scholars.⁵⁴ Moreover, Herodotus claims that the Seven killed Smerdis in Susa, not in Media as Darius says. In the case of other revolts, Darius focuses on widespread revolts in his Empire, while Herodotus' account is the direct opposite, as he mentions only the revolt in Babylon after the ascension of Darius.⁵⁵

The last event connected to Darius in *Histories* but absent in the inscription is the foundation of a festival called Magophonia.⁵⁶ Supposed-

⁵⁰ If we follow the inscription, Bardiya was killed before the Egyptian campaign of Cambyses starting in 525 BC. His death would be unnoticed for three years, less than that in the account of Herodotus, since Smerdis went to Egypt with his brother. How exactly was the murder kept a secret and no one missed real Smerdis or recognized fake Smerdis for several years is not properly explained in the sources. For all the variants of the chronology see note 13.

⁵¹ DE JONG (1997: 387–403).

⁵² DB § 10.

⁵³ Hdt. 3, 65 in a speech of Cambyses. In 3, 73, Gobryas describes Smerdis as a Median, Magian.

⁵⁴ DANDAMAEV (1989: 87–88; 96–98); BRIANT (2002: 895–896). Also see ROLLINGER (2005).

⁵⁵ Hdt. 3, 150–160. Plus, he adds the revolt of Oroetes (3, 120–129).

⁵⁶ Hdt. 3, 79. The festival also appears in the works of Ctesias (Phot. *Bibl.* 72 § 15) and Josephus Flavius (J. *AJ.* 11, 3, 1).

ly, every year on the day of the killing of the Mage, Magi should not leave their homes, otherwise they would be killed. This commemorated the killing of Smerdis by Darius. During the attack on the false king, Darius cut off his head and showed it to other Persians, who in turn killed any Magian they could find. Darius himself mentions only the killing of Gaumāta, not any other Mage. The very existence of this festival and the form of celebration or commemoration are a matter of discussion,⁵⁷ since Magi continued to be the priests in the Achaemenid Empire without any further similar hostilities.

Otanes – Greek variant of the name Utāna. While Darius does not attribute him with anything, Herodotus makes Otanes the protagonist of the revolt against the Mage. According to him, Otanes was the son of Pharnaspes, which is clearly a mistake by Herodotus,⁵⁸ and the brother of the wife of Cyrus, Cassandane. This family relationship is one of few differences connected to the list of conspirators compared to the inscription. Herodotus possibly mixed up the conspirator with another person of the same name⁵⁹ (the name Otanes appears several times in *Histories* and was apparently a common name in Persia). Nevertheless, in Herodotus' account, he is closer to the royal family than Darius could ever dream to be, even with his supposed lineage. If we accept the account of Herodotus as the more trustworthy one, then Darius could have changed Otanes' lineage to exempt him from the royal family and give himself the right to the throne, which would explain one of the changes from the inscription.

Otanes, one of the noblest and wealthiest Persians,⁶⁰ started to suspect the King and with the help of his daughter Phaedyne, wife of Smerdis, he found out that he is an impostor. He contacted two other Persian noblemen, Gobryas and Aspathines, who each brought another person to their ranks. Only after that, Darius joined the rest of the conspirators, somehow knowing the truth about Smerdis beforehand.

⁵⁷ See DANDAMAEV (1976: 137–140); WIESEHÖFER (1978: 175–178); BICKERMAN–TADMOR (1978); BOYCE (1982: 86–88).

⁵⁸ Hdt. 3, 68. He is the son of Thukhra in the Behistun inscription.

⁵⁹ WATERS (2004: 96b).

⁶⁰ Hdt. 3, 68.

Otanes was the most respected conspirator, but his suggestions were overturned by Darius. After the killing of fake Smerdis, much problematic discussion over the future form of government, the so-called 'Constitutional Debate' took place. Otanes is again honoured to speak first, suggesting a form of democracy (rule of *plethos*) and condemning monarchy and tyrannical rulers.⁶¹ While Herodotus asserts the veracity of the discussion, modern scholars are doubtful.⁶² Otanes' proposal of almost Athenian form of democracy as a government in Persia is out of question. The reason behind the inclusion of this debate by Herodotus is unknown, whether he inherited it from his source, or it reflects his time, searching for an ideal form of government.⁶³ Even though other conspirators chose a monarchy, they still decided upon several oligarchic institutions, as they could visit the King, whenever they wanted to (with one exception) and the King was able to marry a wife only from the families of the Seven, clearly distinguishing these families from the other nobles.⁶⁴ Otanes, however, declined to become the King and went on to receive privileges for himself and his descendants.⁶⁵ The importance of the Seven and the protection of the members by Darius is also mentioned in the Behistun inscription.⁶⁶

The fate of Otanes is unknown, but he reappears in *Histories* after he separated himself from the court.⁶⁷ He married Darius' daughter and Darius married Phaedyne in turn. Later, Darius entrusted him with the campaign against Samos,⁶⁸ which was not exactly in accordance with Otanes' wishes (when Otanes declined kingship, he desired not to rule nor to be ruled). Potentially, this general was not the member of the Seven, since the name itself appears in *Histories* five more times and in some cases, it is not specified which Otanes was the mentioned one. It is also unclear if there are five more people bearing the name Otanes, or if

⁶¹ Hdt. 3, 80.

⁶² See for example ROY (2012); LATEINER (2013).

⁶³ FORSDYKE (2006: 224).

⁶⁴ ROY (2012: 316–317).

⁶⁵ Hdt. 3, 83.

⁶⁶ DB § 69.

⁶⁷ For more details see BRIANT (2002: 132–135).

⁶⁸ Hdt. 3, 149.

some mentions represent the same person. From Otanes' progeny, Phaedyne was the wife of Cambyses, Smerdis, and Darius, Amestris was the wife of Xerxes, Anaphes and Smerdomenes were commanders in the army of Xerxes, and Patiramphes was the charioteer of Xerxes. Otanes is also one of the commanders during the invasion of Greece (with an addition that he is the father of Amestris).⁶⁹ If we return to the discussion over the future of Persia, the King had to marry daughters of other Seven, therefore Amestris should be the daughter of the conspirator.⁷⁰ Otanes' involvement in the invasion is rather strange since he would be way too old by that point and possibly not even alive. Herodotus could mix this general with the member of the Seven and we will return to the problem of Otanes and his brethren later again. There is also another Otanes, clearly not related to the Seven, whose father was Sisamnes. This Otanes was a commander during Darius' campaign to Scythia. With more persons bearing this name, the relation between Otanes, the member of the Seven, the children of Otanes, or the other commander is sometimes unclear.

Intaphernes – Greek variant of the name Vindafarnā. Intaphernes is not given much space by Herodotus. His role of a bow-carrier of Darius does not appear in *Histories*. During the attack on the Mage, Intaphernes lost his eye.⁷¹ The only other event related to him is his downfall. The story narrated by Herodotus does not contain many details, why Darius should get rid of Intaphernes, but it appears there was some power struggle between these two men since the main reason for his execution is rather strange. Intaphernes wanted to see the King, but at that time, he was with his wife, the only time the Seven could not meet the King. The guards stopped Intaphernes, who then mutilated them in anger. Darius feared of potential conspiracy against him and when the other five members denounced the actions of Intaphernes, the bow-carrier

⁶⁹ Phaedyne (Hdt. 3, 68, 3), Amestris (7, 61, 2), Anaphes (7, 62, 2), Smerdomenes (7, 82). In the case of the last one, Herodotus asserts that his father Otanes was the brother of Darius, which means that he was not related to Otanes, the member of the Seven. Patiramphes (7, 40, 4) and the other Otanes (7, 61, 2).

⁷⁰ SCHMITT (2006: 175).

⁷¹ Hdt. 3, 78.

was then put to death together with his family (apart from his wife, her brother, and the eldest son).⁷² Intaphernes also does not reappear in his high position on the tomb of Darius, unlike Gobryas. Thus, one of the members and his family were gone.⁷³

Gobryas – Greek variant of the name Gaubaruva. Gobryas appears in *Histories* as a supporter or a close companion of Darius. First, he agrees with Darius' plan to attack the Mage without hesitation, then he risks his life during the fight with Smerdis himself.⁷⁴ These little snippets may reflect the depiction of Gobryas on the monuments by Darius and in the Persian tablets as his second-in-command and one of the most important figures in the Empire. Gobryas married the daughter of Darius, Artazostre, while Darius married the daughter of Gobryas even before his ascension to the throne and had three sons with her.⁷⁵ As a close supporter of Darius from the beginning, he held one of the most prestigious positions in the Empire and his family (namely his son as we will see later) enjoyed a successful career.

Hydarnes – Greek variant of the name Vidarna. Hydarnes is largely ignored by Herodotus during the revolt. His family remained influential for generations within the Empire. His eponymous son Hydarnes was the commander of the Immortals during the invasion of Greece and his other son Sisamnes was the leader of Arians.⁷⁶ As we will see, later, several satraps or kings (from Asia Minor) claimed to be descendants of Hydarnes.

Megabyzus – Greek variant of the name Bagabuxša. Also spelled as Megabyxus.⁷⁷ During the Constitutional Debate, Megabyzus proposed an oligarchy/aristocracy as the best form of government and the middle road between monarchy and democracy.⁷⁸ His son Zopyrus was involved in the capture of Babylon. Herodotus narrates a quite fabulous

⁷² Hdt. 3, 118–119. The lamentation of his wife is compared to the plea of Antigone – see ZELLNER (1997).

⁷³ See BRIANT (2002: 131–132).

⁷⁴ Hdt. 3, 73; 3, 78.

⁷⁵ Hdt. 7, 5, 1 (Artazostre); 7, 2, 2 (marriage with the daughter of Gobryas).

⁷⁶ Hdt. 7, 83; 7, 66.

⁷⁷ See BREMMER (2008: 354–355).

⁷⁸ Hdt. 3, 81. See ROY (2012: 309–311).

story about how Zopyrus mutilated himself in order to gain the trust of the inhabitants of the city and later opened the gates for the Persian army. Darius then gave him the city of Babylon.⁷⁹ This account is at odds with the inscription since Darius sent Intaphernes to capture the city during the second revolt, not Megabyzus or his son, and Darius was not personally there, unlike in *Histories*.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the family of Megabyzus remained influential for several generations, until the reign of Artaxerxes I. We will discuss the fate of Megabyzus' family in the chapter dedicated to Ctesias.

Aspathines – Greek variant of the name Aspačanā. The only name not connected to the inscription, where the last name is Ardunamiš. However, Aspačanā appears on the tomb of Darius as his *vačabara*,⁸¹ carrying an axe and a *gorytus*. His role at the court was thus a very significant one and Herodotus captured a later tradition. Aspathines, obviously a person of high importance, replaced Ardunamiš, whose fate is completely unknown and does not appear in any other source. The name Aspačanā also appears in the tablets from the Persepolis area.⁸² One of the seals is read as 'Aspathines, son of Prexaspes'. Prexaspes is a person known from *Histories*. He was the killer of real Smerdis and later he committed suicide by jumping from a tower, after he told the truth to all the summoned Persians.⁸³ He had a son, who was a cupbearer of Cambyzes, but the name is missing.⁸⁴ The connection between Aspathines and Prexaspes might exist save for the mention in the tablets. The son of Aspathines was another Prexaspes⁸⁵ and grandfathers and grandsons

⁷⁹ Hdt. 3, 150–160. Ctesias further expands this narrative. In *Persica*, the city revolted during the reign of Xerxes after Babylonians killed Zopyrus, and his son Megabyzus, grandson of the conspirator, helped to capture the city (Phot. *Bibl.* § 22).

⁸⁰ DB § 50.

⁸¹ DNd. The word *vačabara* is translated in two different ways – either as a bow-bearer: KENT (1953: 140), or as a garment-bearer (or chamberlain): HINZ (1973: 53–55).

⁸² PT4 14; PF 806; 1444; 1853. See GARRISON (1998).

⁸³ Hdt. 3, 30; 3, 74–75.

⁸⁴ Hdt. 3, 34.

⁸⁵ Hdt. 7, 97.

often shared the name.⁸⁶ The one different name in the account of Herodotus can thus be explained, as Aspathines was an influential person at the royal court.

4. Ctesias

The account of Ctesias is by far the trickiest one. The physician from Cnidus lived and visited the Achaemenid Empire⁸⁷ over one hundred years after the revolt against the Mage took place. We have to deal with two main problems concerning his work *Persica*. Most of all, his work is only fragmentary and the whole story about Darius and the Mage is summarized in a few paragraphs by Photius.⁸⁸ The list itself is extant, but that is virtually the only thing known about the Seven in the work of Ctesias. His list is at first glance very different from the one in the Behistun inscription, but also from *Histories*, and since the work is lost, the importance of the members, their background, what was the course of the events, and who even were the members of the Seven cannot be satisfyingly explained.

The other problem are the sources of Ctesias. Just like Herodotus, he relied on oral tradition, even though he boasted himself with access to royal parchments and documents.⁸⁹ His list is a result of different, later tradition, which he heard at the court around the year 400 BC. He definitely did not see the Behistun inscription in its original or transcribed form since the differences are way too obvious. Furthermore, Ctesias even assigns the creation of the monument to queen Semiramis,⁹⁰ which raises many questions about his sources, trustworthiness, and where exactly he got his information. The events themselves as described by Ctesias are not much different from Herodotus. Cambyses killed his brother, then appointed the Mage to act as the son of Cyrus. Later he went on the expedition to Egypt and died on the way back. The Mage is

⁸⁶ For example, Megabyzus, son of Zopyrus, whose father was Megabyzus, Cambyses, son of Cyrus, whose father was Cambyses, Mardonius, son of Gobryas, whose father was Mardonius, etc.

⁸⁷ See DORATI (2011).

⁸⁸ Phot. *Bibl.* 72 § 10–15.

⁸⁹ D.S. 2, 34. See STRONK (2007: 37–40) or BRIANT (2002: 889) for example.

⁹⁰ D.S. 2, 31, 1.

proclaimed the King and after several months he is killed by the Seven, then Darius becomes the King after his horse neighs first. The differences from *Histories* are minor. Ctesias uses different names for some of the characters, Cambyses' brother is killed before the expedition, and there is an involvement of eunuchs during the revolt. Otherwise, Ctesias followed Herodotus' example, maybe sprinkled with some later Persian (or Babylonian) oral tradition as in the case of the Seven.

Before we proceed to the list itself, we will discuss the most notable change from the previous two lists. The most surprising omission is the absence of Megabyzus. Megabyzus' grandson, Megabyzus, is the protagonist of the books 16 and 17 of *Persica*, as he overshadows King Artaxerxes I as an extremely virtuous man and a great commander with a complicated relationship with the King and the royal family.⁹¹ Ctesias recorded the power struggle between Artaxerxes and the family of Megabyzus and the downfall of one of the prestigious families.⁹² Megabyzus' eponymous grandson actively fought against Artaxerxes, later he was sent to exile, but in the end the King pardoned him. The family of Megabyzus eventually lost power due to hostilities between the sons of Megabyzus and the King. Zopyrus went to exile to Athens and died during the siege of Caunus, and Artyphius was involved in a plot against Darius II.⁹³

Darius – naturally he remains in the list, but there is not much to say about him and his involvement in the revolt, as the description is very sparse. He is the only conspirator whose father (Hystaspes) is mentioned by Ctesias. As in *Histories*, Darius became the King after using a trick to win the contest with neighing horses and founded the festival Magophonia. The widespread revolts are missing from Ctesias' account.

Onophas – this name does not match the list of the Seven from Behistun or *Histories*. Nevertheless, the connection to one of its members is still there. In this case, Ctesias mixed Otanes with his son Anaphes, who is mentioned by Herodotus.⁹⁴ Although, it is not clear whether Ctesias

⁹¹ Phot. *Bibl.* 72 § 28–41.

⁹² See BRIANT (2002: 136); WATERS (2017: 94–100).

⁹³ Phot. *Bibl.* 72 § 43 (Zopyrus); 51 (Artyphius).

⁹⁴ See note 69.

meant Otanes or his son, since he also mentions that Onophas was the father of Amestris,⁹⁵ while in *Histories*, her father is Otanes, and from the fragments, we cannot be exactly sure if Otanes/Onophas is one person or father and son. Onophas is also a commander of the Persian navy in the battle of Salamis.⁹⁶ Diodorus later asserts, that Anaphas was one of the members of the Seven.⁹⁷ Here, he recorded later tradition or mixed up Otanes and his son (again, it is not clear, which one is alluded to), just to further complicate the issue. All in all, while the new name appears in the list, the relation to the original member of the Seven remains. Ctesias recorded a later tradition, in which the son substituted or even merged with his father.⁹⁸

Idernes – The name is widely accepted as a form of the name Hydarnes.⁹⁹ Plutarch mentions a similar variant of the name Indarnes and from the context it is Hydarnes (technically a son of the member of the Seven).¹⁰⁰ We cannot say whether Ctesias wrote about the father or the son because they share the name. The family of Hydarnes suffers the same fate as those of Intaphernes or Megabyzus. Idernes (probably a grandson of the member of the Seven) had a daughter Stateira and a son Terituchmes. Stateira was married to King Artaxerxes II, while Terituchmes married the daughter of Darius II, Amestris. But later he planned to kill her and wanted to start a revolt against the King. However, Terituchmes himself was killed by certain Udiastes, and the whole family of Terituchmes, descendants of Hydarnes, was executed on the orders of Queen Parysatis, save for Stateira (for now).¹⁰¹ As we can see, the royal family continued the tradition of marriages with the families of the Seven, but as with the family of Megabyzus, this could lead to power struggles within the wider family of the kings and downfalls of whole clans.

⁹⁵ Phot. *Bibl.* 72 § 20.

⁹⁶ Phot. *Bibl.* 72 § 26.

⁹⁷ D.S. 31, 19, 1.

⁹⁸ BRIANT (2002: 135); LENFANT (2004: 262, n. 484).

⁹⁹ LENFANT (1996: 374).

¹⁰⁰ Plut. *Apoph.* 69. The episode appears in *Histories* (Hdt. 7, 135, 1).

¹⁰¹ Phot. *Bibl.* 72 § 54–55.

Norondabates – *hapax legomenon*. This person remains a mystery, although there was an attempt to relate him to a known personality, Orontopates.¹⁰² Even if Ctesias referred to any person bearing this name, due to fragmentary account, we cannot say why he would replace established families in the list, as he was probably not related to the Seven.

Mardonius – In his case, the identification is clear. Ctesias continued in recording later tradition, in which the original conspirator blurred with his son. Mardonius is the son of Gobryas (or technically it could also be Gobryas' father). Mardonius was the general of Xerxes' army during the invasion of Greece.¹⁰³ Ctesias' account is not without an issue, for he asserts that Mardonius died after pillaging Delphi¹⁰⁴ and not in the battle of Plataea as in *Histories*.¹⁰⁵

Barisses – One of the problematic names, since Barisses was long thought to be *hapax legomenon*, but very recently he was identified with one of the names in the Persian tablets. Barisses was thought to be connected to Badres,¹⁰⁶ one of the Persian generals in *Histories*.¹⁰⁷ According to the recent research,¹⁰⁸ Barisses is identified as Barišša, one of the officials in Persepolis, treasure keeper during the reign of Xerxes.¹⁰⁹ The relation to the families of the Seven, however, cannot be traced.

Ataphernes – This name is usually associated with Intaphernes.¹¹⁰ His name (Vindafarnā) appears in several variants in Greek sources. Intaphernes is the name stated by Herodotus, Artaphrenes appears in *Persians* by Aeschylus,¹¹¹ and Daphernes is a variant used by Hellanicus

¹⁰² GUTSCHMID (1892: 505, n. 143). See also LENFANT (1996: 377); SCHMITT (2006: 257–260).

¹⁰³ Hdt. 7, 5–10 for example.

¹⁰⁴ Phot. *Bibl.* 72 § 25.

¹⁰⁵ Hdt. 9, 63.

¹⁰⁶ LENFANT (1996: 377). See also SCHMITT (2006: 233–235).

¹⁰⁷ Hdt. 7, 77.

¹⁰⁸ SÖDERLUND (2020: 11).

¹⁰⁹ PT 25; 78.

¹¹⁰ LENFANT (1996: 376); BRIANT (2002: 898).

¹¹¹ A. *Pers.* 21; 776; 778. There we have Artaphrenes as the one who slew the Mage, so we have another version of the events. In third different account, Intaphernes is the leader of the conspiracy. Aeschylus also names certain Maraphis as one of the Kings before Darius and after Mardos. Aeschylus wrote earlier than Herodotus and although his description is extremely short, he recorded another version of the events, in which

as it is mentioned in a *scholion* to Aeschylus' play.¹¹² The name does not reappear in *Persica*, so we do not have any additional information, but with many different variants of the Persian name floating around the Greek world, Ctesias probably meant one of the original Seven. However, the appearance of Intaphernes might be surprising, for Ctesias typically records the sons of conspirators or the persons, who became important later. Intaphernes was dead for a long time and his family did not have any power, but probably his involvement in the rebellion was significant enough (Aeschylus has him as the King of Achaemenid Empire), so Ctesias' source still had him as the conspirator. To exhaust all the possibilities, not probable though, since Darius does not credit him with anything in the inscription and perhaps, he was too young at the time of rebellion, there was also a Persian with very similar name in Greek sources – Artaphernes,¹¹³ brother of Darius (later, his nephew, Artaphernes' son, bore the same name). But save for the similar name, there is nothing that would indicate his presence in the list.

5. Legacy of the Seven

As we could see, the conspirators and their families (or at least most of them) continued to hold offices and the most important ranks in the Achaemenid Empire (unless they met their fate at the hands of the Kings, like Intaphernes, Megabyzus, and Hydarnes). Their importance in the transition of the rule from the family of Cyrus to the family of Darius was so significant, that the satraps and the kings in the following centuries claimed to be descendants of one of the Seven. We can regard the seven conspirators as 'founding fathers' for the rulers of later times.

One of the rulers from Asia Minor, Rhosaces, satrap of Ionia and Lydia in the 4th century BC, claimed to be a descendant of one of the Seven, although it is not specified which one.¹¹⁴ Exactly the same can be said about Orsines (or Orxines), general from Pasargadae during the time of

both Maraphis and Artaphernes became the Kings. See SHAYEGAN (2012: 20–23) for more information on the appearance of these two persons.

¹¹² HFG F167.

¹¹³ For example, Hdt. 5, 73.

¹¹⁴ D.S. 16, 47, 2.

the conquest of Alexander.¹¹⁵ The kings of Cappadocia claimed to be descendants of Cyrus the Great and one of the Seven, Otanes (Diodorus has Anaphas) in this case.¹¹⁶ Curiously, Diodorus mentions that this Anaphas was appointed as a governor of Cappadocia and was freed from tribute, which mirrors Herodotus' account (Otanes was given special privileges).¹¹⁷ Rulers of the smaller kingdom of Armenia, also traced their roots to one of the Seven, Hydarnes this time, whose descendant Orontes ruled there during the reign of Seleucid king Antiochus III.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, the origins of the dynasty are not necessarily connected to the Seven, since Orontes, satrap of Armenia during the reign of Artaxerxes II, was of Bactrian descent¹¹⁹ with an unclear relation to Hydarnes.¹²⁰

One famous satrap from Asia Minor apparently belonged to the family of Hydarnes as well and it was no other than Tissaphernes. His father was Hydarnes as it is stated in the text of Xanthus Stele.¹²¹ Which Hydarnes it was, however, is again a question.¹²² It could be the son of the conspirator or perhaps his eponymous grandson. The mightiest rulers who claimed to be the descendants of the Seven were the kings of the Pontic Empire. The founder of the kingdom, Mithridates, used this claim. However, the conspirator in question is not mentioned by name and we only have a vague description of him.¹²³ The number seven appears in the Sassanian Empire, where seven noble families played a major part in the politics of the kingdom.¹²⁴ They are not related to the co-conspirators

¹¹⁵ Curt. 4, 12, 8.

¹¹⁶ D.S. 31, 19, 1–2.

¹¹⁷ See note 23. Also see BRIANT (2002: 135–136).

¹¹⁸ Str. 11, 14, 15.

¹¹⁹ X. An. 3, 5, 17.

¹²⁰ See BRIANT (2002: 136–137).

¹²¹ *Tituli Lyciae*, 44c, 11–12. Widrřna in the Lycian part of the inscription.

¹²² DANDAMAIEV (1989: 260); BRIANT (2002: 136).

¹²³ Plb. 5, 43, 2. The story appears also in Diodorus (D.S. 19, 40, 2), while elsewhere, Mithridates VI claimed to be a descendant of Darius himself (App. *Mith.* 112; Just. *Epit.* 38, 7, 1). There is even a story related to Mithridates I, the founder of the Pontic Empire, about how Mithridates escaped from Antigonos with the help of *six* companions (App. *Mith.* 2, 9).

¹²⁴ POURSHARIATI (2008: 48).

of Darius, but the number itself and the prestigious role at the court might echo the famed rebellion against Smerdis and seven Persian clans.

The rulers of later times were eager to portray themselves as the descendants of the Seven. Connecting the rule of the famous general or king of earlier periods with the contemporary Hellenistic kingdoms was a fairly common practice at that time. The seven Persian noblemen belonged to the prestigious group of possible ancestors. But it should come as no surprise that these claims of descendancy of the Seven were very far-fetched and simply self-serving. It is not dissimilar to what Darius very likely did in 522 BC – created a lineage to legitimize his rule, later kings, in turn, traced their ancestry to his helpers.

6. Conclusion

The revolt against the Mage with the lists of conspirators is described to a greater detail mainly in three sources – the Behistun inscription, Herodotus, and Ctesias. While many details differ throughout them, the core of the story essentially remains the same. The only source with notable changes compared to other sources is Aeschylus. Our goal was to compare the lists of seven conspirators, who rose against the impostor on the Achaemenid throne. As we could see, the lists themselves and the narrative changed throughout the time. The original description of the rebellion was recorded by Darius the Great, whose list of the Seven is the most trustworthy one since he was an eyewitness. On the other hand, his narrative raises a suspicion, for he possibly created a person of the Mage and revolted against the rightful king of the Empire. His presented lineage is also highly problematic and simply served its purpose. In his narrative, Darius is the supreme lord, the chosen one by the god Ahura-Mazda. Others are merely his followers. This changed in the Greek world. The whole story of the false king became more embellished with a look-alike of the brother of Cambyses, a dramatic scene of the killing, and uncertainty about the future government of the Empire. Darius' role also changed. Although he naturally became the King, according to Greeks, it was under different circumstances. Other conspirators such as Otanes are no less important in *Histories* than Darius himself.

The list of the Seven also changed in Greek sources. Herodotus transcribed the Persian names into Greek and did a fine job since he record-

ed the names from the Behistun inscription with only one change, Ardunamiš was replaced by Aspathines, who rose to prominence later, thus this mistake can be explained easily. Other names match their Persian counterparts, however, their roles in the narrative could be different. Ctesias recorded a very dubious list of the Seven, but when we examine the list closer, there are traces to the original members. Ctesias heard later stories about the events, and it is noticeable in his list. Darius remained in his account, next to him we have potentially up to three sons of conspirators (Onophas, Idernes, and Mardonius), Onophas might be a different name of Otanes, Idernes could be the original conspirator as well, Ataphernes is a different variant of the name from *Histories*, we know Barisses, a person who became important later, from Persian tablets. Only Norondabates is not identified so far.

The members of the Seven and their families remained influential for several generations. The conspirators themselves held the most important offices. Their descendants were generals and officers, too. There were also marriages between the families of the Seven. However, this could have had some consequences, as three clans faced the wrath of the Kings – Intaphernes, Megabyzus, and Hydarnes. The prestige of the Seven lasted for centuries. The satraps and kings across Asia Minor claimed to be descendants of one of the seven conspirators even long after the Achaemenid Empire was conquered by Alexander the Great.

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