
"Challenging the World" – The Persian wars as a mirror of deliberate ideologies

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ABSTRACT: *The globalized world is more and more affected by ideological conflicts. An example from the ancient world is set to represent causes and background of conflicts, not only by the example of ideologies (besides the usual aspects of the intention of gaining power and economic advantages), but also or especially with the aspect on the creation of enemy images. Despite recent research, the complexity of such conflicts is still ignored. This contribution about the (Greek-)Persian wars will clarify that they were by no means conflicts of clearly defined borders as democracy against despotism, east against west or Asia against Europe as often assumed and interpreted.*

KEYWORDS: Greek, Persia, Herodotus, Athens, Sparta, Alexander

"INTRODUCTION: GREEK REVOLTS AS PRELUDE

Who would be so unreasonable to choose war instead of peace? In times of peace the children bury their parents, in times of war the parents bury their children."

Words of Kroisos' to Cyrus according to Herodotus

Unlike other ancient cultures of the Orient, the Persians left few official documents except for some chronicles during the Diadochi period, moreover the Cuneiform scripts had been impossible to translate for a long time. Thus, in the absence of own sources, only foreign ones from the Greek historiographers Herodotus (~484–430/420 BC) and Thucydides (~460– ~404 BC) could be used by researchers. The founder of the Achaemenid dynasty, Cyrus (anglicized, in Greek: Kyros, in Persian Kurash) ended Median supremacy over the Persians and conquered their capital Ekbatana, modern-day Hamadan.



Figure 01. Modest remains of the Median capital

As a further step he conquered Babylon, deposing its last king Nabonidus, and the Persians reigned from then on as cosmopolitan rulers. The Persians were also inclined to adopt foreign customs, confirming their open mind, as Herodotus already emphasized (Her I, 135). Cyrus released the Jews from the Babylonian exile, who were able to return to the Holy Land and to rebuild their temple. In fact, the "children of Israel" were also allowed to cultivate their own customs and traditions and continue to practice their religion during their exile under Babylonian reign, despite the bad reputation in the Old Testament. But now they were able to return to their holy land under Persian rule. Without special preference, Cyrus argued that religion was a matter of law, and granted sovereignty to each people in those matters. Of course, there was political calculation behind his actions – the acceptance of foreign cults brought content subjects. For himself and his people, Cyrus chose the Zoroastrian faith. But whereas he was positively portrayed in the Bible (2 Chron, 36; Ezra 1:1-2, Is 28, 44:24 and 45:3), Egyptian and mainly Greek representations generally did not shed a good light on the Persians. This familiar concept of barbarism by Herodotus did not develop before the victory of the Greeks over the Persians. The historical context is the political leadership of Athens in the Delian-Attic League, whose first purpose at the time of its foundation was the continuation of the war against the Persians. The Persians, initially a real danger, were soon used as an enemy model for the stabilization of Athenian rule. For the Greeks, or at least the Athenians, the coordinates of the world had shifted after the victory, they became a world power. But despite this confederation there was no Panhellenic being in the true sense. To differentiate from the non-Greek neighbors,

the city-states focused on some specific attributes – the same language, sanctuaries, oracles, and customs that gave rise to the name "Hellenic". Influence and importance of common institutions grew, such as the games in Olympia, whose Panhellenic character precluded the participation of Macedonian kings for a long time. Herodotus (V, 22a) reports about Alexander I of Macedonia (about ~494–454 BC) can be found at. Also in the cultural area, similarities were promoted. In the political context, however, this merger never came to fruition. The peculiarity of the Greeks had varied greatly in the political associations. Not all lived in city-states (*poleis*), but in tribes (*ethné*). And though, the largest associations and in the fight against Persia's most important opponents were undoubtedly the two known *poleis* Athens and Sparta:

Athens, as a symbol of democracy par excellence, was only slowly developing into a system that barely can be equated with the so-called present-day "power to / of the people" (Aristoteles, *Athenaion Politeia* 26, 4). Until just a few years before the wars, tyrants as Peisistratos (whose bodyguards had been mercenaries with Scythian background according to Herodotus I, 61), Hipparchos, and Hippias were ruling in this city, who despite today's negative connotation had led a prudent regime to preserve inner peace, prosperity, and godliness (Her, 59-63). Under their rule, the Attic economy flourished as it was boosted by – among other things - the introduction of coinage (around 550 BC). But the Delphic oracle was persuaded by opposition leaders to advise the Spartans to overthrow the tyrant Hippias.



Figure 02. View over Delphi

After a first attempt to overthrow him was brought to collapse by the aid of Thessalian troops allied with Athens, the Spartan king Cleomenes I finally conquered Athens in 510 BC, invoking the troops of the Peloponnesian Confederation. Hippias moved to Sigeion, where he reigned under Persian rule, in whose service he then participated as a consultant in the Battle of Marathon. As already indicated, the boundaries are always more complex than they are presented. The Persians' second big opponent was Sparta. King Cleomenes, by his move against the region Attica to expel the Peisistratides (the above-mentioned Athenian tyrant dynasty), led Athenian democracy to victory against his intention (Mystriotis 2017). In the year 492 BC, Cleomenes was to punish the Aiginetes, who had presented earth and water to the Persian Great King Darius' I ambassadors as a sign of their submission. He wanted to arrest the Persian sympathizers, but he could not achieve it without the help of his Spartan combatant Demaratos. Demaratos was disempowered and fled to Susa to the Persian king Darius and participated later in the move against Greece. After his death, Demaratos was succeeded by his brother Leonidas I, hero of the battle of Thermopylae. Contradictions existed between these two city-states ("poleis") from the beginning. In both, lines for political and social developments were already drawn: In Athens, Solon abolished debt bondage to avoid free underclass being excluded from the events and decisions of the polis in the early 6th century BC. Athens became the largest citizen-sized polis and owned, in a decisive phase for the entire Hellenic world, the largest navy to defend themselves against the Persians (Welwei 2004, 125).



Figure 03. Ancient remains in the heart of modern Athens, in the background the acropolis

In Sparta, on the other hand, society was divided not only by the generally accepted dichotomy of Greek societies into the free and the unfree. Helots in society as a specific form of unfreedom prevented the inclusion of larger populations in the full citizenship. They belonged to a subjugated group working primarily in agriculture and whose exact status (between free people and slave) was already disputed during antiquity (Hornblower 2011, 126).



Figure 04. As a juxtaposition, the old and new Sparta

PERSIAN EXPANSION

But now the "storm from the East" welded the two opponents for a time together: This famous conflict began in the cities of Asia Minor. Persia had expanded to the west in the sixth century BC. Here, too, the above-mentioned great king Cyrus played a role, because when he – even before the above-mentioned conquest of Babylon – expanded westwards, the Lydian king Kroisos (latinized Croesus) tried to forestall him with a pre-emptive strike. Much has been written of the Delphic oracle saying, "if you cross the river Halys you will destroy a great

empire". Apparently, King Kroisos, who was undoubtedly also powerful, never thought of his own downfall.

The historian Herodotus came from Halicarnass (now Bodrum in Turkey), an ancient Carian city, which got huge influx on the part of Greek settlers and fell in 560 BC under the rule of King Kroisos himself. Now, after his defeat it became part of the Persian Empire in 546 BC, and a Greek-Carian family became established as rulers. In the year 468 BC the Athenians took Halicarnass from the Persian Empire and incorporated it into their League. That was the city Herodotus grew up. His family was involved in a coup against the tyrant Lygdamis, and had to leave the city. Under those circumstances he may have travelled. Thus, he may have got to know most of the described events by his own eyes (Hose 2004, 161).

During the Persian expansion and conquests, the Greek cities of Asia Minor came now under their rule from 547 BC. Only then, in 539 BC, did Cyrus conquer Babylon. But 10 years later he died fighting the nomadic steppe people of the Massagetae. His son and successor Cambyses continued this policy of conquest. In 525 BC he was even able to subjugate Pharaonic Egypt but died 3 years later during internal turmoil on the throne. Darius I, who also was called the Great, took care of a comprehensive reorganization of the administration to ensure the stability of the empire. In addition to the development of the individual administrative districts, so-called satrapies, a comprehensive tax system was also developed with a uniform currency system, the so-called dareikos. In addition, the expansion of the inner-Persian road network was promoted, which helped trade and military expansion to become more efficient; but it was precisely this excellent infrastructure that probably helped Alexander 200 years later in his rapid advance against the great power (Briant 2002). Darius thus led his empire to the pinnacle of strength and greatness; in the east he was able to extend his dominion to the Indus Valley, while in the west he reconquered Egypt, which became independent during the internal turmoil, and crossed 513/512 BC. The Hellespont and thus entered mainland Europe, where he acted against the Scythians. However, these withdrew again and again into the steppe. Thus, he took Thrace and Macedonia instead.

The colonies and daughter cities of Greece were subjugated in this area (Her I, 142), among them the city of Miletus, which could literally be called a metropolis both economically and culturally, as not only Thales, but also Anaximander, Anaximenes and Leukipp were from Miletus. But the Persian occupation prevented a further development significantly. Under their king Darius, his satraps – the Persian version of gouverneurs – ruled over the Ionian Greeks (Meyer 2017). Until 500 BC, there were continuously minor uprisings, but they could always be brought under control. Especially during this time, Persian subjugation must have been understood as a special deprivation of liberty, because a few years earlier in Athens, the isonomy (political equality of all full citizens) had been introduced. This early form of

democracy was hardly comparable to today's version, since it only affected a small part of the population, but it was of course a start. On the other hand, it could be argued that in the Persian Empire women were granted the same rights as men in many points, for example in the event of divorce. The ancient Greek society was far away from that. Though, for the Greek self-understanding, the tyranny of the Persian satraps was even more difficult to bear. But the decisive trigger of the uprising was to be seen in Aristagoras, tyrant of Miletus and satrap of the Great King Darius. On his behalf, he was to conquer the Greek island of Naxos, but failed miserably. Fearing punishment, Aristagoras saw his only chance in the Ionian uprising. In consultation between important citizens of Miletus and neighboring towns, Aristagoras downplayed the strength of the Persians and encouraged in 500 BC a revolt. Hekataios of Miletus, the first geographer of antiquity, who – based on his geographical knowledge – advised against a fight against Persia (Her V, 36). On a world map he showed the great Persian empire and made clear that one would engage not only in a fight with the Persians, but also with their allies – a fight against a much bigger world. He advised his fellow citizens to naval construction and the gradual support of friendly cities, to bring the power structure of the Persians to collapse. But Aristagoras decided to act immediately. Though, he was aware from the outset that Ionia alone could achieve nothing against the Persians. He visited the Greek motherland. After King Cleomenes had rejected him from Sparta, Aristagoras went to Athens and succeeded that his request was brought before the People's Assembly. It was decided that the Ionian Greeks would come to aid with twenty ships. Herodotus emphasized in that context that it was obviously easier to fool the masses than a single man (regarding the Ionian kinship of Athens, to which Aristagoras appealed: Her I, 143 and Her V, 35). In 499 BC, the so-called Ionian revolt broke out in Miletus and expanded over Asia Minor.

But not all Greek cities of Asia Minor were involved – Ephesus, for example, was on the side of the Persians. Though, the destruction of Sardis, the center of Persian power in Anatolia, has encouraged more cities to revolt. The Persian counter-offensive was not long in coming, and soon the Persians had brought the fallen provinces back under control. Because of the initial successes of the Ionian rebellion, the Cypriot city kings had also joined the revolt against the Persians (Her V, 104). Like the Ionian Greeks, the Cypriots could defend themselves for a brief time against the overwhelming majority but had to surrender, when all their cities had fallen by siege and the king of Kourion changed the sides in 498/497 BC (Her V, 110-114). Only Soloi and Paphos could withstand for a few months. Notable traces of such a siege were found during excavations on the Marcello Hill near Paphos in Cyprus. The Paphians had fortified their city wall with a series of limestone blocks and dug trenches in front of the wall. The city gate was narrowed by two cross bastions, so that the attackers had to overcome a narrow winding entrance. Everything outside the walls was demolished by the Persians, among them a sanctuary whose debris and votive inventory were used along with earth and stones to build a ramp. Along

the ramp hundreds of bronze and iron arrowheads and spearheads prove that the besiegers had been attacked accordingly. The archaeologists suspect that Greek mercenaries were in Persian service, as their helmets were found in the filler. Likewise, the wall was undermined all around. This technique was also the defenders' instrument to bring down mobile siege towers: The Paphians drove five tunnels under the wall towards the ramp, the cavity was supported by wooden beams, which were then set under fire below the siege towers. But all the defensive measures had no effect since the city was taken after five months and until Alexander the Great remained under Persian sovereignty (Maier 2008, 14-15; Schollmeyer 2009, 43).



Figure 05. Approach adit at Paphos

And after the battle at the island of Lade in 494 BC and the destruction of Miletus, the revolt was finally put down. Although the Greek motherland took little part in it, it was now targeted by the Persian rulers.

COURSE OF THE GRECO-PERSIAN WARS

Seventeen years later, the Cypriots took part in Xerxes' campaign against Greece and were again back on loser's side at Salamis. Persia's attention was set after the fall of the Ionian cities on the Greek mainland. A first Persian offensive in 492 BC on Mount Athos, which rarely appears in

the history books, failed when their fleet sank in a storm. After the aforementioned conquests over Thrace and Macedonia, the Persian expedition after a renewed call for submission of the Greeks, landed in Attica near Marathon in 490 BC. Before the Persians set foot on the mainland, the Athenians had sent a runner named Pheidippides to Sparta, who should ask for immediate help (Her VI, 105). Military assistance had already been promised, but according to a custom, the Spartans did not want to leave before the full moon (Her 6,106). It is not clear whether the support really did not come from religious scruples. When their aid corps arrived at the Marathon plain, the battle had already been decided; the Athenians and Plataeans under the leadership of Miltiades had defeated the Persians. According to Herodotus (VI, 105-106), he was sent for help. Plutarch (45–c.120 CE) (Plut.mor., *On the Glory of Athens* 346C) and Lukian (c.25 CE–after 180 CE) (*Pro lapsu inter salutandum*) mentioned the stories of the "marathon runner" Philippides (Pheidippides, see above), who ran to Athens reporting the victory and then collapsed dying. And yet this story animated to today's popular sporting event.



In the museum of Olympia several objects remind on that event, among them the Helmet of Miltiades with the inscription "Miltiades offered to Zeus" and an enemy's helmet with the phrase "The Athenians dedicated to Zeus this booty which they took from the Medes [sic]".



Figure 07. Helmet of Miltiades and an (Assyrian)-Persian helmet as booty with votive inscriptions – both dedicated after their victory to Zeus in Olympia

In 486 BC, Darius died, and six years later, his successor and son Xerxes I continued the campaign been started by his father. Darius, despite his image nowadays, had presented Persia as a beacon of stability and fairness, as the trilingual inscription (in Ancient Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian) at Behistun demonstrates (Rawlinson 1849, 1-192).



Figure 08. Ganjnameh inscriptions near Hamadan (Ekbatana) by Xerxes, another source for Rawlinson to decipher the texts

Xerxes' resources were far more substantial: A canal was dug at Athos for the ships, and the Dardanelles were spanned with bridges for the infantry and the installation of storehouses for the route to Macedonia. He too called upon the Greek cities to submit – apart from Athens and Sparta. Many remained neutral, and the western colonized areas also gave no support, not least because Sicily was being threatened by the Carthaginians. Ancient historians saw this as a common approach against the Greeks, but this remains controversial. Already in autumn 481 BC, Greek ambassadors had sworn in the name of their military communities in Corinth – the so-called Hellenic League under the leadership of Sparta (Her VII, 145.1), to take up the fight against the Persians, which included about 30 city-states. All hostilities and wars among each other should end. Apparently, however, no measures were adopted against those Hellenes who had submitted to the Persians. This fact goes against Herodotus' claim that the allies intended to punish those city-states and ethnic groups, and to consecrate the tenth part of their possessions to Apollo at Delphi. By that time, the Persian king had not sent yet any heralds to claim water and earth as a sign of submission. Persian messengers left Sardeis in September/October 481 BC and arrived perhaps in November of the same year in Boiotia and Thessaly (Her VII, 32). A preceding diplomatic offensive on the part of the Persians had secured the extradition of a large part of central Greece. No messengers were sent to Sparta and Athens to demonstrate who was considered the main enemy. The mission of the heralds of Xerxes in Greece was already part of a comprehensive overall political-strategic concept that embraced the entire Hellenic motherland, aimed at splitting and demoralizing the defenseless Greek communities (Welwei 2004, 136). The strategy was partially successful, as gloomy oracles (whose clues were always meant for warfare) showed. The cooperation between the city states also remained poor. The defense was under Spartan leadership, whose commander for the land forces was King Leonidas, while the general Mardonios arrived in Greece on behalf of the Persian great king. After the idea of establishing a northern line of defense in Thessaly's Tempe Valley failed, the troops of the Hellenic League tried to stop the Persian advance in central Greece. But the story was different: However, Sparta's organization of the resistance was overwhelmed, as dimensions of the necessary planning of the resistance blew past the current framework of Spartan politics and warfare. A threat of this magnitude was almost unimaginable from a Greek perspective when the Persian army pushed south.

Probably this new experience led to the fantastic exaggerations of the traditional strength of the enemy forces (up to three million combatants according to the poet Simonides what is until nowadays often cited, and even Herodotus (VII, 139 and 143,3) refers to hundreds of thousands. How could a numerically inferior opponent win the victory, if the Persians were really in the majority? Perhaps the Persian armies did not offer superior troop numbers. The reason for the Greek's successful defense of their own country was probably in the phalanx, which had proven itself in many battles. It probably took place during the 7th century BC as seasonal wars between

city-states, or a single battle with phalanges of heavily armed men, conducted in early summer shortly before the harvest. Whoever claimed the field had won. The winner erected a Tropaion ("Turning Valley") as a sign and thanked to the gods. That item testified the turn of the enemies at fleeing, as weapons as booty were placed on a wooden stake. The subjugated ones were usually not persecuted, who expressed their defeat by asking for the bodies of their fallen companions (Woelcke 1911, 134).

The Spartans were not accustomed to prolonged use of larger contingents in a region far outside the Peloponnese. Thus, some serious tactical errors have been made, such as no intervention reserves to prevent Persian bypass troops, or provision for the replacement of combatants, when they were defending the narrow plain of Thermopylae, a sacred place. In ancient times, the pass was protected by three gates; the second one was the so-called Phokian wall, behind which the small Greek camp was settled. It is said, that by treason – the Greek Ephialtes was leading the Persian forces, bypassing the mountain trails and the Anapeion Pass, the Persians were in the rear of the Greek troops. To gain time, Leonidas attacked the bulk of the Persians, but fell with a large part of his troops, as the remaining associations of Spartans and Thespians retreated to the hill of Kolonos (Welwei 2004, 146). No other event in wartime history has been regarded as controversial. The resistance of Leonidas and his Spartans was stylized as a sacrifice for the freedom of the Hellenic and an identification symbol for the following generations of Spartans. In Spartan self-expression, what happened at Thermopylae became the heroic act par excellence.



Figure 09. The so-called Phokian Wall, in the background the plain of Thermopylae, nowadays not that narrow coastline

Famous and well-known is the Distichon by Simonides of Keos cited by Herodotus (VII, 228,2). The verses engraved on a commemorative stone at the battleground can be read in the translation by Friedrich Schiller: "Wanderer, if you come to Sparta, announce that you have seen us lying here, as the law has ordered." This translation gained in European and German reception history almost a life of its own. Even in "Greek Studies", published after WW II (Kirsten, E. – Kraiker, W., Greek Studies, Heidelberg 1967, 231) it is said that by Schiller, the verses of Simonides "to this day become the property of the German people". They apparently had not been aware of its abuse during the III. Reich, when on January 30, 1943 in a speech to mark the 10th anniversary of Hitler's "seizure of power," Göring already had the obituary for the survivors of the Sixth Army: "And it will be again in the history of our days: Come, report to Germany, you have seen us fight in Stalingrad, as the law has commanded for the safety of our people." (Christ 1986, 51, Note 190).

After the breakthrough at Thermopylae, and the advance of the Persian warships at Cape Artemision at the northern tip of Euboea, the Greek fleet withdrew south into the Saronic Gulf, and Xerxes was able to continue to Attica. Central Greece and Attic were at the mercy of the Persian troops. In the Hellenic War Council, it was discussed that a decisive battle against the Isthmos line could save Salamis and Aigina. Otherwise, one would have left some allies to their fate, who would then hardly be motivated to further struggles. The fall of Athens, which culminated in the destruction of the Acropolis, was already a severe setback, also been confirmed by archaeological traces (van Rookhuijzen 2017, 33-35). Residents had already been evacuated, mainly to the islands of Aegina and Salamis, and to the city of Troizen in Argolis. The so-called Themistocles Decree was found from this same city, in which the evacuation and the measures for manning the Attic war fleet by those able to fight are described. However, it is believed that this inscription is a later forgery made for propaganda purposes (Fischer 2010, 122). But the Persians were under pressure and were forced to act. As the season progressed, supply problems rose, and these curtailed strategic options. Xerxes decided to combine land and sea operations, losing numerous triremes at Salamis, resulting in his fleet becoming incapacitated.



Figure 10. The Sound of Salamis – even today you can imagine the problems in terms of maneuverability for larger ships in the middle of the islands

One knows the glorification of the local victory, which is not least due to Athenian self-portrayal on the part of Herodotus on the merits in the struggle for Greece. Although Sparta provided only a small contingent, it had the strategic and tactical conception under the Spartan Supreme Commander Eurybiades and thus greatly contributed to the success. The Athenian Themistocles, who had promoted the expansion of the arctic naval forces thanks to the new resources of the silver deposits in the mines of Laureion, could not convince the council to pursue the enemy fleet to the Hellespont and destroy the ship bridges. Xerxes was therefore not forced to an immediate retreat, which would have meant the confession of his defeat and may have destabilized his rule in the kingdom. By the partial retreat, he could save his face. His commander Mardonios remained in northern Greece (Thessaly) and tried twice to win the Athenians for a separate peace to blow up the Greek alliance. The Macedonian king Alexander I was used as a vassal of the Great King, to convince the Athenians (in the presence of a Spartan legation – apparently to play against each other) that they would forgive the damage done by their side against Xerxes, if they offer alliance to accept (Her VIII, 140). But both great city-states were dependent on each other and for the time being remained in solidarity. After the

failed mission of Alexander I, Mardonios moved south with the Persian army, whereupon Athens sent a request for help to Sparta. The Athenian Legation arrived in Sparta during the feast of Hyakinthia, and for religious reasons were not received at once. Herodotus assumed in this procedure an excuse from the Spartans side (Her IX, 8), until the defensive work on the Isthmus had been completed, and no longer required the Athenians as allies. He took up a later anti-Persian version that suggested that they wanted to betray the Greek cause (Welwei 2004, 155). After the subsequent battle of Plataiai and Mykale (Mardonius was killed) in 479 BC, the Greeks, under the leadership of Athens, now proceeded to attack (Herodotus IX, 32). Encouraged by Xerxes's defeat, the Greeks of Asia and the islands also began to rebel again. In addition, after this complete defeat of the Persians, the Hellenic League went on the offensive and destroyed the remnants of the Persian fleet across from Samos on the Mycale peninsula. At that moment, the Spartans retreated (evidently because of disagreements), but Athens continued the formation of the Delian League. In support of a simultaneous uprising in Egypt, Athens had even dispatched a fleet of two hundred ships there, being lost after the Persians launched a counterattack in Memphis about 454 BC (Holland 2006, 342-355). The conservative families of Greece and Asia Minor, who looked to the East with full sympathy at the time, and who found themselves in need of asylum in Persia, once again prove the complexity of "friend-enemy" images. The Theban collaborators, who were preparing for the decisive battle of Plataiai in 479, held a banquet with the officers of the Persian army – almost a model for Alexander's later policy of integrating Macedonian and Persian leaders. Compare Herodotus 9, 16 (the banquet of Attaginos). The members of the Greek upper class met with the Persian aristocrats, and many will have tried, as Pausanias of Sparta, to marry a Persian princess (Thucydides I, 128, 7; "just" a daughter of a Satrap: Herodotus V, 32). Also, the portrayal of a struggle and victory of democracy against Persian despotism is not only false in relation to Athens (far from genuine people's rule as highlighted above), but primarily because of the allies, that consisted mainly of tyrants and kings. The Persians' influence was obvious in the following years after the great wars, mainly during the disputes within the Greek world that culminated in the Peloponnesian War (Hyland 2017). It started, when the Spartans under Pausanias, asked the Athenians for support against insurgent helots after an earthquake. During the Persian Wars, the Ephorat had been the coordinating body for military and diplomatic action planning. Pausanias, winner of the Battle of Plataia, had to accept despite his ruling position that two *ephors* (leaders of ancient Sparta, sharing power with two kings) had to observe his actions in the field, which as representatives of the people (being elected every five years) had to prevent misconduct by kings and, if necessary, to bring them to court (Welwei 2004, 204). He was accused of *Medismos* (collaboration with the Persians), as narrated in the representation of Thucydides (2009, I, 132,4-5). The trial was in his favor, but an alleged "collaboration with the helots" led to his muring in the Temple of Athena in Sparta. The liberation of the helots, who were generally considered *douloi* (slaves), would have encountered incomprehension at the

time, as the foundations of the existing social order would have been shaken (Welwei 2004, 168-169). Kimon considered an Athenian-Spartan cooperation based on the alliance of 481 BC essentially for Athens' success in the fight against Persia and for the consolidation of the Athenian leadership in the League. In a people's council, he could convince sending hoplites. Kimon, son of Miltiades, the winner of the Battle of Marathon (see above), was the leading politician and strategist in the years after the Persian wars. Thus, the period of the 470s and 460s was called the "Kimonian era". As a strategist, he successfully carried out large naval projects of the Delian-Attic Confederation against the Persians. He was able to free the Cypriot cities from the Persians around 478 BC, who in 468 BC served again as Persian naval bases. Steinbrecher 1985, 134. His army in support of Sparta, however, was sent back by them, which led to a dissolution of the existing agreement to weapons aid, and subsequently to the open dispute during the Peloponnesian War fifty years later. The Spartans had not accepted the requested help, probably out of mistrust of the Athenian urge to bring about political change. Some changes of alliances escalated the tensions in 460 BC. Existing power relations led to dissatisfaction, especially in the midsized and smaller communities, each of them being dependent on a dominant power, so that their freedom of action was decidedly limited. The mighty city-states, in turn, endeavored to maintain their influence under all circumstances and to enforce it with determination. While free movement of goods was guaranteed to the members of these systems, not all large polity-dependent communities saw their own advantage in this kind of peace. Everyone feared the other's power increase (Kagan 1989, 488). The Athenians felt humiliated, and in the same year banished the "Spartan friend" Kimon from the city through an ostracism, a procedure under the Athenian democracy in which any citizen could be expelled from the city, called after the sherds (ὄστρακον) that had been used as voting tokens to save costs. When he returned around 451 BC, he could negotiate a temporary truce with Sparta. He fell in 449 BC during the siege of Kition in Cyprus (nowadays still proudly referring to him in Larnaca).



Figure 11. Bust of Kimon at Larnaca (Cyprus)

REVERBERATION

In the same year, the Persian wars were formally ended with the support of Pericles by the so-called Kallias peace. Not even twenty years later (431 BC), the Greeks fought against each other. In an analysis of the origins of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides named several reasons for the beginning of the fighting between the two Great Powers (Rood 1998). One of them was probably the Spartans' fear for too much power from the Athenians (Thuc I, 1,2). They were not completely unbridgeable ideological opposites. However, developments in political thought and action had already begun, and thus contributed to the defamation of the value and order ideas of political opponents started to become the instrument of power struggles after the war, as Thucydides (2009 III, 82-83) in his so-called "pathology of the war" referred to. Opinions were divided within both elites, many of whom wanted to avoid a military confrontation. But at the beginning of the Peloponnesian war, polemical propaganda of political terminology and typology had taken hold of the political power conditions in the Greek world, so that both the concept of democracy and oligarchy were already variables from the different perspectives of

political struggles. In Herodotus' constitutional debate the term "oligarchy" could be understood on the one hand as the "rule of the best" (aristocracy), but also in its proper meaning ("rule of the few"). On the other hand, in tendentious polemics the democratic conditions in Athens were classified as a negative counter-image (ochlocracy = "mob rule") to oligarchical orders, which were accordingly upgraded. The intertwining of internal and external conflicts led to a deprivation of political concepts that served as propaganda-friendly slogans such as "equality of the crowd" or the demand for a "rule of the best" for the smuggling of revenge acts and unbridled striving for power (Welwei 2004, 192-193 and 201-202). Just during the Peloponnesian war, massacres were committed by both sides (Thuc. III, 32,1) – execution of the prisoners in Myonnessos by Spartans, killing of all Mytilenaians by order of the Athenian Ekklesia (Welwei 2004, 220). The Peloponnesian war extended to the Italian colonies: One of the most important battle-outs was the battle for Syracuse in 415 BC, when Athens tried to conquer that Corinthian colony in Sicily, being the most powerful Greek city west of mainland Greece. It was a protracted siege that tied more and more soldiers and resources and weakened the capital. When the warriors of the Athenian army were largely enslaved after their defeat and found their end in mines, the Athenian supremacy in Greece ended (DeVries et al. 2007, 71).



Figure 12. The cave of L'orecchio di Dionisio – according to legend used to be a prison of the later tyrant Dionysius (c. 430 BC—died 367) of Syracuse, also for the war captives

In its final phase, the Persians made considerable contributions to the clashes between the Greek states, as the Spartan leadership decided to cooperate with the Persian prince Cyrus (named after the Persian Empire's founder) without foreseeing the long-term effects of their decision. In the years 412/411 BC they had already treaties with him and became victorious over Athens, but set themselves into stalemate, since their recognition of the Great King's claim to rule over the Asia Minor Greeks prevented them occurring as their protective power. When Cyrus rose against his older brother Artaxerxes after the death of their father Darius, Sparta supported the uprising, which came to an end with the Battle of Kunaxa 401 BC. Thus, the hoped-for dream of a coexistence with Persia had vanished again; the political constellation changed completely. Artaxerxes demanded the submission of all Ionian poles that had supported Cyrus. The cities responded with a request for help to Sparta, which saw itself after the victory over Athens as "protective power of all Greeks" according to Xenophon's Hellenica (1970, III:1.3). The Hellenica is the primary source for events in Greece from 411 to 362 BC and recounts the last seven years of the Peloponnesian war, as well as its aftermath (Anderson 2001). In the following so-called Corinthian War, Artaxerxes now allied with Athens and Thebes against Sparta.



Figure 13. Bust of a Spartan

The newly appointed Spartan king Argesilaus II propagated with purposeful symbolism the fight against Persia as Panhellenic king. This role was denied to him by various sides, such as in the practice of cultic acts in Aulis. This place was allegedly chosen by King Agamemnon for the departure to Troy. Argesilaus wanted to refer to that event (Clough 1867, 69-70). The Spartans were able to prevail in Greece, but not against Persia. And so, it came to negotiations with the Great King in the year 387 BC, the so-called "King's Peace", which was presented to all parties, according to which the Greek cities in Asia Minor and Cyprus (Cyprus) belonged to the Great King. The Great King stood as a guarantor of peace. The question was whether the arrangements were really "a peace sent by the Great King" (Xenophon, 1970, Hellenica V:15) or a dictate, as authors of the fourth century claimed (Protagma: Isokrates 4.176). Sparta was used as a kind of executor, its almost lost hegemony role (with political, economic, and military predominance) was confirmed again, which caused much displeasure in Greece. Persia had regained its old supremacy in the eastern Mediterranean and was the real winner. But Artaxerxes also faced considerable difficulties, such as the revolt of Euagoras of Salamis (Cyprus), who had allied himself with the Egyptian ruler Akoris. Thus, the Great King was unable to compel Sparta or Athens to recognize his old claims to power in Western Asia Minor on their own. On the other hand, the Spartan leadership realized that a Greek struggle for autonomy in Asia Minor would lead to lost victories, as the Spartan resources for permanent protection were not enough. Sparta had to exercise order functions within the state world of the Hellenic motherland. This in turn led to mistrust on the part of Thebes and Corinth, who had originally sided with the victorious Spartans, and finally led to the so-called Sacred Wars. One of the main reasons for their beginning was, when the locals asked for the excuse of protecting Delphi and the authority of the amphictyons (*Amphyktion*: a city union around a sanctuary for the protection and administration, later also a festival, as the olympic games). The council condemned the Phocians for allegedly ordering holy land. Since Athens and Sparta were friendly to the Phocians, they refused to acknowledge the verdict and robbed 10,000 talents from the Delphic temple treasure, which was considered by many in Greece as an extraordinary sacrilege. The mercenaries recruited with the spoils made it possible for nearly ten years waging war on the countryside (Buckler 1989, 27-28). When, in the last of those holy wars, Philip of Macedonia joined his forces with the Thessalians and Thebans and used their modern military tactics, Greece became gradually conquered by him. The victorious Spartans suffered their greatest defeat at the Battle of Leuktra in 371 against the Thebans. As a result, Sparta's subjugated city-states rose. Generally, it can be seen again and again that defeats, even in connection with loss of prestige, provoke rebellions. Philipp's son Alexander then used the Theban tactics to capture the Persian Empire (DeVries et al. 2007, 72-73). However, Sparta was not ready to join the Hellenic League founded under the hegemony of Philip II. When his successor, Alexander II (the Great), by decision of the Corinthian League, became an authorized strategist in the "Pan-Hellenic" campaign of vengeance against Persia, they refused to give their

consent. King Agis III. sent an embassy to the Persian royal court and negotiated in Siphnos with Persian naval commanders for military and financial support in the fight against Macedonia. The help was minimal. Alexander did not make an example of Sparta since the city had become meaningless anyway after the fall of most combatants. In any case, Sparta had lost its independence. Despite recurring strength, Sparta never regained its former position. Until far into times of the Roman Empire, Sparta remained at least one *civitas libera* (free city with its own administration) with its own institutions (Ephorat, Gerusia, Apella, Syssitien, Agogé), and with upheld tradition of men's institutions as guarantors of security until 267/268 CE, when tribes of the Heruli plundered the city, and in 395 CE Alaric's troops even destroyed them (Welwei 2004, 324-325). And within a brief time, the Persian Empire was incorporated into the Macedonian, when he marched eastwards. There was never the consideration marching north- and westwards, as Europe had barely anything to offer. The conqueror's prestige and reward awaited in the east. Alexander's cosmopolitan thinking contradicted his action in Persepolis in the year 330 BC, when remembering the destruction of the Athenian Acropolis, he burned down the capital of the Persian Empire. Their fame and sudden fall also happened to Herzfeld, the German excavator (financially supported by the Chicago Oriental Institute, where today large volumes of cuneiform texts are stored and whose decoding will last for years and perhaps additionally change the image of the Persians), and whose professorship was withdrawn due to his Jewish roots, as the racial delusion in the III. Reich strengthened (Walser 1979, 9-12; Krefter 1979, 13-25). Radicalizing ideologies have also made it difficult to carry out archaeological research, sometimes even today.



Figure 14. The still impressive remains of Persepolis



Figure 15. The Tachara (king's private residence) in Persepolis, looted by Alexander's troops

Alexander, who by Greek definition was himself nothing else than a barbarian, realized very quickly after his victory over Darius that he could not dominate the empire of Persia without the participation of the Persians and other locals of the empire. It should not be forgotten either that Darius' elite troops against Alexander at the Battle of Gaugamela had a considerable number of Greek hoplite mercenaries – Greeks from areas subjugated by Macedonia and now fighting against them on the part of the Persians (Clark - Turner 2017.) The threat from the Persian side had been marginal anyway for a long time, and the conflicts were often summoned from within. And yet the image of the Asian barbarian move to Europe remains, thanks to the Greek authors. It was inter alia the staging of the play "Pérsai" by Aischylos in 472 BC, recalling the war of 480 BC (Meier 2009, 39-41). Aischylos is several times emphasizing the fight of the Greek pike against the Persian bow (verse 25, 82, 133, 226 and 864), and also Herodotus is referring to that (Her IX, 18 and 49). Despite its proud memory of Athens' great victory, the piece was conceived as a tragedy of the Persian Empire and as a warning against crossing borders. Thus, Ayschilos alluded to the fact that, contrary to nature and divine will, Xerxes sought to connect the two continents with the bridge over the Hellespont, which amounted to a hubris and was punished (as the Old Testamental counterpart Tower of Babel, connecting

heaven and earth in Gen 11,1-9). Symbolically, the Asia-Europe gap even became deeper, exposing itself to the one who wanted to bridge it – Xerxes – as ultimately insurmountable. The Persians were probably also one of the first peoples in the field of tension between natural control and destruction of nature, between economic progress and ecological regression. The Persian king Xerxes appears in Greek sources as a ruler, whose self-understanding was to act as a ruler of nature. Iustinus rated him in the typical Western traditional image as a negative ruler of the East (Iustinus II 10.24). A similar interpretation can also be observed in Herodotus who serves as the main source of the Persian wars: He was concerned with a different representation of the contradiction between the rise and fall of great powers. Beside Herodotus, Thukydides, and Xenophon, the Geographia of Hekataios, the authors Dionysius of Miletus, Charon and Hellanikos should also be mentioned as works of historical value, especially in those contexts. The kingdom of the Lydians had subjugated in the 6th century BC the Greek colonies, which were conquered by the Persians who became subsequently destroyed by the Greeks. The Ionian cities, under the leadership of the commercial metropolis Miletus, had a political and intellectual role in the 6th century BC, after uprising against the Persians defeated and Miletus was destroyed, as Athens in the 5th century BC. The Persians as the indomitable masters of the world failed in their attempt to conquer the small Greece, and now Athens appeared as a new (sea) kingdom. Herodotus tried to interpret the story again and again as a cycle. After the Lydian king Kroisos crossed the Halys River, encouraged by the oracle (see above) and was defeated by the Persians, he warned the Great King Cyrus to attack the wild Massagetes, but Cyrus crossed the river of Araxes and was killed in his campaign. Herodotus lets him say: "Do you believe that you are immortal and command an army of immortals? There is no use in telling you my opinion. However, if you are aware that you are a human being and you rule over people, let me tell you that there is a wheel of human happiness. As a result of this rotation, it does not allow them to be in luck forever." (Her I, 71-92; I, 207,2; I, 214). It reminds on the Wheel of Fortune (Κύκλος ἀνθρωπέιον προγμάτων) that was also a common image in the Middle Ages. This is often preceded by a misconduct, a transgression of a limit set for man, symbolically equated with a geographical border, a river, or a strait. Like the kings Kroisos and Cyrus, Darius also suffered a defeat when crossing a river, as he wanted to attack the Scythians over the Danube, Xerxes failed when crossing the Hellespont, which he tried to subjugate with a bridge. The conflict was also the battle for supremacy – Xerxes, according to Herodotus, is quoted to have said that only one can dominate the other, there is no middle ground. A popular topos was that Asia proved to be weakened by luxury as juxtaposition to the Greek manly attitude (areté), caused by wisdom and strict law. Over the centuries, these traditions have been incorporated in the West in many ways over the centuries, not least by referring to the own qualities against the Asian quantities. Thus, "barbaric" became over time the synonym for wild and uncivilized (Her I, 2-5). The conflict and the gap between the two continents, Herodotus already presented with the legend of the robbery of women: The

Phoenicians stole the Greek Io, the Greeks (metaphorically, in form of Zeus) the Phoenician princess Europe. This was followed by the robbery of Medea from Colchis at the Black Sea by the Greek Argonauts, a little later of Helena by the Asian Trojans. Although Herodotus is considered the "father of history" (Cicero (106-43 BC): *pater historiae*), his approach was often doubted in antiquity. Thucydides seemed to correct him in several phrases, in the 4th century he was then openly criticized by historians such as Theopomp and Ktesias. Ktesias had spent some time as a personal physician at the court of the Persian king and founded his verdict on Herodotus' account of the personal history, and yet he also accuses him of lying and exaggerating (Hose 2004, 154). Plutarch later called Herodotus a "barbarian friend". Herodotus himself relativises his report: "I owe it to my reader to tell what is being told (*légein ta legómena*), but I do not need to believe it completely, and this principle should be kept in all my work." (Her VII,152,3). The previously mentioned alliance offers by Mardonius to the Athenians, Herodotus used to influence the reader: They rejected and explained their decision to the already worried Spartans:

"... you should be ashamed of such fear, for you know perfectly well that for all the gold in the world and the most beautiful land that could be given to us, we would not help the Persians to subjugate Greece. Because even if we wanted it, many important reasons would make it impossible for us. First and foremost, the burnt and destroyed temples and gods ... But we are also Greeks, sharing with you the same blood and the same language. We have the same temples and images of the gods and the same customs ... " (Her VIII,144.)

But this portrayal of heroism and solidarity was not found among the Hellenistic states. The argument of such similarities was put forward by the Athenians to explain their strict refusal to negotiate with the Persians. The "blood" as a criterion of Greek commonality is unusual; this should probably emphasize the family context of all Greeks. The notion of a not merely Athenian, or Spartan, or Argivian identity (Thucydides 2009, V, 67), but of a common – modern-speaking, ethnicity (Hall 1997, 41.) – was by no means familiar to every Greek politician, but instrumentalized by the Athenians in their own sense. The term "Hellas" for Greece was hardly used before the age of the Persian wars and only referred to as name in the early time to a certain part of Northern Greece (Thucydides 2009, I, 3) However, a rudimentary awareness of Greek commonalities beyond the small-state particularism already in the archaic era should not be ignored. Already in the Iliad, the army of the Greeks (Achaeans, Argeians and Danaans) distinguished themselves by a much better coordinated appearance in comparison with the Trojans (Cartledge 2011, 23). Herodotus integrated two relevant aspects: The Athenians wanted to take revenge on their ruined temple; on the other hand, he interrupted the story where the Greeks in turn would have to cross the Hellespont – the zero point, which could have fatal consequences if exceeded. The term "history" was not yet *terminus technicus* for Herodotus, as it contained in its true sense "investigation" (Her II, 444). He identified data,

explanations, traditions, and juxtaposed them, allowing the readers to draw conclusions and decide by themselves (Hose 2004, 163 and 169-170). But Herodotus was of course biased, and the reader's reception often leads to false conclusions today, too. This problem came into evidence in the 19th century, when the emerging sciences of Assyriology, Iranian Studies and Egyptology exploited Herodotus' monopoly position as a "source" for ancient Near Eastern cultures, for the classically educated person was able to translate Greek rather than cuneiform texts. In some cases, the scholars had not even been able to translate cuneiform scripts at that time, as mentioned above. In the literal and historical perspective Herodotus is still read today as a historiographer. Thucydides, Xenophon, and Polybios continued this genre; their texts usually refer to him as well. Lydika of Xanthos, the Lydian history, which ended Kroisos' reign with the conquest of the capital city Sardes by the Persian, should be named, too. Was the author a Hellenized Lykian, coming from the transitional area between Ionian Greece and Lydia? (Hose 2004, 158-159) Although some of his statements could be confirmed, many stories remain stories. Such approaches become critical if they are used for today's foreign policy legitimacy, using in case of Iran keywords as the fight between oriental-religious despotism against Western democracy. When reading the ethnographic chapters on the Persians, one is surprised about the high appreciation of the opponent's culture of 480 BC, who had been perceived as a threatening power at least until the year 449 BC. The year 449 is the year of the so-called "peace by Kallias" (as mentioned above) or at least a diplomatic arrangement that led to a temporary cessation of hostilities (Badian 1987, 1-39).

However, a distinction must be made between the original culture of the Persians and their condition in the epoch of the Persian wars and afterwards. Herodotus was full of respect for Persian morals in general, but very critical of the regime and Great King's behavior. In their reflection, the Greeks were to be prevented from becoming like those whom they so much had been opposing. Herodotus wrote his work in the heyday of Delish-Attic symmarchy and in the crisis years before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, working with allusions to events after 478 BC (Bichler – Rollinger 2000, 367-369). The work ended with the conquest of Sestos in 478 BC, but Herodotus had designed the final section of his work so that it had to be read as a warning to his Athenian audience. Herodotus took a subtle position on the political development in the age of the sea confederacy, by making evident to his Athenian listeners that the Persians were different in their manners and customs but could also behave very exemplary. Athens, on the other hand, risked ruthlessly pursuing its political interests to alienate itself and became as Persian-barbaric as corresponded to the chauvinist idea of the Persian barbarians in the streets of Athens. Moles (1996, 262-263) was emphasizing the instrumentalization of the "foreign" Persians as a warning example: "Reading Herodotus' History is itself a moral and political act." (Ibd., 279). As a warning against such developments, Herodotus as historian and ethnographer apparently remained as unsuccessful as most do today.

When Alexander the Great led his troops against the Persians (in most cases all the Hellenic city-states had to be submitted first, too), he (mis)used polemic phrases and populism in reminding on the sack of Athens by the Persians as excuse for his own expansion. That kind of politics reminds of Western ideas trying to distribute "democracy" in the Near and Middle East. On the other hand, Alexander adapted a lot of the obviously higher Persian culture. That and other (conquered) local elements merged with the Greek we call his distribution of culture, religion, and to a lesser extent language *Hellenization*. Alexander's Empire did not survive his death, and when his successors fought against each other, new oriental dynasties emerged. Over the centuries, the realms of Alexander's successors (Diadochs) got merged into the Roman Empire. To the east, the Parthians – their name referring to the rulers of the Achaemenid Empire – took the scepter. And now they got into conflict with the west, the expanding Roman Empire. In that case, the term Persian Wars can also be referred to the centuries-long war of the Roman and later Byzantine empires against the Parthians and Sasanians – powers that both adhered to the ancient glories of the Persian empire. The Parthian dynasty of the Arsacids (named after their founder Arsaces) derived from northeastern Iran and (re)conquered larger parts of the ancient Persian Empire until 174 CE. Here, science can finally rely on reports from both sides and thus they are no longer one-sided, and moreover according with each other, for example Theophanes (Chronographia I), Prokop (De bello Persico), and Herodion on the Western side, on the other side consistent with Kon ʒ- Tabari (Wiesehöfer – Müller 2017, 243).



Figure 16. Nisa, the Parthian's first capital, close to Ashgabat in Turkmenistan

CONCLUSION

This contribution showed the old and yet repeatedly brought up conflict between east and west through ideologies as well as the danger of instrumentalization up to the present day. Furthermore, the "clashes of cultures" are considered, all of which were in some way related or influenced, regardless of time, thus closing the circle of decline and renewal of empires, such as in the case of ancient Persia. For a long time, the historical classification of the success of the Greeks was seen and interpreted in the West as the struggle for the intellectual independence of western people and thus generally for the cultural foundations of Europe. Often, however, it is not about the fight against a completely foreign culture. Today people are more careful with it, because on the one hand the belief in the timeless greatness of Greek culture has dwindled, while one no longer sees them as oriental despots – not least because of the ability to also translate Persian sources. As the development of Egypt or the cities of Asia Minor under Persian rule shows, their capture would hardly have meant an end to their cultural identity. Nonetheless, developments within the Greek city-states, most notably Athens, were their complete independence regarding some ideas such as rational science as well as democracy. Most city-states in Greece itself continued to be "non-democratic" societies, challenging, and threatening each other.

For it was evident in Greece that the city-states fought each other again without an external enemy as before the great Persian crisis. To a limited extent, they had overcome their conflicts for the time being, but after the Persian wars a power-political dualism had emerged: The two leading city-states Athens and Sparta, from their respective perspectives, saw in the existence of the other hegemonic power a threat to their leadership as well as in their own alliance system. Deliberate forces of both city-states tried to avoid a conflict and yet could not prevent it, and the Greek world was torn apart by the Peloponnesian War. Ultimately, the Spartans could only win this fight with the help of the (former hostile) Persians, but they came by the power struggle with Athens into a confrontation with the Persians again. The Persians tried to incorporate Greek cities in a diplomatic and economic way, that reminds almost on a "cold war" with its surrogate wars, until Alexander put an end to the Persian Empire. When under Darius and Xerxes "the great war had come from the soils of Asia to Europe", as it was said in a poem by Choirilos of Samos, the same happened one and a half centuries later in the opposite direction. It was the time of Hellenism that spread deep into the Asian heartland. The Greek way of life and language, as well as now their philosophy spread all along the old world. The Hellenic culture became the dominant one, the gap between the two continents fell, and for a brief time there was again exchange in wealth and relations, as they prevailed earlier, before Alexander's successors tore the empire apart again. It should be emphasized that the orientaling influence was already strong in the centuries before. As around 750 BC, when the colonization began, the Greeks also reached out to the oriental regions. They responded to the trading of the Phoenicians, and now headed even to the Levant over Rhodes and Cyprus. They founded their own trading stations (such as Al Mina at the Orontes in Syria), and besides trading, they absorbed many ideas from there. To emphasize is also the adoption of a writing system – our alphabet, which had been taken over detours from the Phoenician one. Myths, forms of music, literary motifs, and figures – all of these were appropriated. The myth of the succession of the dynasties of the deities in the Oriental East not only helped Hesiod to organize the world of the

gods but helped later also Aeschylus to interpret the days after the overthrow of democracy. With the outbreak of the rebellion in Ionia and the support by the Greeks partly for economic and partly for ideological reasons, the gap between east and west widened again, patterns that we observe even more intensively today.

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