





*xšnaoθrahe ahurahe mazdā*

Detail from above the entrance of Tehran's fire temple, 1286š/1917–18. Photo by © Shervin Farridnejad

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## Hystaspes, Gobryas, and elite marriage politics in Teispid Persia

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During the reign of Cambyses in the 520s BCE, two of Persia's most prominent families joined forces in a double marriage alliance. Hystaspes, son of Arsames, and Gobryas, son of Mardonius, were leading members of the aristocracy of an empire just entering its second generation; the former was cousin to the king through mutual descent from his great-grandfather Teispes, and the latter was the leader of the prosperous, semi-autonomous tribe known as the Pātišuvariš (DBbab §54; DNC; PF-NN 1581).<sup>1</sup> The union of Gobryas with Hystaspes' daughter (Hdt. 7.5.1) probably occurred before the succession struggle of 522; its offspring, Mardonius, was old enough to take a wife in or before 498 (PFa 5=PF-NN 1345; Hdt. 6.43.1). Gobryas gave his own daughter from an earlier marriage to Hystaspes' son, the future king Darius, by 525 at the latest, since she bore him three sons before his rise to the throne (Hdt. 7.2.2).<sup>2</sup> She may be attested in Babylonian documents of Darius' reign, and a case can be made for

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1- See Henkelman and Stolper 2009, 284-87; Henkelman 2010, 710; Henkelman 2011, 11-13; Bahadori 2017, 184-85. Strabo 15.3.1, calling them the Patischoreis, asserts that they ranked with the Achaemenids and the magi as Persia's preeminent population groups. See Henkelman and Stolper 2009, 286 n. 39, for Battišmaran (Fort. 1904-001) as one of their towns.

2- Two of their sons were Artabarzanes, whom Hdt. 7.2.2-3 names as Xerxes' unsuccessful rival for the throne, and Ariabignes, commander of the Ionian ships in 480 (Hdt. 7.97); see Schmitt 2001; Briant 2002, 902. Xerxes mentions other brothers over whom Darius selected him as heir (XPf §4); see Brosius 1996, 60-61.

her identification with Irdabama, the most powerful female landowner in the Persepolis Fortification Archive.<sup>3</sup>

Previous studies have situated these marriages in the context of Darius' efforts to consolidate power by securing the allegiance of other Persian aristocrats. Darius acquired his other spouses, notably including the daughters and widows of the Teispid rulers Cyrus and Cambyses, after his contested succession.<sup>4</sup> With this in mind, Maria Brosius has questioned Herodotus' accuracy on the timing of the first marriage, speculating that the link to Gobryas' daughter also took place after 522 as a reward for Gobryas' loyalty.<sup>5</sup> Ali Bahadori has recently argued that Darius married Gobryas' daughter to secure the support of the Pātišvariš in controlling the Fahliyan region between Persis and Khuzestān.<sup>6</sup>

But it is unnecessary to reject Herodotus' testimony, the sole source for the marriage between Darius and Gobryas' daughter (and the birth of their children before the succession). A simpler approach to the evidence would explain the first marriage, along with that between Gobryas and Darius' sister, by recognizing the probable agency of Hyštaspes, Darius' father, in arranging both unions before Darius emerged as a contender for the throne.

Evidence on non-royal marriages in the Achaemenid period is somewhat scarce, but it is reasonable to assume that noblemen expected to select their daughters' husbands (cf. Xen. *Hell.* 4.1.4-15; Xen. *Ages.* 3.2-3; Diod. 9.35.2).<sup>7</sup> Several Persepolis documents mentioning elite women hint at the lengthy reach of paternal authority, designating a group of adult women traveling between Media and Persepolis in 500/499 as the "daughters of Hyštaspes" (PFa 31), and another party in 499/8 as the "women of Gobryas" (PF 684; Fort. 1017); the latter group was led by a woman named Radušdukda, probably Gobryas' wife and possibly Hyštaspes' daughter. Later periods of Iranian antiquity provide explicit evidence for fathers' oversight of their daughters' marriages, for example in a Sasanian template for marriage contracts which stipulates a transfer of guardianship from brides' fathers to their husbands.<sup>8</sup> Gobryas' wedding to Hyštaspes' daughter, then, should imply a deliberate pre-arrangement between the groom and the father of the bride that served the interests of both.

We should also consider the possibility that Hyštaspes orchestrated Darius' marriage with Gobryas'

3- For her possible identification with a woman designated *ša-ekalli* with the personal name Apama in two documents from Borsippa dated to 503/2 and 502/1 (BM 29447 and BM 85009), see Zadok 2002, 1-2; Kuhrt 2007, 173 n. 1, 597 n. 7. Henkelman 2010, 697, argues that the Borsippa texts do not give a personal name but a title, *abbamuš*, associated with Irdabama in the PFA, and suggests that Irdabama might have been Darius' mother or "perhaps more likely" his wife (693). The former option seems less plausible given Hyštaspes' apparent residence in Media, the location from which his daughters traveled in PFA31, by the end of his life. Bahadori 2017, 186, follows the association of the Borsippa landowner with Irdabama and accepts the identification with Gobryas' daughter.

4- Cf. Briant 2002, 113, 135, 309.

5- Brosius 1996, 52, 61.

6- Bahadori 2017, 188. Bahadori's argument for the tribe's location in Fahliyan rests on two unproven assumptions, that Irdabama's estates would have been located in her father's territory (while Gobryas was still alive and Mardonius his principal heir), and that Gobryas' travel attestations in this region reflect his permanent residence.

7- Cf. Briant 2002, 337.

8- See Yakubovich 2005; cf. Shaki 1999. Marriage contracts from Achaemenid Babylonia similarly involve the consent of the bride's male guardian, the father if living, for transfer to the husband (Brosius 1996, 79-80).

daughter. Achaemenid kings chose their sons' spouses (Hdt. 9.108.1), and nobles are likely to have done so as well; once again, the custom is attested in the Sasanid period.<sup>9</sup> Despite the young Darius' acquisition of a high court office as "spear-bearer" of Cambyses (Hdt. 3.139), it would be rash to assume that a male in his twenties could have superseded his father's authority in the matter of a marriage that might advance his elite family's fortunes.<sup>10</sup>

The motives for Darius' marriage with Gobryas' daughter, therefore, should not be associated with the young man's later policies as king, but rather with the aspirations of Hyštaspes and Gobryas under Cambyses. It is doubtful that Hyštaspes made these arrangements in order to prepare his son's bid for power, and more likely that he sought to enhance his own political and economic position. Most scholars have rejected Herodotus' claim that Hyštaspes was the governor (*hyparchos*) of Persis (3.71), due to his military command in Parthia in 522-521 (DB §35).<sup>11</sup> But it is not impossible that he held a position in the heartland under Cyrus and that Cambyses (or Bardiya) later sent him to Parthia, while his father Arsames, who also lived into Darius' reign (XPf §3), remained in their ancestral domains. Matt Waters has suggested that he served under Teispid royal oversight as a "paramount ruler of whatever region in which the Achaemenids were dominant," thereby justifying Darius' allusion to him and Arsames as kings in DB §2-4.<sup>12</sup> In this case, Hyštaspes' practical situation may have been similar to that of Gobryas among the Pātišuvaiš, and he may have seized an opportunity to increase his regional influence through alliance with another prominent population group close to the Teispid heartland. During Darius' reign, the Pātišuvaiš maintained their own internal structures and leadership while interacting in mutually beneficial ways with the Persepolitan economy; at an earlier period, Gobryas may have sought marriage alliance with Hyštaspes' household in order to benefit his tribe by strengthening his personal ties to the royal family.<sup>13</sup> The limited number of Cyrus' female offspring and their retention within the households of Cambyses and Bardiya meant that few Persian nobles, with the exception of Otanes whose daughter married the king, had the opportunity for direct marriage into the Teispid household.<sup>14</sup> But matrimonial bonds with a prominent royal cousin may have entailed the prospect of greater favor from the king himself, so long as Hyštaspes' family remained in Cambyses' good graces.<sup>15</sup>

Darius' rise to power exploited these marriage links for his own gain while reshaping the Persian

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9- See Shaki 1999.

10- Darius was born c. 550 (Hdt. 1.209.2); for *doryphoros* as court title, see Briant 2002, 112; Henkelman 2003, 120; Waters 2004, 96-97.

11- Briant 2002, 112; Waters 2004, 96; Waters 2014a, 65. Briant suggests that his role in Cyrus' final campaign (Hdt. 1.209) might have resulted from an early Parthian command. It is noteworthy that DB does not call Darius' father a satrap, in contrast with Dadaršiš in Bactria and Vivana in Arachosia.

12- Waters 2014b, 67.

13- For economic structures under Cambyses similar to those attested in the PFA, see Henkelman and Kleber 2007.

14- For Otanes and Phaidyme, see Brosius 1996, 52-54. Henkelman 2003 identifies Otanes' daughter Phaidyme as the deceased woman Upanduš who shared funerary rites with Cambyses at Narezzaš in the reign of Darius; for the religious implications of cult offerings to deceased members of the royal family see also Rollinger 2012, 42-44.

15- Similar considerations may have influenced the earlier Achaemenid marriages attested in Herodotus, likely orchestrated by Hyštaspes' father Arsames: Hyštaspes' sister and an Achaemenid named Teispes (4.43.1-2), and another probable sister and the father of Darius' cousin Megabates (5.32).



political landscape, not least for Hyštaspes and Gobryas. Both supported Darius' coup and battled his enemies in 522-521, no doubt in the recognition that his failure and the survival of Bardiya/Gaumata or Vahyazdata would spell their own certain downfall as Darius' closest kin. But in so doing, they accepted a lifetime of deference to a royal son and son-in-law, in contrast with the customary state of paternal authority over the younger generation. Darius acknowledged their unusual status by honoring both men above and beyond their former peers, as hinted at in the Bisitun inscription and the Persepolis evidence for their extensive households and income two decades into his reign.<sup>16</sup> Although Darius chose a grandson of Cyrus to succeed him, rather than one of his sons with Gobryas' daughter, he named one of his sons with the Teispid princess Irtašduna after Gobryas, and arranged a match between his daughter Artazoštre and Gobryas' son Mardonius that extended their familial connection into the next generation.<sup>17</sup> When Hyštaspes died, his son honored him with royal funerary cult at Persepolis, comparable with the offerings at Cambyses' tomb in Narezzaš.<sup>18</sup>

The marriage pact between the families of Hyštaspes and Gobryas bore consequences that neither could have imagined at the time of its conception; yet despite its outcome, it may be a typical example of aristocratic but non-royal marriage alliances in the early Persian empire. This double union provides pre-Achaemenid evidence for the linear ties that bound Persian elites to colleagues at the same time as they competed for royal favor, and reinforces the significance of the unusual role played by the King's living father in the first half of Darius' reign.

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16- For the presentation of Hyštaspes in DB, see Hyland 2014, 21. For Gobryas' position in Darius' inner circle, see DB §68, 71; DNC; Hdt. 3.73, 3.78.4-5. For his income, among the highest attested in the PFA, see PF 688; Fort. 0758-104; PF-NN 0210; PF-NN 1133; PF-NN 2533 (cf. Briant 2002, 136; Henkelman and Stolper 2009, 286 n. 40).

17- Hdt. 7.72, 6.43; cf. Lewis 1985, 111; Briant 2002, 132, 520. For Irtašduna's importance in the Persepolis archive, with apparent authority over the surviving Teispid patrimony, see Henkelman 2010, 698-703.

18- Henkelman 2003; Tuplin 2008, 322-323.

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