

in extracting DNA from Egyptian mummies. Most of the DNA community is awaiting confirmation by labs outside of Cairo before accepting the results.

This controversy should not distract from the quality and quantity of important radiological findings presented in this remarkable book. The scans are reproduced for all to see and an extensive section of color images provides information never before reported. The comprehensive bibliography is also a contribution. This volume sets a high standard for future scans of the mummies of ancient Egypt.

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Ctesias' Persica and Its Near Eastern Context. By MATT WATERS. Wisconsin Studies in Classics. Madison: UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN PRESS, 2017. Pp. xiii + 159, illus. \$64.95.

Perfidious eunuchs, warrior queens, egregious lion slayings: *Ctesias' Persica*, at least what fragments remain of it, bursts with amusing stories told from the other side of the Mediterranean—the Persian side, and with a gusto and imagination that rivals Herodotus. But this is not history, suggests Matt Waters in his brief yet illuminating account of the *Persica* and its context. Although rivaling Greek historians, Ctesias sought not historical accuracy but distinction. Better to consider Ctesias' work a romance, a “proto-historical novel.” This genre-switching opens new pathways of research, freeing the reader from the pedantry of policing errors and misstatements. Waters' treatment of the *Persica* raises exciting questions about the making of history as well as the writing of it.

Ctesias' Persica and Its Near Eastern Context traces illustrative case studies in the *Persica* to unfold the literary and oral traditions that shaped and were shaped by it. Waters examines eunuchs as threshold figures; the Semiramis story as a Ctesian rendition of the Assyrian and Babylonian legends undergirding their ideology of kingship; Ctesias' creative retelling of the story of Cyrus; and the aspects of Achaemenid ideology and royal practice manifested by other extant stories from the *Persica*. All of these intellectual forays presume that Ctesias appropriated Mesopotamian motifs, rather than simply borrowing them. This appropriation, moreover, comes in the service of an overarching ambition to stir the imagination of his readers (p. 104).

Eunuchs certainly stirred Ctesias' imagination. According to Waters, Ctesias' treatment of eunuchs as liminal figures finds no historical antecedent. Waters reads eunuchs in the *Persica* as serving the literary purpose of bridging divides between the public side of the royal family and its private sphere: between the King and his women, between the King and his court, between the King and his rivals, and between life and death. Waters surveys the controversy about who eunuchs actually were; although the language of *sha resi* is inconsistently applied, Ctesias appears to use it to develop a particular character type, namely the “perfidious eunuch” (or “conniving courtier,” p. 20). This type appears in named and unnamed registers, both showing how trust forms the material of whatever bridge eunuchs create between parties in the royal court; Ctesias seems to employ this character to illuminate the many human connections upon which this court rested.

Ctesias also offers one of the earliest sources for Semiramis, the legendary queen of Assyria. Examining these stories (preserved primarily by Diodorus Siculus), Waters suggests that Semiramis fascinated Ctesias and his audience because she “flipped the type”: she embodied many masculine attributes central to kingship while still maintaining the patronage of Ishtar, the goddess of sexual love and war. Semiramis thus illustrates Ctesias' interest in gender opposition and inversion as well as the crossing of boundaries that many of these types occasion. Waters educes the particular features of Semiramis by using the legend of Sargon as a comparison point. Ctesias' account of Semiramis has close parallels, such as their birth and upbringing stories or possible divinity; however, alongside these masculine features, Semiramis also incorporates feminine elements such as her beauty and sexual allure. When Diodorus recounts how Semiramis sexually preyed upon and then killed attractive young men from her own army, he evokes the gendered ambiguity that sets off Semiramis from her male predecessors. Ctesias creates a “hybridized Semiramis” embodying the Greek fascination with opposites and inversions.

Ctesias also draws on alternative sources to fashion an account of Cyrus that detours from the standard conventions. Waters suggests that Ctesias intends to correct previous accounts of Cyrus (such as Herodotus') not with an eye toward accuracy but rather to set his own work apart from that of his predecessor and rival. These differences also reveal Ctesias' reliance on oral and unofficial traditions: the Sargon legends that A. Kuhrt has suggested but also, as Waters forwards, literary tropes of fate and strategic brilliance, such as winning favor as a lowly member of the palace staff and then advancing by dint of his own acumen and ability.

In Herodotus' version, Astyages (the ruler of the Medes) dreams of his daughter Mandane's giving birth to a world-encompassing vine. In Ctesias' version, the dream (of a flood of urine sweeping over Asia) is external to the Median royal house, dreamt by Cyrus' mother, who was not from the royal family. Good omens proceed to guide Cyrus' action, which is much more deliberate and calculated than in Herodotus' narrative. Ctesias also offers a different take on the "wise advisor" motif, emphasizing Cyrus' groomsmen Oibaras' cleverness and worth, even while Cyrus remains the mastermind behind his own ascendancy.

Waters' treatments of Semiramis and Cyrus in the *Persica* illustrate how Ctesias adapts Near Eastern legends to fit his Greek milieu. In a separate chapter, Waters details a number of other smaller examples of this and the tropes they illustrate. The overthrow of the Assyrian Empire provides the story of Sardanapalus, who exemplified effeminacy and delicacy. The saga of Parsondes, the first "feature-length" story featuring a Persian in the extant *Persica*, develops the theme of inversion when the masculine Parsondes undergoes a social (if not literal) transformation from man into woman. The tragic love story of the Scythian warrior queen Zarinaia and the Mede Stryngaios describes a "common, ritualistic phenomenon of abasement before the deity" (p. 94) but does so with an emotive component similar to the Ashurbanipal-Ishtar relationship, albeit with lovers rather than a mother and son.

Waters ends when Ctesias reaches his own era, where the material "is less obviously fictional" and the "tangle of history and embellishment becomes harder to unravel" (p. 101). Ctesias continues to treat his favorite themes—inversion, excess, feminization—until the end of the *Persica*, showing continued appropriation of Mesopotamian motifs as he manipulates these elements for his Greek audience. Waters concludes: "Entertainment and art were the purpose of his work, not an objective record. Why stick with the facts when so much exotic and fascinating inspiration was at hand to embellish?" (p. 103).

Inspiration to what end? *Ctesias' Persica and Its Near Eastern Context* remains suggestive about its ultimate insights, in part because of its reliance on a fragmentary text but also in part because of Waters' decision to adopt a commentary-like approach. It appears as a sign of humility that Waters does not venture more than elaborated readings of the fragments, refusing the temptation to conclusive argument. Yet this humility also means that Ctesias speaks, in Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht's words, with a "general flavor of vagueness," not having a definable end or purpose. Waters connects Ctesias' text to its Near Eastern contexts with admirable dexterity, yet these connections never quite resolve to support the broader claim about Ctesias' genre and the ambitions of that genre. What does it mean to call Ctesias an innovator in the genre of romance writing? And what are the stakes of such a claim for the history of the ancient Mediterranean and Near East?

Here a contrast with Herodotus seems worthwhile. If Ctesias did not attempt to inquire into the causes of great deeds, was his task nonetheless one of remembrance, lest these deeds lose their *kleos*? Or was Ctesias' appropriation meant to win fame in the moment and little else? Waters' reading implies the latter more than the former; his Ctesias becomes an amusing companion but without the world-historical scope of Herodotus or Thucydides. Yet here I wonder if Waters undersells his own subject. Ctesias' reworking of genre does not abandon history so much as expand it; his pursuit of alternative stories to the dominant narratives anticipates Nietzsche's praise of critical history. These are perfidious eunuchs with an edge canted towards the conventional thinking of fourth-century Greeks who rested on easy assumptions about Greek and Other. Ctesias not only complicates these preconceptions but shows through his example of living and learning among the peoples he chronicled how a more truthful inquiry might proceed.

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