

*P*ROSKYNĒSIS AND THE GESTURE OF THE KISS AT ALEXANDER'S COURT: THE CREATION OF A NEW ÉLITE¹

The introduction – or attempted introduction – of the Achaemenid *proskynēsis* at Alexander's court is a famous episode of the Alexander tradition among ancient scholars. The debates that the possibility that the Companions did *proskynēsin* before Alexander caused, which we can read in the classical sources, both in the so-called Vulgate tradition (in this case Plutarch and Curtius Rufus) and in Arrian, has found a place in many articles and in all the monographs on Alexander. As with many other traditions related to Alexander, separating the legend and the different, biased interpretations from what may actually have happened is not an easy purpose. In any case, it is not my task to deal with the historiography in the sense of understanding why any *milieu* influenced the picture and the interpretation of the *proskynēsis* affair that the different authors offered. As has been noted, “scholars (...) have viewed the subject only in Alexander-centered ways”² without taking into consideration when and where, to what purpose and for which public ancient authors wrote and that these elements are worth further investigation. But it does also mean that, once aware of these elements, we can come back to the history with a clearer and more critical approach to what happened. The goal of this paper is not to give a complete picture of Alexander's attempt to introduce the *proskynēsis*. The topic will be addressed instead from an unusual point of view, in order to focus on two questions: 1) what kind of gesture Alexander's Companions

¹ This is a revised version of the paper I presented at the 10th “Conference on History, From Ancient to Modern”, organized by ATINER, Athens, Greece, from the 30th of July to the 2nd of August 2012.

² T. Howe, ‘The Diadochi, Invented Tradition, and Alexander's expedition to Siwah’, in V.A. Troncoso (ed.), *After Alexander: the Time of the Diadochi (323–281 BC)*, Oxford 2013, 57–58.

were asked to perform, and 2) how it relates to the system of recruiting his élite that Alexander had planned from the beginning of the expedition.

First, it is necessary to explain what *proskynēsis* was.³ Ancient Greek *kynein* means “to kiss”⁴ and the preverb *pros* indicates the kiss is directed towards somebody “in front of”. Greek sources used the term *proskynēsis* to indicate a gesture performed by people in front of the Persian king, before approaching him.⁵ Gadatas the eunuch could greet Cyrus just after observing the mandatory court protocol: “after setting things in order within the fort, [he] came out and did the *proskynēsis* according to the custom and said: ‘Joy be with you, Cyrus!’” (Xen. Cyr. 5.3.18). The expression *proskyneuein toi nomoi*, which we read in the text, indicates that the Greeks considered the gesture as a “usual habit” of the Persians, which had become a rule because of its repetitiveness.⁶

Some will be surprised that the gesture Greeks called *proskynēsis* is already to be found in the ancient Near East from at least the third millennium BCE. As Bickerman points out, the cuneiform ideogram KARABU is formed by the symbols of a hand and a mouth. It means “to approach”, usually divinities, as if to

³ I provide an extensive picture of the *proskynēsis* in the ancient Near East in C. Matarese, *Ancient World* (forthcoming). To mention all the bibliography on the topic is not possible. Some key titles are: L. Ross Taylor, ‘The “Proskynesis” and the Hellenistic Ruler Cult’, *JHS* 47.1 (1927), 53–62 (with previous bibliography on the theme); J. Horst, *Proskynein*, Gütersloh 1932; E.J. Bickerman, ‘A propos d’un passage de Chares de Mytilène’, *La Parola del Passato* 91 (1963), 241–255; R.N. Frye, ‘Gestures of deference to royalty in ancient Iran’, *IA* 9 (1972), 102–107; P. von Sachsen Meiningen, ‘Proskynēsis in Iran’, in F. Altheim (ed.), *Geschichte der Hunnen, Bd. II: Die Hephthaliten in Iran*, Berlin 1972, 125–166; J.K. Chosky, ‘Gesture in Ancient Iran and Central Asia II: Proskynēsis and the Bent Forefinger’, *Bulletin of the Asia Institut* NS 4 (1990), 201–7; J. Wiesehöfer, “Denn ihr huldigt nicht einem Menschen als eurem Herrscher, sondern nur den Göttern”: Bemerkungen zur Proskynese in Iran’, in C. Cereti, M. Maggi, E. Provati (eds), *Studies in honor of Professor Gherardo Gnoli on the occasion of his 65th birthday on 6th December 2002*, Wiesbaden 447–452; D. Musti, ‘Posidonio e l’etimologia di Proskynesis’, in *ERKOE, Studi in Onore di Franco Sartori*, Padova 2003, 159–70.

⁴ *Kynein* is used mostly in poetry (H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Heidelberg 1960, Bd. II, 49–50). The same stem in other Indo-European languages: got. *kukjan*; skt. *cumbati*; Ger. *küssen*; Eng. *kiss*; cf. E. Boisaq, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque étudiée dans ses rapports avec les autres langues indoeuropéennes*, Paris, Heidelberg 1938, 535.

⁵ Some relevant evidence of the *proskynēsis* addressed to the Achaemenid king may be found in: Hdt. 1.134; 7.136; Xen. Cyr. 1.3.2, 1.3.18, 8.3.13–4; *Anab.* 2.5.23, 3.2.13; Plut. *Them.* 27; *Artax.* 15.7; *Arist.* 5.7; [Plut.], *Mor.* 488d; *Arr. Anab.* 8.3.

⁶ This is the meaning of the Greek word *nomos*. See P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, Paris 1968–80, t. II, s.v.; *LSJ*, s.v. Far from getting behind the historical validity of Xenophon’s work as a source of Achaemenid history (see H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, ‘Political Concepts in Old-Persian Royal Inscriptions’, in K. Raaflaub [ed.], *Anfänge politischen Denkens in der Antike. Die nahöstlichen Kulturen und die Griechen* [Schriften des Historischen Kollegs: Kolloquien, 24], München 1993, 145–163 with bibliography and C. Nadon, *Xenophon’s Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia*, Berkeley 2001, 3–7), what we are referring to is just the Greek perception.

say that doing the *proskynēsis* was the usual way of greeting gods.⁷ The gesture is documented by Old Babylonian presentation scenes⁸ and Syrian and Mesopotamian cylinder seals⁹ as a way of greeting gods or god-kings. In the first millennium BCE, *proskynēsis* appeared to be used for non-divine kings, as the Elamite, the Neo-Assyrian and the Achaemenid ones were.¹⁰ Relief IV of the series at Kül-e Farah¹¹ near the city of Izeh in Khuzestan, southwest Iran, though not well preserved, depicts an animal sacrifice on six different registers, in the presence of a priest, the enthroned king and during prayers: on the 3rd, the 4th and the 5th registers, many people taking part in a procession are shown bringing the right hand to the mouth in the gesture of sending a kiss. In the wall paintings of the palace of Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BCE) at Til Barsip, Syria, the enthroned king receives a tribute procession.¹² Two court dignitaries stand in front of the throne: one prostrates himself, the other raises his hand, palm and fingers turned toward the face, executing a *proskynēsis*. Another man involved in the procession sends a kiss with the hand to the king: there can be no doubt about the movement of his lips and the left hand, even though with a clear error of perspective in the painting. Coming to the Achaemenid evidence, in the Treasury reliefs¹³ from the northern stairs of the so-called Apadana at Persepolis, we find Darius on the throne and his son Xerxes

⁷ Bickerman, 'A propos d'un passage', 247–8.

⁸ As in a bronze statuette dedicated to the gods for the life of King Hammurabi (1792 to 1750 BCE): see P. Amiet, *Art of Ancient Near East*, New York 1980, pl. 433.

⁹ See B. Teissier, *Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seals from the Marcopoli Collection*. Berkeley, Los Angeles 1984, xxi; E. Porada, 'Why Cylinder Seals? Engraved Cylindrical Seal Stones of the Ancient Near East, Fourth to First Millennium B.C.', *The Art Bulletin* 75.4 (1993), 563–582.

¹⁰ See W. Rölling, 'Zum "Sakralen Königtum" im Alten Orient', in G. Burkhard (ed.), *Staat und Religion*, Düsseldorf 1981, 114–125. See also Chosky, 'Gesture in Ancient Iran', 206; Particularly on the human nature of the Achaemenid king see at last: J. Wiesehöfer, *Das antike Persien von 550 v. Chr. bis 651 n. Chr.*, 4th edition with bibliographical epilogue, Zurich, München 2005, 55; M. Brosius, *The Persians*, London 2006, 32f.; R. Rollinger, 'Herrscherkult und Königsvergöttlichung bei Teispiden und Achaimeniden. Realität oder Fiktion?', in L.M. Günther, S. Plischke (eds), *Religiöse Traditionen und Innovationen zwischen Indus und Afrika- Vom Euphrat an den Bosphoros: Zum hellenistischen Herrschenkultur zwischen Verdichtung und Erweiterung von Traditionsgefächten* (Oikumene. Studien zu antiken Weltgeschichte, ...), Berlin 2013, 23–27, considers possible a cult of the king after his death.

¹¹ Main bibliography: A.H. Layard, 'A Description of the Province of Khuzistan', *JRGS* 16 (1846), 1–105; L. Vanden Berghe, 'Les reliefs élamites de Mālamir', *IA* 3 (1963), 22–39; P. Calmeyer, M.W. Stolper, 'Malamir', in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie*, Bd. VIII, München 1988, 275–87; U. Seidl, 'Izeh', in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, vol. III, Oxford 1997, 199–203; J. Álvarez-Mon, 'Plattform Bearers from Kül-e Farah III and IV', *Iran* 48 (2010), 27–41.

¹² See F. Thureau-Dangin, M. Dunand, *Til-Barsip, album et texte*, Paris 1936, pl. XLVII a-c; A. Parrot, *The Arts of Assyria*, New York 1961, pls. 112–113.

¹³ A.S. Shahbazi, 'The Persepolis "Treasury Reliefs" Once More', *AMI* 9 (1976), 151–156; M.C. Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art*, Leiden 1979, 125–40; A. Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, London–New York 2007, 536–538.

behind him. In front, a dignitary, dressed in the Persian style, brings his right hand to his mouth, making a little bow. A detail of the procession of people and products from the eastern stairs of the Apadana shows a man, probably a Median because of his dress, who is sending a kiss to the king.¹⁴ Other dignitaries like these can be seen in the main scene of the staircase. At the center of the panel we find something like the Treasure relief: an officer standing before the king¹⁵ with his hand raised to the mouth, palm toward the face, standing and making just a little bow.¹⁶ Also in the reliefs of the tomb of Artaxerses III (358–338 BCE) we find the same gesture: on the right side of the edge, in the higher register, six mourners, with the hand to the mouth, send a last kiss to the king.¹⁷

I think that the figurative sources exhaustively clarify that *proskynēsis* was not one of the gestures of self-humiliation, which were yet very common in the ancient Near East, as prostration, kissing plus prostration, kissing the king's feet,¹⁸ and kissing the ground in front of the king¹⁹ (the last two may be considered the most extreme forms of *proskynēsis* plus prostration). It is not the case that we have so many examples of enemies, which were always obliged to prostrate to the winner, both in the East and in the West: those who had been defeated on the battlefield had to be humiliated too.²⁰ The *proskynēsis* must be understood,

¹⁴ D. Stronach, *Pasargadae*, Oxford 1978, 56ff.; Root, *The King and Kingship*, 227–284; R. Hachmann, 'Die Völkerschaften auf den Bildwerken von Persepolis', in U. Finkbeiner, R. Dittmann, H. Hauptmann (eds), *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte Vorderasiens: Festschrift für Rainer Michael Boehmer*, Mainz 1995, 195–223.

¹⁵ See R.N. Frye, 'Persepolis Again', *JNES* 33 (1974), 383–386; E. Porada, 'Classic Achaemenian Architecture and Sculpture', *CHI* 2 (1985), 828–831.

¹⁶ L. Allen, 'Le Roi Imaginaire: an Audience with the Achaemenid King', in O. Hekster, R. Fowler (eds), *Imaginary Kings. Royal Images in the Ancient near East, Greece and Rome* (Oriens et Occidens, 11), Stuttgart 2005, 46–50.

¹⁷ See E.F. Schmidt, *Persepolis I*, Chicago 1953, 95–101 and pls. 70–75.

¹⁸ Examples are to be found in the Assyrian court ceremonial (see K.F. Müller, *Das assyrische Rytual. Teil 1: Texte zum assyrischen Königsritual* (Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch-Agyptischen Gesellschaft, 41/3), Leipzig 1937, 13, 15; R. Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, Wiesbaden 1996, 284, 294; M. Lang, R. Rollinger, 'Im Herzen der Meere und in der Mitte des Meeres – Das Buch Ezechiel und die in assyrischer Zeit fassbaren Vorstellungen von den Grenzen der Welt', in R. Rollinger et al. (eds), *Interkulturalität in der Alten Welt: Vorderasien, Hellas, Ägypten und die vielfältigen Ebenen des Kontakts*, Wiesbaden 2010, 207–64, esp. 251f.) and in the Babylonian one (see H. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros des Großen. Alter Orient und Altes Testament* [Kultur und Geschichte des Alten Orients und des Alten Testaments, 256], Münster 2001, 494, 525; Rollinger, *Herrscherkult*, 14, n. 57).

¹⁹ In the literary text 'The poor Man of Nippur' (see O.R. Gurney, 'The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur', *AS* 16 (1956), 145–16, 152); other examples in the Assyrian ceremonial: *idem*, 'The Sultantepe Tablets', *AS* 10 (1960), 105–131, esp. 110; F. Talon, *The Standard Babylonian Creation Myth Enūma Eliš* (State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts, 4), Helsinki 2005, 59.

²⁰ Just some examples: relief of the king Annubanini from Sar-i-Pul (2000 c.a. BCE, see E. Sollberger, J.R. Kupper, *Inscriptions royales sumériennes et akkadiennes*, Paris 1971, IIIG1; D. Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period*, RIME Early Periods, Toronto 1990, 704–6); reliefs of queen Hatshepsut's

on the contrary, simply as a more deferential kiss than a kiss; it was a kiss sent with the hand from distance. A passage by Herodotus (1.134) is helpful in this regard. He relates that the form of greeting on the street among people in the Persian Empire was to kiss each other, and that the *proskynēsis* was performed in the case of a social gap between the person executing it and the person receiving it: they did *proskynēsis* instead of giving a kiss because their different social status did not allow physical contact between them. In only some cases was *proskynēsis* accompanied by prostration. Herodotus relates that Persians performed the *proskynēsis* plus prostration in cases of a deep social gap between the person who executing the kiss and the one who received it (1.134) and narrated that the Spartiates, coming to the Persian court, were commanded to perform the *proskynēsis* falling down at the Achaemenid king's feet (7.136). This must not confuse us. On the one hand, the *proskynēsis* without any sign of prostration is clearly visible in the Persian reliefs, as already mentioned. On the other hand, the Leitmotiv of the Oriental despotism found in 5th century BCE Athens could well have originated in a Greek misunderstanding according to which the Achaemenid *proskynēsis* was always performed with a prostration.²¹

According to the picture we have retraced, the kiss had a central place in greeting in the ancient Near East. It was performed in different ways according to the social gap between the people involved: a kiss given, *proskynēsis*, *proskynēsis* plus prostration, the kissing of the feet of the king, and the kissing of the ground in front of the king. An element of self-humiliation enters only in the case of a social gap of great importance. Now it will be interesting to observe that different ways of performing the kiss (and the *proskynēsis*) were also to be found at the Alexander's court in Asia.

expedition to Punt (Egypt, 1400s BCE, see E. Naville, *The XIth Dynasty Temple at Deir El-Bahari. Egypt*, part I, London 1907, pl. LXXXVI); the 'Broken Obelisk' of Assur-Bel-Kala (Assyria, 1060 c. a. BCE, see K. Jaritz, 'The problem of the "Broken Obelisk"', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 4/3 (1959), 204–215); self-humiliation formulas in the letters from El-Amarna (1400s BCE, see M. Liverani, 'Formule di auto-umiliazione nelle lettere di El-Amarna', *Serta antiqua et medioevalia* 4 [2001], 17–29); prostration in the Assyrian inscriptions (E.K.A. Riehm, *Handwörterbuch des Biblischen Altertums*, 2th Edition, Charleston 1894 [originally published in Bielefeld in 1884], 889); Lucius Aemilius Paulus kneeling to the Macedonian king Perseus (168 BCE, see Liv. 45.7); for other examples, see Rollinger, *Herrscherkult*, passim. The Old Testament mentions the practice of setting one's foot upon the neck of the conquered foe (Josh. 10:24, Ps. 90:1).

²¹ From the Persian Wars, the Greeks' freedom in contrast with the Persians' slavery became a *Leitmotiv* in the Greek literature; e.g.: Aesch. *Pers.* 272 and 402–5; Eur. *Hel.* 273–276: 'the gods have removed me from my native country to barbarian customs [...]. I have become a slave although I am free by birth; for among barbarians all are slaves except one'. See also Arist. *Pol.* 1252b 5, 1285a 20. Later sources, conditioned by the *Leitmotiv* just confused between *proskynēsis* and prostration: examples are to be found in the scholia and glosses of the tragedy *Persians* by Aeschylus, where the explanation given for the term *proskynein* is just *prospiptein* (Hsch. 3832; *Scholia in Aeschylum Persas* 152b).

There are two main traditions as to what happened when the Persian king Alexander decided to introduce the *proskynēsis* among his Companions. The first one is given by Arrian (4.12.1–2) and Curtius (8.5): it reports Callisthenes' speech about the opportunity to perform the Persian custom in front Alexander and its implications. I put aside this one for now and turn to the other one, referred to by Arrian as an alternative version (4.12.3–5), and Plutarch (*Alex.* 54.4–5 = *FrHistGr* 125F 14), which already Eduard Meyer considered the most reliable account of the *proskynēsis* affair.²² Plutarch named as his source Chares of Mytilene, supposedly an eye-witness at the scene. In the spring of 327 BCE when Alexander's army was most probably staying in Bactria, a customary banquet took place. The plan was that Alexander would hand his cup to the person next to him, after drinking from it. The Companions in turn were to raise the cup so as to face the *hestia*, to drink and to perform *proskynēsis* to Alexander, then to kiss him (so tells Plutarch) or to receive a kiss from him (so tells Arrian) and, finally, to resume their places on the couch. Everybody did the same thing until it was Callisthenes's turn. He took the cup and drank without performing the *proskynēsis*, and then tried to kiss Alexander, who had not noticed his omission of the act. But one of the guests called the king's attention to it, and so Alexander refused Callisthenes's kiss.

The procedure consists of two phases: to perform *proskynēsis* to Alexander (first phase), to kiss or to receive a kiss from him (second phase). I think that the difference between giving a kiss and receiving a kiss is not a substantial one in this case: what both formulas indicate is, in my opinion, the right to kiss the king.

The kiss was the form of salutation *inter pares*, as clearly testified to by Herodotus (1.134); by Xenophon in a passage of the *Cyropedia* (1.4.27: "we are told that when Cyrus was going away and they were taking leave of one another, his kinsmen bade him good-bye, after the Persian custom, with a kiss upon his lips. And that custom has survived, for so the Persians do even to this day."); and in one passage of the *Agésilaios* by Xenophon (5.4: "it is the custom among the Persians to bestow a kiss on those whom they honour"). It was suitable also to the relationship that Alexander as the Macedonian king had with his Companions.²³ Introducing the Persian ceremonial, Alexander asked the *hetairoi*, at first, to maintain a distance from him and not to give a kiss but to send it. And just after that they were allowed to kiss him. I think that Alexander had planned to preserve the kiss in that context, just as a sop to the *hetairoi*. The kiss is the (false) pledge to have their privileges granted. The *conditio sine qua non* to receive is to accept what the king was asking for, and that was the *proskynēsis*. Some elements indicate it was an extremely rational plan.

²² E. Badian, 'Conspiracies', in A.B. Bosworth, E.J. Baynham (eds), *Alexander the Great in Fact and Fiction*, New York 2000, 65, n. 27.

²³ Arr. *Anab.* 7.11.1, 6–7; cf. Hdt. 1.134.

In the account, Alexander sent around the cup, passing it first to those who were privy to the plan about *proskynēsis*. It means that they were just asked to follow an agreement already made with the king and convince through their compliance the others to do the same. It was not accidental, as well, that the banqueters at first did not face Alexander but rather the altar of the household gods (*hestia*). The *proskynēsis* (lat. *adoratio*) was a gesture reserved for gods or heroes in the West: Greeks and Romans commonly performed the custom of bringing the hand to the mouth and blowing a kiss towards the images of gods or the Sun.²⁴ Therefore I suggest that Alexander hoped that the Companions would have been confused between the altar and him and thought they were asked to do *proskynēsis* in front of the *hestia*, as was usual for them. Ross Taylor went too far in thinking that Alexander had planned the *proskynēsis* as directed to a supposed statue of himself located on the altar.²⁵

The gesture that Alexander's Companions were asked to do was without doubt that of *proskynēsis*, which was something traditional in ancient Near Eastern court protocol. The *proskynēsis* is a kiss without any contact, reminds Callisthenes, in the passage reported by Arrian (*Anab.* 4.11): "You greet men with a kiss, but since a god is placed higher up and it is sacrilege to touch him, you honour him in this way with *proskynēsis*". As for the context of the cited passage, what Callisthenes is stating here is that *proskynēsis* implies the divinity of the recipient. And it is true that the request to *proskynein* has been used by both classical sources and many modern historians to show Alexander's engagement with divine kingship.²⁶ Actually, the *proskynēsis* affair fueled two issues that were of great importance for the ancient writers: that Alexander's court from 330 BCE onwards was becoming a byword for consumption²⁷ and that Alexander wanted to be recognized as a divine being. In any case, this was not Alexander's point,²⁸ as it had not been his point

²⁴ Some examples: Plato *Rep.* 469; *Maen.* 609 (Kock). See also Soph. *fr.* 738 (Radt); Aristoph. *Plut.* 771–773; Plut. *Artax.* 11.4–12.5.

²⁵ Ross Taylor, 'The Proskynesis', 58–9.

²⁶ Arr. *Anab.* 4.10f.; see also Curt. 8.5.5: "With all the preparations made, Alexander now believed that the time was ripe for the depraved idea he had conceived some time before, and he began to consider how he could appropriate divine honors to himself. He wished to be believed, not just called, the son of Jupiter (...).".

²⁷ It is clearly shown by the long section concerning the *thyryphe*, included by the third century AD Greek author Atheneus of Naukratis in his *Deipnosophists* (537d–540a). But at first Alexander was the well-behaved Athenian gentleman, who resisted to sensory temptation such as Darius' beautiful wife or Asian gastronomy (especially in Plutarch: e.g. *Alex.* 20.8; 21.4; 22.4). According to the "western" point of view, the reason of such degeneracy must be seen in Alexander's contact with the East (sources: Arr. *Anab.* 4.7.4; Diod. 17.77.4; Curt. 6.6.1; Just. 12.3.8–12).

²⁸ Of a connection between Alexander's request and the desire of being recognized as a god: J.P.V.D. Baldson, 'The Divinity of Alexander the Great', *Historia* 1 (1950), 363–88; L. Edmunds, 'The Religiosity of Alexander', *GRBS* 12 (1971), 368–391; E. Fredricksmeier, 'Alexander, Zeus Ammon, and the Conquest of Asia', *TAPhA* 121 (1991), 199–214.

sometime before in the discussion that had led to Cleitus' murder.²⁹ On one hand, it has been definitively proved how Alexander's living divinity was a product of the agendas both of the Diadochi³⁰ and of the Roman Era.³¹ On the other hand, it is clear that Alexander's priority, even more after Darius' death, was to increase the strategy of collaboration between Macedonians and Persians, which had been his goal since the beginning of the expedition. It was not to unite the Persian and the Macedonian cultures that Alexander took for himself a Persian wife and celebrated a mass wedding with Persian ceremony along with his officers. Actually, the weddings of Susa (324 BCE)³² were a strategic decision, the aim of which was to create a new leadership. It was the last step in the integration of foreign elements into Alexander's élite, as the Macedonian had programmed since the very beginning of the expedition in Asia. Famous cases are that of Mithrenes, the Armenian commander of the Persians at Sardis, who in 334 BCE after the battle of Granicus voluntarily surrendered to Alexander the Great (s. Arr. *Anab.* 1.17.3f.; Diod. 17.21.7) and became member of his retinue (Curt. 3.12.6) and that of Ada, the daughter of Hecatomnus, who surrendered the fortress to the Macedonian, who committed the government of Caria to her.³³ We have to imagine that for Iranians to perform *proskynēsis* in front of their king was quite normal and that they probably regarded that as a purely secular act of royal protocol. Why should they have changed it, as Alexander became their new king? As concerns Alexander, he thought that just by adopting the Persian ceremonial he could insert himself into the tradition of Achaemenid dynastic power, especially in the spring of 327 BCE, when, after another wave of capitulations among the eastern Iranian lords and Alexander's marriage to Rhoxane, the king's entourage must have included an unprecedented number of Iranian aristocrats. The same mechanism had been used by the Achaemenid kings themselves: The similarity between the Achaemenid and Neo-Assyrian audience scenes follows a general pattern in the sourcing of legitimacy in both textual his-

²⁹ Also in this case the divinity was not the point, but, as Cleitus tells, that Alexander was orientaling his court, surrounding himself by barbarians "because he could no longer stand to be among free men. (...) But what proved to be the last straw was a song sung by some third-rate poet by the name of Phranichus or Pierion which mocked those Macedonians who had recently been defeated by the Sogdians". On Cleitus' episode, see A.B. Bosworth, 'The Tumult and Shouting: Two Interpretations of the Cleitus Episode', *Ancient History Bulletin* 10 (1996), 19–30.

³⁰ Howe, *The Diadochi*, 58–9.

³¹ D. Spencer, *The Roman Alexander: Reading a Cultural Myth*, Exeter 2002, 251f.

³² Sources: Arr. *Anab.* 7.4.4–8; Plut. *Alex.* 70.2; Diod. 17.107.6; Just. XII 10; Athen. 12.538b; Aelian *Var. Hist.* 8.7, which gives a detailed description of the marriage feast; see also [Plut.] *Mor.* 329d-f.).

³³ The daughter of Hecatomnus was in possession of Alinda, when Alexander entered Caria (see S. Ruzicka, *Politics of a Persian dynasty: the Hecatomnids in the fourth century B.C.*, Oklahoma 1992, 30–9). She formally adopted Alexander as her son, ensuring that the rule of Caria would have automatically passed to him. See E.D. Carney, 'Women and Dunasteia in Caria', *AJPh* 126.1 (2006), 65–91.

tory and imaginary by the Persian kings beginning with Cyrus II. A diachronic exchange of legitimacy was created by the similarity of the new enthronement to those surviving in seals or local rock reliefs and palace ruins in the landscape.³⁴

As we know, the customary closeness between the king of Macedonia and his aristocrats is apparent in the name *hetairoi*, which simply means Companions. The lack of an administrative or court hierarchy in Macedonia meant that the king ruled with the aid of his closest entourage.³⁵ The introduction of the *proskynēsis* among the Companions was an indication that, according to Alexander's plan, the position of the *hetairoi* at court was going to change profoundly. At this stage of the expedition, the Companions' status could not be that of peers *a priori* anymore and the introduction of the *proskynēsis* must be considered indicative of this change. Thus, the most interesting part of Callisthenes' discourse is not that of the supposed divinity of Alexander but where he claimed that by introducing *proskynēsis* Alexander was breaking an unwritten *nomos* of the Macedonian monarch, which was not to make decisions without previously obtaining the assent of its (privileged) subjects (Arr. *Anab.* 4.11).

Curtius (8.5.5), referring to the *proskynēsis* affair relates that Alexander "gave orders for the Macedonians to follow the Persian custom in doing homage to him by prostrating themselves on the ground". In addition to the motif according to which Alexander claimed to be honoured as god³⁶ and the confusion between Leonnatos and Polyperchon,³⁷ it is also questionable that the Companions were asked to prostrate themselves, as Curtius states. It is the classical confusion between *proskynein* and *prospiptein*, which is to be found both in the sources and among ancient scholars.³⁸ And, even more, it is also improbable that the Companions were asked to prostrate while performing the *proskynēsis*. A passage of

³⁴ Allen, *Le Roi*, 44.

³⁵ Especially the *somatophulakes*, the "personal guards", see R.A. Billows, *Kings and Colonists: Aspects of Macedonian Imperialism*, Leiden–New York–Cologne 1994, 9–10. The king, who wore no unique garments or head covering distinguishing him from his wellborn subjects, was probably addressed by name. See K. Nawotka, *Alexander the Great*, Cambridge 2010, 10–1 with the previous literature.

³⁶ See *supra*.

³⁷ Due to the numerous mistakes (see *infra*), Curtius' passage cannot be taken as genuine evidence. See W. Heckel, 'Leonnatos, Polyperchon and the introduction of Proskynesis', *AJP* 99 (1978), 459–61.

³⁸ Also recently: A. Zgoll, 'Audienz – Ein Modell zum Verständnis mesopotamischer Handerhebungsrituale. Mit einer Deutung der Novelle vom Armen Mann von Nippur', *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 34 (2003), 181–203, esp. 193ff.; R. Bichler, 'Der Hof der Achaimeniden in den Augen Herodots', in B. Jacobs, R. Rollinger (eds), *Der achaimenidische Hof/ The Achaemenid Court* (Classica et Orientalia, 2), Wiesbaden 2010, 155–87, 169ff. Some other prefers to leave the question opened. *Proskynēsis* could be a 'Verbeugung', a 'Knifall' or also a 'Niederwerfen' according to M. Brosius, 'Das Hofzerimoniell', in B. Jacobs, R. Rollinger, *Der achaimenidische Hof*, Wiesbaden 2010, 459–471, esp. 461 ff.

Arrian (*Anab.* 4.12.2) reads as follows: “the eldest of the Persians came forward to perform *proskynēsis* one after the other. Leonnatos, one of the Companions,³⁹ thought that one of the Persians had not done *proskynēsis* properly (*ouk en kosmōi proskynēsai*) and made fun of the Persian’s air of submissiveness. Alexander was angry with him at the time, though later he was reconciled”. I think that what the Macedonian found funny was that the Persian prostrated in front of the king doing *proskynēsis*. The gesture fit the air of submissiveness Leonnatos saw in him, because the prostration, as discussed above, was a gesture of self-humiliation. The passage proves, once more, that, on the contrary, the Companions in Bactria were asked to perform *proskynēsis* without prostrating. Thus, they accused the Persians, who did *proskynēsis* and prostration together, of being slaves, according to the well-known *Leitmotiv*.⁴⁰

The privilege of kissing the king must have been granted by Alexander, and not just as a sop, both to some Persians as well as to several Companions. With respect to this, a passage from the seven book of the *Anabasis* by Arrian is interesting. The context is the Macedonian mutiny at Opis in 324 BCE⁴¹. When the Macedonians quickly submitted, one of the officers told Alexander that he had now made some of the Persians his kinsmen with permission to kiss him, while none of the Macedonians had yet enjoyed this privilege. Then Alexander, interrupting him, said, “But all of you without exception I consider my kinsmen, and so from this time I shall call you” (*Anab.* 7.11.6–7).

It is relevant for us neither how many exaggerations and rhetorical elements are present in this passage nor if permission to kiss the king was connected with what happened in Opis.⁴² But this is the general situation as we can reconstruct it. Greek and Macedonian leaders at Bactria had been asked to send a kiss from a distance to Alexander. This meant they had been included, at least according to Alexander’s plan, among the subjects of the king. On the other hand, both Persians

³⁹ According to Curt. 8.5.2, it was Polyperchon, but this is impossible as he was not present when the *proskynēsis* affair took place (see Heckel, *Leonnatos*). Plutarch refers to a similar and unlikely episode but relating to Kassandros in Babylon (*Alex.* 74.2–5).

⁴⁰ Some evidence: Aesch. *Pers.* 272 and 402–5; see also Arist. *Pol.* 1252b 5, 1285a 20. Persians were considered more trained to slavery than the slaves among the Greeks; the same concept is expressed in Isocr. *Paneg.* 150, even though the rethorised nature of the work is undeniable (first bibliography on the support of Isokrates to the Macedonian project: see M. Markle, ‘Support of Athenian Intellectuals for Philip: A Study of Isocrates’ Philippus and Speusippus’ Letter to Philip’, *JHS* 96 [1976], 80–99; R.A. Moysey, ‘Isokrates and Chares: A Study in the Political Spectrum of Mid-4th Cent. Athens’, *AncW* 15 [1987], 81–86; M.A. Flower, ‘From Simonides to Isocrates: The Fifth-Century Origins of Fourth-Century Panhellenism’, *CIAnt* 19 [2000], 65–101).

⁴¹ Sources: Arr. *Anab.* 7.8.1–12.4; Diod. 17.108.3, 17.109.1–3; Plut. *Alex.* 71.1–5; Just. 12.11.5–12; Curt. 10.2.8–10.4.2.

⁴² See also Plut. *Alex.* 7.3.

and Greeks were given permission to kiss the king. This was a fundamental step in the strategy of collaboration, through which the king laid the foundation of the élite of his kingdom: Greeks and Macedonians who had accepted and integrated the Persian practice and would have remained loyal to their king and Persians who could maintain the status they had under the Achaemenid dynasty. To kiss the king was of course not just a gesture but the indication that the selected people enjoyed a privileged status. It is evident that now the king Alexander is deciding which status each of his subjects of his kingdom has and that this has nothing to do with his origin.

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