CHAPTER SEVEN

DARIUS THE GREAT (522-486 B.C.)

The establishing of his rule

The first year of Darius' reign was thus one of hard fighting, as each of the lands ruled by Cyrus and Cambyses, Iranian and non-Iranian alike, strove again for independence; and it was by one of the great feats of arms in history that he and his generals succeeded in subduing them all. Egypt was the last to be reconquered; and thereafter, in intermittent campaigns, Darius extended the bounds of the Achaemenian Empire to their furthest extent, so that in the end he could proclaim: 'This is the kingdom which I hold, from the Scythians who are beyond Sogdiana, thence unto Ethiopia; from Sind, thence unto Sardis'.

For his title to rule over non-Iranians, the lesser breeds of 'anarya', Darius was content to rely on right by conquest. Thus on a surviving stele he states simply: 'I am a Persian. From Persia I seized Egypt'. But among the Medes and Persians themselves he strove in diverse ways to strengthen his claim to rule as an Achaemenian in due succession to Cyrus, the great founder of the empire. He fostered therefore the traditions of his predecessors, and maintained their pious institutions. So the daily and monthly rites were continued at the tomb of Cyrus, and the terms of Cyrus' charter to the priests of Apollo on the Meander were duly honoured. It must, moreover, have been Darius who began or adopted the royal custom of going to Pasargadæ after being crowned for a religious service of initiation, during which the new king put on a robe once worn by Cyrus. This remained usage for each of his successors, being in fact first recorded for Artaxerxes II; but it is most unlikely that it was one of them who revived or instituted such an observance. For them, heirs to Darius, the founder of their line, it would have had little symbolic significance; but for Darius himself it must have been yet another way to declare to the Iranians that he ruled legitimately as the kinsman of Cyrus, and not simply as a usurper, by force of arms.

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1 DPh 3-8 (Kent, Old Persian, 136-7).
2 DZe 7-8 (ibid., 147).
3 Or, as he reckons in, e.g., DB I.8-11, as the ninth in the Achaemenian family to bear the title of king.
4 See above, pp. 70-1, 47-8.
5 Plutarch, Life of Artaxerxes, III; see further below, p. 209.
6 On the symbolic importance of the king's robe see A. Shabazii, 'An Achaemenid Symbol II', AMI N.F. XIII, 1980, 119-47. For the robe worn by Darius himself and his successors see A. B. Tilia, Studies and Restorations II, 53-5 with Fig. 6.
Darius further strengthened his claim to legitimate possession of the throne by his marriage to Atossa, daughter of Cyrus. He also took to wife her younger sister, Artystone, as well as an unnamed daughter of Bardiya's.⁷ (Cambyses, Herodotus records, left no issue.) Yet another of his queens, who like Atossa had before been wedded to Cambyses and Bardiya, was a daughter of a Persian nobleman, Utāna;³ and it is an indication of the cross-currents and complexities of the times that Utāna was himself one of those who aided Darius in killing Bardiya.

*The six noble conspirators and the six Ameša Spentas*

Darius himself names the six Persians who joined with him in the assassination in the following terms: 'These are the men who were there at the time when I slew Gaumāta the Magus who called himself Bardiya; at that time these men strove together as my followers. Vindafarnah ... Utāna ... Gaubaruva ... Vidarna ... Bagabukhsa ... Ardumanis ... Thou who shalt be king hereafter, protect well the family of these men'.⁹ Herodotus in his account gives the Greek equivalents of the first five names as Intaphernes, Otanes, Gobryas, Hydarnes and Megabyzus. Only the sixth is different, Aspathines instead of a rendering of Ardumanis. One suggested explanation of this is that Ardumanis (who is not mentioned except in this one passage of the Behistun inscription) may have died either in the actual attack on Bardiya or soon afterwards. In the carving over his tomb Darius had himself represented flanked by six nobles; and inscriptions identify the first two as Gaubaruva and Aspačana, the latter being presumably the Aspathines of Herodotus. According to the Greek historian, Aspathines had a son called Prexaspes; and this makes it very probable that he was himself the son of the Prexaspes who was (according to Herodotus) the reputed killer of Bardiya,¹⁰ advanced, it would seem, into the ranks of the six in place of Ardumanis. His own loyalty to Darius was perhaps genuine from the outset, perhaps secured initially by this high honour.

Three of the six—Vidarna, Vindafarnah and Gaubaruva—are said in the Behistun inscription to have led Darius' armies during the first

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⁷ Herodotus III.88.
⁸ Ibid., III.68. Dandamaev, Persien, 159 with n. 677, identified Otanes as an Achaemenian, the brother of Cyrus' queen Cassandane, because Herodotus names the fathers of both Pharnaspe; but Darius, the better authority, gives Utāna's father's name as Thukhra.
⁹ DB IV.80-8. On Herodotus' divergent account, that Darius was only one of the seven, elected later by omen to be king, see with bibliography K. Brinkmann, 'Die Verfassungsdebatte bei Herodot 3.80-82 ... ', Hermes 104, 1976, 266-79. Cf. also F. Geschnitzer, Die sieben Perser und das Königtum Darius, Heidelberg 1977.
¹⁰ See Herodotus III.70, VII.97, with Justi, Namenbuch, 46.