

GREEK CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF PERSIAN TRADITIONS: GIFT-GIVING AND FRIENDSHIP IN THE PERSIAN EMPIRE*

ABSTRACT

This article examines gift-giving within the Persian empire and its perception in Greek literary sources. Gift-giving in the Greek world was often framed in the language of friendship, and Greek authors subsequently articulated Persian traditions using the language and cultural norms of their intended audience. There were fundamental differences in the concepts of gift-exchange and reciprocity between the Greeks and the Persians. This article will examine Persian traditions of gift-giving followed by Greek traditions of gift-giving, and will argue that the Greek misrepresentation of Persian customs led to numerous misunderstandings in relations between Greek and Persian individuals. The use of Greek descriptive language, rather than more accurate terminology, to describe Persian traditions has hindered our understanding of gift-giving in the Persian empire. In addressing these misconceptions, this article will demonstrate the successful use of gift-giving in the Persian empire and the perils of Greek misrepresentation of foreign customs.

Keywords: gifts; *philia*; Greece; Persia; friendship; reciprocity; status

The exchange of items or services as gifts played a fundamental role in the administration of the Persian empire, featuring prominently in both Greek and Persian sources. Whether it was giving a gold coin to Persians who had the greatest number of offspring, gifting land grants and tax breaks to loyal satraps or gifting vast quantities of ornate golden regalia to accomplished soldiers, gifting was ever-present in the empire. This paper will examine in particular the perception of Achaemenid gifting in the Greek literary sources. Greek authors made conscious attempts to articulate the cultural norms of their intended audience through their description of foreign cultures and the terminology they used. Greek unfamiliarity with the Persian court system and with imperial administration led to many misinterpretations and meant that they lacked the precise terminology to describe certain Achaemenid practices. This led to Achaemenid customs being presented in descriptive terms which the Greek audience could relate to rather than in a more accurate *emic* terminology. While descriptions of Achaemenid gifting customs are relatively reliable in the sources, the technicalities of the gifting process are often misunderstood, and this is most evident in Greek perceptions of what entering into a *xenia* relationship with a Persian individual entailed. The importance of this distinction cannot be overstated, since any examination of Achaemenid culture has

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Abbreviations: DB – Behistun Inscription of Darius I; DNb – Lower register of Darius I's tomb, Naqš-I Rostam; TADE – B. Porten and A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt* (Jerusalem, 1987–99); XPI – Xerxes' adaptation of DNb.

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to take into account that it will need to consist, at least at first, in an examination of Greek perceptions of foreign customs.¹

Fundamental differences in concepts of gift-exchange and reciprocity meant that there was a clear lack of understanding about how gift-exchange was used within the imperial administration. This lack of comprehension has been exacerbated by modern anthropological studies which have related gift-exchange to primitive, pre-state societies. The works of Bronislaw Malinowski, Marcel Mauss and Marshall Sahlins have all focussed on examining gift-exchange with an ethnographic, field-based focus on clan-based societies.² Unfortunately, their studies led to the introduction of a concept of anthropological elementarism, which implied that gift-exchange lost its significance upon the emergence of the market and the state.³ This theory has subsequently percolated into modern Achaemenid historiography, most notably in the work of Pierre Briant. The Achaemenid administration has been interpreted as somewhat rudimentary for its apparent reliance on gift-exchange. By examining the use of gift-giving in the Persian empire alongside Classical Greek concepts of gift-exchange and reciprocity this paper aims to show that our understanding of Achaemenid gift-giving is hindered by two factors. First, its perception in the Greek sources and their lack of understanding of the workings of the Achaemenid administration. Second, the modern anthropological correlation of gift-exchange with primitivism. Gift-giving could operate within an imperial state of immense administrative complexity in which market-exchange was well established.⁴

Modern studies of gift-exchange focus largely on the commercial aspect that gifting plays in the economy, and place a heavy focus on the actual goods exchanged.⁵ For this paper, the term gift-exchange refers to the exchange of both tangible objects and intangible honours—my analysis will focus on the social significance gifts confer rather than on any financial benefits.⁶ Concerning reciprocity, I will use the definition given by Mary Douglas: ‘Reciprocity is the rule that every gift has to be returned in some

¹ H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, ‘Gifts in the Persian empire’, in P. Briant and C. Herrenschmidt (edd.), *Le Tribut dans l’empire Perse* (Paris, 1989), 129–46, at 131–5. See E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford, 1989) for a study on how theatre presented conceptualized images of Achaemenid culture for Greek audiences to digest. Much of Hall’s argument can be extended into fifth- and fourth-century histories, where authors consciously conceptualized Achaemenid customs based on Greek communal beliefs of the barbarian.

² See B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (London, 1922); M. Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London, 1925 [1990]); M.D. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (London, 1974). See also C. Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté* (Paris, 1949). This is not to dismiss the significant advancements in anthropological understandings of gift-exchange that resulted from the works of these scholars. While I question the link between gift-exchange and primitivism that is perpetuated in the studies of clan-based societies, the methodologies applied by these scholars are incredibly beneficial and I will use them throughout this paper. In particular, I shall discuss the concept of inalienability and Sahlins’s theory of reciprocity and social distance.

³ Coined by D. Cheal, *The Gift Economy* (London, 1988), anthropological elementarism refers to the belief that the significance of gift-exchange diminished upon the emergence of the state. Influential gift-giving by this standard is seen to have only been prevalent in supposed primitive societies.

⁴ Although Herodotus has Cyrus state that there were no marketplaces in the Persian empire (1.152–3), he himself identifies their presence a number of times (1.37.2, 1.197.2, 2.138.4, 5.101.2, 7.26.3).

⁵ For example, see J.P. Thomas and T. Worrall, ‘Gift-giving, quasi-credit, and reciprocity’, *Rationality and Society* 14 (2002), 308–52 and C. Hann and K. Hart, *Economic Anthropology: History, Ethnography, Critique* (Cambridge, 2011).

⁶ It could be argued that loyalty schemes establish a relationship between customer and retailer; however, this relationship exists purely on a commercial basis and has no social ramifications.

specified way, setting up a perpetual cycle of exchanges within and between generations. In some cases the specified return is of equal value, producing a stable system of statuses; in others it must exceed the value of the earlier gift, producing an escalating contest for honour.⁷ Within this definition are three sub-divisions, first established by Sahlins:⁸

- Generalized reciprocity: this involved a vague obligation to reciprocate, for example altruistic giving, charitable donations, hospitality and the so-called ‘free gift’.
- Balanced reciprocity: this refers to direct exchange where there is a more apparent need to reciprocate, with a firm expectation of a counter gift of similar value within a reasonable time period.
- Negative reciprocity: this is where one party seeks to gain at the other’s expense, essentially getting something for nothing.

Whilst both Greek and Achaemenid gift-giving fall under the umbrella of generalized reciprocity, the Achaemenid pattern of creating obligations through giving a greater counter-gift is reflective of the competitive exploitation of generalized reciprocity. This key difference is responsible for repeated instances of misunderstanding, both by Greeks of the Persians and by modern scholars.⁹

PERSIAN PRACTICES OF GIFT-GIVING

The modern tendency to correlate reciprocity with equality means that the concept is difficult to relate to monarchic societies such as the Persian empire. One integral feature of the imperial administration was the prominence of a gift-oriented service-reward system of exchange. Gifts were used to maintain and reinforce both the social hierarchy of the empire and the status of the King. As Herodotus states, ‘among the Persians benefactions are greatly honoured in return, in proportion to their magnitude’ (3.154.1, transl. A.D. Godley). Within the empire the King was naturally the dominant partner in gift relationships and was fully aware that the really important aspect of exchange was not economic but one of status. And his status was absolute. In such cases the generosity usually associated with gift-giving is largely a ritualistic gesture of subordination.¹⁰ Symbolically the correlation between imperial status and gifting is reflected in the Persian demand for earth and water from conquered nations. The call was symbolic, representing a surrendering of provincial resources to the King and an acknowledgement of his superordinate status. It was in the royal interest to create relationships of dependence. The King benefited through a legitimization and reinforcement of his superiority, with the granting of a gift so magnanimous that the recipient was in a constant state of indebtedness. For example, during Cambyses’ conquest of Egypt, Syloson gifted a cloak to Darius, who at that time was only a part of Cambyses’ guard. In return, upon becoming king, Darius fulfilled his obligation to Syloson by installing him as client-king of Samos (Hdt. 3.139–42). Darius himself subsequently benefited

⁷ Taken from M. Douglas’s foreword for the 1990 edition of Mauss’s *The Gift* (n. 2), xi.

⁸ See Sahlins (n. 2), 193–6 for a detailed analysis of the variations of reciprocity.

⁹ See D. Cairns, ‘Honour and kingship in Herodotus: Status, role, and the limits of self-assertion’, *Philos* 14 (2019), 75–93 for a similar argument analysing the different understandings of *timē*, appraisal respect and recognition respect in Greece and the Persian empire.

¹⁰ Cairns (n. 9), 79–80 notes that the titles (and gifts) given by the King ‘confer a prestige on the beneficiary’ but also highlight that the gift is in return for services rendered, which in turn ‘recognizes the King’s claim to deference on the basis of his office’.

from the revenue Samos was forced to provide in taxation and tribute.¹¹ The King ensured that in his rewarding of individuals with vastly extravagant gifts he was creating a relationship so unbalanced that there was no conceivable way of levelling accounts, and no conceivable way of terminating the relationship unless by the King's own doing.¹² However, the relationship was usually mutually beneficial, and it was in neither party's interest to sever ties.

One of the main aspects of gifting within the Persian empire apart from material objects was that of nomenclature.¹³ Persians desired the gifting of a title because of the social prestige it attracted and the benefits it subsequently entailed, including economic benefits. We see a hierarchy of titles based on their proximity to the King and the degree of royal favour, hence the importance of titles suggesting familial relations: for example, Arshama is referred to in Aramaic as *bar bayta*, 'son of the house' (TADE A6.3, A6.4, A6.7, D14.6).¹⁴ Intimacy could also be expressed through titles relating to dining, such as Democedes' title as Darius' tablemate (Hdt. 3.131) and Darius as Cambyses' wine-pourer (3.34.1), or through titles relating to the royal hunt; for example, Darius had been Cyrus' quiver-bearer (Ael. *VH* 12.43) and Cambyses' lance-bearer (Hdt. 3.34). The importance of gaining a level of intimacy with the King is reflected in all levels of the administration and is an example of Sahlins's theory of social distance.¹⁵ This theory states that the more intimate the relationship between the two beneficiaries then the stronger the requirement was to reciprocate. Whilst Sahlins uses his theory horizontally, examining gift-exchange among people of an equal status, I would suggest that a vertical approach is more appropriate for the Persian empire. The further down the hierarchy one was from the King, the lower the obligation there was to reciprocate, though it is important to note that the obligation was still there. Thus we hear of the peasant Simetes gifting Artaxerxes II a few drops of water and being rewarded with a golden robe, a golden cup and a thousand darics (Ael. *VH* 1.32). Just as the aristocracy craved the honour

¹¹ Similarly see Cyrus' granting of several cities to Pytharchus of Cyzicus (Agathocles, *FGrHist* 472 F 6), Alabanda in Phrygia to Amyntas (Hdt. 3.160.2), Gongylus and Demaratus (Xen. *Hell.* 3.1.6; Ctesias, *FGrHist* 688 F 15, F 32), and the granting of Magnesia to Themistocles (Thuc. 1.138).

¹² See D. Graeber, *Debt. The First 5000 Years* (London, 2011), 112. See also A.H. Betteridge, 'Gift exchange in Iran: the locus of self-identity in social interaction', *Anthropological Quarterly* 58 (1985), 190–202 for gifting between superiors and inferiors in modern Iran.

¹³ On material gifting, specifically jewellery, see N. Cahill, 'The treasury at Persepolis: gift-giving at the city of the Persians', *AJA* 89 (1985), 373–89; C. Tuplin, 'Persian décor in *Cyropaedia*: some observations', in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and J.W. Drijvers (edd.), *Achaemenid History V: The Roots of the European Tradition* (Leiden, 1990), 17–30; H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'ΤΙΕΡΣΙΚΟΝ ΔΕ ΚΑΡΤΑ Ο ΣΤΡΑΤΟΣ ΔΩΡΟΝ: a typically Persian gift (Hdt. IX.109)', *Historia* 37 (1988), 372–4; Sancisi-Weerdenburg (n. 1); V. Azoulay, *Xénophon et les grâces du pouvoir: De la charis au charisme* (Paris, 2004), 92; J. Curtis, 'The archaeology of the Achaemenid period', in J. Curtis and N. Tallis (edd.), *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia* (London, 2005), 30–49, at 30; J. Curtis, 'Jewellery and personal ornaments', in J. Curtis and N. Tallis (edd.), *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia* (London, 2005), 132–50.

¹⁴ P. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Paris, 2002), 308 notes the ceremony surrounding the King's banquet, with a eunuch summoning individuals by name in order of status, and leading them through to a special room to drink in the company of the King, which in itself was a great honour.

¹⁵ Sahlins (n. 2), 191. On the principle of concentricism, see M.C. Miller and T. Hölscher, 'Wealth and social identity, East and West: between cultural anthropology and political ideology', in N. Zenzen, T. Hölscher and K. Trampedach (edd.), *Aneignung und Abgrenzung. Wechselnde Perspektiven auf die Antithese von 'Ost' und 'West' in der griechischen Antike* (Heidelberg, 2013), 367–420, at 368–88.

of proximity to the King, Herodotus specifies that the Persians held other people in honour in relation to how close they dwell to themselves (1.134.2). This is also reflected in the royal inscriptions at Persepolis that list the countries and people over which the King held power. With only one exception, the lists begin with the peoples closest to Persia and then move progressively outwards.¹⁶ It becomes clear that one of the key forms of honour was proximity to the imperial administration, and the opportunistic King was able to use this to his advantage. However, although the titles awarded by the King suggest a close proximity to him, they did not imply affection, and the titles were clearly of a ranking beneath the King. Any 'affection' was hierarchical, with the King in the dominant position and free to terminate the relationship at any moment.¹⁷ Every court position was temporary, and could be transferred from one day to the next to another trustworthy and better-serving individual.¹⁸ This was also true of material goods given as gifts, which were often inscribed with a royal signature marking the gift as having come from the King.¹⁹ Within anthropology this is called inalienability, which is defined as an object's association with the gifting individual even after exchange, creating a relationship between giver and recipient.²⁰ This was far more important than any economic value the gift might have had and granted the beneficiary an influential conduit of royal favour throughout the empire.²¹

¹⁶ M. Flower, 'Herodotus and Persia', in C. Dewald and J. Marincola (edd.), *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus* (Cambridge, 2006), 274–80, at 280; M.C. Root, 'Reading Persepolis in Greek: gifts of the Yauna', in C. Tuplin (ed.), *Persian Responses: Political and Cultural Interaction with(in) the Achaemenid Empire* (Swansea, 2007), 177–224, at 180. Root describes the sculptural representation of gift-giving as a metaphor for the Empire itself, emphasizing the King's dominion over the known world. Intimacy as a reflection of honour was not limited to the Persians: the Spartiates at the Battle of Plataea stationed the Tegeans next to themselves in line of battle 'for the sake of both honour and *aretē*' (Hdt. 9.28.3).

¹⁷ See M.B. Garrison, 'The royal-name seals of Darius I', in M. Kozuh, W.F.M. Henkelman, C.E. Jones and C. Woods (edd.), *Extraction and Control. Studies in Honor of Matthew W. Stolper* (Chicago, 2014), 67–104, at 87–9, who points out the gifting of royal-name cylinder seals to top bureaucrats, rather than Elamite heirlooms given to the inner-court circle. Such distinction provides a material example of relational hierarchy contributing to the maintenance of loyalty as opposed to personal relationships.

¹⁸ Briant (n. 14), 258. See also E. Schieffelin, 'Reciprocity and the construction of reality', *Man* 15 (1980), 502–17, at 508 who argues that gift-giving acted as a vehicle of social obligation and political manoeuvre, solidifying the King's status and creating a competitive culture of status among his subordinates. J.F. Sherry, Jr., 'Gift-giving in anthropological perspective', *Journal of Consumer Research* 10 (1983), 157–68, at 157 agrees, describing gift-giving as one of the fundamental processes in the integration of society.

¹⁹ Cahill (n. 13), 385; Briant (n. 14), 307.

²⁰ On inalienability, see C.A. Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London, 1982), 18–19; M. Bloch, *Marxism and Anthropology* (Oxford, 1983), 87; H. van Wees, 'The law of gratitude: reciprocity in anthropological theory', in C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite and R. Seaford (edd.), *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* (Oxford, 1998), 13–49, at 27. Mauss also supported this theory, emphasizing the social impact of the gift, believing that the gift transferred became 'charged' with a symbolic energy representative of its original owner. Mauss (n. 2), 10 indicates that, according to Maori belief, a gift given is alive and contains a spirit known as *hau*. Sancisi-Weerdenburg (n. 1), 138 does not go so far as to refer to royal gifts as inalienable, but states that the gifts certainly had a 'personal identity' and were seen as prestige goods rather than consumable commodities.

²¹ I. Morris, 'Gift and commodity in Archaic Greece', *Man* 21 (1986), 1–17, at 8 states that the gifts themselves were ranked hierarchically, with individuals able to use these gifted positions to wield influence and garner benefit. See also E. Kistler, 'Großkönigliches symbolon im Osten—exotisches Luxusgut im Westen: zur Objektbiographie der achämenidischen Glasschale aus Ithringen', in R. Rollinger, B. Guffler, M. Lang and I. Madreiter (edd.), *Interkulturalität in der Alten Welt. Vorderasien, Hellas, Ägypten und die vielfältigen Ebenen Kontakts* (Wiesbaden, 2010), 63–95 for a

To gain a true understanding of the importance and fluidity of social hierarchy within the empire, the royal table provides a suitable example. The palace reliefs at Persepolis clearly demonstrate the ceremonial importance of the royal table.²² The Greek accounts state that the King dined in the company of his *homotrapezoi*, *homositoi* or *sussitoi* (Hdt. 3.132, 5.24, 7.119; Xen. *An.* 1.7.25, *Cyr.* 7.1.30). From Xenophon's description of the organization of Cyrus' royal table, it becomes apparent that the royal hierarchy was maintained and adjusted as the King saw fit (*Cyr.* 8.4.3–5).²³ Xenophon states that the King 'did not, however, assign the appointed place permanently, but he made it a rule that by noble deeds any one might advance to a more honoured seat, and that if anyone should conduct himself ill he should go back to one less honoured' (*Cyr.* 8.4.5, transl. W. Miller). In keeping with Sahlins's social distance theory, the closer one sat to the King the more honour one was perceived to have.²⁴ According to Ctesias (*FGrHist* 688 F 40), those guests who were judged to have been worthy of reward received silver and gold dinnerware, whilst those who were unworthy received only earthenware.²⁵ Thus the royal table was a further method of legitimizing the imperial power of the King, with the position of the diners reflecting the social hierarchy of the meritorious subordinates and the fluidity and ever-changing nature of the King's favour, which naturally led to a vast amount of competition amongst the nobility.²⁶

Royal gifts were by definition insecure and could only be retained if the King continued to hold the recipient in high esteem. Thus we hear of examples of royal gifts being confiscated for disobeying royal orders (Xen. *Cyr.* 8.1.20), whilst Babylonian tablets from the time of Darius II attest to the revocation of a previous land grant to a man who turned disloyal.²⁷ Even gifts and honours granted for the lifetime of an individual, or to be transmitted to his heirs, were implicitly given with their retention dependent on future services.²⁸ Individuals often forgot that this was the case, as we see with Pythius, who gave magnificent gifts to the King and received magnificent gifts in return (Hdt. 7.27–9). However, Pythius misinterpreted the gift relationship he had established with the King and requested that Xerxes might excuse his sons from military service, resulting in Xerxes' brutal execution of Pythius' eldest son as punishment. In other words, service did not make the King accountable, and he

thorough examination of circles of engagement in gift exchange and the multiple meanings items could possess based on location.

²² Sancisi-Weerdenburg (n. 1), 133.

²³ See also Xerxes' use of seating plans at a meeting to express the *timē* in which he holds his allies (Hdt. 8.67.2).

²⁴ Briant (n. 14), 319–20.

²⁵ See Sancisi-Weerdenburg (n. 1), 133; S.J. Simpson, 'The royal table', in J. Curtis and N. Tallis (edd.), *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia* (London, 2005), 104–31 for an in-depth analysis of the Achaemenid royal table.

²⁶ E.R.M. Dusinberre, *Empire, Authority, and Autonomy in Achaemenid Anatolia* (Cambridge, 2013), 80 notes that the public setting of the banquet, in much the same way as the giving of *gera* at the feast in Homeric epic, ensured maximum publicity not only of the king's generosity but also of his power.

²⁷ Briant (n. 14), 105, 319–20 points out that, upon accession of a new king, *dōreai* granted to individuals, be they granted for a lifetime or not, were often revoked, as the new king set about establishing his own circle of favoured individuals and trustees. See also M. Weiskopf, *The So-Called Great Satraps' Revolt, 366–360 B.C. Concerning Local Instability in the Achaemenid Far West* (Stuttgart, 1989), 16.

²⁸ See Hdt. 3.160 for gifting of lifetime-honours, 7.106 for gifts transmitted to the heirs of the beneficiary.

was never committed to furthering the relationship.²⁹ It was the King's prerogative how and when a reward should be given. No one escaped the King's judgement, not even those most honoured, including a son-in-law of the King (Ctesias, *FGrHist* 688 F 41), the son of Artaxerxes II (Plut. *Art.* 29) or Orontes, who was excluded from the King's immediate company and stripped of his riches (Diod. Sic. 15.2.2).

Loyalty to the dynasty was the prime criterion for judgement as Darius boasts at Naqs-I Rústam (DNb §8b). Dynastic loyalty took precedence over all other forms of relationship. Darius' inscriptions at Behistun refer to his justice (*arstam*), exclaiming 'the man who cooperated with my house, him I rewarded well; whoso did injury, him I punished well' (DB §63). This is repeated in Xerxes' parallel inscription stating 'and I generously repay men of good will' (XPI §26–31). Darius remarks to Histiaeus of Miletus that 'an intelligent and loyal friend is the most valuable of all possessions' (Hdt. 5.24.3, transl. A.D. Godley). The King's association with Ahuramazda was also an incentive, with a potential correlation between dynastic loyalty and loyalty to the gods. Thus we see the King often granting the 'protection of Ahuramazda' as a reward for fealty (DB §60–1). Mascames, who alone succeeded in holding out against the Greeks, was awarded an annual present by Xerxes (Hdt. 7.106), whilst Mithridates, who without hesitation betrayed his father Ariobarzanes, was rewarded for choosing dynastic, over familial, allegiance (Nep. *Dat.* 7.1; Diod. Sic. 15.91.3). The promise of reward was a powerful motivator, and emulation was the foundation of the Achaemenid model. Such a wildly different system to that deployed by the egalitarian society of Greece naturally led to misunderstandings between the two cultures. When this is paired with Greek perceptions of monarchy, it meant that there was a reluctance to perceive the imperial system in a positive light anyway, and indeed there seems to have been little interest in examining the administrative elements of the Persian empire.

GREEK CONCEPTS OF GIFT-GIVING

In Greek mythology, the process of gifting is fairly instrumental to the evolution of humanity. Greeks believed that the *technai* of humanity were gifts given by Prometheus, who had stolen them from Zeus. The gods responded by delivering their own gift, albeit a falsehood, in the form of Pandora, who brought misery upon mankind (Hes. *Theog.* 535–620); Greek civilization therefore was believed to have been born out of a gift transaction.³⁰ It is therefore unsurprising to see how prevalent gifting is in Homer. As Mauss argues, gifting within primitive chieftdom societies such as that in Homer is largely used as a political tool to establish relations of domination and control.³¹ Gifts were given because they created and sustained social relations, attached

²⁹ However, see Cairns (n. 9), 80–1, who notes that even Xerxes here recognizes the norms of reciprocity by sparing Pythius' remaining sons ('you and four of your sons are saved by your hospitality', Hdt. 7.39.1–2). The King is able to exploit these norms with impunity but still has to recognize that they exist. For further evidence, see the tale of Mordecai and the Book of Benefactors in Esther 6:1–9.

³⁰ See also T.O. Beidelman, 'Agonistic exchange: Homeric reciprocity and the heritage of Simmel and Mauss', *Cultural Anthropology* 4 (1989), 227–59, at 245.

³¹ Mauss (n. 2), 54, 60–83. On the anatomy of the Homeric *polis*, see especially H. van Wees, *Status Warriors: War, Violence and Society in Homer and History* (Amsterdam, 1992), 25–58. For a discussion on the personal power of the Homeric *basileis*, see van Wees (this note), 61–145; also W. Donlan, 'Reciprocities in Homer', *CW* 75 (1981–2), 137–75, at 163; id., 'The politics of generosity in Homer', *Helios* 9 (1982), 1–16; Gregory (n. 20), 19.

timē to warriors and created hierarchy and obligation within the society.³² Gift-giving therefore acted as a method to legitimize a political office. Gifts given to individuals outside the community were deemed *xeneia*, literally ‘things given to an outsider’, and these gifts, of equivalent value, were a form of solidification of the participants’ friendship. Friendship in Homer is a matter of mutual respect, a reciprocal relation of honour.³³ Gifts given to members of one’s own community were usually awarded on a meritocratic basis, and were known as *gera*, or gifts of honour.³⁴ The distribution of *gera* was a hierarchical process, with the most prominent leader involved in selecting *gera* for himself first, before he gives *gera* to other *basileis* and men of valour. Such a hierarchical process ensured that the men of higher rank held an unfair monopolization of booty gained from victory, without ever needing to participate themselves. The Homeric account of Agamemnon and Achilles is enlightening in this regard, as Achilles declines *gera* offered by Agamemnon as compensation. Achilles is offered some of the most prestigious gifts by Agamemnon: land, loot from Lesbos, a daughter in marriage, horses and women, yet declines his offer for numerous reasons (*Il.* 9.119–61).³⁵ First, accepting such a subordinating offer would act as confirmation of his acceptance of Agamemnon’s authority. Second, the loot from Lesbos was gained mainly because of Achilles’ own skill, yet Agamemnon as chief and redistributor of resources has possession over them.³⁶ By publicly offering these gifts to Achilles, Agamemnon is able to engage in a competitively exploitative form of generalized reciprocity that simultaneously attempts to reassert his position as chief by quashing a would-be competitor and also to appear magnanimous in his generosity. As Cairns points out, the anecdote is presented as a conflict between rank and prowess, with Achilles’ protestation not just about the disrespect being shown by Agamemnon but about the lack of due respect that negates the reciprocity Achilles’ actions should obtain among peers.³⁷

As processes of state formation led to the development of more centralized and institutionalized *poleis*, elite individuals had to distance themselves from claims of tyranny and show that their incremental gift-giving had a wider communal value.³⁸ Reciprocal practices and ideas typical of the old elite still existed but were enlisted towards very different and more horizontal purposes. The exchange was now to be on a political level, primarily between the collective *dēmos* and the individual, whereas

³² S. von Reden, *Exchange in Ancient Greece* (London, 1995), 18 goes on to state that the epics can be explored at three levels. First, by attesting a number of rules and meanings which were attached to gift-exchange as social practice; second, they contain some veiled mockery of these rules; third, they are evidence of how gift-exchange was transformed into a moral concept at the time of the incipient city-state.

³³ Van Wees (n. 31), 228–30. See also D. Cairns, ‘Honour and shame: modern controversies and ancient values’, *Critical Quarterly* 53 (2011), 23–41, at 35.

³⁴ Van Wees (n. 31), 299–304 gives the example of Neleus, prince of Pylos, who received first choice of booty following the raid of the Epeians despite not having participated in the campaign (*Hom. Il.* 11.670–88, 11.696–709). See also H. van Wees, ‘Greed, generosity and gift-exchange in Early Greece and the Western Pacific’, in W. Jongman and M. Kleijwegt (edd.), *After the Past. Essays in Ancient History in Honour of H.W. Pleket* (Leiden, 2002), 341–78.

³⁵ On the prestige of these gifts, see examples in *Hom. Il.* 6.234–6, 23.257–886.

³⁶ See Beidelman (n. 30), 237–8; von Reden (n. 32), 19; Cairns (n. 33), 31–4.

³⁷ Cairns (n. 33), 34.

³⁸ Morris (n. 21), 13; van Wees (n. 31), 304; von Reden (n. 32), 18; E. Stein-Hölkeskamp, *Adelskultur und Polisgesellschaft: Studien zum griechischen Adel in archaischer und klassischer Zeit* (Stuttgart, 1989) for evidence of a change in the archaeological record around this period as evidence of attitudes shifting towards communalism. This is represented in a marked shift from grave goods to sanctuary deposits.

reciprocal gift-exchange (and the social bonds it created) between individuals, in the political sphere, became frowned upon.³⁹ Thus, when Themistocles and Miltiades are awarded bronze statues following their victories at Salamis and Marathon, their names were not appended to them. The statues were awarded by the *dēmos* for the individuals' achievement in preserving liberty (Dem. 13.21, 23.197; Aesch. *Pers.* 3.183; Lys. 8.2). What had occurred on a private level in elite practices of the Archaic period was now translated, at least superficially, to a civic level in the Classical *polis*.⁴⁰ Given the promotion of liberty in the new democratic ethos of Athens, an association with the political form of gifting that supported subordination under one individual was naturally frowned upon.⁴¹ Sahlins's statement that 'gifts make slaves as whips make dogs' seems markedly apt.⁴² This naturally fed into Greek perceptions of the Persian empire. The Classical Athenian was unable to separate barbarism from kingship, and gift-exchange became an inadvertent associate of Greek reactions against these concepts. The new system of gift-exchange in Classical Athens and the requirement of *philia* led to it taking on a more democratic, acceptable form.⁴³ Thus, when Classical Greek writers draw similar comparative links with gift-exchange in the Persian empire, they reflect a predetermined mindset based on their own historical relationship with sole rulers and gift-exchange.

PHILIA AND XENIA

Central to the Classical Greek custom of gift-exchange was the relationship of *philia* or friendship. In his discussion on friendship, Aristotle describes three different types of *philia*, based on virtue or pleasure or utility (*Eth. Nic.* 8.256a6–10; *Eth. Eud.* 7.1236a14–15). A common strand, however, was the requirement for a mutual level of goodwill (*eunoia*). Even in a utilitarian relationship, Aristotle states that a degree of affection is required (*Eth. Eud.* 7.1236a12–14).⁴⁴ When we see that Athens as a collective *polis* forms alliances with foreign states, the relationship is solidified in terms of friendship, in this regard with the city. The only exception to this rule is exchange between men and gods, because, as Aristotle indicates, a relationship of reciprocal affection between man and god is impossible, since the difference between the two is so great that *philia* is not possible in either direction ([*Mag. mor.*] 2.11).⁴⁵ Notions of affection and equality were still required when entering a ritual friendship with an outsider, termed *xenia*. For a Greek, entering into a relation of *xenia* was a binding agreement, and featured oaths of loyalty and *pistis* witnessed by the gods.⁴⁶

³⁹ Van Wees (n. 31), 306–10; von Reden (n. 32), 98–9.

⁴⁰ L. Mitchell, *Greeks Bearing Gifts: The Public Use of Private Relationships in the Greek World, 435–323 B.C.* (Cambridge, 1998), 131.

⁴¹ Mauss (n. 2), 93 highlights the antithetical nature of liberty and obligation within clan society.

⁴² Sahlins (n. 2), 133.

⁴³ Van Wees (n. 31), 306. However, the notion that parties to a relationship should be roughly equal in status does not presuppose that their gifts and services should be exactly equal, either in face value or in use value.

⁴⁴ G. Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge, 1987), 80 describes the expectations of reciprocity as being built into almost every single gesture connected with the institution of *xenia*.

⁴⁵ See J. Larson, *Understanding Greek Religion* (London and New York, 2016), 42–3 on gift-exchange and asymmetric relations between humans and gods.

⁴⁶ E. Belfiore, 'Xenia in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*', *CJ* 89 (1993), 113–29, at 115–16.

The entire process of forming *xenia* revolved around gifts, with the initiation preceded by the exchange of *pista* and the exchange of *dōra* during the initiation. Thus we hear of Alcibiades exchanging oaths with the Persian satrap Pharnabazus to seal their *xenia* (Xen. *Hell.* 1.3.12) and of Pharnabazus gifting a javelin to Agesilaus in exchange for horse trappings (4.1.39). A refusal to reciprocate these gifts was deemed a declaration of hostilities and the end of the attempted *xenia*. What becomes startlingly apparent from reading the texts, however, is that from the outset cultural differences and varying expectations set *xenia* relationships up for failure. Achaemenid society was hierarchical in nature, and was reinforced by an imbalance of power, meaning that Persians did not necessarily view *xenia* as an equal relationship. Rather they saw it purely as a relationship of utility, in which they were of higher status and free to abandon the *xenia* when they so decided.⁴⁷

It is therefore unsurprising to see how frequently Greek and Achaemenid *xenia* relations broke down. The lack of affection present in cross-cultural *xenia* constantly seemed to catch Greek individuals unawares, as is evident in Agesilaus' shock at the sudden termination of relations with Spithridates (Xen. *Hell.* 4.1.28). When Alcibiades tried to solidify his relationship with Tissaphernes with gifts, he was met with imprisonment (1.1.9). Alcibiades' aforementioned *xenia* with Pharnabazus, although sealed with oaths, resulted in his death once Pharnabazus found him to be dispensable (Diod. *Sic.* 14.11.1–4; Plut. *Alc.* 39.1–7). Antalcidas, to whom Plutarch records was assigned the title 'Friend' of the King, was *xenos* of Artaxerxes and naturally had certain expectations of the relationship. However, once Artaxerxes decided that he had no further use of Antalcidas, he abandoned the friendship, resulting in Antalcidas' death (Plut. *Art.* 22.2.6, *Pel.* 30.6). Greeks failed to cope with different expectations in *xenia* relationships, and this resulted in miscommunication and numerous examples of exploitation. By approaching relationships with Achaemenid individuals with the same expectations as they approached the generalized reciprocity of Greek gift-giving relationships, Greek individuals confirmed their failure to understand the customs of their eastern neighbours.

'FRIEND' OF THE KING

Among the names used within Greek literary accounts to suggest proximity to the King, 'Friend' of the King appears frequently.⁴⁸ Although it would be logical to assume that the title 'Friend' of the King was a legitimate honour, suggesting a certain level of relationship with the King, I think that the term is a peculiarity, oddly Hellenic in its phrasing, and is an example of the misrepresentation of Achaemenid gifting within the sources. Its usage seems interwoven with the receiving of gifts; for example,

⁴⁷ Mitchell (n. 40), 132–3 views Graeco-Persian gift exchange in slightly negative reciprocal terms, at least from the Achaemenid point of view. Mitchell describes an Achaemenid perspective as being simply 'in it for what he could get out of it', which itself seems a rather Hellenocentric view to take.

⁴⁸ For example, Xen. *An.* 4.4.4; Diod. *Sic.* 15.2.2, 16.52.1; Plut. *Art.* 2.2, 27.7. Some distinction between Classical and Hellenistic source material is needed, and post-Classical sources such as Plutarch and Diodorus may be affected by the undisputed use of the term *philos* in the Hellenistic court. However, the use of *philos* in relation to kingship is very similar in both Classical and Hellenistic sources, with Herodotus and Thucydides using the term in relation to the Persian King and his satraps, often in gifting scenarios. Xenophon uses the term most frequently; his own elite pro-Spartan outlook likely meant that he would have viewed competitive gift exchange as an expression of *philia* more appropriate. See n. 49 below for further primary examples.

Xenophon has Clearchus declare: ‘for Cyrus became my friend and not only honoured me, an exile from my fatherland, in various ways, but gave me ten thousand darics’ (*An.* 1.3.3, transl. C.L. Brownson). Plutarch recounts a similar scenario concerning Artaxerxes and Antalcidas, stating that ‘Artaxerxes made Antalcidas his *xenos* and called Antalcidas his *philos*’ and that ‘Artaxerxes honoured Antalcidas more highly than any other Greek, by giving him a garland dipped in perfume’ (Plut. *Art.* 22.3–4, *Pel.* 30.4–6, transl. B. Perrin). There are further examples of the title being awarded to Tiribazus, who ‘alone had the privilege of mounting the King upon his horse’ (Xen. *An.* 4.4.4, transl. C.L. Brownson), and to Orontes, who had the title stripped following his unsuccessful impeachment of Tiribazus to Artaxerxes II (Plut. *Art.* 2.2, 30; Xen. *An.* 4.4.4). Tissaphernes was awarded the title along with the hand in marriage of Xerxes’ daughter Rhodogune following the Battle of Cunaxa (Diod. Sic. 14.26.4), whilst Diodorus specifies that within the category of ‘Friends’ there was a further internal hierarchy based on the degree of royal favour (Diod. Sic. 16.52.1). What becomes apparent from studying the usage of the term in the literary accounts is that it is assigned only to: a) members of the Achaemenid court; b) members either concurrently receiving gifts/honours or having them removed as punishment.⁴⁹ Such limitation suggests that the title is a construct of a Classical Greek literary circle that had difficulty understanding how a court worked, and so conceptualized the service-reward nature of the Achaemenid administration in terms of friendship. This is largely due to Greek perceptions of gifting being between two individuals of an equal standing who share a certain level of affection and are thus ‘friendly’. I argue instead that the title is in fact a Greek term, with Greek expectations attached to it.

By assigning a title more aligned to the egalitarian form of generalized reciprocity prevalent in the Greek world our understanding of gifting in the hierarchical administration of the Persian empire is hindered. Whilst the term ‘Son of the House’ appears in the Aramaic documents from the Arshama collection, ‘Friend’ appears only in Greek contexts and in the later Hebrew Bible, itself influenced by the earlier Greek sources.⁵⁰ Its usage in the Bible is also limited to court scenarios, both at the court of Solomon (I Kings 4:2–6) and at the Canaanite court of Abimelech (Genesis 26:26). There is no attestation in epigraphic form. It does not appear in any of the Aramaic, Bactrian or Elamite documents recovered from within the empire. Llewellyn-Jones attempts to correlate the title with the Akkadian *rukhi šarri*, but van Selms points out that this is actually an incorrect translation.⁵¹ Achaemenid historiographers have previously noted the title’s restriction to the Greek sources but have been happy to accept its validity given the prevalence of titular rewards, specifically those indicating a degree of intimacy with the King. However, the term should now be accepted as a Greek descriptive term applied, by analogy with Greek relations

⁴⁹ See Hdt. 7.135 for the use of the term ‘Friend’ of the King and its correlation with slavery. On the use of ‘Friend’ in relation to the King in Greek sources, see Hdt. 3.21; Thuc. 8.48.1–2; Xen. *An.* 1.3.3, 2.1.20, 4.4.4, *Cyr.* 4.6.2, 6.1.45, 8.2.13, 8.2.22, *Hell.* 4.8.2, 4.8.24–7, 7.1.39; Isoc. *Pan.* 103.6, 162.2; Diod. Sic. 14.26.4, 16.52.1; Plut. *Art.* 22.3, *Ages.* 12.3, 23.6, *Pel.* 30.5.

⁵⁰ The title ‘Son’ also has a strong hierarchical dimension not present in *philos*. Aristotle demonstrates the problems of friendship between incommensurable individuals (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 7.1158b29–1159a12). See C. Atack, ‘Aristotle’s *pambasileia* and the metaphysics of monarchy’, *Polis* 32 (2015), 297–320, at 314–17 for a discussion on friendship between monarch and subject.

⁵¹ L. Llewellyn-Jones, *King and Court in Ancient Persia: 559–331 B.C.E.* (Edinburgh, 2013), 32; A. van Selms, ‘The origin of the title “The King’s Friend”’, *JNES* 16 (1957), 118–23, at 122.

based on gift-exchange, to a reality for which the Greeks lacked precise terminology, rather than as an accurate reflection of Persian terminology.⁵²

CONCLUSION

What this analysis has made apparent therefore is that Greek authors lacked understanding of a court society, which they could only conceptualize on their own terms. They adopted Greek descriptive language designed to help a Greek audience understand foreign customs in relation to their own social and cultural practices. Thus, when we see members of the Achaemenid elite dubbed ‘Friend’ of the King, what we are in fact seeing is the Greek conceptualization of the utilitarian service-reward gift culture of the Persian empire, placing unrealistic Greek expectations of friendship and goodwill on that culture. These unrealistic expectations are then used in the Hellenocentric accounts of the Greek authors to help depict foreign customs through a Greek lens—using terminology and ideology Greek individuals could relate to and understand. Following the rise of the Hellenistic kings in the third century B.C., Athens once again had to re-engage with the prospect of sole rule, and to legitimize their sudden diplomacy, descriptors of sole rule turned from *tyrannos* to *euergetēs*. By presenting sole rulers as ‘Friends’ and beneficiaries of the *polis*, monarchy became more acceptable to the Greeks in general.⁵³

Athenian political power was by this point depicted as firmly in the hands of the collective *dēmos*, and Greek writers conceptualized ideas taken out of their cultural context and constructed them to suit their intended audience. Achaemenid gift-exchange thereby lost its identity, which shifted in response to the needs of a Greek audience that lacked the ability to understand a system so different from its own. Greek rationalizations of gift-exchange were geared towards a system of egalitarian generalized reciprocity, a system clearly at odds with the Persian empire. Within the Persian empire we clearly see the successful workings of a highly complex system of hierarchical competitive generalized reciprocity. The fluidity of the social hierarchy and the promotion of inter-elite competition helped to provide constant legitimization of the King’s power. What is certain, then, is that the supposed correlation between gift-giving and primitivism within the empire is a fallacy. The giving of gifts was rather intrinsically linked with ideological representations of monarchic power and was used at all levels of the Achaemenid administration continuously to reinforce the status of the King. By analysing Greek expectations on gift-giving relationships, and their related conceptualization of Achaemenid practices, it becomes apparent that our understanding of gift-giving in the Persian empire is hindered both by misconceptions in the Greek sources and by the influence of the theory of anthropological elementarism—a hindrance that this paper has begun to rectify.

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⁵² For a similar argument of Greek conceptualizations, see J. Morgan, ‘Drunken men and modern myths: re-viewing the Classical *andrōn*’, in S.D. Lambert (ed.), *Sociable Man: Essays on Ancient Greek Social Behaviour in Honour of Nick Fisher* (Swansea, 2011), 267–90 on the perception of the Classical *andrōn*.

⁵³ On fourth- and third-century concepts of virtuous monarchy, see Atack (n. 50).