

CURTIVS 6,5,22–3, DARIUS III AND THE EUNUCH BAGOAS¹

Abstract: According to Curtius, the last Achaemenid ruler Darius III reportedly had a young eunuch lover named Bagoas. Upon Darius' death, this boy was presented to Alexander the Great by Nabarzanes, who had betrayed his master. This article argues that Curtius' attempt to connect Bagoas with Darius was likely the product of his sources' efforts to assimilate Alexander's character with that of the Achaemenid 'tyrants' whose rule he had supplanted. If Alexander was supposed to have loved a young eunuch favourite, who allegedly manipulated the king as he fell into the habits of oriental despotism, Curtius' Darius III therefore remains a lens through which we are meant to understand the nature of his successor, Alexander.

Keywords: Curtius, Darius III, Bagoas, Eunuchs

It is now well understood that the character of Darius III, the last Achaemenid king, is presented to us in the extant Greco-Roman sources as a kind of cipher through which we are meant to form an opinion of Alexander the Great. Such was the thesis of Briant's monograph, now translated into English, on the reception of Darius throughout the ages, and is also a view that Müller has recently reiterated.² Although Brosius, in her review of the first

1) Abbreviations follow the 'Liste des périodiques' in *L'Année philologique*. Other abbreviations are as per LSJ and the OLD. Unless indicated otherwise, translations are from the relevant Loeb Classical Library edition, adapted where deemed necessary. The authors would like to thank the journal's reviewers for drawing their attention to some important recent literature on the topic that would otherwise have been missed.

2) P. Briant, *Darius dans l'ombre de Alexandre*, Paris 2003. This was translated into English as 'Darius in the Shadow of Alexander', tr. J. M. Todd, Cambridge, MA 2015; S. Müller, *Alexander, Dareios und Hephaestion. Fallhöhen bei Curtius*, in: H. Wulfram (ed.), *Der Römische Alexanderhistoriker Curtius Rufus. Erzähltechnik, Rhetorik, Figurenpsychologie*, Vienna 2016, 13–48, at 18: "Dareios ... ist ein Instrument, um Alexanders jeweilige Charakterdisposition zu veranschaulichen" (see also 25 of the same article, which elaborates further on this theme); cf. M. B. Charles, *Two Notes on Darius III*, *CCJ* 62, 2016, 52–64. On Darius' portrayal in the Greco-Roman sources, see also C. Nylander, *Darius III – The Coward King. Points and Counterpoints*, in: J. Carlsen / B. Due / O. S. Due / O. Steen (eds.), *Alexander the Great. Reality and Myth*, *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici* Supple-

edition of Briant's monograph, alleged that this approach reduces Darius to a figure almost without historicity, it is nonetheless clear that we can only with extreme difficulty recover an independent assessment of the king, his character, and his actions.³ This prompted a response from Briant in the preface to the English edition of his work, where he claims that it is the primary duty of the contemporary historian not to determine precisely what happened and why it occurred; rather, it is the historian's role to try to unravel the reason why an incident is presented to us in the way that it is.⁴

One such instance worthy of further inquiry is Quintus Curtius' representation of Darius' supposed relationship with the eunuch Bagoas at 6,5,22–3. This shadowy figure, not found in the normally more highly regarded Alexander narrative of Arrian, or even that of Diodorus Siculus, is presented by Curtius (10,1,25–6) as the influential lover of Alexander, and is supposed to have manipulated the new Persian king into executing the worthy Persian noble Orxines (found as Orsines in Curtius), who did not approve of a eunuch being so influential (10,1,27–9; 10,1,37). In his monograph on Darius, Briant noted that "Bagoas is introduced by Quintus Curtius Rufus in the course of narratives and descriptions that belong mostly to the realm of romance and fiction".⁵ In fact, he devoted a small section of the book to Bagoas, with most of the attention being paid to the references in Curtius.⁶ Yet, in keeping with the nature of his book, which deals mainly with the reception and appropriation of Darius by various authors from Alexander's day through to the modern era, Briant focuses more on the broader motifs at play, rather than the specifics of Curtius' presentation of Bagoas.

mentum 20, Rome 1993, 145–59. Despite his article's title, G. Wirth fails to deal with how Darius was portrayed in the sources; see id., *Dareios und Alexander*, Chiron 1, 1971, 133–52.

3) M. Brosius, Review of Pierre Briant: *Darius dans l'ombre d'Alexandre*, *Gnomon* 78, 2006, 426–30 at 430. Brosius contends that Briant's work almost seems to "reduce history to a literary construct".

4) Briant (above, note 2) 259.

5) Briant (above, note 2) 10. S. Müller, *Alexander, Makedonien und Persien*, Berlin 2014, 141 agrees with this assessment and wonders who, precisely, was there to record the "intime Szenen" that Curtius describes.

6) See Briant (above, note 2) 344–54.

Briant observes, not without reason, that “whether such an individual as Bagoas existed is not a problem that ought to occupy our attention”.⁷ Furthermore, he insightfully points out that our focus should be redirected on the “genesis and narrative structure of . . . [Curtius’] story”, which ought to be read as an *exemplum* of good and bad kingship in the context of Alexander’s supposed orientalizing.⁸ This study adds to our understanding of the narrative structure of Curtius’ account beyond the initial interpretations offered by Briant and offers additional support to his argument regarding how little we really know about Darius,⁹ all the while adding insights into the development of the rhetorical tyrant motif – with particular reference to the construction of Alexander’s supposed oriental tyranny in Curtius. In particular, it will be worthwhile to look again at the material from a position that is more deeply rooted in the ancient source material itself, particularly as the material that Curtius relates arguably represents the clearest example of how little we really know about Darius.

Given our specific interest in Curtius’ portrayal of Bagoas, and its implications for our reception of Darius, let us look more closely at what he tells us about Bagoas and Darius. Bagoas is introduced to us at 6,5,22–3, where decidedly Roman language is employed to describe the boy’s beauty¹⁰:

ibi Nabarzanes accepta fide occurrit, dona ingentia ferens. inter quae Bagoas erat, specie singulari spado atque in ipso flore pueritiae, cui et Dareus assuerat et mox Alexander assuevit; eiusque maxime precibus motus Nabarzani ignovit.

There [i. e., the city of Hyrcania] Nabarzanes, having received a safe conduct, met him, bringing great gifts. Among these was Bagoas, a eunuch of remarkable beauty and in the very flower of boyhood, who had been loved by Darius and was afterwards to be loved by Alexander; and it was especially because of the boy’s entreaties that he was led to pardon Nabarzanes.

The next time we come across Bagoas – with Darius now long gone – is in the context of the Persian noble Orxines refusing to ho-

7) Briant (above, note 2) 347.

8) Briant (above, note 2) observes that Bagoas becomes the “symbol and vehicle of Alexander’s Orientalization”.

9) Briant (above, note 2) 347.

10) On this, see C. A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity*, New York / Oxford 1999, 321 n.70.

nour the eunuch as one of Alexander's friends, for Orxines viewed Bagoas, not as one of the friends of the king (*amici*), but as a one of his prostitutes (*scorta*). It is worthwhile to once again look at the whole passage (10,1,25–6):

nam cum omnes amicos regis donis super ipsorum vota coluisset, Bagoae spadoni, qui Alexandrum obsequio corporis devinxerat sibi, nullum honorem habuit, admonitusque a quibusdam Bagoam Alexandro cordi esse, respondit amicos regis, non scorta se colere, nec moris esse Persis mares ducere qui stupro effeminarentur.

For when he [the Persian noble Orxines, a satrap at Parsagada] had honoured all the friends of the king with gifts beyond their highest hopes, to Bagoas, a eunuch who had won the regard of Alexander through prostitution, he paid no honour, and on being admonished by some that Bagoas was dear to Alexander, he replied that he was honouring the friends of the king, not his harlots, and that it was not the custom of the Persians to mate with males who made females of themselves by prostitution.¹¹

Afterwards, we read how this treatment so offended Bagoas that the latter decided to bring about Orxines' demise by spreading about false accusations likely to arouse Alexander's wrath (10,1,27–9), the precise details of which are not really relevant to this study. Bagoas eventually achieved his goal of destroying his supposed nemesis, but not before Orxines had the last word at 10,1,37: *audieram . . . in Asia olim regnasse feminas; hoc vero novum est, regnare castratum!* ("I had heard that women once reigned in Asia; this however is something new, for a eunuch to reign!").¹²

11) This speaks to the debate in antiquity regarding same-sex relations among the Persians. Herodotus (1,135) and Xenophon (Cyr. 2,2,28) claimed that pederasty with boys was introduced by the Greeks, whereas Plutarch, in his tract entitled *On the Malice of Herodotus* (Mor. 857c), refuted this view, mainly because the Persians were castrating boys before they had even seen the Aegean – a statement suggesting that the Greeks primarily regarded castration as a means to create a sexual object for men (something which is probably debateable in a Near Eastern context). Also, note that Artaxerxes II was said to have been in love with a eunuch called Tiridates, a story related by Aelian (VH 12,1). Aelian makes it clear that Artaxerxes' excessive grief over Tiridates' death did not prevent him from wooing, at the same time, Aspasia, a beautiful Greek woman and, previously, his brother's concubine, whom he honoured more than his first wife and persistently sought to win over; cf. S. D. Smith, *Man and Animal in Severan Rome: The Literary Imagination of Claudius Aelianus*, Cambridge 2014, 258, who discusses Aelian's interest in Aspasia's relationship with both Artaxerxes and Cyrus.

12) On the *loci* in Curtius involving Orxines, see Müller (above, note 2) 38. Orxines would have been shocked to learn that a eunuch would eventually become

Of particular interest to us, of course, is that Bagoas is supposed to have once been a eunuch of Darius, and that he was beloved of him, as the *cui . . . Dareus assuerat* found at Curt. 6,5,23 would imply.¹³ That there was some sort of close relationship between Darius and Bagoas is also vaguely suggested at 10,1,34, where we are told that, although the eunuch had not seen the tomb of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Achaemenid empire, he had nonetheless heard from Darius (*sed ex Dareo ita accepi*) that Cyrus had been buried with 3,000 talents of gold. Yet, as mentioned above, we fail to find any reference to the eunuch Bagoas at all in: a) the account of Arrian, who tended to follow the more ‘official’ version of events, being mainly reliant on Aristobulus and Ptolemy for his information; or b) the account of Diodorus Siculus, who is usually placed among those authors following the so-called Alexander Vulgate, a broad source tradition with which Curtius is also generally associated and which, according to Nylander, portrays Darius in a manner not entirely consistent with the Herodotean paradigm of the “oriental despot”.¹⁴ So, with Bagoas being a

a consul of Rome, in the East, in AD 399; see Claudian’s *In Eutropium I* and *II*. P. Guyot, *Eunuchen als Sklaven und Freigelassene in der griechisch-römischen Antike*, Stuttgart 1980, 93–4 points out that, while Alexander’s court likely had many eunuchs attached to it, their influence would have been mediated by the king’s personal connections with his Macedonian *Hetairoi*.

13) The eunuch seems to have had a double role in Roman literature, that of a passive partner in a same-sex relationship, particularly when the eunuch was young (e.g., Claud. *Eutrop.* 1, 61–71), to the more traditional Eastern role of a chamberlain, particularly when the eunuch was older (e.g., Claud. *Eutrop.* 1, 105–109).

14) Nylander (above, note 2) 149. The only Bagoas found both in Arrian and Diodorus is the ‘kingmaker’, who supposedly put Darius III on the throne; see Arr. *An.* 2,14,5 (the context is a purported letter of Alexander to Darius, where he states that he had assassinated the previous king Arses with Bagoas’ help) and Diod. *Sic.* 17,5,3–6 (the context is Darius’ accession). Yet Arrian also records another Bagoas in his *Indica* (18,8). This Bagoas, son of Pharnuches (Βαγώας ὁ Φαρνούχεος), is described by Arrian as a ship’s commander (τρίηραρχος) with Alexander’s fleet on the Hydaspes (326 BC). As A. B. Bosworth, *Alexander and the Iranians*, *JHS* 100, 1980, 1–21 at 15 suggests, he might possibly be the same Bagoas with whom Alexander was dining soon before his death in Aelian’s *Varia Historia* (3,23), for the latter context is one of Alexander’s drunkenness instead of sexual overindulgence; see also A. B. Bosworth, *From Arrian to Alexander: Studies in Historical Interpretation*, Oxford 1988, 171–2, with E. Baynham, *Barbarians I: Quintus Curtius’ and Other Roman Historians’ Reception of Alexander*, in: A. Feldherr (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Historians*, Cambridge 2009, 288–300 at 290–1. Despite the view of R. Lane Fox, *Alexander the Great*, London 2004, 377

poorly attested figure in the first place, one starts to wonder about this supposed relationship with Darius, who is neatly stitched into Curtius' narrative tapestry to highlight the increasing decadence and orientalizing of Alexander.

Now, aside from Briant's brief treatment of the matter, it might not surprise that there has been considerable debate about whether Bagoas was indeed a historical figure, or was a construction designed to implicate Alexander in tyrannical behaviour. Tarn, who sought to exculpate his hero Alexander from the then morally repugnant charge of having indulged in same-sex relationships, contended that, although "some modern writers have taken [him] for a real person", the character of Bagoas was probably an invention designed to illustrate Alexander's supposed descent into tyranny.¹⁵ Regardless, Tarn's statement that "[t]he only of our extant writers who features Bagoas is Curtius" is clearly untrue – he also appears in the works of Plutarch and Athenaeus, as Badian, who sought to reinstate Bagoas as a historical figure, points out in an article devoted to the eunuch.¹⁶ In this article, Badian took Tarn to task for claiming that the two vignettes in Curtius involving Bagoas presented above were inventions of Peripatetic philosophers who sought to damn Alexander, and whose accounts were followed indiscriminately by the moralist Curtius, who was also of a similar mind about Alexander's character. In particular, Badian argues that the tale involving Orxines was not simply an invention, more so given that the supposedly more reliable Arrian (6,30,1–2) provides a different version of the noble's demise, in which Orxines was put to death for stealing from temples and royal tombs, and for unjustly killing many Persians.¹⁷ Rather, Badian contends that

and A. Chugg, *Alexander's Lovers*, Bristol 2012, 157–8 that this Bagoas and the eunuch are the same, any approximation of the two is convincingly refuted by H. Berve, *Das Alexanderreich auf prosopographischer Grundlage II*, Munich 1926, 99 n. 1. Note, too, that Chugg contends that Βαγώας ὁ Φαρνούχου represents a corrupted version of Βαγώας ὁ εὐνοῦχος, with this possibly resulting from Arrian, who was aware of a translator called Pharnuches (see *An.* 4,3,7), and found it "difficult to accept" his (alleged) source Nearchus, who supposedly recorded the eunuch Bagoas as a trierarch. It is impossible to verify this speculation.

15) W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great II*, Cambridge 1948, 319–23.

16) Tarn (above, note 15) 320; E. Badian, *The Eunuch Bagoas: A Study in Method*, *CQ* n. s. 8, 1958, 144–57 at 144 n. 8.

17) Arrian (6,29,2) states that Orxines had put himself in charge of Persia in Alexander's absence.

Curtius' version may reveal a kernel of truth, and that Arrian followed the 'official' version of events reported by his source Ptolemy – whom Tarn admits was wont, in recounting the results of battles, to present figures that served to glorify both himself and Alexander.¹⁸ Chugg, who more recently argued for the eunuch Bagoas' historicity, holds that the more salacious aspects of Alexander's relationship with Bagoas were exaggerated, and states that Arrian's silence was because he "wished to rehabilitate Alexander in the eyes of the Roman patrician audience in the Antonine age", a view which is obviously difficult to substantiate.¹⁹

We do not want to dwell excessively here on what all this implies for how we are meant to view Alexander, but it is of interest that both Tarn and Badian pass little comment on Darius' connection to Bagoas. Badian simply says that, according to Curtius at least, Bagoas "had been Darius' favourite".²⁰ Indeed, most commentators dealing with Darius III have accepted that the Persian king had a eunuch boy-lover called Bagoas in his retinue.²¹ To offer a different slant on Curtius' presentation of events, Nabarzanes, one of the conspirators who had brought about Darius' death, was spared by Alexander on account of the intercession of the boy Bagoas, who, according to Badian, "had no doubt been carefully

18) Tarn (above, note 15) 70.

19) Chugg (above, note 14) 162. Chugg (154–5) also argues that Bagoas' reputation derived mainly from his eloquence and ability to persuade (hence his pleading on behalf of Nabarzanes), qualities which the Romans, such as Curtius, might have misconstrued as beauty.

20) Badian (above, note 16) 145. Chugg (above, note 14) 154 is careful to refer to Bagoas as Darius' "personal attendant". He adds (163) that, although Alexander's contemporaries understood Alexander's relationship with Bagoas as sexual (something which Chugg agrees was "likely to have been correct"), we need to revise our modern assumption that "a beautiful teenage eunuch lover must have been a lowly body slave" in light of the ancient evidence from both the Persian court and the role of eunuchs in Macedonian politics since the time of Philip II. On eunuchs in the Hellenistic world, see Guyot (above, note 12) 92–120.

21) For example, see Lane Fox (above, note 14) 377: "Bagoas his Persian favourite"; 402: "Bagoas, the eunuch who had served Darius"; M. B. Charles, *The Chiliarchs of Achaemenid Persia: Towards a Revised Understanding of the Office*, *Phoenix* 69, 2015, 279–303 at 292: "a castrated favourite of Darius III and Alexander"; Badian (above, note 16) 144: "Darius' favourite and in due course Alexander's"; cf. Bosworth (above, note 14) 98. See also Guyot (above, note 12) 93: "Bagoas, dem Lustknaben des Dareios"; Müller (above, note 2) 33–4: "Dareios' Lustknabe".

coached in his role of suppliant”.²² What Badian does not comment on, given his focus on the portrayal of Alexander in the Greco-Roman sources, is the perversely paradoxical outcome of a boy supposedly beloved of Darius begging for the life of one of the men who had brought about the king’s demise. Such, it seems, is the fickleness of fate, and this was a nuance arguably embraced by Curtius. The vignette also points towards the depiction of Alexander drifting into oriental tyranny, a point also made by Müller, who views Curtius’ portrayal of Alexander and Bagoas in the context of the Macedonian slipping into “die Rolle des verdorbenen Großkönigs”.²³ Indeed, by Curtius’ day, sexual desire for eunuchs was usually regarded as indicative of an excessive devotion to *luxus* and thus unsuitability for political responsibility. So, Alexander executed two men who had conspired to usurp the throne from Darius, these being Bessus and Barsaentes, but the third party to this treasonous endeavour avoids justice because of the entreaties of a beautiful eunuch boy, who is presented as pleading to an already infatuated Alexander, as the word *mox* would suggest.²⁴

Aside from the two vignettes involving Bagoas in Curtius, we have a third, as indicated above. We are told by Plutarch (Al. 67,4) and Athenaeus (13, 603a–b), whose source is Dicaearchus, that Alexander kissed Bagoas at a theatre, to the rapturous applause of the audience – no mention of Darius here, for what it is worth. As Toner argued, kissing was a powerful gesture in the Roman cultural context, and was an act through which patrons and subsequently the emperors recognized the social standing of certain individuals or social groups; notably, it was also a means of displaying an em-

22) Badian (above, note 16) 145.

23) Müller (above, note 2) 34. Müller also observes (33) that eunuchs act “als Standardcode ethischen Verfalls” in the Greco-Roman literature dealing with orientalist tendencies; see also p. 38 of the same article, and id. (above, note 5) 140–141. On attitudes towards eunuchs in Roman times, see K. Schnegg, Körperliche Verstümmelung zur Wertsteigerung, Eunuchen als Sklaven, in: A. Exenberger / J. Nussbaumer (eds.), Von Körpermärkten, Innsbruck 2009, 15–26, and especially 19–21, with Guyot (above, note 12) 37–45, who devotes attention to the eunuch’s association with effeminate luxury.

24) On Bessus’ execution, which is recorded differently by Ptolemy and Aristobulus, see Arr. An. 3,30,4–5 and cf. Diod. Sic. 17,83,9; on Barsaentes’ death, see Arr. An. 3,25,8. Tarn’s denial (above, note 15) 321 n.3 that Barsaentes was not executed for Darius’ murder seems improbable, and Badian (above, note 16) 146–7 is right to reject this view.

peror's tyrannical behaviours, as with Gaius, who chose to give senators his foot to kiss but would himself kiss actors on a daily basis.²⁵ The erotic overtones of kissing boys, widely disseminated among literate Romans, as evidenced by Catullus' 'kissing' poems addressed to the boy Juventius (i. e. 48, 99),²⁶ imply that Plutarch and Athenaeus' readers would appreciate Alexander's growing decadence, as is implied in their narratives. Tarn holds that Plutarch's source was Dicaearchus, who is actually named by Athenaeus, yet he dismissed this kissing incident as false, mainly on account of his view that there were no theatres in the area at the time, which, according to him, "damns the story completely".²⁷ Badian, who refuses to believe in a common source for both vignettes given their seemingly different contexts, contends that "To the unbiased reader it seems almost incredible that such an argument could be seriously advanced as decisive".²⁸ He observes that there is no reason why Alexander would not have held "choral or scenic contests before a Graeco-Macedonian audience", and that, even if these contests were not held in a built-for-purpose theatre, Alexander would have found "a place naturally suitable for such an arrangement".²⁹

Although Badian's explanation seems fitting enough, this description of Bagoas and Alexander clearly conforms to two well-known tyrannical *topoi*. In Plutarch, it is the drunken tyrant, with the description being prefaced with Bacchic revelry, and in Athenaeus, it is the excessively lustful tyrant who has subordinated himself to the passion of someone unworthy of his attentions.³⁰ Sexual lust and drunkenness were two of the basic characteristics of the rhetorical tyrant in ancient literature, as exemplified in Plato's *Republic* and Cicero's *Philippics*. In the *Republic* (9, 573d), Socrates

25) J. P. Toner, *Popular Culture in Ancient Rome*, Malden, MA 2009, 135.

26) D. Konstan, *Enacting Eros*, in: M. Nussbaum / J. Shivola (eds.), *The Sleep of Reason: Erotic Experience and Sexual Ethics in Ancient Greece and Rome*, Chicago / London 2013, 354–73 at 365–7.

27) Tarn (above, note 15) 322. On Dicaearchus, see also Müller (above, note 5) 107–8.

28) Badian (above, note 16) 151, with 153, on there being two different sources at play for both Plutarch and Athenaeus.

29) Badian (above, note 16) 151.

30) Badian's reference (above, note 16) 151 n.3 to "homosexuality is what matters and is stressed" is rather misleading, although he recognizes the motif of Alexander being "the slave of his eunuch".

often refers to tyrants' love of carnal pleasures and wine, including their usual "feasts and carousals and revelling and courtesans" (ἑορταὶ . . . καὶ κῶμοι καὶ θάλειαι καὶ ἑταῖραι), and observes that they act similarly to those whose souls are governed by "tyrant Eros" (Ἔρως τύραννος).³¹ Likewise, at Phil. 3,12, Cicero accuses Marcus Antonius of prodigality, effeminacy, and drunkenness, as is indicated by *impuro, impudico, effeminato, numquam ne in metu quidem sobrio*.³² Badian convincingly demonstrated that a procession and the aforementioned games were indeed held in Carmania, since such contests are reported in Arrian (6,28,3), while only the drunken procession is found in Curtius (9,10,24–8). He does not find it particularly odd that Curtius fails to mention Bagoas in this context, since he was likely using "a source that dwell's on Alexander's feasting and drunkenness and one that knows Bagoas".³³ As a result, Tarn's view that the whole kissing-in-the-theatre incident was "invented" by Dicaearchus, a contemporary of the Successors, in order to damn Alexander as part of a broader Peripatetic attack on Alexander is dismissed – as is the whole notion of a concerted Peripatetic intent to demonstrate that Alexander, a good pupil of the virtuous Aristotle, had been spoiled by Fortune, and had descended into base tyranny as a result.³⁴

There is one other (possible) mention of the eunuch Bagoas in the Greco-Roman source tradition. This is found in Aelian (VH 3,23), specifically in the context of describing a month when Alexander was either drunk or asleep.³⁵ Here we read that Alexan-

31) Plato (Resp. 9, 573b–c) claims that a drunkard develops a tyrannical temper; cf. Pl. Phdr. 238b, where a similar association is invoked; in addition, see also Eur. Hipp. 538 and Andr. fr. 136 (Nauck), where Eros is also called a tyrant. On this, see now E. Anagnostou-Laoutides, *Drunk with Blood: The Role of Platonic Baccheia* in Lucan and Statius, *Latomus* 76, 2017, 304–23 at 309–10.

32) See T. D. Frazel, *The Rhetoric of Cicero's "In Verrem"*, Göttingen 2009, 179 with n. 138, where Cic. Phil. 3,20; 3,31 and 3,35 are cited with respect to drunkenness as a sign of someone's unsuitability for public office.

33) Badian (above, note 16) 152.

34) Tarn (above, note 15) 320; cf. Badian (above, note 16) 153, and especially 156: "As for Curtius, we must give up the simple story of a 'Peripatetic account' which he, three or four centuries later, was the first to write down coherently".

35) Many have described this *locus* as referring to the eunuch; see, e. g., Badian (above, note 16) 156; Berve (above, note 14) 99; J. G. Devoto (trans.), *Claudius Aelianus: Historia Varia*, Chicago 1995, 353 n. 95; R. Egge, *Untersuchungen zur Primärtradition bei Q. Curtius Rufus. Die alexanderfeindliche Überlieferung*, Freiburg 1978, 157.

der travelled to “Bagoas’ house” (ὁ Βαγῳά οἶκος), which was “ten stades” (δέκα σταδίου) from the palace, to have dinner.³⁶ Of interest is that Aelian states that Alexander was either a drunkard, as his source material would imply, or that his sources, such as Eumenes of Cardia, generally regarded as the original compiler of the *Ephemerides* or King’s Journal, were dishonest – as indicated by οἱ ταῦτα ἀναγράψαντες ψεύδονται.³⁷ Here, at least, we have an ancient writer questioning the tradition of the ‘bad Alexander’ that had become embedded in Roman consciousness, and who is associated with the name Bagoas, regardless of whether this was: a) the eunuch lover of Alexander, if indeed there was a sexual relationship between the two; b) Bagoas, son of Pharnuches, who is mentioned in passing by Arrian in his *Indica* (18,8), a man sometimes conflated with Bagoas the eunuch; or c) another Persian of this name, eunuch or otherwise.³⁸ Even if VH 3,23 was based on material originally recorded in the much-debated *Ephemerides*, such material was likely twisted by subsequent writers in order to accord with their intended portrayals of Alexander.

Now Badian puts forward the case that Curtius’ portrayal of Alexander as virtuous to begin with, yet descending into tyranny, may owe more to Roman contextual issues rather than any coordinated Peripatetic assault. He points us to a letter of Cicero to his friend Atticus (Att. 13,28,3), written in May 45 BC, in which he mentions his previous intent, now aborted, to write a ‘symbolleutic’ or advice-giving letter to Caesar designed to restore the writer to favour. Cicero, here, despairs of such a plan, for even the “disciple of Aristotle” (*Aristoteli discipulum*) had become a tyrant when he was named king – witness *superbum*, *crudelem* and *immodera-*

36) Briant (above, note 2) 556 observes that the only “concordant text” is a *locus* in Theophrastus (Hist. Plant. 2,6,7), where there is a reference to “a garden of Bagoas the Elder (τοῦ παλαίου)” near Babylon. Briant thinks that this could be “the same piece of property”, even though he contends that the Bagoas referred to is more likely the Bagoas killed at the start of Darius’ reign, a view shared by Charles (above, note 21) 292 n.43.

37) F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* 2.B, Berlin 1929 at Item 17 placed VH 3,23 among the known fragments of the *Ephemerides*, a view supported by Chugg (above, note 14) 163, with n.254; id., *The Journal of Alexander the Great*, AHB 19, 2005, 155–75 at 156 and E. Anson, *Eumenes of Cardia: A Greek among Macedonians*, Leiden / Boston 2015, 156.

38) On this, see note 14 above.

tum qualifying *discipulum*.³⁹ Tarn, for his part, viewed this as a convenient summary of the supposed Peripatetic portrait of Alexander, but Badian argued, convincingly, that “[s]urely *this* Alexander has nothing to do with . . . the Peripatetic School: he is the Alexander of a Roman aristocrat chafing under the *regnum* of Caesar”.⁴⁰ But if it is true that Curtius draws on this very Roman depiction of the moral dangers associated with unfettered supreme power, such as the position of *rex*, the same might also be said about those cast in its shadow, such as Darius.

Regardless of Badian’s views on Bagoas’ historicity, the introduction of the eunuch in Curtius’ narrative, as Briant sought to emphasize, clearly speaks more to rhetorical issues than to verisimilitude. There are two issues at play here. First, as Cauer once pointed out in his entry on Bagoas in the *Realencyclopädie* of Pauly / Wissowa, the very name Bagoas became almost inextricably associated with Persian eunuchs by Roman times.⁴¹ For example, he points out that Lucian (Eun. 4), Ovid (Am. 2,2,1) and Quintilian (Inst. 5,12,21) all refer to ‘Bagoas’ as almost a generic name for a eunuch.⁴² Pliny (NH 13.41) even writes that “Bagous” [sic] is “the Persian word for eunuch” (*ita uocant spadones*), and observes that eunuchs had even reigned in Persia (*qui apud eos etiam regnauere*). The name is also associated with a Persian eunuch in the fictional third- or fourth-century-AD *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus of Emesa, for example at 9,26, where a certain Bagoas is described as “the most precious possession of Oroondates”, an invented Persian

39) Attempts at writing such a letter (συμβουλευτικόν) are also referred to at Cic. Att. 12,40,2, where he mentions that he had similar letters addressed by Aristotle and Theopompus to Alexander beside him.

40) Badian (above, note 16) 156. On Cicero following the supposed Peripatetic portrait of Alexander, see Tarn (above, note 15) 96–7, with 97 n. 1. See also Berve (above, note 14) 98–9.

41) F. Cauer, Bagoas, RE II, 1896, 2771–2 at 2771.

42) Observe, too, that Ctesias (FGrH 688 F13 § 9) calls a eunuch of Cambyses Bagapates, a name similar to that of Bagoas, while he also writes that another Bagapates (FGrH 688 F16 § 66) lived at the time of Artaxerxes II. The name Bagoas seems to have as its root the Persian word *baga* = “God”, which is found in numerous Persian personal names; see J. Kellens, BAGA, in: K. van der Toorn / B. Becking / P. W. van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, Leiden / Boston / Köln 1999, 159–60. In Sanskrit the corresponding name for god is “Bhaga”, while the Sanskrit adjective “Bhagwat”, meaning “fortunate”, sounds quite similar to Bagoas; see F. Bopp, *A Comparative Grammar of the Sanscrit, Zend, Greek, Latin, Lithuanian, Gothic, German and Slavonic Languages*, Part II, London 1845, 1217.

satrap of Egypt.⁴³ Second, the name Bagoas is associated with the murderer of two Persian kings, which was perhaps the inspiration of Pliny's statement at NH 13,41. This Bagoas eventually placed Darius III on the throne as his puppet, before the latter did away with him. He is generally described as a eunuch, despite supposedly holding the position of Chiliarch, the commander of the king's infantry bodyguard, although whether he was indeed a castrated man probably warrants discussion elsewhere.⁴⁴

Some authors have suggested that the Greek use of the term εὐνοῦχος to describe Persian court officials could be the result of a translation error. Briant argues that "ceux que les textes grecs désignent comme eunuques ne sont rien d'autre que des détenteurs de hautes fonctions auliques dans l'entourage du roi".⁴⁵ Furthermore, Briant refers to the similarity of οἰνοχόος ("cupbearer"), seemingly a court official, and εὐνοῦχος ("eunuch"). He therefore wonders whether the latter term became confused with the former among Greek writers and copyists. More telling, perhaps, is that the Hebrew *sārîs* ("eunuch") is a loan-word from the Akkadian *ša rēš šar-ri* (sometimes written simply as *ša rēši*).⁴⁶ This term, as Yamauchi observes, originally denoted a highly-ranked courtier (literally, "one who [stands] at the head of the king"), but eventually came to

43) Translation of W. Lamb, Heliodorus. *Ethiopian Story*, edited with new introduction and notes by J. R. Morgan, London 1997, 229.

44) See Charles (above, note 21) 292. Charles has also pointed out something similar at id., *The Achaemenid Chiliarch Par Excellence: Commander of Guard Infantry, Cavalry, or Both?*, *Historia* 65, 2016, 392–412 at 406 n. 64, where he stated that "Diodorus mentions Bagoas several times in Book 16 as a military commander in Egypt and an administrator in the Upper Satrapies (e.g., 16,47,4; 16,49,4–5; 16,50,1–8), yet it is not until Book 17 that he describes him as a eunuch, the Chiliarch (ὁ χιλίαρχος), and a serial murderer (17,5,3)".

45) P. Briant, *Histoire de l'Empire Perse. De Cyrus à Alexandre*, Paris 1996, 288; on this, see also id. (above, note 2) 348.

46) See H. Tadmor, *Was the Biblical Sārîs a Eunuch?*, in: Z. Zevit / S. Gitin / M. Sokoloff (eds.), *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield*, Winona Lake, IN 1995, 317–25 at 322–3; cf. A. K. Grayson, *Eunuchs in Power: Their Role in the Assyrian Bureaucracy*, in: M. Dietrich / O. Loretz (eds.), *Vom Alten Orient zum Alten Testament: Festschrift für Wolfram Freiherrn von Soden zum 85. Geburtstag am 19. Juni 1993*, Kevelaer 1995, 85–98 at 93; J. Hawkins, *Eunuchs among the Hittites*, in: S. Parpola / R. M. Whiting (eds.), *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East. Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, Helsinki, July 2–6, 2001, vol. 1, Helsinki 2002, 217–33 at 218.

be associated with a castrated man.⁴⁷ While we do not have a similar term preserved in Old Persian, Egyptian documents from the Achaemenid period use *saris* to designate an important official, so one might reasonably infer, as does Briant, that the title, in one form or another, may have been used elsewhere in the empire.⁴⁸ In accord with this reasoning, Kuhrt writes that not all “eunuchs” might have been castrated and that the word ‘eunuch’, however it was written, was “a more general term defining royal body servants generally, only some of whom were castrati”.⁴⁹ More recently, however, Nissinen has argued that the *sārîs* or *ša rēši*, at least in non-Persian Near Eastern contexts, was typically understood as a castrated man based on the ancient sources’ insistence that those men described thus were permanently unable to father children, even though they could be entrusted with military offices; hence, in the Old Testament we come across a *sārîs* who was in command of soldiers (2 Kings 25:19).⁵⁰ It follows that there remains considerable uncertainty regarding the Greek use of the term εὐνοῦχος to describe Persians at court.⁵¹

So, even if the incidents pertaining to Bagoas described by Curtius are based on some sort of reality, as Badian and more recently Chugg made such an effort to demonstrate, there is no guarantee that the name of one of the supporting actors was really Bagoas, this being a hackneyed name for a Persian eunuch. This is

47) E. M. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 1990, 262.

48) Briant (above, note 45) 288.

49) A. Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period II*, London / New York 2007, 577, with Charles (above, note 21) 293.

50) M. Nissinen, *Relative Masculinities in the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament*, in: I. Zsolnay (ed.), *Being a Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity*, Abingdon / New York 2016, 221–47 at 233; see also 231–2, which summarizes the ancient sources that clearly regard the *ša rēši* as eunuchs. As Nissinen further argues, “the Judaean eunuchs, much in the same way as their Assyrian colleagues, occupied leading positions in the state bureaucracy, including military leadership conventionally thought of as hegemonic masculine performance *per definitionem*”. For a survey of Biblical references to eunuchs, see S. D. Burke, *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch*, Minneapolis, MN 2013, 25–32.

51) Herodotus uses the word εὐνοῦχος seven times in his *Histories*, although in only two instances does he explicitly associate eunuchdom with castration (Hdt. 6,32; 8,104–5; cf. Hdt. 1,117,5; 3,4,2; 3,77,2–3; 3,130,4; 7,187,1). Xenophon wrote extensively about castrated eunuchs (Cyr. 7,5,58–65), and so did Lucian (Eun. 6–10; Pseud. 17). For a thorough overview of Greco-Roman sources discussing castrated eunuchs, see Burke 2013, 34–35.

especially the case given a) the failure of such a person to be included in narratives drawing on texts closer to the time of Alexander (unless his existence was entirely suppressed in these narratives), and b) the clear evidence that Bagoas was a generic moniker for a Persian eunuch – just as a butler or valet in an English-language television programme might be called Jeeves after the P. G. Wodehouse character. Regardless, it does not necessarily follow that every aspect of Bagoas' presentation in Curtius, and indeed in Athenaeus and Plutarch, both of whom might also be said to be writing for Roman sensibilities, must be historical. Into this category one might justifiably place Darius. As is well recognized, and is discussed at length by Briant in his work on the reception and appropriation of Darius in antique and modern literature, we know precious little about Darius outside the Greco-Roman Alexander-centric narratives available to us. But even in these narratives, we see him, in the apologetic Alexander source tradition exemplified by Arrian, as a weak and ineffectual king simply not up to the task of resisting the *genius* of the Macedonian conqueror; or, in the so-called Alexander Vulgate exemplified by Curtius, an essentially good and capable man who found himself in the wrong time and the wrong place, a tragic victim on the cruel stage of life.⁵² Yet, in both versions, he still remains a mirror in which we are meant to view the conduct and character of Alexander.

What can we glean from this? It follows that Curtius presents Bagoas not simply as device to show the increasing oriental corruption of Alexander, but presents him as another spoil of war, another indication that Alexander now has what was once that of Darius, from the very Persian empire, through to his (alleged) castrated boy lover. Briant was not far from the mark when he stated that “the young eunuch is both the symbol and vehicle of Alexander's ‘Orientalization’”, but he, like Müller in her treatment of the same passages, concentrated more on what Curtius was saying about Alexander, rather than what Curtius' narrative might say about Darius – even if the former was clearly the Roman writer's main concern.⁵³ The issue for us is whether it necessarily follows

52) On this, see Charles (above, note 2) 63.

53) Briant (above, note 2) 348; Müller (above, note 2) 33–4, and see also 38, with id. (above, note 5) 140–1, who observes that Bagoas acts “als Marker von Alexanders Sittenverfall”.

that Darius must have had some sort of eunuch lover. Regardless of Curtius presenting Darius as a somewhat more sympathetic figure than does Arrian, who concentrates on the king's utter unsuitability for command,⁵⁴ he must still necessarily be cast as an eastern despot of sorts, even if he is of the better, less hubristic kind. By the time that Curtius was composing his history, such an oriental tyrant would normally be expected to have had a boy lover, and a castrated one at that.

Briant observes that the very language used by Curtius to describe Bagoas' appearance, such as *in ipso flore pueritiae*, was probably intended to be "evocative for Roman readers, who were captivated by the disturbing beauty and sexuality of the *puer delicatus*".⁵⁵ Yet not all *pueri delicati* were castrated, and it is the pederastic love for a eunuch that is particularly associated with oriental tyranny. One thinks of Nero, with his eunuch Sporus, whom he supposedly married (Suet. Ner. 28,1), together with Domitian, who was even presented with a poem written about his eunuch Earinus (Stat. Silv. 3,4).⁵⁶ One also thinks of Suetonius' depiction of Titus. Before he became the 'good' emperor, it was thought that he would become a tyrant, and so he is given troops of catamites and eunuchs (*exoletorum et spadonum greges*) as part of his retinue – a retinue which he dismissed upon succeeding his father Vespasian (Suet. Tit. 7,1–2).⁵⁷ Even the uxorious Claudius, supposedly not interested in same-sex relations, as Suetonius (Claud. 33,2) tells us with *marum omnino experts*, was cast as a tyrant ready to listen to the counsel of freedmen, including the eunuch Posides, whom he presented with military honours (Suet. Claud. 28).

To allow Alexander to become an oriental tyrant, as opposed to a Macedonian king, his Persian predecessor was also therefore

54) See, in particular, Arr. An. 3,22,2, where Darius is described as cowardly and an entirely useless general. Darius' alleged cowardice and lack of military skills is discussed at length by Nylander (above, note 2) 145–59.

55) Briant (above, note 2) 349.

56) See especially lines 14–9, where Earinus is presented as a Ganymede to Domitian's Jupiter, all with the approval of Juno (i. e., Domitian's wife Domitia); see also Cass. Dio 67,2,3.

57) Cassius Dio (67,2,3) also records Titus' interest in eunuchs. Cf. Hadrian's much-publicized relationship with Antinoüs, which belongs to a different construct, for, as A. R. Birley, Hadrian: The Restless Emperor, London / New York 1997, 2 suggests, the emperor was "behaving in the tradition of classical Greece, the older man, the *erastes*, and the beautiful youth, the *eromenos*".

necessarily imbued with the trappings of oriental despotism.⁵⁸ For Darius, this included having been in love with a beautiful boy eunuch. It is worthwhile to note that, in Curtius, Alexander's acceptance of Bagoas into his court is soon accompanied by a description of him abandoning the virtuous ways of the Macedonian, and embracing *superbia* and *lascivia* (6,6,1), all of which was accompanied by an effort "to rival the loftiness of the Persian court" (*Persicae regiae . . . fastigium aemulabatur*: 6,6,2). Aside from using "the ring of Darius" (*Darei anulus*) to seal documents (6,6,6), wearing Persian royal attire "such as Darius had worn" (*quale Dareus habuerat*: 6,6,4), and compelling his subjects to perform obeisance in the Persian manner (6,6,3), he adopted the lovers of the king: "Three hundred and sixty-five concubines, the same number that Darius had had, filled his palace, attended by herds of eunuchs, also accustomed to prostitute themselves" (*Pelices CCC et LXV, totidem quot Darei fuerant, regiam implebant, quas spadonum greges, et ipsi muliebria pati assueti, sequebantur*: 6,6,8).⁵⁹ Curtius (6,6,9) goes on to describe how the "veteran soldiers of Philip" (*veteres Philippi milites*) were upset by Alexander's surrender to eastern luxury, with the words *luxu et peregrinis infecta moribus* describing the king's slide into oriental decadence. This was because these soldiers were members of "a people novices in voluptuousness" (*rudis natio ad voluptates*), with the overall message of the passage being that Alexander, the Macedonian king, had now become Darius, the Persian tyrant. The attempt to assimilate Alexander and Darius is clear. Alexander does not simply capture and enjoy Darius' female concubines – he also claims as his own those castrated males who took on a female role in sexual intercourse, as *ipsi muliebria pati assueti* clearly indicates.

58) Briant (above, note 2) 213: "Introduced at this point only by Curtius, the story of the love affair with the young eunuch Bagoas, whom Darius too had loved, further blackens the portrait of the Macedonian king".

59) Müller (above, note 2) 34 similarly observes that Alexander "verwandelt *continentia* und *moderatio* in *superbia* und *lascivia*, indem er sich mit Dareios' 360 Konkubinen und den Eunuchen vergnügt". Briant (above, note 2) 353 observes that the use of "herds of eunuchs" is very Roman language. In the context of Alexander becoming Darius, one might also consider Curtius' statement at 10,3,12 that Alexander married a daughter of Darius; cf. Arr. An. 7,4,4 (Barsine); Diod. Sic. 17,107,6 (Stateira).

In sum, we shall obviously never know if Darius really had a eunuch favourite, as indicated by Curtius at 6,5,23 (it may well have been true), or the scores of sexualized eunuchs indicated at 6,6,8. But it should be relatively clear that the actions and inclinations assigned to Darius in Curtius' history of Alexander were never really intended to allow us to gain a better understanding of the last Achaemenid king. Rather, they are meant to serve a rhetorical purpose; that is, to allow us to gain a better understanding of what the author, in this case Curtius, wanted us to think about his main subject, this being Alexander. As Müller points out, the *loci* discussed herein serve only to highlight “das volle Ausmaß von Alexanders Verkommenheit”.⁶⁰ Curtius was simply not concerned about the true nature of Darius, irrecoverable as it surely was by the Roman Principate. As a result, Darius was presented as the stereotypical eunuch-boy-loving eastern tyrant of Curtius' day in order for Alexander to be portrayed as the inheritor of all the trappings of oriental tyranny, to which he inevitably succumbs. The real Darius must continue to linger in the shadows, and will likely never emerge.

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60) Müller (above, note 2) 33; see, also, id. (above, note 5) 140, where the introduction of eunuchs is described as forming part of a standardized Greco-Roman code for moral decay.