

THE PURPORTED LETTER OF DARIUS TO GADATES

This letter, which was found inscribed on a marble corner-block from a wall at Deirmendjik on the road from Magnesia on the Maeander to Tralles, has been accepted by most scholars as a genuine translation into Greek from a Persian original¹). Some have, however, doubted its authenticity, most thoroughly M. v. den Hout²). I accept his opinion, but what in my opinion is the strongest case for regarding the letter as a forgery is the fact that during Darius' reign the greatest sanctuary of Apollo in Asia Minor, the temple at Didyma, was burnt down by Xerxes³). This fact corresponds very badly with the traditional Persian religious toleration and especially with l. 28–29 of the letter: ὃς Πέρσαις εἶπε [πά]σαν ἀτρέκε[ι]αν καὶ τῆ. So the problem and subject of this paper is: Who wrote the original version of this letter which contains so strong an irony of Darius and Xerxes and their attitude towards Apollo? What the editors have uttered as explanation of the conflagration and the inconsistency with the above mentioned lines of the letter does not convince me⁴).

The suggestions made by some scholars that πεῖθαρχεῖν *c. gen.* of l. 5–8 and the word ἀτρέκε[ι]αν of l. 29 could imply an older Ionic text as the original are convincingly refuted by van den Hout⁵). But as a date for the forgery some time

1) Editio princeps: G. Cousin–G. Deschamps, Lettre de Darius, fils d'Hystaspes, BCH 13 (1889) 529–542; SIG 22; U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Griechisches Lesebuch II: Erläuterungen, Berlin 1909, 252–253; A. Ten Eyck Olmstead, A Persian Letter in Thucydides, American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures 49 (1932–33) 156–159; M. van den Hout, Studies in Early Greek Letter-writing, Mnemosyne 2 (1949) 144–152; R. Meiggs–D. Lewis, A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions, No. 12; E. Marinoni, La Lettera di Dario a Gadates, Acme 29 (1976) 227–228; L. Robert, Documents d'Asie mineure, BCH 101 (1977) 84–85.

2) *Op. cit.* 149. He suggests that the letter was forged not long time after Darius' reign. K. J. Beloch has (Gr. Gesch. II 2, 154–155) considered the letter as false. As our version – owing to the letter-forms (O. Kern, Inscriptiones Graecae, Bonn 1913) – should be dated in the first half of the second century A. D., Beloch has supported his statement with: “Die Fälschung ist ad maiorem Dei gloriam, zum Nutzen der Kirche begangen, und die hatte schon damals einen guten Magen”. Meiggs–Lewis, *loc. cit.*, regard with reason Beloch's argumentation as bad.

3) Strabo 14, 1, 5; 17, 1, 43. For the robbery of the cult-statue of Apollo cf. Paus. 1, 16, 3; 8, 46, 3. Olmstead, History of the Persian Empire, Chicago 1948, 155–156 and notes.

4) Cousin–Deschamps, *op. cit.* 539: “Si Artaphernis (494 av. J.-C.) détruisit le temple des Branchides, la vieille statue d'Apollon par Kanakhos fut respectée et envoyée à Ecbatane.” The editors quote Hdt. 6, 19, but that passage does not mention Darius' brother Artaphernis.

5) *Op. cit.* 148–149.

during Darius' reign may be suggested (522–486 B.C.). Then a *terminus post* and *ante quem* must be fixed, because the letter, as it stands, can be dated any time in his reign. A *terminus ante quem* could be fixed by the year 491/0, as we possess evidence which informs us that Darius in the age of 52 had given the power to Xerxes, who reigned from that year⁶). The *terminus post quem* could be fixed by 494, the approximate date of the conflagration, but even a date before would prove the lacking reliability of the Persian religious toleration, especially if other crimes against sanctuaries of Apollo had taken place before the destruction of the temple at Didyma⁷).

Who was the writer then? The purpose of writing such a letter seems clear: it could be used as a political manifesto by the Ionic Greeks against the Persians and their king. As I have stated above the original version of the letter was not written in Ionic, but rather in Persian owing to the fact that some nouns in the text are lacking the definite articles. Whether the letter was written by a Greek or a pro-Greek Persian who was angry with his king, because the latter had broken the traditional religious toleration, is hardly possible to determine.

But why was the letter 're-published' in the second century A.D.? I think with van den Hout⁸) that the re-publication took place in order to prove the ancient dignity of either the local cult of Apollo at Aulæ near Magnesia or the sanctuary at Didyma⁹), the new building of which was seen still unfinished by Pausanias in the second century A.D. just when our version of the letter was written¹⁰).

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6) See F. W. König, *Der falsche Bardija* (= Klotho 4), Wien 1938, 116 ff.

7) This is indicated by Strabo 14, 1, 5: ἐνεπρήσθη δ' ὑπὸ Ξέρξου, καθάπερ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἱερὰ πλὴν τοῦ ἐν Ἐφέσῳ.

8) *Op. cit.* 147 *supra*.

9) Cf. Paus. 10, 32, 6. F. W. Schehl, *Darius' Letter to Gadatas*, *AJA* 54 (1950) 265 for a comprehensive survey of the numismatic evidence which proves the existence of a cult at Aulæ.

10) Cf. Paus. 7, 5, 4.

I wish to express my gratitude to Prof. Jerker Blomqvist, University of Copenhagen, for valuable criticism on an earlier draft of this paper.