



THE PERSIAN COURT

Herodotus

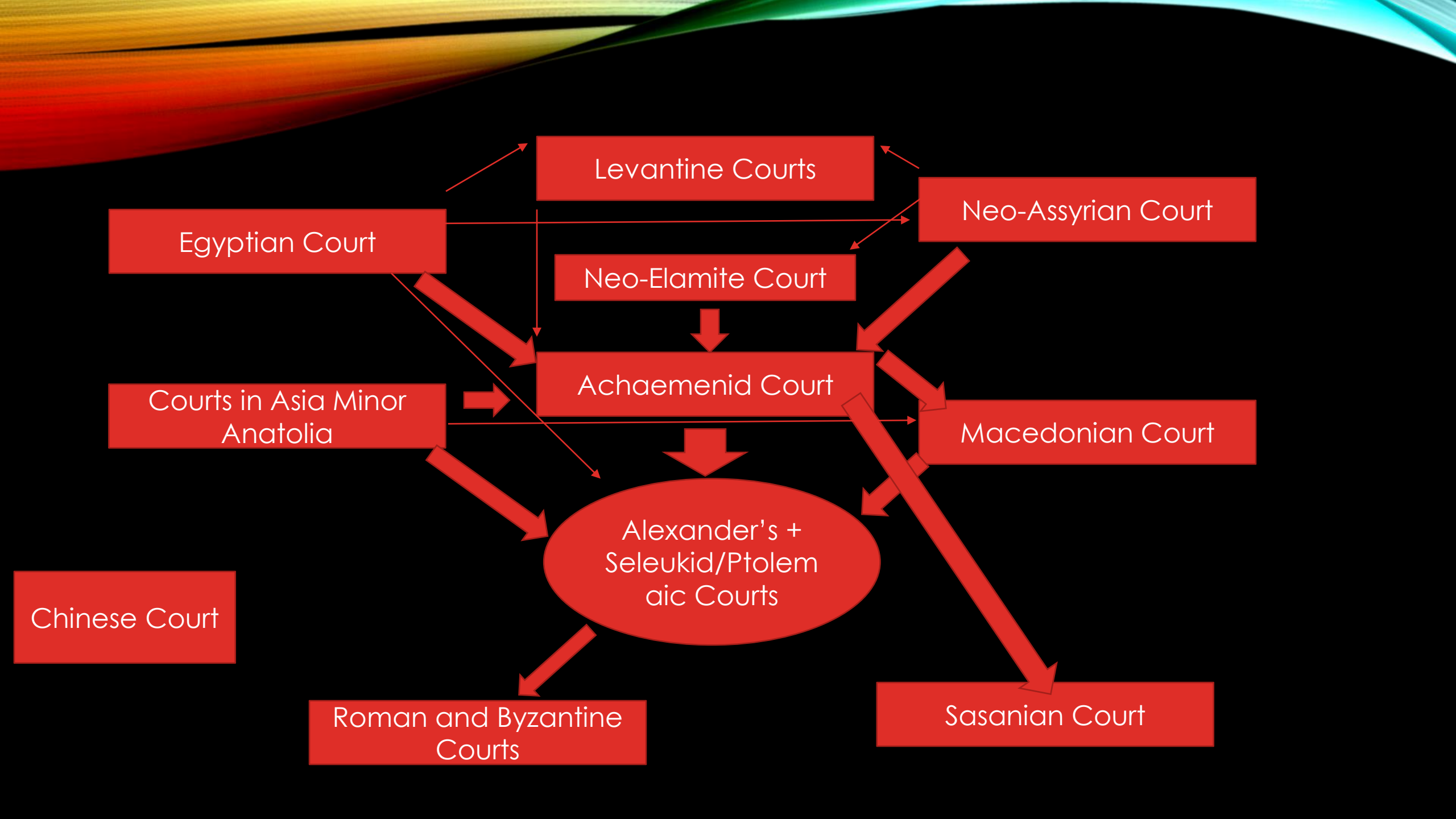
CREATION OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

- Settlement in eastern Elam (Persis = modern Fars) c. 1000 BC
- Tribal society made up of clans and extended family groups
- Herodotus gives us 9 tribes (Pasargadae, Maraphians, and the Maspians, the settled Panthialaens, the Derusians and the Germanians, the nomadic Mardians, Dropicians and Sargartians) (Hdt. 1.125)
- Pasargadae are the leading tribe by the time Cyrus II (559-530 BC) founds the empire
- Achaemenid empire named after Achaemenes the founder of 'empire' (i.e. Cyrus' family kingdom)



INFLUENCES ON PERSIAN COURT

1. Persian Tribal Society
2. Elam/Neo-Elamite court
3. Media
4. Lydia
5. Babylon
6. Assyria
7. Egypt



COURT ETIQUETTE (FROM MEDIA)

It was Deioces first who established the rule that no-one should come into the presence of the king, but all should be dealt with by the means of messengers; that the king should be seen by no man; and that it should be in particular a disgrace for any to laugh or to spit in his presence. He was careful to hedge himself with all this state in order that men of his own age (who had been bred up with him and were nobly born as he and his equals in manly excellence), instead of seeing him and being thereby vexed and haply moved to plot against him, might by reason of not seeing him deem him to be changed from what he had been.

Hdt. 1.99

THE IMPORTANCE OF CLOSENESS AND DISTANCE

Cyrus conceived a desire to establish himself as he thought became a king, but he decided to do so with the approval of his friends, in such a way that his public appearances should be rare and solemn and yet excite as little jealousy as possible... So Cyrus stationed a large circle of Persian lancers about him and gave orders that no-one should be admitted except his friends and the officers of the Persians and the allies.

Xen. Cyr. 7.5.37,41

QUESTIONS OF RANK

- [Will any of the] 'eunuchs' (and) the bearded (officials), the king's entourage, or (any) of his brothers or uncles
- [his kin], his fa[ther's line], or junior members of the royal line, or the 'third men', chariot drivers (and) chariot fighters,
- [or the recruitment officers, or] the prefects of the exempt military, or the prefects of the cavalry, or the royal bodyguard, or his personal guard,
- [or the keepers] of the inner gates or the keepers of the outer gate, or the .. 'eunuchs', the mounted(?) scouts (and) trackers,
- [or the lackeys, tailor]s, cup-bearers, cooks, confectioners, the entire body of craftsmen,
- Or the Itu'eans and the Elamites, the mounted bowmen (?), the Hittites (or) the Gurreans, or the Aramaeans, [or the Cimmerians, o]r the Philistines, or the Nubians (and) the Egyptians or the Shabuqeans, [or the 'eunuchs' who b]ear [arms], or the bearded (officials) who bear arms and stand guard for the king.

THE PERSON OF THE KING

- Through their (*the bodyguard's*) court also the king would go on foot, Sardis carpets, on which no-one else but the king ever walked, having been spread on the ground. And when he reached the last court he would mount his chariot, or sometimes his horse; but he was never seen on foot outside the palace. (Athen. 12.514c)
- Whenever the king descended from his chariot...he never leaped down, although the distance to the ground was small, nor did he lean on anyone's arms; rather, a golden stool was always set in place for him, and he descended by stepping on this; and the king's stool-bearer attended him for this purpose. (Dionon apud Athen. 12.514)

PEOPLE WITH FREQUENT ACCESS TO THE KING

- Servants (chiefly, but not exclusively Persian) (also often non-Persian eunuchs)
- King's spear-bearer, bow-bearer, axe-bearer
- Head of the king's bodyguard (hazarapatis)
- Head of the palace administration
- Head of the royal treasury
- Chief scribe
- Keeper of the gate
- Priests
- Nobles who serve as the the King's Councillors
- Royal Judges
- King's Eye
- Physicians (often, if not exclusively, non-Persian)



THE PERSIAN PALACE

The king himself, they say, lived in Susa or Ecbatana, invisible to all, in a marvellous palace with a surrounding wall flashing with gold, electrum and ivory, it had a succession of many gate-towers, and the gateways, separated by many stades from one another, were fortified with brazened doors and high walls; outside these the leaders and most eminent men were drawn up in order, some as personal bodyguards and attendants to the king himself, some as guardians of each outer wall, called Guards and Listening-Watch, so that the king himself, who had the name of Master and God might see everything and hear everything.

Ps.Aristotle, *de Mundo* 398a

MILITARY V CIVIL

- Not a firm distinction
- Hazarapatis = Chiliarch (in Greek) = military official
- Under Darius I administrative head was Parnaka son of Arsames (uncle of the King)

INSTRUCTIONS

Tell Yamaksedda the wine-carrier, Parnaka spoke as follows: '2,000 quarts of wine are to be issued to Artystone the princess. It was ordered by the king.' Month 1, year 19. Ansukka wrote the text. Maraza communicated the message. (Fort. 1795)

- http://ochre.lib.uchicago.edu/PFA_Online/

OFFICIALS

- King's Councillors
 - Royal family and nobility
 - Act as political advisors
 - Unclear how many there were or if there was ever a fixed number
 - Probably ranked
 - Royal Judges
 - Permanent office
 - Uneven in number (Diod. 15.10.1)
 - Higher than the local judges in the satrapies
- King's Eye
 - Intelligence gathering
- Royal Women
 - Clearly present
 - Can hold their own courts

ROYAL PHYSICIANS

- Mostly from Egypt and Greece
 - E.g. Democedes of Croton, Apollonides of Cos, and Ctesias of Cnidus

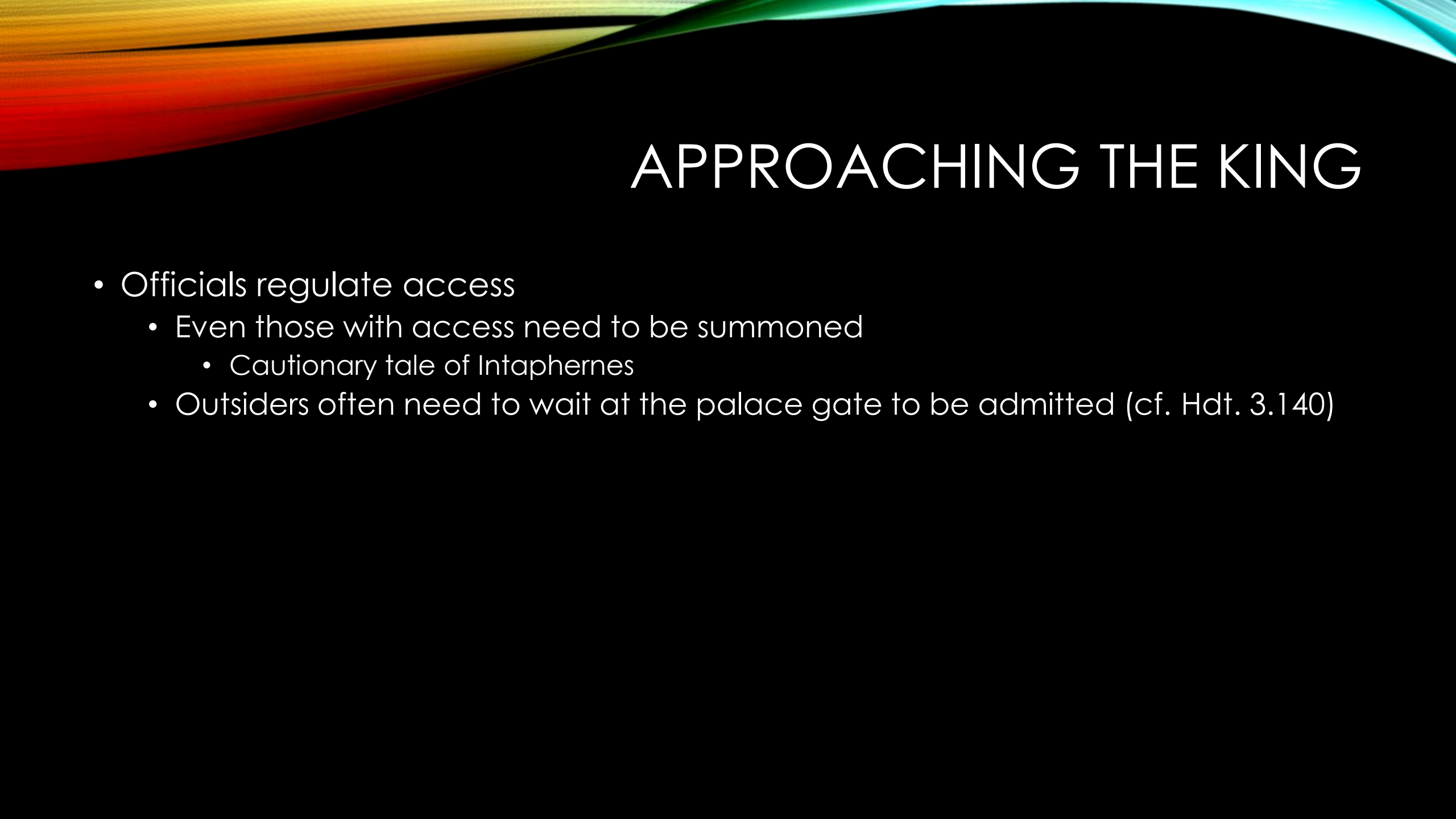
- Udjahorresnet (physician to Cambyses II)

"His Majesty assigned to me the office of chief physician. He caused me to be beside him as a companion administrator of the palace. I made his royal titulary, his name being the King of Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt Mesuti-Re."

Brosius 2000: no. 20

OUTER COURT

- Not as close to the king
- Both permanent and temporary members
- Extended royal family (often in service elsewhere)
- Satraps (often family members)
- Persian Nobility (i.e. the families of the six nobles that rebelled with Darius)\
 - Intaphernes, Otanes, Gobryasm Hydarnes, Megabyxus, Ardumanish



APPROACHING THE KING

- Officials regulate access
 - Even those with access need to be summoned
 - Cautionary tale of Intaphernes
 - Outsiders often need to wait at the palace gate to be admitted (cf. Hdt. 3.140)

DINNER

All who attend upon the Persian kings when they dine first bathe themselves then serve in white cloths, and spend nearly half the day on preparations for dinner. Of those who are invited to eat with the king, some dine outdoors, in full sight of anyone who wishes to look on; others dine indoors in the king's company. Yet even those do not dine in his presence, for there are two rooms opposite each other, in one of which the king has his meal, in the other the invited guests. The king can see them through the curtain at the door, but they cannot see him. Sometimes, however, on the occasion of a public holiday, all dine in a single room with the king, in the great hall. And whenever the king commands a symposium (which he does often), he has about a dozen companions at the drinking. When they have finished dinner, that is, the king by himself, and the guests in the other room, these fellow-drinkers are summoned by one of the eunuchs; and entering they drink with him, though even they do not have the same wine; moreover, they sit on the floor while he reclines on a couch supported by feet of gold; and they depart after having drunk to excess.

Heracleides *FGrH* 689 F 2 = Athen. 4.145

ROYAL ENTOURAGE (AFTER CURTIUS RUFUS 3.3.8-16)

1. Fire carried on 2 silver altars
2. Magi
3. 365 men in purple robes
4. White horses pulling the chariot of Ahuramazda
5. Horse of the sun
6. 10 chariots
7. Horsemen of 12 nations
8. 10,000 immortals
9. 15,000 royal kindred
10. Spear bearers
11. King's chariot
12. 10,000 lancers
13. 200 king's relatives on the right and left
14. 30,000 infantry
15. 400 king's horses
16. Chariots of the king's mother and king's wife
17. Women of the queen's household on horseback
18. King's harmamaxa for children and eunuchs
19. 365 concubines
20. 600 mules, 300 camels
21. The wives of the King's relatives and Friends
22. The troops of sutlers and batmen
23. The band of light-armed troops

PHYSICAL SPACE: PALACE AT PERSEPOLIS

- City not yet excavated
- Royal terrace built 18 m above the ground (uses natural rock to support it)
- Large fortification wall
- Access to Terrace by Gate of Four Lands (big double staircase first)
- Sit and wait
- Apadana (Throne hall)
- <https://oi.uchicago.edu/collections/photographic-archives/persepolis/apadana>

A CITY AND THE EMPIRE

The cedar timber was brought from a mountain called Lebanon. The Assyrian people brought it to Babylon. From Babylon the Carians and Ionians brought it to Susa. The *sissoo*-timber was brought from Gandara and Carmania. The gold which was worked here was brought from Sardis and from Bactria. The precious stone lapis lazuli and carnelian which was worked here was brought from Sogdiana. The precious stone turquoise, which was worked here, this was brought from Chorasmia. The silver and ebony were brought from Egypt. The ornamentation which the wall was adorned was brought from Ionia. The ivory which was worked here was brought from Ethiopia, and from India and from Arachosia. The stone columns which were worked here were brought from a village called Abiradu, in Elam. The stone-cutters who worked the stone were Ionians and Sardians. The goldsmiths who worked the gold were Medes and Egyptians. The men who worked the wood were Sardians and Egyptians. The men who worked the baked brick were Babylonians. The men who adorned the wall were Medes and Egyptians (Darius building inscription at Susa 4)

KNOWING THE KING

- And whenever Cyrus wished to honour anyone it seemed proper to address him by name. Furthermore, it seemed to him that those who were conscious of being personally known to the their general exerted themselves more to be seen doing something good and were more ready to abstain from doing anything bad. (Xen. Cyr. 5.3.47-8)
- (Xerxes) riding in a chariot past the men of each nation he questioned them, and his scribes wrote all down, till he had gone from end to end of the infantry and cavalry. This done... Xerxes alighted from his chariot into a ship of Sidon, sitting wherein under a golden canopy he was carried past the prows of ships, questioning of them in the manner as of the army and making the answers to be written down. (Hdt. 7.100)

GIVING AND RECEIVING

- And besides this he used to reward with gifts and positions of authority and seats of honour and all sorts of preferment others whom he saw devoting themselves most eagerly to the attainment of excellence; and thus he inspired in all an earnest ambition, each striving to appear as deserving as he could in the eyes of Cyrus (Xen. *Cyr.* 8.1.39)
- 'it was no less the mark of a king and lover of his fellow men to accept small gifts graciously and with a ready goodwill; and so, on a time when he was riding by, and a simple labourer, possessed of nothing else, took water from a river in his two hands and offered it to the king, he accepted it pleasantly and with cheerful smile, measuring the favour by the ready goodwill of the giver, and not by the service rendered by the gift.' (Plut. *Mor.* 172B)

XERXES IN HERODOTUS

Hdt. 7.4-19

- How is this discussion different from the practice of decision making I've outlined?
- What is the purpose of this narrative?
- What does this tell us about Persian kings?
- What does this tell us about Herodotus' views on kingship?