

Doc. Analysis  
7/10

THINKING THROUGH SOURCES

Political Authority in Second-Wave Civilizations

CONTEXT:

States, empires, and their rulers are surely not the whole story of the human past, although historians have sometimes treated them as though they were. But they are important because their actions shaped the lives of many millions of people. The city-states of ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, the emerging Chinese empire of the Qin dynasty, and the Indian empire of the Mauryan dynasty — these were among the impressive political structures of the second-wave era in Eurasia. Rulers in each of these regions sought to establish or maintain their authority by mobilizing and promoting a variety of ideas that gave legitimacy to their regimes. The sources in this collection explore how rulers sought to advertise and strengthen their legitimacy and authority. Keep in mind that each of the sources represents an idealized image of political authority rather than an “objective” discussion of how these political systems actually operated. They reflect how rulers, with the help of their advisers, expressed their values and their self-image even as they created mythologies and rituals that endured far longer than those who generated these texts and works of art and propaganda.

Source 3.1

Behistun Inscription

ca. 500 B.C.E.

From the Persian Empire comes an impressive representation of political power: a monumental sculptural program and lengthy multilingual inscription located on a limestone cliff some 300 feet above the ground in western Iran. Known as the Behistun Inscription, this monument was commissioned by the emperor Darius the Great (r. 522–486 B.C.E.) to celebrate his many victories over foreign enemies and domestic rebels alike. The central figure in the carving is Darius himself, the third from the left, holding a bow as a symbol of rulership with his foot on the chest of one of the rebels whom he had crushed. To the right stands a line of nine captives roped at the neck

with their hands tied behind them, who represent other rebels or conquered peoples. To the left of Darius are two of his leading generals, who have the honor of ritually carrying the monarch’s bow and lance respectively. Hovering over the entire scene is the Faravahar, the ancient Near Eastern winged disk symbol, which had come to represent Ahura Mazda and the Zoroastrian tradition.

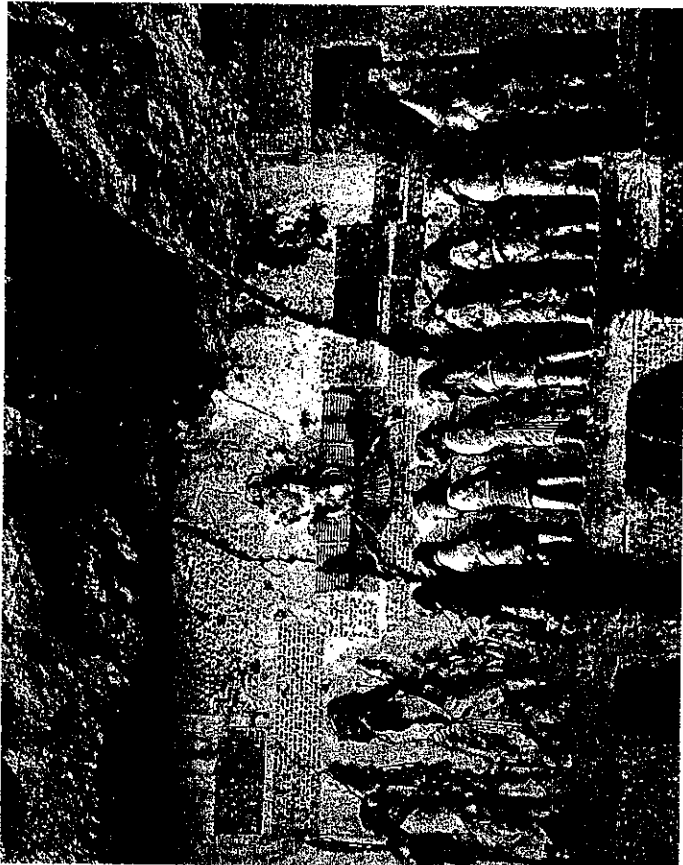
Accompanying this image are five columns of inscriptions recounting in three languages Darius’s triumphs during the first three years of his reign and asserting that they were accomplished “by the grace of Ahura Mazda,” the great benevolent Deity of Zoroastrianism (see photo of Zoroastrian Fire Altar on page 166 of the main text). Reproduced here are the opening lines of the inscription where Darius offers an autobiography of himself and part of the conclusion where he summarizes his accomplishments and asserts the righteousness of his actions. The intervening passages recount individual victories over his enemies, as do several passages added to the end.

Questions to consider as you examine the source:

- What message did Darius seek to convey in commissioning this work?
- How does this monument present the sources of political authority in the Persian Empire?
- What does the written text add to your understanding of the visual components of this monument?

ANSWER

Source 3.1A  
*Behistun Inscription*



De Agostini Picture Library/W. Huss/Bridgeman Images

Source 3.1B  
*Behistun Inscription*

ca. 500 B.C.E.

I am Darius, the great king, king of kings, the king of Persia, the king of countries, the son of Hystaspes, the grandson of Arsames, the Achaemenid.

King Darius says: Eight of my dynasty were kings before me; I am the ninth. Nine in succession we have been kings.

King Darius says: By the grace of Ahura Mazda am I king; Ahura Mazda has granted me the kingdom.

King Darius says: These are the countries which are subject unto me, and by the grace of Ahura Mazda I became king of them: [There follows a list of states that he conquered.]

King Darius says: These are the countries which are subject to me; by the grace of Ahura Mazda they became subject to me; they brought tribute unto me. Whatsoever commands have been laid on them by me, by night or by day, have been performed by them.

King Darius says: Within these lands, whosoever was a friend, him have I surely protected; whosoever was hostile, him have I utterly destroyed.

King Darius says: Ahura Mazda has granted unto me this empire. Ahura Mazda brought me help, until I gained this empire; by the grace of Ahura Mazda do I hold this empire.

[The intervening passages record Darius's triumphs over foreign enemies and domestic rebellions.]

King Darius says: This is what I have done. By the grace of Ahura Mazda have I always acted. After I became king, I fought nineteen battles in a single year and by the grace of Ahura Mazda I overthrew nine kings and I made them captive.

King Darius says: As to these provinces which revolted, lies made them revolt, so that they deceived the people. Then Ahura Mazda delivered them into my hand; and I did unto them according to my will.

King Darius says: You who shall be king hereafter, protect yourself vigorously from lies; punish the liars well, if thus you shall think, "May my country be secure!"

King Darius says: This is what I have done, by the grace of Ahura Mazda have I always acted. Whosoever shall read this inscription hereafter, let that which I have done be believed. You must not hold it to be lies.

King Darius says: Those who were the former kings, as long as they lived, by them was not done

thus as by the favor of Ahura Mazda was done by me in one and the same year.

King Darius says: Now let what has been done by me convince you. For the sake of the people, do not conceal it. If you do not conceal this edict but if you publish it to the world, then may Ahura Mazda be your friend, may your family be numerous, and may you live long.

King Darius says: If you conceal this edict and do not publish it to the world, may Ahura Mazda slay you and may your house cease.

King Darius says: This is what I have done in one single year, by the grace of Ahura Mazda have I always acted. Ahura Mazda brought me help, and the other gods, all that there are.

King Darius says: On this account Ahura Mazda brought me help, and all the other gods, all that there are, because I was not wicked, nor was I a liar, nor was I a despot, neither I nor any of my family. I have ruled according to righteousness. Neither to the weak nor to the powerful did I do wrong. Whosoever helped my house, him I favored; he who was hostile, him I destroyed.

King Darius says: You who may be king hereafter, whosoever shall be a liar or a rebel, or shall not be friendly, punish him!

Source: *The Sculptures and Inscription of Darius the Great on the Rock of Behistun in Persia* (London: British Museum, 1907), full text available electronically at <https://archive.org/details/sculptures/inscri00britnwoft>.

Source 3.2  
*In Praise of Athenian Democracy*

The Greeks of Athens generated political ideas that have long been celebrated in the West, although they were exceptional even in the small world of classical Greece. The best-known expression of praise for Athenian democracy comes from Pericles, the most prominent Athenian leader during the fifth century B.C.E. Sometimes called the "first citizen of Athens," Pericles initiated the grand building projects that still grace the Acropolis and led his city in its military struggles with archrival Sparta. To his critics, he was a populist, manipulating the masses to enhance his own power, and an



Athenian imperialist whose aggressive policies ultimately ruined the city. His famous speech in praise of Athens was delivered around 431–430 B.C.E. at the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian War against Sparta. The setting was a public funeral service for Athenian citizens who had died in that conflict. Pericles' oration was recorded by the Greek historian Thucydides (thoo-SIH-dih-dees), who was probably present at that event.

Questions to consider as you examine the source:

- Does Pericles' argument for democracy derive from fundamental principles, such as human equality, or from the practical benefits that arise from such a system of government?
- What kind of citizens does Pericles believe democracy produces? Keep in mind that not everyone shared this idealized view of Athenian democracy. How might critics have responded to Pericles' arguments?
- Although Pericles praised Athenian military prowess, his city lost the Peloponnesian War. In what ways does this affect your assessment of his arguments?

ANSWER

#### PERICLES

### Funeral Oration

431–430 B.C.E.

Our form of government does not enter into rivalry with the institutions of others. We do not copy our neighbors, but are an example to them. It is true that we are called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few. But while the law secures equal justice to all alike in their private disputes, the claim of excellence is also recognized; and when a citizen is in any way distinguished, he is preferred to the public service, not as a matter of privilege, but as the reward of merit. Neither is poverty a bar, but a man may benefit his country whatever be the obscurity of his condition. There is no exclusiveness in our public life, and in our private intercourse we are not suspicious of one another, nor angry with our neighbor if he does what he likes. . . . While we are thus unconstrained in our private intercourse, a spirit of reverence pervades our public acts; we are prevented from doing wrong by respect for the authorities and for the laws. . . .

And we have not forgotten to provide for our weary spirits many relaxations from toil; we have regular games and sacrifices throughout the year; our homes are beautiful and elegant; and the delight which we daily feel in all these things helps to banish melancholy. Because of the greatness of our city the fruits of the whole earth flow in upon us; so that we enjoy the goods of other countries as freely as of our own.

Then, again, our military training is in many respects superior to that of our adversaries. Our city is thrown open to the world, and we never expel a foreigner or prevent him from seeing or learning anything of which the secret is revealed to an enemy might profit him. We rely not upon management or trickery, but upon our own hearts and hands. And in the matter of education, whereas they from early youth are always undergoing laborious exercises which are to make them brave, we live at ease, and yet are equally ready to face the perils which they face. . . .

For we are lovers of the beautiful, yet simple in our tastes, and we cultivate the mind without loss of manliness. . . . To avow poverty with us is no disgrace; the true disgrace is in doing nothing to avoid it. An Athenian citizen does not neglect the state because he takes care of his own household; and even those of us who are engaged in business have a very fair idea of politics. We alone regard a man who takes no interest in public affairs, not as a harmless, but as a useless character; and if few of us are originators, we are all sound judges of a policy. The great impediment to action is, in our opinion, not discussion, but the want of that knowledge which is gained by discussion preparatory to action. For we have a peculiar power of thinking before we act and of acting too, whereas other men are courageous from ignorance but hesitate upon reflection. And they are surely to be esteemed the bravest spirits who, having the

clearest sense both of the pains and pleasures of life, do not on that account shrink from danger. . . .

To sum up: I say that Athens is the school of Hellas, and that the individual Athenian in his own person seems to have the power of adapting himself to the most varied forms of action with the utmost versatility and grace. . . .

For we have compelled every land and every sea to open a path for our valor, and have everywhere planted external memorials of our friendship and of our enmity. Such is the city for whose sake these men nobly fought and died; they could not bear the thought that she might be taken from them; and every one of us who survive should gladly toil on her behalf.

Source: Benjamin Jowett, *Thucydides, Translated into English, to Which Is Prefixed an Essay on Inscriptions and a Note on the Geography of Thucydides*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), bk. 2, paras. 37–41.

### Source 3.3

### Statue of Augustus

This statue of Augustus, the first of the Roman emperors (r. 27 B.C.E.–14 C.E.), was probably created shortly after his death, though based on a somewhat earlier bronze original. It symbolized a new era of peace and abundance in Roman history, following a century of turmoil and civil war. Here Augustus is “imperator” or military commander, wearing a breastplate and with his right arm extended as if addressing his troops. The statue was clearly intended to commemorate the victory of Augustus over the Partisan Empire, centered in Persia, in 20 B.C.E., a triumph that reversed several earlier Roman defeats. The central relief on the breastplate shows the Partisan ruler (on the right) returning to a Roman military figure the battle standard that the Partians had seized thirty-three years before. “I compelled the Partians to return the spoils and standards of three Roman armies,” Augustus declared, “and humbly to beg the friendship of the Roman people.”

The other figures from Roman mythology on the breastplate represent the ordered, peaceful, stable, and bountiful world that the defeat of the Partians promised. Cupid on Eros, riding a dolphin next to Augustus's right leg in the statue, evokes his mother, Venus, often said to be an ancestor of Augustus. Notice that the military figure of Augustus is strangely barefoot, a portrayal usually associated with gods and heroes.