

PAGLIARO, LE ETIMOLOGIE «PRESCIENTIFICHE»
E UN TOPONIMO IN CTESIA DI CNIDO (*)

Abstract

This paper deals with two obscure passages respectively in Diodorus Siculus (17, 71, 7) and in a fragment of the Greek physician Ctesias of Cnidus (fr. 13, 19 Lenfant), where the royal Achaemenid tombs are accurately described. The name of the mountain, where the graves of Darius and other Persian kings of kings were buried, has been variously transmitted.

*According to Diodorus the site was called “the royal mountain” (Gr. ὄρος βασιλικόν); in Ctesias the oronym was “the double mountain” (Gr. δισσὸν ὄρος). Unfortunately, these different toponyms have never been satisfactorily explained from an etymological point of view and, as a matter of fact, any attempt to connect their meanings with the realia of Persepolis and Naqš-e Rostam failed utterly; nor a couple of emendations of the transmitted texts seems philologically acceptable. A possible solution involves the hypothesis of two different “pre-scientific” etymologies, which could have been formulated by the sources of Diodorus and the informants of Ctesias. The linguistic category of “pre-scientific” etymology, namely an etymology created by Aramaic interpreters and/or high ranked officials at Alexander the Great’s court, was firstly employed by A. Pagliaro, in order to shed light on the Gr. title ὀφθαλμὸς τοῦ βασιλέως “the king’s eye”. The title presumably reflected an Old Persian official. In this paper we adopt an analogous explanation for both opaque toponyms in Diodorus and Ctesias. Thus, we argue that these names might originate from two “pre-scientific” etymologies of Middle Pers. * bītaxšē kōf, either explained as “the double mountain” (cf. the Avestan prefix bi- “double”), or, more correctly, “the king’s mountain” (cf. Pahl. bitaxš “vice-king”, βίταξ in Hesychius, glossed ὁ βασιλεὺς παρὰ Πέρσαις).*