ROME IN THE GREEK NOVEL? IMAGES AND IDEAS OF EMPIRE IN CHARITON'S PERSIA

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Travel is a prominent feature of ancient fiction; despite this, Rome and the Romans are conspicuously absent from the fictional landscape of the five extant Greek novels, products of an era when the culture of the Greek east strove to assert its centrality in the culture and structure of the Roman empire. A key component of this project was the idealization of the glories of the Ages of Themistocles, Pericles, and Alexander, and the consequent marginalization of Rome. To what extent is it possible to speak of Rome in the Greek novels? Recent studies of imperial Greek authors have shown that nostalgia for the Golden Age of the polis was no mere escapist fantasy created by a vanquished people but one of many strategies used in a complex, ongoing struggle to claim cultural hegemony in the vast, multicultural Roman empire.[1] Although Rome is not on the map of the Greek novels, it loomed in the mental geography of their authors and audience. This can be seen in one Greek novel set in the classical age of the Greek cities: Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, written some time in the first to early second centuries C.E.[2] This article argues that Rome is, so to speak, present in its absence from Chariton's novel.

The center of the world of the Greek novels is the Greek city: this is the point from which the protagonists travel and to which they (usually)

1 Surveys of this cultural movement are to be found in Anderson 1993, Swain 1996, and Whitmarsh 2001.

2 Recent estimates place Chariton in the first or even second centuries C.E.; see Hernández Lara 1990, Ruiz Montero 1991, Baslez 1992, Cueva 2000.

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return.[3] The novels are escapist entertainment: the arc of the narratives goes from the familiar to the exotic—and back to the familiar. The Greek novelists, like other Greek writers of the imperial era, inherited from the texts and traditions of the classical period a template that divided the world into "Greek" and "barbarian." From a Greek perspective, Rome occupied an ambiguous position in this dichotomy. After Alexander, Greek identity lost its rootedness in the landscape of Greece and became something that could be acquired through education (παιδεία). During the Roman period, Ἑλληνισμός lost its advantage as the culture of the conqueror, while *Romanitas* emerged as an alternate cultural identity. The Hellenism of imperial authors thus emerged as a kind of response to Romanization. It was during the Second Sophistic of the first and second centuries C.E. that the project to fit Rome into the dichotomy—or to adapt and revise the dichotomy to fit Rome—became a focus of the energies of Greek intellectuals.[4] The Greek novels share in this process of the negotiation of Hellenism within the culture of power in the Roman empire.

The reflection of reality in fictional narrative has been a focus of recent scholarship on the ancient novel.[5] The few references to Roman institutions have been of interest in the ongoing question of the novels' chronology. For example, in *Habrocomes and Anthia*, Xenophon of Ephesus mentions a peacekeeping official in Cilicia (2.13.3: ὁ τῆς εἰρήνης τῆς ἐν Κιλικίᾳ προεστώς) and a magistrate or governor in Egypt (3.12.6: τῷ τῆς Αἰγύπτου τότε ἄρχοντι and 4.2.7: διοικοῦντα τὴν Αἴγυπτον). The former is reminiscent of the *irenarch*, a Roman officer of the peace established during the reign of Trajan (98–117 C.E.), mentioned in *Digest* 50.4.18.7, and epigraphically attested in Asia Minor; the latter seems to be the prefect of Egypt, even though the novelist does not call him the ἔπαρχος Αἰγύπτου, the official Greek title of the *praefectus Aegypti*.[6] We see in these details an attempt to evoke general verisimilitude rather than to present a systematic depiction of specific historical persons or institutions. The Romanness of

3 On the function of the city as the main point of reference in the novels, see Saïd 1994.

4 For an eloquent synopsis of this position, see Whitmarsh 2001.295–301.

5 Bowie and Harrison 1993.166 identify a trend in the scholarship towards "disengaging nuggets of reality" in the novels. The variety of approaches taken toward the study of *Realien* in the novels is exemplified by the articles collected in Baslez, Hoffman, and Trédé 1992.

6 For *irenarch*, see Magie 1950.647–48 and 1514–15; on Xenophon of Ephesus's polical terminology, see Hägg 1971.31–32 and, especially, Rife 2002.

these officials does not significantly impinge on the action of Xenophon's novel in what is otherwise a Hellenocentric universe. More recently, searchers for *Realien* have become more sophisticated in their approach, recognizing that the production and consumption of fiction—fantasies—is part of the process of imagining and, therefore, defining the world of the reader and the reader's position in it. This is the approach taken in a recent article by Catherine Connors (2002), who approaches Chariton's work from the perspective of a Latinist and identifies details in Chariton's depiction of Syracuse that would have resonated with post-Augustan audiences of the novel.

Rome's presence outside of the spatial and temporal frames of the extant Greek novels brings perspective to representations of other empires—in particular, the Persian empire.[7] Persia stood for the "other" in classical Greek thought. Roman emperors deployed an Orientalist paradigm to position themselves, and Rome in general, as the champions of civilization in the face of ongoing barbarian (i.e., Parthian) aggression in the east. Anthony Spawforth identifies (1994.233) a "Persian-wars mania" during the first centuries of the empire. On the other hand, Greek imperial writers sometimes draw implicit parallels between Rome and Persia. For example, Plutarch and Arrian both speak of going "up" (ἀνά) to Rome, a direction Greeks traditionally associated with Persia; provincial governors could be called "satraps" and the emperor "the Great King."[8] The use of Persian vocabulary was not necessarily a slur on the Roman institutions; even classical authors such as Herodotus, Xenophon, and Plato idealized aspects of Persian culture, particularly the reign of the first Persian king, Cyrus. Given the repertoire of images supplied by centuries of Orientalism, the idea of the Persian empire provided a wealth of precedents for understanding the new empire of Rome. The parallels between the two empires were far from perfect; Persia was not a simple allegory for Rome. Indeed, this was the key to the success of Persia as a trope. Pierre Briant argues that, already in the

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7 The other novelist to treat foreign empires in extensive detail is Heliodorus, who, in his *Aethiopica,* includes extended sections set in Memphis, where the Persian satrap's palace is located, as well as in the Ethiopian kingdom of Meroë. This will be the subject of another article; it suffices to note that the general thrust of my argument applies to Heliodorus as well.

8 For ἀνάβασις, see Plutarch *Praecepta Gerendae Reipublicae* 814C and Arrian *Dissertationes Epictetearum* 1.10.2; it is discussed in Jones 1971.113 n. 22. For satrap, Bowie 1970.33 n. 95 cites Philostratus *Vitae Sophistorum* I.22 p. 524, Dio of Prusa *Oration* 33.14, and Lucian *Nigrinus* 20; see also Mason 1970.157. For "Great King," Swain 1996.176 n.125 cites Lucian *Toxaris* 17 and *Apology* 11.

classical period, "Greek authors used the example of Persia only in as much as it allowed them to develop a discourse which was internal to the city."[9] Imperial-era Greeks continued to use the idea of Persia as a foil in their ongoing discourse about reviving the classical city under the Roman empire. Persia—that is, Persia the ideal, the once-upon-a-time universal state—provided a framework through which Greeks could create their identity as Greeks vis-à-vis Rome, while, at the same time, carving out their position within the Roman imperial administration.

Chariton deploys all the standard elements of the Persian mirage: luxury, prostration, harem life, eunuchs, satraps, court intrigue, hunts, *magi*, the *paradeisos*.[10] Although the Persian empire in *Chaereas and Callirhoe* is unmistakably meant to signify everything exotic, certain forms and structures might have resonated with the Greek elite's experience of some aspects of Roman rule, or at least with their perception of themselves as culturally superior to their rulers. The representation of imperial power helps to shape the significance of the action of the narrative and, therefore, to reorganize Greek readers' conception of empire and their place within it. This becomes particularly clear in a recurrent type-scene in the Greek novels: the trial scene. Trial scenes were a staple of Greek fiction.[11] They highlight the hallmark of παιδεία: the ability to speak a highly rhetorical form of Greek (Anderson 1989). In the imperial period, the law was one area of life, particularly for the Greek elite, where provincials would most directly experience Roman imperial government. The "charisma" of the emperor guaranteed that subjects of the empire (provided they were citizens) had an ultimate court of appeal.[12] The Greek cities, which had long nurtured and cherished the cultural memory of political autonomy, were faced with the task of repositioning themselves in relation to the political power emanating from Rome. A heightened sensitivity to the tensions and dynamics of living subject to a political order with overlapping legal systems is reflected in the novels' interest in trials. The fictional trials dramatize the ideology of an

9 Briant 2002.201. For another discussion of the role of Persia as an antecedent, see Momigliano 1975.137–38.

10 Baslez 1992 attempts to distinguish Achaemenid from Parthian *Realien* in Chariton's depiction of Persia, but concludes that the novel reflects a popular image of the Orient rather than a specific historical reality.

11 Each of the five extant Greek novels, as well as both Latin novels, contain at least one trial scene. The fragments indicate that legal themes appeared in other lost novels as well.

12 Millar 1977, Ando 2000, Boatwright 2000.

empire personally ruled by a monarch, whose charisma—that is, his reputation for justice, prudence, mercy—draws petitioners from the edges to the very center of imperial power. The trials dramatize the inverse of this ideology as well; namely, the tyrant who thwarts justice and fails to keep his empire together.

Trials are represented in a variety of social and geographical settings in the Greek novels; but what is of interest here is the trial of a Greek in the court of a foreign—usually Persian—king. Both Chariton and Heliodorus set their stories at some time around the fifth century, when the Persians controlled Egypt, but they position themselves differently with regard to the landmarks of Hellenism. Whereas Heliodorus, an author who writes in sophisticated Greek but claims to be a Phoenician from Emesa, ends his novel beyond the limits of the Persian empire in the utopia of Meroë, Chariton identifies himself as an Aphrodisian who will now tell about another Greek city, Syracuse. In his opening sentence, Chariton identifies himself as the clerk (ὑπογραφεύς) of a professional speaker (τοῦ ῥήτορος), thus establishing himself as an insider with regard to the law, which features prominently in his novel.[13] His choice of cities is "Athenofugal": his heroine is the daughter of the historical figure Hermocrates, the general who defeated the Athenians in Sicily. Athens is only alluded to in passing by a pirate chief who avoids it because of its meddlesome citizens (Chariton 1.11.6: τὴν πολυπραγμοσύνην τῶν Ἀθηναίων). The narrative presents two trials in the city of Syracuse, and then moves beyond the Greek world to the land of the barbarian to present an extended trial in Babylon, the capital of the Persian empire.

Space limitations preclude a full analysis of the trial scenes themselves; for the purposes of my argument here, it will suffice to choose select details that are illustrative of the situation of Greeks who journey from the periphery to the center of the empire, where they personally approach the king in contests over life, liberty, and love.

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13 Chariton 1.1.1: Χαρίτων Ἀφροδισιεύς, Ἀθηναγόρου τοῦ ῥήτορος ὑπογραφεύς, πάθος ἐρωτικὸν ἐν Συρακούσαις γενόμενον διηγήσομαι, "I, Chariton of Aphrodisias, the clerk of the *rhetor* Athenagoras, shall tell a love story which happened in Syracuse" (my translation). The Greek text is from Goold 1995. On Chariton's knowledge of the law, see Zimmermann 1957, Karabélias 1990, Schwartz 1999.

CHARITON'S PERSIA: THE ANABASIS TO THE CAPITAL

The fifth and sixth books of Chariton's eight-book novel center on an extended set of trials in the court of the Persian king. The lawsuit is the result of the rivalry among a number of men over the beautiful heroine, Callirhoe; however, it is constructed as the complaint of a provincial Greek against an imperial governor, precisely the type of suit in which Roman emperors took a keen interest. The provincial in question is Dionysius, the most prominent man of Miletus, a Greek city at the westernmost edge of the Persian empire. The trouble begins when he intercepts a letter addressed to his wife, Callirhoe, signed in the name of Chaereas, Callirhoe's first—and presumed dead—husband. Dionysius has enough experience of the dynamics of the Persian government to suspect foul play: he surmises that the letter is a forgery perpetrated by none other than Mithridates, the satrap of Caria and a guest-friend of Dionysius, in a scheme to steal his wife.

Chariton repeatedly invokes an analogy to the erotic triangle of Menelaus, Helen, and Paris (Chariton 2.6.1, 5.2.8, 5.5.9, 8.1.3); however, the novel takes a more pedestrian turn than its mythic model. Instead of launching a war, Dionysius pre-empts the supposed seduction scheme and lodges a formal complaint with the Persian king against the satrap. This tactic ultimately carries all the main characters to Babylon, the capital of the Persian empire, where the Persian king himself adjudicates the case.

Chariton builds upon a scenario found in historiography and especially prone to romanticization: the tale of the Greek who travels to Persia and meets with the Great King. In particular, Chariton models his story on the last days of Themistocles, the great Athenian general and Panhellenic leader who ended his career in the Persian court.[14] The story of the last years of his life was the stuff of legend. It was related by a number of historians, including Thucydides, Diodorus, and Plutarch, and was also the pretext for a series of fictional letters of Themistocles.[15] Chariton's Persian section contains many elements found in the Themistocles legend. Most pertinent to the depiction of networks of power in the Persian empire is the episode in which the Greek protagonist initiates contact with the Persian king.

There are certain elements common to the historiographic accounts

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14 On the identification of Athenocentrism and Panhellenism, see Hall 1989.16–17.

15 Thucydides 1.137.3, Diodorus *Historical Library* 11.54–59, Plutarch *Themistocles* 22–32; discussed in Lenardon 1978.139–53. On the fictional letters, see Penwill 1978.

of Themistocles and to the story of the ἀναβάσεις of the main characters in Chariton's novel: a letter to the king, a friend who acts as intermediary, and a secret transport. Thucydides 1.137.3 presents a letter written by Themistocles after his enemies have driven him from Greece to Artaxerxes in which he asks the king to return a favor by receiving him. In Diodorus (11.56.4–5), Themistocles flees to a personal guest-friend (ἰδιόξενος) in Asia Minor by the name of Lysitheides, who was a φίλος of the Persian king. He asks his friend to introduce him to the king; his friend demurs at first, then agrees, and transports him through Persia by hiding him in a wagon decorated as the carriage of a royal concubine so as not to be waylaid en route. Plutarch's account basically follows Diodorus's.

The historical accounts serve as a useful counterpoint against which we can compare Chariton's scene. Of the five extant novelists, Chariton seems to be the most conscientious about verisimilitude; his novel is the only one that takes an overtly historiographic pose by linking a fictional character to a historical one.[16] The historical accounts help us to discern where Chariton embellishes the scenario with details he hoped would make his audience believe the story was real; that is, details that agreed with what they knew from experience or from other texts. Chariton builds his fiction upon the very thing that he knows best: legal paperwork.

Chariton describes in detail the operation of patronage in the empire. Patronage at the highest social strata is a business of competing, self-interested governors or satraps seeking to win prominent clients and to undermine the power of their rivals. Superimposed upon the relations of hospitality and suppliance seen in Diodorus's account is a more fully articulated view of society as a network of hierarchical relationships of patronage. The power relations on the estates of wealthy landlords in Asia Minor prefigure the power relations in the court of the Persian king.[17] Just as the grandiose private estate of Dionysius dwarfs the city of Syracuse and, in turn, is dwarfed by Mithridates' estate in Asia Minor, the capital of the Persian empire is much grander than anything yet encountered in the novel. The power differentials among Dionysius, the two satraps, and the emperor are parallel to those among the local elites, the governors, and the emperor under the Roman empire. Dionysius's status as a member of the elite of a

16 This subject has been well studied; see Bartsch 1934, Hägg 1987, Hunter 1994.

17 The royal court is prefigured by the estates of Asia Minor in that the king is the master and all his subjects are referred to as slaves (Chariton 4.6.4, 6.1.1).

provincial city gives him personal connections with the local satraps.[18] This picture neatly conforms to the traditional socio-political relationships between members of the upper classes in the cities of the Roman provinces and the imperial administration (Edwards 1994.703–12).

A PETITION TO THE EMPEROR

Although the descriptions of the Persian empire and court are Orientalizing, the trial proceeds according to a pattern familiar to the experience of judicial administration in the Roman empire. Written documents assume a critical role in the plot of the lawsuit. Chariton delineates a formal business of petition and response. When Dionysius wishes to accuse one satrap of trying to seduce his wife, he naturally appeals to another satrap for help. In a private interview, he addresses Pharnaces, the satrap of Lydia and Ionia, as his "master" (Chariton 4.6.1: ὦ δέσποτα) and presents his complaint. After Pharnaces agrees to take up Dionysius's cause, he sends a confidential letter (Chariton 4.6.3: γράφει δι᾽ ἀπορρήτων ἐπιστολήν) on behalf of Dionysius to the king. The structure and content of this letter generally conform to non-literary evidence for the procedure used in official petitions to the Roman emperor and to other Roman officials.

Usually the complainant petitioned the official directly. It was not uncommon, however, for individuals to write letters of recommendation on behalf of others, as Pharnaces does. Formally, the letter of Pharnaces conflates elements seen in letters of recommendation and official petitions. It opens with a formula found in both types of letters: "To B, A χαίρειν." Pharnaces' letter begins with the greeting, "To the King of Kings Artaxerxes, Pharnaces the satrap of Lydia and Ionia greets his own master" (Chariton 4.6.3: Βασιλεῖ Βασιλέων Ἀρταξέρξῃ σατράπης Λυδίας καὶ Ἰωνίας Φαρνάκης ἰδίῳ δεσπότῃ χαίρειν). *Libelli* and other formal requests often opened by praising the emperor and respectfully humbling the petitioner. After this greeting, the first sentence of the body of Pharnaces' letter identifies Dionysius as "your trustworthy slave, from the time of his forefathers, and eager toward your house" (Διονύσιος ὁ Μιλήσιος δοῦλος ἐστι σὸς ἐκ προγόνων πιστὸς καὶ πρόθυμος εἰς τὸν σὸν οἶκον, Chariton 4.6.4). Letters of recommendation typically also began with the identification of the bearer of the letter,

18 He hosts the visiting representatives of the imperial regime; Mithridates and Pharnaces, while traveling through Miletus, pay an obligatory call on Dionysius (Chariton 4.1.7–8).

usually expressed formulaically and intended to convince the recipient to treat the bearer of the letter well (Kim 1972.37–49). In a sample of such letters in the papyri, "the social status or personal qualification of the recommended does not count for much. The family ties with the writer or with a well-known person are regarded as more valuable than one's own credentials" (Kim 1972.51). Thus Pharnaces emphasizes first Dionysius's ancestral relationship to, in this case, the recipient, and only later in the letter gives Dionysius's credentials as "the most powerful of the Ionians" (δυνατώτατος Ἰώνων). The reference to Dionysius's loyalty to the king accords with the ethics of the Persian empire: it was the most important criterion on which the king based his judgments (Briant 1996.328–29). Another common feature of letters of recommendation was for the writer to explain his own relationship with the recommended (Kim 1972.50). And Pharnaces does so when he explains that Dionysius had come to him with a complaint against the satrap Mithridates.

Petitioning an official to redress some grievance or to settle a dispute was an established practice beginning in the Hellenistic period. Petitions, or documents connected with the petitioning process, have survived as inscriptions and on papyri.[19] The body of a petition typically consisted of a description of a grievance and a request for remedy (White 1972.15–18). The letter in the novel frames the issue as a case of an arrogant governor abusing his power in order to damage an important provincial. Pharnaces writes that Dionysius was aggrieved and appealed to him because Mithridates the satrap corrupted Dionysius's wife while he was his guest (Chariton 4.6.4: οὗτος ἀπωδύρατο πρός με ὅτι Μιθριδάτης ὁ Καρίας ὕπαρχος ξένος αὐτῷ γενόμενος διαφθείρει τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ). He argues that this case should be of interest to the king because Mithridates' actions injure the king. Pharnaces uses every word short of ἀδικία to describe Mithridates' unjust behavior toward Dionysius: Mithridates "corrupts" (διαφθείρει), brings "great ill repute and disorder" to the king's affairs (μεγάλην ἀδοξίαν, ταραχήν) and "blameworthy illegality" (παρανομία, μεμπτή), and his insolence (ὕβριν) cannot be overlooked. This is a perfectly appropriate rhetorical strategy to use in an appeal to the king/emperor, and there are many examples of this standard complaint among

19 Welles 1934, White 1972. For an excellent analysis of this practice in the Roman empire, see Ando 2000.

extant *libelli* sent to the Roman emperor by provincials.[20] This was the type of petition to which the Roman emperor was likely to pay attention—it provided a check against the excesses of governors who worked far from the emperor's oversight. It was during the imperial period that it became the practice for provincials to appeal to the highest ranking imperial magistrate before exhausting local remedies (Ando 2000.336–85).

A petition could close with a formulaic request for remedy such as: "Wherefore I request that the accused may be brought before you for the consequent punishment. Farewell."[21] Similarly, Pharnaces' letter closes with a reminder of Dionysius's high rank and the outrageousness of Mithridates' behavior. Except for a seemingly gratuitous reference to Callirhoe's extraordinary beauty (this is, after all, a fictional letter in a romance), the petition is plausibly realistic. Chariton's acquaintance with the forms of legal correspondence is clear.

Literarily, the scene brings to life the implicit ideology underlying such appeals. The letter serves as a pivot between the scene of Dionysius's consultation with Pharnaces and the king's consultation with his advisers. This effect can be best imagined in cinematic terms: the camera first shows Pharnaces writing the letter, then zooms into the letter itself and backs out to show the king reading the letter. The direct connection between the petitioner and the king himself reflects the ideology of the system of imperial rescripts in the Roman empire. Legal sources provide thousands of examples of rescripts allegedly written by the emperor.[22] The addressing of appeals was an integral element in the image of the Roman emperor. According to Aelius Aristides in his panegyric of Rome, leading the entire civilized world through letters was the activity that distinguished Rome from all preceding world empires (Aelius Aristides *Roman Oration* 33: πᾶσαν ἄγειν τὴν οἰκουμένην δι' ἐπιστολῶν). The reality of the process was much more complex: the emperor could not have, in fact, penned each and every rescript to which his name was attached and so relied on the support of various legal advisers and secretaries. Despite this, the fiction that each judgment came personally from the emperor was essential for main-

20 Brunt 1961, Williams 1974, Millar 1977.541ff., Turpin 1991.

21 *P. Ryl.* II.126 (28–29 C.E.): διὸ ἀξιῶ ἀχθῆναι τὸν | ἐνκαλούμεν[ο(ν)] ἐπὶ σὲ πρ[ὸς] | τὴν ἐσομένην ἐπέξοδ(ον). | εὐτύχει. On formulas of request in official petitions, see White 1972.41–61.

22 Honoré 1994 includes 2,609 rescripts dating from the third century alone in his study.

taining the emperor's aura of authority.[23] Chariton fleshes out the image of the Persian king as the dispenser of justice, a stereotype found in both Achaemenid and Greco-Roman sources, with details drawn from the activities of the Roman emperor.[24]

A response from the Roman emperor could be in the form of a *subscriptio,* a note written at the bottom of a petition, rather than a complete letter in itself. This seems to be the case with the king's reply. He writes to Pharnaces a simple order: send Dionysius, my slave, the Milesian (Chariton 4.6.8: Διονύσιον, ἐμὸν δοῦλον, Μιλήσιον, πέμψον). Although Chariton later calls both Pharnaces' letter and the king's response ἐπιστολάς (Chariton 5.4.7), it seems that what is described is not a formal letter as much as a *subscriptio*, a note jotted at the bottom of a page.[25] The terse, direct wording of the response, in contrast to the letter, accentuates the social gulf between the king and his subordinate, the "slave" Dionysius. Furthermore, it sets up the very different political context for the coming trial in Persia: Persia is the household of the king where there is one master and all others are slaves.

A HELLENE IN THE COURT OF THE GREAT KING

The politics of the court are those of the household projected onto a large screen. The king's sense of justice and his φιλανθρωπία are endangered by his vulnerability to erotic passion.[26] The king is consistently represented as a powerful figure, but one who is ultimately swayed by his passions. He is a mixture of positive royal qualities, such as those attributed to the Roman emperor, and negative qualities normally attributed to Oriental despots and tyrants. The narrative displays an interest in the king not only as a figurehead but also as a private man, whose thoughts, desires, and dreams are presented in the text. The splendor of the public aspects of the court correspondingly magnifies the importance of those private passions. The

23 Millar 1977.203–52, Turpin 1991, Honoré 1994.1–48.

24 On the representation of the king in Achaemenid ideology, see Briant 1996.217–65 and, in particular, 26–27.

25 The Latin term *rescriptio* was sometimes loosely translated into Greek as ἐπιστολή: Mason 1974.126. On the difference between two types of imperial *rescripta*, namely the *epistulae* and *subscriptiones,* see Williams 1974.86–88.

26 The story of Gyges and Candaules in Herodotus 1.8–13 is the paradigm for the conjunction of *eros* and power under barbarian monarchies. On the representation of the despot as ἐραστής in Herodotus, see Hartog 1988.330–31.

intertwining of absolute political power and unruly private forces creates the dramatic tension of the episodes in the Persian court.

Chariton describes the setting of this trial in great detail (5.4.5–6):

> Ἐπεὶ δὲ ἦκεν ἡ κυρία τῶν ἡμερῶν, ἐκαθέσθη βασιλεύς. ἔστι δὲ οἶκος ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις ἐξαίρετος, ἀποδεδειγμένος εἰς δικαστήριον, μεγέθει καὶ κάλλει διαφέρων· ἔνθα μέσος μὲν ὁ θρόνος κεῖται βασιλεῖ, παρ᾽ ἑκάτερα δὲ τοῖς φίλοις οἳ τοῖς ἀξιώμασι καὶ ταῖς ἀρεταῖς ὑπάρχουσιν ἡγεμόνες ἡγεμόνων. περιεστᾶσι δὲ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου λοχαγοὶ καὶ ταξίαρχοι καὶ τῶν βασιλέως ἐξελευθέρων τὸ ἐντιμότατον, ὥστε ἐπ᾽ ἐκείνου τοῦ συνεδρίου καλῶς ἂν εἴποι τις· οἱ δὲ θεοὶ πὰρ Ζηνὶ καθήμενοι ἠγορόωντο.
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> When the appointed day came, the King took his seat. There is a special room in the palace which is designated as a law court, an unusually big and beautiful room. In the middle stands the King's throne; on each side are places for the King's friends, those who in rank and ability count among the first in the land. Around the throne stand captains and commanders and the most distinguished of the King's freedmen—one could well say of such an assembly, "The gods, sitting at Zeus's side, held debate." (trans. Reardon 1989.80)

The majesty of the Persian court is underscored by Chariton's hyperbolic analogy of it to the συνέδριον of the gods. The opulence and the rigid etiquette of the Persian court were proverbial in classical literature (Briant 1996.311–13); but the description may also have resonated with ideas about the Roman court.[27] The setting of the trial in an "unusually big and beautiful" room of the palace perhaps reflects a reality under the Roman empire when, beginning with Augustus, the palace became an important locus for

27 Karabélias 1990.393 n. 104, 394. The scene of the king holding court is an artistic motif found in representational art dating from the Assyrian and Persian periods, and continuing through the classical Greek, Hellenistic, Roman republican and imperial periods; see Gabelmann 1984. A discussion of Achaemenid scenes of royal audiences may be found in Briant 1996.230–35.

the emperor's juridical functions. The hierarchy of the court is displayed in the seating arrangements. The king's throne stands in the center of the room and is flanked by seats for his friends in order of their τοῖς ἀξιώμασι καὶ ταῖς ἀρεταῖς—essentially, their *dignitas* and *virtus*. The use of the term "friends" (φίλοι) does not necessarily indicate a Roman model. It fits with Hellenistic kings' practice of calling their advisers φίλοι, or it may be a translation of *amici principis,* recognized features of the Roman imperial court. The hierarchical ordering of the friends suggests the formalization of this institution in the later Hellenistic period (Crook 1955.21–30). An outer circle of guards, commanders, and "the king's most distinguished freedmen" surrounds the inner circle. The guards and military escorts suggest the *cohors praetoria*, though it was not unusual for other ancient rulers to include military officials in their entourages (Millar 1977.61–66). It is the inclusion of freedmen that points to a specifically Roman prototype: early Roman emperors employed freedmen in the administration of the empire. Freedmen rose to positions of power from the time of Tiberius to Claudius, until scandals eventually made their presence a liability for the emperor.[28] Fergus Millar notes (1977.74) that freedmen had receded from public view in the imperial court by the reign of Trajan, an emperor who was engaged in a war against the new Achaemenids, the Parthians. Chariton aligns his portrait of empire with critics of imperial freedmen by projecting them onto a barbarian empire. Nevertheless, there are enough similarities to Roman practices to ring a bell of familiarity with at least one style of Roman imperial government.

If we approach the trial scene in this light, the contrast between the entrances of the contestants must have tapped feelings of vulnerability that members of the Greek elite experienced when faced with the power of the Roman imperial administration. Chariton economically sketches the psychological and political dynamics of the courtroom of the Great King in his description of the participants' initial entrances (5.4.7):

> παράγονται δὲ οἱ δικαζόμενοι μετὰ σιγῆς καὶ δέους. τότε οὖν ἔωθεν μὲν πρῶτος ἦκε Μιθριδάτης, δορυφορούμενος ὑπὸ φίλων καὶ συγγενῶν, οὐ πάνυ τι λαμπρὸς οὐδὲ φαιδρός, ἀλλ', ὡς ὑπεύθυνος, ἐλεεινός·

28 The significance of freedmen in this particular scene in Chariton is noted in Karabélias 1990.393 n. 104. On freedmen in the Roman empire, see Millar 1977.69–83.

> ἐπηκολούθει δὲ καὶ Διονύσιος Ἑλληνικῷ σχήματι Μιλησίαν στολὴν ἀμπεχόμενος, τὰς ἐπιστολὰς τῇ χειρὶ κατέχων.
>
> Those involved in the case are brought in in silence and trepidation. Well, on this occasion Mithridates was the first to appear, early in the morning; he was escorted by his friends and relatives, and was far from bright and cheerful in appearance, but rather, as befitted a man under examination, pathetic to behold. Dionysius followed; he was dressed in Greek style, wearing a Milesian robe, and had the letters in his hand. (trans. Reardon 1989.80)

Mithridates, obviously at home in this milieu, comes with a bodyguard of his friends and relatives: he is well connected and he shows it. In contrast, Dionysius is obviously Greek and he is alone: in an ironic twist to enhance the Greek reader's sense of alienation, it is Dionysius's costume that merits comment. Yet even this garment is not purely "Greek" (whatever that means): it is also more specifically "Milesian," distinctive for its luxuriousness and softness.[29] Dionysius's dress encodes him as Greco-Oriental.

As the underdog in this trial, Dionysius clutches the letters of Pharnaces and the king's reply. His case rests upon documentary evidence rather than on the influence of political allies in Babylon. He uses the letters in the same way a subject of the Roman empire might use a *libellus,* a written document addressed to the emperor. Examples of *libelli* that survive in papyri show that they were considered precious documents: they were copied and kept with private papers or quoted in legal documents as well as in inscriptions (Millar 1977.245–46). Dionysius's letters are important documents, a counterweight to Mithridates' wealth and personal connections.

Both men then bow to the king. The trial is launched with the public reading of the petition and the king's response (Chariton 5.4.8). This procedure is reminiscent of the Roman practice of presenting *libelli* at the emperor's *salutationes* (Millar 1977.241). Such moments were important occasions: they afforded the emperor the opportunity to display his authority

29 A scholion on Aristophanes *Frogs* 542 notes that Miletus was known for its intricate and soft textiles; cf. Theocritus *Idyllion* 15.125–26. Such a cloak is also worn by Callirhoe on her wedding to Dionysius (Chariton 3.2.16).

and to have it acknowledged by his courtiers. Accordingly, the king orders the letter and his response be read aloud so that his "fellow judges" (συνδικάζοντες) may learn the background to the dispute (Chariton 5.4.8). Precisely who these "fellow judges" are is not clear; this is the first time they are mentioned. Outside sources illuminate their identity: during the Roman empire, it was customary in criminal cases for the emperor to be advised not by a council of advisers but by συνδικάζοντες.[30] This fictional autocrat, like the Roman emperor, pretends that he is not the sole judge in this case. These listeners respond to the letters by applauding the king's prudence and sense of justice (σωφροσύνην καὶ δικαιοσύνην). In this simple detail, Chariton sketches the dynamics of this court, where the συνδικάζοντες are not really judges but cheerleaders for the king.

In the trial that follows, the parties present speeches as if they were in a courtroom in a Greek city. They present sophisticated arguments before the king, who is repeatedly praised for his sense of justice. Throughout the trial, the Persian king carefully consults his advisers. It is only once Callirhoe is in the custody of the palace that the intrigues of the eunuch induce the king to postpone the judicial proceedings and pursue his desire for the beautiful heroine. Yet, despite his desire for Callirhoe, the king never takes advantage of his position to force himself upon her. In the end, he overcomes his "barbarian" lust and turns his attention to quelling a provincial rebellion in Egypt and rewarding Dionysius for his loyal service—in short, the king devotes himself to administering his empire.

The Persian king remains secure in his own power, while his authority in the westernmost part of the empire is reinforced through the co-optation of the Ionian Dionysius into the structures of government. Ionia, as typified by the city of Miletus, represents the transitional space between east and west. Ionia's reputation for acculturating to imperial power had a long tradition that stretched back to the time of the "Anacreontics" who attracted attention in Athens for wearing the Persian couture of parasols, long chitons, and head scarves (Lissarrague 2002.111–13). This reputation apparently continued into the Roman period. According to Philostratus, the first-century sage Apollonius of Tyana arrived at Smyrna during the Panionian festival and was shocked to read the relevant decree moved by people named Lucullus and Fabricius, whereupon he sent a letter criticizing the Ionians for

30 Cassius Dio 76.17. On the emperor's legal advisers, see Honoré 1994.9–10.

the "barbarism" of adopting Roman names.[31] Chariton's novel ends with the establishment and reinforcement of a (generous) buffer zone in which the culture of the imperial ruler and Greek παιδεία are conjoined in the urban elite. It is through this liminal space that the dichotomy between barbarian and Greek is reaffirmed.

Chaereas, on the other hand, wins not only victories at sea, he also regains the heroine and returns to take the leadership of a free and autonomous Syracuse. By ending in the Greek city of Syracuse, the narrative brings the reader to the central reference point for the Hellenic reader and leaves the Persian empire on the periphery. Yet there remains a certain openness at the end. Chaereas announces to the people of Syracuse that one of their fellow citizens is being raised in Miletus—this is the child to whom Callirhoe gave birth while she was married to Dionysius (Chariton 8.7.12). Thus the novel ends on a note of ambivalence: this child, the hope of the city of Syracuse, is by birth both a free citizen of a Greek city as well as a privileged subject in a powerful empire. In effect, it is only a matter of time before the forces of cultural assimilation to empire will extend to the powerful, proud, and autonomous city of Syracuse. In Chariton's vision, this will be accomplished not through violence and conquest but through ὁμόνοια as personified in the reunion of Callirhoe and Chaereas's love child with his parents and his entry into his patrimony: the hegemony of the city of Syracuse.

It is in the conjunction of the figures of the *paterfamilias* and the monarch that the simple dichotomy between Greek and barbarian begins to break down. The ideology of the novels promotes the specific virtue of σωφροσύνη, the cornerstone of mutual, heterosexual marriage. In the Greek cities of the empire, power was concentrated in the hands of a limited number of families; therefore, marriage alliances were critical for the maintenance of status. The novels are a celebration of continuity, of patriarchy as the foundation of the city. The king is the *paterfamilias* writ large. This idea was so essential to the legitimacy of the Roman emperor that the Flavian emperors employed the fiction of adoption in designating their successors. Chariton, writing within the archaizing traditions of the Second Sophistic, could not invent a good Greek king without committing gross anachronisms

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31 Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 4.5: ἐπίπληξιν ποιούμενος περὶ τοῦ βαρβαρισμοῦ τούτου. Jones 1971.127 attributes Apollonius's censure to his sense of conservatism and purity rather than to anti-Romanism.

in his fifth-century settings. He had to work from the prototype of a foreign—which, in a fifth-century context, can only mean Persian—king, as laden as this figure was with anti-Hellenic ideology. This is a relatively minor problem in the novels, with their interest not in politics but in love and marriage. Yet because the king is also the supreme male authority in his realm—*pater patriae*—the novelists cannot afford to demonize him without coming uncomfortably close to attacking the ideological supports of the Roman emperor. The solution is to deflect blame onto the members of the king's court. In the Greek novels, as long as the king's household is in order, the empire is in order. The court becomes despotic only when non-males—that is, women and eunuchs—manipulate the ruler or usurp his authority. The conception that "the more barbarian a community the more powerful its women" was, as Edith Hall has noted (1989.95), a virtual "law of Greek ethnography." Thus, Chariton does not attack the idea of empire in and of itself but only the unruly passions at the center of power that propel the empire towards tyranny.

To return to the question with which this article opened: is Rome to be found in the Greek novels? It is both nowhere and everywhere. Persia functions as the paradigmatic empire in the novels; however, the equation of Persia, the fictional empire, with Rome, the real empire, was complicated by Hellenism's recruitment of Roman power to its side of the conventional antithesis between the civilized self and the barbarian other. The convenient moral bifurcation between the character of the king and that of his courtiers deflects attention from the Greek/barbarian antithesis. Chariton's novel illustrates the ambivalent attitudes of the Greeks toward their Roman rulers and the complex processes that went into forming an identity in a multicultural universe. The resulting picture places Hellenic identity at the center of power; imperial power is good as long as it acknowledges the superiority of Hellenic values and, importantly, awards them a place in the empire. This vision of empire is consonant with the attempt by Greek elites to hold simultaneously two opposing conceptions: that they lived in free and autonomous poleis and that the best government was rule by an emperor.

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