

## THE BRANCHIDAE AT DIDYMA AND IN SOGDIANA

On the subject of the Branchidae there are a few facts and some outstanding questions. The facts may be stated first. They are provided by literary evidence and one piece of archaeological evidence, which are generally accepted.

(i) The Branchidae, members of a clan descended from Branchus, were the priests in charge of the oracular shrine of Apollo at Didyma, some ten miles south of the city of Miletus. The origin of the shrine and of the Branchidae pre-dated the arrival of the Ionian Greeks (Hdt. 1.157.3; Paus. 7.2.6). Oracular responses were given by a priestess esconced above a sacred spring, and they were interpreted by the priests.<sup>1</sup> (ii) In the sixth century the shrine was famous for its bronze statue of Apollo and its accumulated treasures, including the offerings of Croesus (Hdt. 5.36.3–4). (iii) In the first quarter of the fifth century during the hostilities between the Greeks and the Persians the shrine was plundered and burnt. (iv) Thereafter the spring dried up, the oracle was silent, and the Branchidae were no longer present. (v) After the liberation of Miletus from the Persians by Alexander in 334 the spring and the shrine revived, and oracular responses were given. The priests thenceforth were appointed by the city of Miletus. (vi) The existence of the worship of Didymaeon Apollo and of the Branchidae in Central Asia was revealed by the report of altars dedicated to Didymaeon Apollo on the borders of Sogdiana (Pliny, *NH* 6.18), and by inscriptions on amphorae at Dilbergin in that area reading *Βρο* | *αρχιδ* and *Βρο* | *αρχ*, a dialect form of the classical ‘Branchidai’.<sup>2</sup> (vii) the famous bronze statue of Didymaeon Apollo was found at Ecbatana in Media and was sent ‘to Branchidae for Milesians’ by Seleucus I (Paus. 1.16.3). (viii) ‘Branchidae’ was a place-name, an alternative to ‘Didyma’. The shrine and its priests were within the territory of Miletus (Hdt. 1.46.2, 1.92.2), but they were an independent entity until the plundering and the burning. Thereafter the shrine was controlled first by Carians and then by the Milesians, who appointed its priests.

I shall take the main questions individually. They have been considered and answered in differing ways by earlier scholars. My intention is to discuss the ancient evidence rather than their views. I begin with a much-debated question: when was ‘the shrine at Didyma, both its temple and its oracle, plundered and burnt’ (Hdt. 6.19.3)?

Statements made by Herodotus about Didyma are particularly dependable, because he had first-hand knowledge, for instance, as regards the offerings of Croesus at Didyma, which had been plundered before Herodotus grew up. He wrote about the

<sup>1</sup> The sacred myth in which Apollo had a passionate love of Branchus (Strabo 634), and the derivation of the name Branchus from the Sanskrit ‘Brahman’, Latin ‘flamen’, according to How and Wells indicate that the cult was indeed pre-Hellenic in its origin. Delphi tried to claim seniority (Strabo 421). The Greek word *βράγχος* is onomatopoeic, meaning ‘hoarse’.

<sup>2</sup> Like the transplanted Eretrians, these Branchidae had been out of touch with Greece for 150 years and preserved their language in an archaic form of dialect (Hdt. 6.119.4; Curt 7.5.29). For the amphorae see I. R. Pichikyan, ‘The city of the Branchidae’, *Vestnik Drevnie Istorii* 2 (1991), 168–80 with n. 3; he does not give any date for the inscriptions. Dr P. Sommer very kindly sent me an offprint of this article. After the massacre of the Branchidae the name of the place as ‘Branchidae’ may have survived, as it had done at Didyma after the flight of the priests of that name. That Apollo Didymaeus was worshipped in Sogdiana in the Hellenistic period is shown by Pliny, for the altars were dedicated by a general ‘of Seleucus and Antiochus’.

scale of the offerings 'from personal knowledge' (1.92.2: *ὥς ἐγὼ πυνθάνομαι*),<sup>3</sup> obtained no doubt during a visit to Didyma. He will have seen there or at Miletus a copy of the oracle which he quoted at 6.19.2. I quote the translation by H. W. Parke:

And then indeed, Miletus, deviser of wicked deeds, you will become a feast and bright gifts to many, and your wives will wash the feet of many long-haired men, and others at Didyma will care for our temple.<sup>4</sup>

This was the second part of a double oracle, of which the first part was issued to Argos, and it was delivered by Apollo of Delphi although 'no Milesians were present'. So unique were these features that, as Parke insists, the oracle is to be accepted as a genuine utterance, delivered two or three years before the fall of Miletus in 494.

'Then indeed this befell the Milesians', Herodotus continued,

when the men for the most part were being killed by the long-haired Persians and the women and children were becoming accounted as slaves, and the shrine at Didyma, both its temple and its oracle, were plundered and burnt. Of the possessions in this shrine mention has often been made by me elsewhere in my account. The Milesians who were captured were being taken from there to Susa. . . . Of the Milesian territory the Persians themselves were possessing the city confines and the plain, and they granted the uplands to the Carians of Pedasus.<sup>5</sup>

In his account Herodotus provided an explanation for the last line of the oracle: 'others at Didyma will care for our temple', that is 'others' than the Milesians (to whom the oracle was addressed) or than the previous carers, the Branchidae. The new carers were the Carians. On the other hand the plundering and the burning of the shrine, though much more important, were not foreshadowed in the oracle. They were a separate matter which Herodotus introduced parenthetically, without stating a date for a sequel which was well known by his readers.

That Herodotus was referring in this parenthesis to what happened not in the time of Darius but in that of Xerxes may be inferred from the following considerations. Darius had a special regard for Apollo. In a letter Darius reprimanded his satrap in Western Asia Minor for levying a tax on the gardeners of land sacred to Apollo (Tod, *GHI* 10; M-L, *GHI* 12). In 490–89, when a gilded statue of Apollo was found as spoil on a Phoenician ship, Darius' general ordered that it should be restored to Apollo's temple at Delium (Hdt. 6.118.1–2). It is therefore not credible that Darius authorized the plundering and the burning of Apollo's shrine at Didyma, the most famous in Western Asia Minor, and in particular countenanced the removal from Didyma and the retention in Ecbatana of the famous statue of Apollo as loot.

We turn now to the positive evidence in favour of the plundering and the burning of the shrine at Didyma having taken place during the reign of Xerxes in 479. After his departure from Greece Xerxes had his headquarters in Sardis (Hdt. 8.117, 9.107), and when the Greek fleet threatened to attack he concentrated his fleet and a large army on the coast between Mount Mycale and Miletus (9.97). In this situation the Milesians and the Branchidae had to commit themselves to one side or the other. The

<sup>3</sup> He used a similar phrase when he visited Tyre (Hdt. 2.44.1: *πυνθανόμενος αὐτόθι*).

<sup>4</sup> In *A History of the Delphic Oracle* (Oxford, 1939), p. 172.

<sup>5</sup> In this passage Herodotus contrasted 'men' and 'women' with *μέν* and *δέ* and he used the imperfect tenses for vividness. In the additional sentence beginning *ἰρὸν δὲ τὸ ἐν Διδύμοισι* he marked two stages, the first being in the aorist passive *συληθέντα*. Then he resumed the imperfect tenses with *ἤγοντο* and *εἶχον*. The bestowing of the 'uplands' (*τὰ ὑπεράκρια*) on the Carians fulfilled the oracle that 'others will care for our temple', that is 'others' than the Milesians (to whom the oracle was addressed) or 'other' than the previous carers, the Branchidae. For the position of Didyma in the uplands see the map in *RE* 5.1 (1903), 439.

unanimous tradition is that the Branchidae declared in favour of Xerxes. The texts are as follows.

(1) Strabo 517 fin.: 'They say that Xerxes founded in this area (Bactria–Sogdiana) the city of the Branchidae, who set off willingly with him from their homeland, because they handed over the possessions and the treasures of the god at Didyma.'

(2) Strabo 634: 'The oracle of Didymean Apollo at Branchidae . . . was burnt by Xerxes . . . and the Branchidae after handing over the treasures of the god set off with the Persian in his flight in order to escape punishment for the temple-robbery and the betrayal' (τῆς ἱεροσυλίας καὶ τῆς προδοσίας).

(3) Strabo 814: 'Callisthenes says that oracles were given in words at Delphi and at Branchidae . . . and Callisthenes writes in a dramatic manner<sup>6</sup> that Apollo left the oracular shrine at Branchidae from the time when the sanctuary had been plundered by the Branchidae in the reign of Xerxes, as they sided with the Persians, and the spring too had ceased' (*FGrH* 124 [Callisthenes] F 14).

(4) Diodorus 17 contents: 'How the Branchidae, having been settled long ago by the Persians at the extremity of their kingdom,<sup>7</sup> were destroyed by Alexander as traitors of the Greeks.'

(5) Curtius 7.5.28: 'The Branchidae had crossed over from Miletus long ago on the order of Xerxes while returning from Greece, and they had settled in that place (on the border between Bactria and Sogdiana), because they had violated the shrine called the Didymion to please Xerxes.'

(6) Pausanias 1.16.3, commenting on the piety of Seleucus I: 'It is Seleucus who sent to Branchidae<sup>8</sup> for the Milesians the bronze statue which had been brought up to Ecbatana by Xerxes during the Persian affair.'

(7) Paus. 8.46.3, on the plundering of statues of deities: 'A king of the Persians, Xerxes, son of Darius, took the bronze Apollo at Branchidae after finding fault with the Milesians, that they held back in the naval battle against the Athenians in Greece.<sup>9</sup> And that statue Seleucus intended later on to send to the Milesians.'

(8) Aelian fr. 54 in *Souda* s.v. *Branchidae*: 'Those living at Didyma in Milesian territory as a favour to Xerxes betrayed the temple of the local Apollo to the barbarians. Very numerous offerings were plundered. At their request, as they feared retribution at the hands of those in the city,<sup>10</sup> they asked Xerxes for a home elsewhere . . . there they built a city and called it Branchidae.'

These passages are all centuries later than the events of 479. It is therefore necessary to consider what sources were used by the writers.

The first passage in Strabo (517 fin.) had been preceded by a citation from Onesicritus. Since Strabo introduced our passage with the word 'they say' (φασί), he was not continuing with Onesicritus. It is also certain that he was not following Callisthenes as his source, since events occurring after the death of Callisthenes were

<sup>6</sup> In using the rare word *προστραγωδεῖ* Strabo may have been commenting on the rhetorical style of Callisthenes as well as on the sensational nature of the oracles about Alexander's descent from Zeus and his future achievements.

<sup>7</sup> The entry comes just after Alexander's advance 'through the desert' on his way to reach the river Oxus in midsummer 329. The Branchidae were on the far side of the river, that is in Sogdiana, the north-easternmost province of the Persian Empire.

<sup>8</sup> The place-name persisted as an alternative to 'Didyma' throughout antiquity.

<sup>9</sup> Hdt. 8.90.1, when the Phoenicians accused the Ionians of treachery during the battle of Salamis.

<sup>10</sup> That is the Milesians in Miletus. For the contrast between Miletus and Didyma see Hdt. 6.19.3.

mentioned. There are two clues. In this section (11.11.4) there is a remarkable amount of detail concerning Alexander's activities in Bactria–Sogdiana, which is best explained if Strabo was using the work of a writer or writers contemporary with Alexander and familiar with the geographical features, namely Ptolemy and/or Aristobulus. In the first sentence of the next section Strabo cites Aristobulus for a description of the river Polytimetus in Sogdiana. The balance of probability is therefore in favour of Aristobulus being the source behind passage (1).

Passage (2) from Strabo 634 introduces a detailed account of the great temple and the other constructions which were developed after the revival of the shrine at Didyma. It was thus not due to an Alexander-historian, but to a subsequent writer—let us say X.

Passage (3) from Strabo 814 is cited from Callisthenes. It was stated in connection with the description by Callisthenes of Alexander's consultation of the oracle of Zeus Ammon at Siwah, and Strabo went on to record the oracles issued to Alexander from Didyma<sup>11</sup> and from Erythrae, which reached him at Memphis in Egypt at the end of 332.

Passages (4) and (5) were probably based on the account of Cleitarchus. I have argued that this was so in *Three Historians of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 61 and 141.

Passage (6) from Pausanias was probably derived from an account of Seleucus I, written by Hieronymus of Cardia. See my remarks in *A History of Macedonia* 3.162, n. 4.

Passage (7) from Pausanias 8.46 occurs within a detailed account of the stealing of statues of deities from shrines from early times down to that of Augustus. It is due either to Pausanias himself or to a post-Augustan author—let us say Y.

Passage (8) in the *Souda* s.v. *Branchidai* is from Aelian (fr. 54).

When we put our suggestions together, we see that the attribution of the plundering of the shrine at Didyma to the reign of Xerxes was common to several writers: Aristobulus (for passage 1), Callisthenes (for 3), Cleitarchus (for 5), and Hieronymus (for 6). These writers wrote independently of one another.<sup>12</sup> They were all contemporary with Alexander, and they wrote about the Branchidae because they believed that Alexander had destroyed them in Sogdiana. The fact that they all date the plundering of the shrine at Didyma to the reign of Xerxes and not to the reign of Darius is very striking. Moreover, the later writers of passages (2), (7), and (8) write of Xerxes and not Darius.

The writers we have named were likely to have read the *History* of Herodotus. Even if they were unaware of Herodotus 6.19–20, their unanimity ensures that our interpretation of the passage is correct: namely that it did not refer to Darius. The ultimate source of all information about the plundering of the shrine at Didyma is the Milesians' traditional account of what had happened at the time of the Persian Wars.

The next question is: how did Alexander treat the Branchidae?

In the first passage above (Strabo 517–18), 'they say that Alexander destroyed the city of the Branchidae, whom Xerxes had settled there . . . because he abominated their temple-robbery and their treachery' (τὴν ἱεροσυλίαν καὶ τὴν προδοσίαν).

<sup>11</sup> See n. 6 above.

<sup>12</sup> The sequence of publication was Callisthenes, Cleitarchus, Aristobulus, and then Hieronymus. Of them Callisthenes was not trusted because he was a propagandist, and Cleitarchus made false statements, some of which were corrected (e.g. Curt. 9.5.21, and with regard to the Amazons Strabo 505 and Arr. 7.13.3).

In passage (4) Diodorus 17 contents), 'How the Branchidae . . . were destroyed by Alexander as traitors of the Greeks.'

In passage (5) (Curtius 7.5.28–35), Alexander, having consulted the Milesians who were serving with him, and having found them divided in their opinions, surrounded the city with his infantry and ordered it 'to sack the city as the haunt of traitors and kill them to a single man'. No mercy was shown, the walls were razed to their foundations, and the sacred groves were uprooted. Thus 'the sin of their forefathers was paid for by the descendants, who had not even seen Miletus and so could not have betrayed it to Xerxes.'

In Plutarch *Moralia* 557 B, 'not even the admirers of Alexander, among whom I count myself, approve his wiping out the city and destroying the entire manhood (πᾶσαν ἡλικίαν)<sup>13</sup> because of the betrayal of the shrine near Miletus by their forefathers.'

In passage (8) (*Souda*), when the Branchidae had built their city in Sogdiana, 'the foresight of the god did not slumber', but Alexander killed them all and they disappeared (ἡφανίσθησαν).

The sources behind some of these passages may be identified with probability: for passage (1) Aristobulus, for passages (4) and (5) Cleitarchus, and for passage (8) Aelian drawing on an account by Aristobulus. My arguments for the first three were stated above. As regards the *Souda*, the concept of the offended god foreseeing (and providing for) retribution was a feature in the account of the killing of Cleitus in Arrian 4.8.2 and 9.5; for it was supposed that 'the wrath of Dionysus', to whom Alexander had failed to sacrifice, led to the disaster and the anguish of Alexander. On my interpretation this aspect of Arrian's account was derived from Aristobulus.<sup>14</sup> Finally, Plutarch in *Moralia* 557 B was probably referring to Aristobulus as one of the admirers of Alexander who disapproved of the action of Alexander; for elsewhere in *Moralia* Plutarch cited Aristobulus.

Cleitarchus published his entire work before Aristobulus wrote. It is in theory possible that Cleitarchus, who was notoriously untruthful, might have invented a massacre in a land so distant from his readership in Greece. But we must remember that there were Milesians serving at the time with Alexander. They would have known what happened, or if Cleitarchus was lying what did not happen; and they would have informed their compatriots and the priests of the revived oracle at Didyma. That being so, it would have been absurd for Cleitarchus to have made a false report.<sup>15</sup> With Aristobulus we are on firm ground. He was with Alexander in Sogdiana. He will have known what happened or did not happen there. If Cleitarchus had invented a massacre, his version would have probably been corrected by Ptolemy and/or Aristobulus (as on other occasions, e.g. at Arr. 6.11.8).

My conclusion, therefore, is that Alexander did destroy the city of the Branchidae; that it was well known at the time throughout the Macedonian army; and that the Milesians serving in it will have informed their compatriots in Ionia. No ancient author whose work survives raised any doubt that the massacre took place.

<sup>13</sup> For this meaning see *LSJ* s.v. ἡλικία I 2. The killing of the adult males and the enslaving of the rest are implied by Curtius 7.5.32, 'diripere urbem' and 'ipsosque ad unum caedere'; for the women and the children were part of the booty in the sacking of the city.

<sup>14</sup> In *Alexander the Great: King, Commander and Statesman* (2nd edn, Bristol, 1989), p. 198 and *Sources for Alexander the Great* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 242.

<sup>15</sup> Even more so for Callisthenes to have invented a massacre which did not occur, as Tarn supposed (*Alexander the Great* [Cambridge, 1948 and 1979], 2.274). For his work was published quickly, and the army would have known what the truth was.

The last question is: why did Alexander destroy the city of the Branchidae?

Alexander had particularly close ties with Apollo. In 337 Apollo of Delphi had prophesied a victory for Philip and the Greeks in their war 'to punish the Persians for their crimes against the Greek temples' (Diod. 16.89.2). On his accession Alexander convened the Amphictyonic Assembly and he received from it on behalf of Delphi the appointment as commander of the Greeks against Persia (17.4.2). After his first victory in Asia the oracle of Apollo at Didyma spoke again, declaring that Alexander was descended from Zeus and foretelling further victories (Strabo 814 = *FGRH* 124 [Callisthenes] F 4). The fate of Tyre was in the hands of Apollo, who proved to be 'Philalexandros' (Diod. 17.46.6). Sacrifice was made to Apollo for saving the life of Alexander during the Philotas episode (Arr. 3.27.5).<sup>16</sup> It was shortly afterwards that Alexander met the Branchidae at the border of Sogdiana.

He asked the Milesians in his army how he should treat the Branchidae. They were divided in their opinions. Alexander had to make a personal decision. He was obsessed by the sins of the past generation of Branchidae against Apollo, 'abominating the temple-robbery and the treachery' (Strabo 518). He was of an age to remember the temple-robbery of Delphi by the Phocians and their mercenaries, and the fact that Philip had had 3,000 of them executed when prisoners of war 'as temple-robbers' (Diod. 16.36.6: ὡς ἱεροσυλοῦς).<sup>17</sup> Alexander thought of the past generation of Branchidae also as 'traitors of the Greeks' (Diod. 17 contents), for during the war for the liberation of the Greeks in Ionia they had taken the side of the Persians and absconded with them. The analogies were with Thebes both in 480–79 and more significantly in 335; for then the Thebans had taken subsidies from Persia and fought against the Greek League. When the city fell, the Council of the Greek League took into account both acts of Medism, and decided to raze the city to the ground (Arr. 1.9.6–10; Diod. 17.14.1–4; Just. 11.3.7–10).

With these precedents in mind, Alexander decided to exact retribution for the sins of the past generation of Branchidae, sins committed both against Apollo and against the Greeks. All adult males were executed and the rest of the population was enslaved. The city was looted by the army, the buildings were razed, and the trees were torn up by the roots (Curt. 7.5.32–4). The power of Apollo was vindicated.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Alexander continued to pay tribute to Apollo: for the safe arrival of Nearchus and his fleet (Arr. *Ind.* 36.3), and in his plan to build two magnificent temples for Apollo at Delos and Delphi (Diod. 18.4.5). For the genuineness of Alexander's last plans, see the Appendix in my *Alexander the Great* (n. 14), pp. 281–5.

<sup>17</sup> For my acceptance of this passage see my *Philip of Macedon* (London, 1994), p. 48 with n. 6 on p. 200. For a different view, see G. T. Griffith in *A History of Macedonia* 2.274–7, in which he considered the idea of sacrilege to have been 'a ramp' and the drowning of prisoners to have been 'not a civilized practice' in the fourth century.

<sup>18</sup> Of the literature on this subject the arguments of Tarn in *CR* 36 (1922), 63–6 and in *Alexander the Great* (n. 15), pp. 272–5 prevailed for some time; thus L. Pearson wrote in *The Lost Histories of Alexander the Great* (American Philological Association, 1960), p. 240, that 'the massacre is, as most critics agree, a fiction'. The strongest reaction came with an article by H. W. Parke in *JHS* 105 (1985), 59–68, in which he argued that the massacre did take place—but his arguments were far from convincing. Other writers simply omitted any mention of the episode. A. B. Bosworth in *Conquest and Empire* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 108–9 thought that 'a massacre probably had taken place', and in his n. 251 he cited J. M. Bigwood in *Phoenix* 32 (1978), 37, n. 1 as supporting Tarn and H. Bellen in *Chiron* 4 (1974), 63–5 as anticipating Parke's view. These writers did not make a thorough analysis of all the evidence, such as I have attempted here.