



CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS PERFORMANCE OF XERXES

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ABSTRACT

Xerxes, the son of Darius was chosen to succeed his father with certain conditions. In addition to complete buildings not done by the father, he built another magnificent buildings too, that has created all of them in the inscription of himself.

Xerxes' religious beliefs were as well as his father's although he was distant from Zoroastrianism and alien to it; and his religious prejudice can be seen clearly in his inscription ; the DEMONS. So that he has opposed to the demons and has fired the statues of the gods and the idol temples.

Although he, like his father and grandfather has failed to respect the peace and religious policy together well, but the reign's power and glory of his time cannot also be ignored when he had not removed himself from the government.

In this study, we have tried to deal with Xerxes' religious performances and to investigate it completely .the research method of this study is analytical and descriptive and finally it comes to an end with the conclusion of the Xerxes performance .

Keywords: Xerxes- religion – Achaemenian- Zoroaster – inscription

INTRODUCTION

Xerxes Character

Xerxes is the son of « Darius the Great » and «Atosa»; the daughter of cyrus.

Darius; the achaemenid king was to determine his successor before leaving borders of the Persian empire to the Athens.

Because it was the custom that; if a king intended to go out of his country's political

borders, certainly he was to determine his successor before that (**Herodotus, 1380, 349**).

But since Darius had many wives and children, it was difficult for him to choose the successor from among his sons. At that time, the powerful family: included many wives and children was important as much

as the crown and the throne what guaranteed the basis of a king's power was at first; his dynasty and the second ; folksy legitimacy . but among all of the Darius s' children , just two sons were the succession candidate of Darius ; one was artabaz that because he was the oldest of all , he had priority to claim the succession (**mashkur , 212**) and the other was Xerxes who was the first child of Darius after his ascending the throne.

In this regard, Herodotus has written; in the midst of choosing a successor to Darius the king, one Spartan ; named demaratus who had taken refuge to the achaemenids , entered the court . he was able to have an effective role in the case of choosing a successor . he said ; in Greek's opinion , the son would have born after his father's ascending the throne is the KING and other sons have no right in this matter . with this word , darius was inclined towards Xerxes ' succession (**Herodotus, 1389, 351**) . But another and maybe more important reason that caused darius not to set artabaz as his successor was that he was not from cyrus' dynasty , while Xerxes was the son of atosa ; the daughter of cyrus that anyway , Xerxes – with such privileges – was elected as the successor to his father (**Gershevitch, 1387, 43**).

It was such that Xerxes came to the throne after twelve years of Babylon regency.

However, this point must be considered that this selection had a great influence on the achaemenidempire, because after Xerxes' ascending the throne, undisputed power of cyrus and Darius times in the achaemenid dynasty was returned. although the Darius defeat in 490 BC in the battle of marathon had destroyed the greeks' fear of Iranians forever and the year 460 BC was the beginning of the Alexander's conquest in 332 BC but the Xerxes ' role in the fall of Darius III can't be also disregarded because most of the time and the energy of Xerxes was spent on the Persepolis ' expansion and in fact, the greatness of Persepolis is for Xerxes .

In the writings of the greekhistorians , it's been mentioned alto about the Xerxes desire in the luxurious life at the court . reliefs of Persepolis have provided a considerable help in depict of these magnificent scenes, luxuries and ceremonies of the Achaemenid king's court .Although , such these ceremonial affairs and unimaginable scenery of the achaemenid's wealth and lucury stimulated the curiosity of many greeks , but such this matter caused to this point that , the envy to the achaemenids and even admiration of them is frequently seen in the greek's writings . (**Gershevitch , 1387 , 45 / Figure 1**).

The king would arrange a glorious elegance for himself, that according to the Xenophon

, he would wear a long purple robe with the full and embroidered sleeves of golden and brocaded designs and he had a striped tunic on it and the purple trousers . the king's hat which would make him distinct from the others was a long hat with the flat surface and probably made of felt that there was a blue and white fragrant ribbon around it . he would take the imperial golden mace in his hand and there was an umbrella above his head. The throne was long and it was placed a short stool in front of it and a purple umbrella at the top . many cosmetic powders and oils had been rubbed into the king's face and gems were dangling from his neck , ears and wrist . reliefs of persepolis reflects largely the stature and dignity of the king and the motifs that show Xerxes with the Crown prince standing behind him have a certain glory and greatness that puts him one of the most hand some Asian men (**Figure 2**). If the king's image carved on the treasury relief would be the image of Xerxes himself, this point is true about him (**Gershevitch , 1387 , 46-47**).

It should be said that; after the Greece combat tour, the childish authoritarian nature and the lecheries of Xerxes had questioned the grandeur and prestige of this luxury and glory. One case of these lecheries led to the expression of love to his sister – in – law and the achaemenid king was impressed with her conspiracies that led

to kill his brother , malistes; the ruler of the bacterianprovinces (**Zarinkoob , 1388 , 167**).

With all of the interpretations, Xerxes' giving importance to the art and architecture is not secret to anybody. although ,« the policy of cryus and Darius political tolerance against idolaters can't be compares , not at all , with the policy of Xerxes that didn't respect the ritual and religious belief of foreigners »(**rajabi , 1382 volume , 21**) , but his attention to the art and architecture of foreigners such as Greeks and Assyrians , before depicting his royal strength and pride describes the artist soal the way of his insight so that it is capable of such a king. Although some of the historians has know him as a lust – worshiper and weakling person , but in the years later , during the fire of Persepolis , the achaemeind king's statue fallen on the ground had such a kingship pride and strength that Alexander didn't want to raise it from the ground.

This statue and palace was originally belonged to the harem of Xerxes.

Xerxes' Religious Beliefs

During the reign of Xerxes, a religious evolution occurs which tend toward Zoroastrianism trends and it is « fighting to demons» , because this type of worship was still common in northern and northeastern areas of Iran. It is mentioned that Aryan tribes have never been demon – worshipers,

but this was a policy that Xerxes and Zoroastrian clergymen applied it . they considered the followers of other religions except Zoroastrianism – who worshiped other deities instead of worshiping ahuramazda – as « the demon – worshipers» (Bayani , 1387, 212).

Xerxes, like his father, does not deny the existence of other gods apart from ahuramazda, but he doesn't name them , like his father .

According to herodotus'reports , there is on contradiction between the Xerxes ' acts and deeds; and Zoroastrianism which has come in the later Avesta texts. Although Xerxes was foreign and distant from Zoroastrianism than his father , but it seems that he knowingly was the backer and supporter of distorted form of Zoroastrianism had beencreated by the magi (Zemez , 1387 . 237 – 239). In addition to Herodotus and other Greek historians, Xerxes can be know through the inscriptions and friezes. in the achaemenid inscriptions of Persepolis , he explains about the buildings and how to build them (Boyce , 1376 , volume 2 , 256). Xerxes worshiped ahuramazda like his father, since his inscriptions are imitation of his father (Darius)'s .Because in both inscriptions, it's been mentioned to the words such as «ahuramazda helped me. «» according to ahuramazda willing ...» Xerxes has referred to other gods in his

inscriptions . such as this word that ; «ahuramazda with other deities keep ...» ; and what separates the inscriptions of Xerxes from the Darius ' inscriptions of religious point of view is that it refers to this word: « in the future if you think that I might be happy when I'm alive and when I'm dead , it hope to be RAUTAVAN» . that is so to say ; the worship of rauta is the very worship of ahuramazda and he has followed the law of ahuramazda . so , someone who worships both ahuramazda and RAUTA , he becomes blissful in this world and will become RAUTAVAN in the hereafter . RAUTA from the linguistics point of view is the equivalent of ASHA in Avesta and RAUTA in ancient India and RAUTAVAN (ASHAVAN in Avesta and RAUTAVAN in ancient India) , that the Indo – Iranian concept of RAUTA makes its position in the other world clear . In Gershevitchopinion , Xerxes has been less familiar with the innovative ideas of Zoroaster than his father; Darius (Gershevitch , 1387 , 593-594).

There's been remained an inscription of Xerxes that is know as « demons » . it follows the substance of this stone tablet that the tolerance and respect has been changes and Xerxes has banned the worship of demons and banished them form his territory and has ruined their temple , on impingement and religious intolerance .

again the same king, during the conquest of athenorders to break the statues of gods and set the pagodas on fire , because he believed that god has no place and he can not be transformed into an idol . this act of Xerxes increased the hatred of the Greeks. In this inscription, Xerxes says that he has broken the idols, ruined the pagodas and popularized the religion of ahuramazda, because the idols were the agent of destruction, corruption, drught and lie (**Girshman , 1375 , 213**). Xerxes in his inscription of demons .not only deals with religious duties, but also deals with moral issues (**Boyce, 1376 , volume 2 , 28**). In the demons ' inscription, Xerxes says :« Among these countries , there was somewhere in which the demons were worshiped previously . After that, I ruined the temple of demons in ahuramazda willing and I declared that the demons would not be worshiped . In the place the demons were worshiped previously, I worshiped ahuramazda andrauta in humility You , that will be in the future , if you'll think how to be happy in the life and how to be auspicious at the death , respect the directions which ahuramazda has said and worship rauta and ahuramazda in humility » (**Sharp 1388 , 121 / Figure 5**) .

Among the achaemenid kings, only Xerxes showed the religious fervor. Because not only the destruction of temples, the statue of

marduk and his behavior in Egypt representsv his such desire but also his anti – demon inscription shows that Xerxes had treated in a manner of more specific and stronger than his predecessors .

It shows that he had been more faithful Zoroastrian than his predecessors .it follows from the Persepolis Elamite documents that ; throughout the rivers and mountains were worshiped (**Razi , 1382 , 95**) . When the inheritor of Darius pacified the riot of Egypt , he applied a lot of strictness on its people and didn't support their religious mores and , for this humiliating action , they were pessimistic towards the achaemenid king (**Jafaridehaghi ; 1382 , 66**) .

But some of the historical authors know the cyrus and Xerxes reign periods as the periods of religious freedom in all achaemenidterritories .in the policies of cyrus and Xerxes, the tolerance in the religious matters was such that even governorswould encourage and promote cults and rituals of their peasants through putting them free in redemption and sacrifice to the presence of god .

Of course if the presence of the gods worshiped was not inconsistentwith the promotion of the peace and the government regulation.

This referring to Xerxes as the ruiner of pagodas; right or wrong, is plentiful in the traditions of Greek historians, from

Herodotus onwards. His « demon's» inscription and destruction of Babylon's temples have caused not to be able to absolve him from the profane to the sacreds . in fact such effort has been made « to exhibit an oriental despotic figure of Xerxes that the ambition and the boundless arrogance that's led him to these disrespects , eventually has led to his downfall and the decline of the achaemenid dynasty . » (weerdenburg ,heleen and kuhurtamelie 1388, 110).

RESULT

- The selection of the crown prince at the time of achaemenids and at least during the Xerxes ' selection as the Darius ' successor was not bound up with being senior of the male child.
- Xerxes , after coming to the throne , was the extender of his father (Darius) ' s method in both « the internal and the external policies and the construction of Persepolis.
- Due to the destruction of the temples and the demon's inscription of Xerxes , it can be said that Xerxes had the more bias towards the former achaemeindkings on the issues related to the religion.

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