



# The Case of the Daiva Inscription

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## Introduction

Archaeology – in its broad sense, including investigations into ancient history – has, at times, been compared to criminal detective work.<sup>1</sup> Not dissimilar to detectives, archaeologists, facing equally fascinating, but usually less gruesome cases, are apt to gather facts and devise theories. But, unlike detectives, archaeologists can hardly claim their ultimate goal to be the discovery of the truth, but facts,<sup>2</sup> and to arrive in dynamic theories – i.e., models – to explain the past. Models act in much the same way. As different models are proposed, researchers attempt to falsify them. In doing so, they collect more evidence and come across more information. As different models are proposed, researchers make further attempts to falsify them. Those that are falsified are usually abandoned and new models are proposed. Models that cannot be falsified based on current knowledge are generally accepted as viable theories to explain the question. In the process, our knowledge keeps increasing, and this is perhaps one of the most significant contributions archaeology is capable of making.

Sometimes, however, the question is so enigmatic that archaeologists must seek assistance from other experts, including criminal detectives. In the present paper, we are facing such a case, so abundant in ambiguity that I decided to seek advice from the greatest detective of all time, Mr. Sherlock Holmes of 221 Baker Street. The verisimilitude of Mr. Holmes has proven highly effective in numerous cases through his method of accurate observation and perceptive deductions. This method, which may seem chimerical to untrained observer, has given Mr. Holmes an acute vision for relevant facts and an impressive perceptual power to eliminate conjecture and arrive in viable conclusions, turning out to be the answer in most cases entrusted to him. Thanks to Mr. Holmes, detective work, which prior to him was a blend of speculations and guesswork, bordered an exact science, a



destiny many archaeologists long for their profession.

In his illustrious career, Mr. Holmes has been successful in assisting a number of individuals of noble blood, as well as royalties, including the King of Bohemia<sup>3</sup> and the King of Scandinavia;<sup>4</sup> therefore, I believe, he could be of great service in resolving this particular case, involving another king, however rather ancient compared to his more recent clients.

I therefore proceeded with making an appointment with Mr. Holmes to discuss the case and seek his advice. I arrived at the Holmes residence and was lead to his lodge to find him luxuriously leaning back in his arm-chair and sending up thick blue wreaths from his pipe, accompanied by his friend and companion Dr. Watson. Holmes greeted me warmly and asked me to sit by the fire-place. After introduction and a cup of tea, Holmes inquired about the purpose of my visit. I explained that the case I am about to present to him has puzzled scholars for the past 65 years, perhaps causing an even greater nuisance in one of the ancient empires of the Near East, that of the Achaemenids; but the details are so incomplete and scholarly opinions so diverse that any attempt to resolve the case has approached the realm of conjecture rather than sound theories.

*Holmes rubbed his hands, and his eyes glistened. He leaned forward in his chair with an expression of extraordinary concentration upon his clear-cut, hawk-like features.*

*“State your case,” said he, in brisk, business tones.<sup>5</sup>*

### **The Statement of the Case**

On June 26, 1935, an expedition from the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago to Persepolis lead by Erich Schmidt found seven stone slabs in the Garrison Quarters – a group of structures to the southeast corner of the Persepolis terrace.<sup>6</sup> These slabs were used as facing of a mud-bench in Room 16, set up on their edge just like a row of baked bricks sitting about a meter in front of them. Four of these seven slabs – three in Old Persian and one in Babylonian – turned out to be virtually identical to another text found in 1931 by Ernst Herzfeld in the so-called

“Harem” complex.<sup>7</sup> The other three slabs – two in Old Persian (PT3 142 and PT3 143) and one in Babylonian (PT3 141) – bore a rather different text which led to labeling them as the “Daiva Inscription.”<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, excavations in Room 5 at the Garrison Quarters yielded a fragmentary slab inscribed with the same text in Elamite (PT3 337). This latter slab seemed to form part of a doorsill of the late Achaemenid date, but may, as the other ones, has been the seat of mud-bench on an earlier level.<sup>9</sup> The missing fragment of the Elamite version was discovered in 1957 by Ali Sami during excavation and conservation work at the same area and was published by George Cameron in 1959.<sup>10</sup> Later, in 1961, a third Old Persian copy of the inscription was found at Pasargadae.<sup>11</sup> This copy was used in constructing a drain in the K trench on Tall-i Takht.<sup>12</sup>

*“There is indeed a mystery,” [Watson] remarked. “What do you imagine that [this] means?”*

*“I have no data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorise before you have all the data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories instead of theories to suit facts.”<sup>13</sup> [Holes said]*

The statement of the case continued with the text of the Daiva Inscription (hereafter XPh). The text appears on two slabs in Old Persian, one slab in Babylonian, and one fragmentary slab in Achaemenid Elamite from Persepolis and another slab in Old Persian from Pasargadae. The three Old Persian texts are identical, even down to the division of lines, suggesting that they were both inscribed from the same draft.<sup>14</sup> All three versions of the XPh have been translated several times. The translation of the Old Persian version by Kent<sup>15</sup> is still the standard reference. Herzfeld’s translation of the Babylonian version still serves as the most commonly used reference to this version.<sup>16</sup> The Elamite version was later re-translated and re-studied by Cameron.<sup>17</sup> The latter version has also been the subject of some linguistic commentaries.<sup>18</sup> The most recent translations of the text are by Pierre Lecoq<sup>19</sup> and Rudiger Schmitt.<sup>20</sup> Following is a translation of the Old Persian version of the XPh:<sup>21</sup>

§1 (1-6) Ahura Mazda is the great god who

gave (us) this earth, who gave (us) that sky, who gave (us) mankind, who gave to his worshipers prosperity, who made Xerxes, the king, (to rule) the multitudes, (as) the only king, give alone orders to other (kings).

§2 (6-13)

I am Xerxes, the great king, the king of kings, the king of (all) countries (who speak) all kinds of languages, the king of this big and far(-reaching) earth, the son of (the) king Darius, the Achaemenid, a Persian, and Aryan of Aryan seed.

§3 (13-28)

Thus speaks Xerxes, the king: By the favor of Ahura Mazda these are the countries – in addition to Persia – over which I am king under the shadow of Ahura Mazda, over which I have sway, which are bringing me their tribute, whatever is commanded to them by me, that they do and they abide by my law: Media, Elam, Arachosia, Armenia, Drangiana, Parthia, Aria, Bactria, Sogdiana, Chorasmia, Babylonia, Assyria, Sattagydia, Sardis, Egypt, the Ionians who dwell by the sea and those who dwell across the sea, Maka, Arabia, Gandara, Sind, Cappadocia, Dahae, Amyrgian Scythians, Pointed-Cap Scythians, Skudra, Akupish, Libyans, Carians, Ethiopians.

§4a (28-35)

Thus speaks Xerxes the king: After I became king, there were (some) among these countries (names of which) are written above, which revolted. Afterwards Ahura Mazda brought me aid, by the favor of Ahura Mazda I crushed those countries, and I put them (again) into their (former political) status.

§4b (35-41)

Furthermore, there were among these countries (some) which worshipped and performed religious services to

the *daiva*. But, by the favor of Ahura Mazda I eradicated these *daivadana* and proclaimed (as follows): The *daiva* shall not be worshipped (any more). Thus, wherever formerly the *daiva* were worshipped, there I worshipped Ahura Mazda *artaca brazmaniy*.

§4c (41-46) Furthermore, there were other things which were done in a bad way, and those (too) I made in to the correct way. That which I did, all I did by the favor of Ahura Mazda. Ahura Mazda gave me his support until I accomplished this.

§4d (46-56) Those who (shall be) hereafter, if those shall think “may I be prosperous in this life and blessed in afterlife,” do live according to this law which Ahura Mazda has promulgated: “worship Ahura Mazda *artaca brazmaniy*. A man who lives according to this law which Ahura Mazda has promulgated, and (who) worships Ahura Mazda *artaca brazmaniy*., he both becomes happy while living and becomes blessed when dead.

§5 (56-60) Thus speaks Xerxes the king: May Ahura Mazda protect me, my family and these countries from all evil. This I do ask of Ahura Mazda and this Ahura Mazda may grant me.

*“What on earth does this mean?”  
[Watson] ejaculated, after [he] had  
twice read over the extraordinary [text].*

*Holmes chuckled, and wriggled in his  
chair, as was his habit when in high  
spirits. “It is a little of the beaten track,  
isn’t it?”<sup>22</sup>*

I explained to Holmes that what I was about to enunciate about the interpretations of the XPh by modern scholarship is perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of the statement of the case:

The discovery of the first four texts at Persepolis soon led to a series of publications. The initial report of the discovery<sup>23</sup> was followed by a number of more thorough studies by Ernst Herzfeld,<sup>24</sup> Ronald Kent,<sup>25</sup> Hans Hartman,<sup>26</sup> Franz Weissbach,<sup>27</sup> Isidore Lévy,<sup>28</sup> Arthur Christensen,<sup>29</sup> and Jacque deMenasce.<sup>30</sup>

It is generally agreed that the XPh was composed early in Xerxes's reign. The exact date, however, seems to depend on the reference in the text to the Ionians of the west coast of the Asia Minor and the mainland Greeks. In his early publications, Herzfeld argued that the reference to "Ionians who dwell in the sea" in XPh include the Greeks of the west coast of Asia Minor, and, accordingly, dated the XPh to between 486 and 480 B.C.E.<sup>31</sup> Herzfeld later stated that the mainland Greeks do not seem to be mentioned in the text, and the text must thus be dated to between 479 and 472 B.C.E., i.e., between the year the Achaemenids lost control over mainland Greeks and the year Pausanias was driven from Byzantium.<sup>32</sup> Herzfeld finally settled on 478 B.C.E. as the date of composition.<sup>33</sup> This date approximately corresponds with Kent's date of 479 B.C.E., who, nonetheless, believed that the mainland Greeks are in fact mentioned in the text.<sup>34</sup>

Ever since its discovery, the historicity of the XPh and what Xerxes meant by *daiva* and *daivadana* has occupied the students of ancient Iranian studies as well as related fields. Herzfeld who first published the text argued that it relates to an uprising led by Magi of Media and the *daiva* were the pre-Zoroastrians deities whose temples – the *daivadana* – in Media, Persia, and Susiana in Iran were destroyed by Xerxes.<sup>35</sup> Kent<sup>36</sup> and Hartmann,<sup>37</sup> on the other hand, argued that the Old Persian version mentions only one rebellious land and only one place where the *daiva* were worshipped. Levy drew upon a correlation to Herodotus (VIII.85) and suggested that by *daivadana* Xerxes was referring to the Athenian temples.<sup>38</sup>

While Levy's correlation of *daivadana* with the Athenian temples appealed to scholars in the Classical fields,<sup>39</sup> some Iranicists, following Herzfeld, tried to seek Xerxes's motivations for the compilation of the XPh in the Iranian world. For instance, Albert Olmstead suggested that Xerxes was referring to Bactrian or other eastern Iranian deities.<sup>40</sup> Richard Frye also argued for cults in

eastern Iran, e.g., in Kerman, or more likely Elamite cults in Fars and western Iran. This, according to Frye, was motivated by a deliberate attempt by Xerxes to “de-Elamitize” and Iranicize the cultural and religious character of Persia proper.<sup>41</sup> The heretic Iranians as motives for Xerxes to compose the XPh has most recently been argued for by Lecoq.<sup>42</sup>

Another group of Iranicists have also sought an Iranian origin for the XPh, attempting, concurrently, to address broader issues, especially the religious orientation of the Achaemenids in general and Xerxes in particular. Ugo Bianchi used the absolute negative use of the word *daiva* in the XPh to argue that the Achemenids were indeed Zoroastrians.<sup>43</sup> In this regard, special emphasis has been placed on Xerxes’s attempt to replace old Iranian deities, such as Indra, with Ahura Mazda.<sup>44</sup> In the same framework, but with slightly different approach, Mary Boyce argues that in the XPh, Xerxes is referring to the destruction of a place of worship in Iran for warlike beings condemned by Zoroaster.<sup>45</sup> These deities, according to Mohammad Dandamayev were Mithra and Anahita.<sup>46</sup> Roman Ghirshman even identified one such *daivadana* at Tappeh Nush-i Jan.<sup>47</sup>

*“I am afraid,” said [Watson], “that the facts are so obvious that you will find little credit to be gained out of this case.”*

*“There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact,” [Holmes] answered, laughing. “Besides, we may chance to hit upon other obvious facts which have been by no means obvious . . .”<sup>48</sup>*

Perhaps the most enduring hypothesis on the historicity of the XPh was first put forward by Hans Hartmann.<sup>49</sup> Drawing upon a reference in Herodotus (I.183), Hartmann argued that the *daivadana* mentioned in the XPh was in fact the Bel-Marduk temple in Babylon which, according to Herodotus, was destroyed by Xerxes, after that land rose in rebellion early in his reign. In the years to come, Hartmann’s proposition was advocated by a number of scholars in one way or another.<sup>50</sup> This hypothesis, in turn, has led to discrediting Xerxes as a megalomaniac despot with rash behavior and no tolerance for the belief systems of the subject people, especially their

religion.<sup>51</sup>

*“I could hardly imagine a more damning case,” [Watson] remarked. If ever circumstantial evidence pointed to a criminal it does so here.”*

*“Circumstantial evidence is a very tricky thing,” answered Holmes thoughtfully; “it may seem to point very straight to one thing, but if you shift your own point of view a little, you may find it pointing in an equally uncompromising manner to something entirely different. It must be confessed, however, that the case looks exceedingly grave against the young man, and it is very possible that he is indeed the culprit . . .”<sup>52</sup>*

In recent years, however, the *daivadana* = Bel-Marduk temple correlation, and, consequently, the personality of Xerxes has been subject to a revision. Amélie Kuhrt and Susan Sherwin-White,<sup>53</sup> in particular, present a review of the pertinent written sources, concluding that not only the *diavadana* in the XPh cannot be identified with the Bel-Marduk temple in Babylon, but Xerxes’s attitude toward Babylonian deities and temples is rather different from what Classical sources, especially Herodotus, tell us.<sup>54</sup> Following the same trend in Achaemenid historiography, Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg even argues that the XPh does not reflect any historically specific event or action, but merely indicates the royal ideology of the Achaemenid dynasty.<sup>55</sup> In other words, according to this view, the XPh is a royal proclamation that rebellion against the Empire, in any form and by anyone, is sacrilegious and equal to worshipping false gods instead of Ahura Mazda, and thus will be punished by the Empire. This view of the XPh is also adhered to in the most recent reviews of the Achaemenid history.<sup>56</sup>

At this point, I brought the statement of the case to closure. Holmes, in his calm voice, said:

*“Your case is an exceedingly remarkable one, and I shall be happy to look into it. From what you have told me I think that it is possible that graver issues hang from it than might at first*



sight appear.”<sup>57</sup>

## Investigation Begins

Before leaving, Holmes told me that he will intermittently inform me of his progress. From the first note I received from him a day later, I learned that he has begun his inquiry into the case by investigating on who the mysterious “daivas” were.

The standard Zoroastrian doctrine relates that Ahura Mazda created six gods (i.e., the *Amesha Spentas*) and Angra Mainyu created an equal number of beings in opposition to them.<sup>58</sup> Ahura Mazda also created 24 lesser gods (i.e., the *yazatas*) and placed them in cosmic egg. Again, Angra Mainyu created an equal number of demons (i.e., the *daivas*). These pierced the cosmic egg and caused good to be mixed with evil.

Impression gained from other Zoroastrian texts, however, suggest that the *daivas* (Avestan *daëuuas*-) were a group of deities in Indo-Iranian pantheon who seem to have completely fallen from their sacred position in the ancient Iranian religion and have become demonized. It is difficult to determine just when this change took place and to understand its significance within the framework of Zoroastrian theology. The impression from various sources, however, suggest that this process was a gradual one.

In the Gathas, the *daëuuas* had not yet become demons. In fact, as Émile Benveniste established, they constituted a distinct category of quite genuine gods.<sup>59</sup> Although at this point the *daëuuas* have been rejected, they were still venerated by the leaders of the larger Iranian nation (*Yasht* 32.3, 46.1) and had formerly been worshipped even by the people who accepted the religion of the Gathas (*Yasht* 32.8). The composers of the Gathas, however, reproached the *daëuuas* for being, through blindness, incapable of proper divine discernment and of having, as a result, accepted the bad religion. It appears from the Gathas that the process of rejection, negation, or demonization of the *daëuuas* was only just beginning; but as evidence is full of gaps and ambiguities, this impression may be erroneous.

In the Younger Avesta, the *daëuuas* were represented as small, wicked genies who disturb human health, the regularity of religious life, and especially the order of the world. These include *Aeshma* (anger), *Druj* (lie), *Apaosha* (famine), *Azi* (greed), and *Bushayasta* (procrastination) among others. These daivic creatures were by no means separate entities, but formed a complex intertwined web in Zoroastrian cosmology. For example, greed may lead to lie which would bring famine upon the land.

Among the *daëuuas* mentioned in the Younger Avesta, of particular importance to the present inquiry is *Nasa*, the *daëuua* of the dead matter, or the flesh of a daivic creature. This particular daiva has been considered particularly abhorrent in Zoroastrian teachings and detail instructions have been gathered in *Vendidad* on how to protect the sacred elements, especially fire, from coming into contact with it (see below).

### **A Suggestive Fact**

The next day, I found myself with Holmes on the same street. He pulled me aside and told me that he has some interesting news to share with me:

*“There is no great mystery in this [case]” . . .*

*“What! you have solved it already?”*

*“Well, that would be too much to say. I have discovered a suggestive fact, that is all. It is, however, very suggestive. The details are still to be added.”<sup>60</sup>*

Astonished, I pleaded to him to elaborate. Holmes said that he is in a rush to attend to a business, therefore he has to leave the details for a later time. Yet, he made the following remark as he walked away and left me in oblivion: “*Nasa* and fire, my friend, there lies our clue!”

### **An Explanation**

I did not hear from Holmes for a few days. The next note I received from him was an invitation to his residence. When I arrived, I found Holmes, as we first met,

luxuriously leaning back in his arm-chair beside the fireplace and smoking his pipe. He invited me to sit down. After a cup of tea, I once again thanked him for accepting my offer to look into the case. Holmes remarked:

*“I would not have missed the investigation for anything. There has been no better case within my recollection. Simple as it was, there were several most instructive points about it.”*

*“Simple!” I ejaculated.*

*“Well, really, it can hardly be described as otherwise,” said Holmes, smiling at my surprise. “The proof of its intrinsic simplicity is, that without any help save a few very ordinary deductions I was able to [devise with a theory]. . .”<sup>61</sup>*

Amazed, I pleaded to him to explain how, in just a few days, he managed to solve a case that has occupied scholars for so many years. Holmes responded:

*“[This] is one of those cases where the art of reasoner should be used rather for the sifting of details than for acquiring of fresh evidence. [In other attempts to explain the case] we are suffering from a plethora of surmise, conjecture, and hypothesis. The difficulty is to detach the framework of fact – of absolute, undeniable fact – from the embellishments of theorists. . . . Then, having established ourselves upon this sound basis, it is our duty to see what inferences may be drawn, and which are the special points upon which the whole [case] turns.”<sup>62</sup>*

Holmes then began with enumerating the outline of his theory:

The vast Achaemenid Empire housed a variety of ethnic groups, each with its own ideology and religious practices. Early Achaemenid kings – Cyrus II, Cambyses, and Darius I, all pragmatic rulers actively involved in a process of empire-building soon realized that peaceful control over this archipelago of religious communities

required a prudent policy of tolerance.

Darius's son and successor Xerxes, on the other hand, experienced a drastically different upbringing. Born after his father's ascension to the Achaemenid throne, Xerxes received full courtly training that, almost certainly, included heavy doses of Zoroastrian teaching. This obviously must have left an enduring impact on Xerxes's worldview. Thus, early in his reign, Xerxes conceived a religious reformation and had a royal decree composed (XPh) to eliminate whatever he deemed against Zoroastrian teachings, especially the offerings of dead matter on fire, a repulsive practice forbidden in Zoroastrianism and totally unacceptable to a devout Zoroastrian such as himself.

At this point Holmes paused, poured another cup of tea, leaned back on his arm-chair and asked me what I think of the outline of his hypothesis.

*"[It] is mere speculation," said I.*

*"It is more than that. It is the only hypothesis which covers all the facts." [said Holmes]<sup>63</sup>*

"What facts?" I remarked, "this is just your conjecture." Holmes juggled in his arm-chair and said: "well, now let us look at the facts; allow me to begin from the heartland of the Achaemenid Empire."

### **The Evidence from Persepolis Tablets**

Holmes then explained that cuneiform tablets from Persepolis may prove to be of particular help to our case. There are two main sets of tablets from Persepolis. The first set, conventionally called Persepolis Fortification Tablets (PFT) consist of an estimated thirty thousand tablets and fragments slightly over two thousand of which are published by Richard Hallock.<sup>64</sup> The published PFT's are dated to the reign of Darius I, between 510 and 494 B.C.E. The second set, called Persepolis Treasury Tablets (PTT), is much smaller, presumably comprising of about 750 tablets and fragments, about one hundred of which are published by George Cameron.<sup>65</sup> The published PTT's are dated from thirtieth year of Darius I to the seventh year of Artaxerxes I, between 492 and 458 B.C.E.

A distinctive group of PFT's, labeled by Hallock as "K1 Texts" is classified as "Rations for Individuals with Religious Functions."<sup>66</sup> The "K1 Texts" include thirty-four tablets referring to rations (*gal*) of flour, beer, wine, grain, and fruits – but no meat – for the *lan* ceremony, apparently of a religious nature. The variety of Elamite, Iranian, and Mesopotamian deities to whom the ceremonies are dedicated and people with different ethnic backgrounds attending or partaking in these ceremonies maybe taken as an evidence for the liberal religious atmosphere at Persepolis and its environs during the reign of Darius,<sup>67</sup> but what stands out is the complete lack of any reference to any ceremony involving sacrifice to fire. There is however, a single reference to a certain Akshimashra who delivered three sheep for unspecified gods at an unspecified shrine (PFT 364); but, whether this delivery was intended for burnt-offering or some other ritual activity dealing with fire we are not in a position to say.<sup>68</sup>

With the beginning of the reign of Xerxes a drastic change took place. Of the sixty-six published PTT's, only two (PTT 10a and PTT 11) are related to a religious matter. Both texts are dated to the early years of Xerxes, perhaps not later than his second year. PTT 10a refers to a payment of silver made out to "men of the god," but the responsibilities of these men is not specified. PTT 11 is some sort of memorandum regarding the payment made out to a "haoma priest."

At this point I interrupted Holmes to remind him of the unequal proportion of the discovered and published PFT's and PTT's and the ensuing problems involved in any attempt to draw conclusions based on their correlation. He agreed and pointed out that there is nonetheless a sharp decrease in the quantity of tablets referring to some sort of religious activities from the reign of Darius to Xerxes (thirty-four to two). If this is not an accident of preservation or discovery, it perhaps reflects an actual decline in religious activities at Persepolis. Holmes added that what is of particular significance in regard to the case in question is the complete lack of any reference to burnt-offerings.

### **The Biblical Evidence**

At this point Holmes paused to pour himself another

cup of tea. After a sip he said that he has to apologize in advance for a brief divergence to present another line of evidence coming from the Biblical texts of Malachi, Ezra and Nehemiah. Puzzled, I asked Holmes how these particular texts could be of relevance to our case. He responded:

*“ . . . Indeed, I have found that it is usually in unimportant matters that there is a field for observation, and for the quick analysis of cause and effect which gives the charm to an investigation.”<sup>69</sup>*

Holmes then explained that after the conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C.E., Cyrus II (559-530 B.C.E.) granted the Yehud freedom to return to Palestine and appointed a certain Sheshbazaar to see that the temple vessels were returned to Jerusalem and supervise the building of a new temple.<sup>70</sup> Cambyses (530- 525 B.C.E.) and Darius I (521-486 B.C.E.) seem to have followed Cyrus’ policy by supporting local religions and temples.<sup>71</sup> In case of the Yehud, the small administrative glitch in the construction of the Jerusalem temple seems to have been rectified by the recovery of a copy of Cyrus’ edict in the archives of Ecbatana upon an order from Darius.<sup>72</sup> The construction of the temple at Jerusalem seems to have been reached a satisfactory level by the sixth year of Darius’ reign (515 B.C.E.).<sup>73</sup> For the rest of his reign, Darius practiced a *laissez-faire* policy towards the Yehud, allowing them to follow their traditions, encouraging local religion, and occasionally financing local religious practices from the royal treasury, as long as people remained obedient and provided the state with support on time.<sup>74</sup>

But, with the beginning of the reign of Xerxes in 486 B.C.E., this relaxed atmosphere was about to change. In a series of articles,<sup>75</sup> Julian Morgenstern argued that early in the reign of Xerxes (485 B.C.E.) the Restoration community in Yehud suffered from a catastrophe resulting from an unsuccessful revolt. According to Morgenstern, with the death of Darius I in 486 B.C.E. the Jewish nationalists made an attempt to put a monarch on the throne of Yehud. As recorded in Ezra 4:6, the local Achaemenid authority reported the attempt to the imperial court. Xerxes, just assuming the throne and facing more severe rebellions in Babylon and Egypt, entrusted the

nations surrounding the Yehud with forming a coalition to suppress the Jewish revolt. The latter attacked Jerusalem in 485 B.C.E., destroyed the Second Temple, tore down the city walls, and captured and sold a number of the Jews to the Greeks.<sup>76</sup> Morgenstern then goes on to argue that the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah were deliberate attempts by the new Achaemenid imperial regime of Xerxes's son and successor Artaxerxes I to remedy for the catastrophe of 485 B.C.E.<sup>77</sup>

Morgenstern's reconstruction of the events surrounding the early reign of Xerxes in Yehud has been subject to critique from historical and biblical points of view,<sup>78</sup> but regardless of these criticisms, Morgenstern's argument is still sound that the catastrophe of 485 B.C.E. left some enduring changes on the Jewish ideology and religious practices. The destruction of the Temple brought an end to centralized worship and a diminution in the status of the Levitical priesthood. In its place, synagogues emerged as a religious institution, and divergent patterns of belief worship paved the way for Jewish sectarianism.<sup>79</sup>

Traditionally, the Yehud practiced various types of sacrifice, one in the form of burnt-offering known as *'olâ*, literally meaning "an offering of ascent" or "an ascending offering."<sup>80</sup> The *'olâ* sacrifice was one which was completely burnt on the altar so its smoke, or more appropriately, its scent, was directed towards the heaven for the deity to inhale it. The *'olâ* sacrifice was widely practiced by the Yehud in pre-exilic times (cf. Exodus 20:24; Numbers 21-24; 1 Kings 18; 2 Kings 3:26-28; Job 1:5).<sup>81</sup> However, sometime in the period between the exile and the Second Temple, a change took place in the practice of *'olâ*. This change entailed the development of several specialized sacrifices types from *'olâ* in none of which, unlike the latter, burnt-offering played a pivotal role.<sup>82</sup>

Roughly in the same time the Book of Malachi was composed. Despite debates on the actual date of the Book of Malachi, computerized grammatical and linguistic analyses suggest a date around 475 B.C.E., early in the reign of Xerxes.<sup>83</sup> Scholars have long noticed the critical tone of the Book of Malachi regarding religious practices in Yehud. Of particular relevance to this query is Malachi's Second Oracle (1:6-2:9) where the prophet criticizes the priests for defiling the sacred altar by

permitting impure and improper sacrifices to be made in the temple in violation of the Covenant. Interestingly enough, the term that denotes the sacrifice in this Oracle is not *'olâ*, but has been identified as *βelâmim* “(peace) offering),”<sup>84</sup> another form of sacrifice that does not involve burnt-offering.

After Xerxes, Artaxerxes I dispatched Ezra to Judae to “inspect the Yehud and Jerusalem according the law of your god”(Ezra 7.14) and “the king’s law” (Ezra 7. 25-26). It has been suggested that this phrase shows that the law of Ezra was not the one that was followed in Yehud and Jerusalem in all its details, and that, through Ezra, Artaxerxes wished to institutionalize a law in Yehud which was more acceptable to the Achaemenids.<sup>85</sup> It is interesting to read that a group of Yehud who returned with Ezra to Jerusalem, offered substantial sacrifices to Yahweh upon arrival (Ezra 8:35) and, regularly, in morning and evening, and afterward on Sabbaths (Ezra 3: 2-5). However, these sacrifices were also “peace-offering”<sup>86</sup> and took place prior to rebuilding of the temple of Yahweh (Ezra 3:6) thus representing the consecration of the rebuilt altar (cf. Ezekial 43.27).

Nehemiah served for many years as the cup-bearer of Artaxerxes I, before he was appointed the governor of Jerusalem in 444 B.C.E. Boyce argues that during his tenure as the royal cup-bearer, Nehemiah must have been well educated in Zoroastrian codes of purity.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, it comes as no surprise that, upon assuming his new task, Nehemiah concerned himself most profoundly with questions of purity among he Jews. Nehemiah especially emphasized that once he accomplished his social and religious reforms, he

“ . . . set up orders . . . *for the supply of wood [for the altar] at the proper times* and for the first fruits.” (Nehemiah 13: 30-31, italics added).

### **Correspondence Regarding the Temple of Yaho at Elephantine**

#### **Other Lines of Evidence**

Holmes further explained that, in fact, there are two important pieces of evidence dating to the Achemenid



period; but note that both, while encourage religious practices, discourage burnt-offering. Interestingly enough, the first case, also relates to religious practices among the Yehud.

A group of Aramaic papyri discovered in Elephantine in Upper Egypt furnish us with an interesting clue to the question by presenting an appeal made by the Jewish residents to the Achaemenid administration:

In the month of Tammuz of 410 B.C.E., when Arsames, the satrap of Egypt was visiting Darius II in Iran, the priests of the Egyptian god Khnum conspired with Vidarnag, the commander-in-chief of the Achaemenid troops at Elephantine and destroyed the temple of the god Yaho at the fortress of Elephantine. After three years, the Jews led by a certain Yedoniah the son of Gemariah, petitioned to Bagoas,<sup>88</sup> the governor of Judah, to rebuild their temple. In their petition to Bagoas, the Jews propose to offer meal-offering, incense, sacrifices and burnt-offering under his name to Yaho, if Bagoas allows them to rebuild the temple.<sup>89</sup> Bagoas's response was sent via Arsames, the satrap of Egypt, who allows the Elephantine Jews to rebuild their temple, but just make meal-offerings and incense to the altar.<sup>90</sup> Later, however, the same group of the Jews, led by Yedoniah, send another petition, this time directly to Arsames. This time, probably somehow informed that they should not touch upon such sensitive issues before the Zoroastrian Arsames, they specifically promise that they will offer no sheep, ox, or goat as burnt-offering, but only incense, meal and drinking-offering.<sup>91</sup> The permission was hence granted and the temple rebuilt.

It seems that animosity between the Yehud and priests of Khnum began with a dispute over property in the Yaho temple area.<sup>92</sup> But, one should not ignore the fact that sacrificing rams by the Yehud in the Yaho temple may have been offending to the followers of the ram-headed deity Khnum. Regardless of whatever the reasons for the dispute, Vidarnag, the commander-in-chief of the Achaemenid troops at Elephantine, is usually blamed for accepting bribe from the priests of the Egyptian god Khnum and conspiring with them to destroy the temple of Yaho.

But, there is a more complex story behind this event.

There is evidence to suggest that the post of commander of the Syene garrison at Elephantine was hereditary in a specific Persian family. Further it seems that the above mentioned Vidarnag was the grandson of an Achaemenid official by the same name who in June of 458 B.C.E., i.e., during the reign of Artaxerxes I, built a brzmdn' (\*brazmadana, translated as "place of worship") at Elephantine.<sup>93</sup> The evidence for this undertaking comes from an Aramaic inscription on a sandstone stele, found in Aswan (now in the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo), first published in 1903. The inscription is damaged and only lines 2-5 are preserved. They read as follows:

“[Vidarnag], commander of the garrison of Syene, built this brzmdn' in the month of Siwan, that is Mehir, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the King. By the grace of God, welfare.”<sup>94</sup>

The latter Vidarnag himself was most probably the son of Vidarnag II, the commander of the ten thousand immortals under Xerxes at Thermopylai who led the troops from the pass with the help of the Greek informant Epialtes. Later, while his troops remained in Greece under Mardonius, Vidarnag returned with Xerxes to Asia to be appointed the commander of Persian coastal defenses of Thrace.<sup>95</sup> Vidarnag II himself was the son Vidarnag I, one of the six co-conspirators with Darius I against the Gaumata the Megian, who, in 521 B.C.E., suppressed the Median revolt against Darius, and in return, was appointed the satrap of Armenia.<sup>96</sup>

From this information emerges another feasible scenario. Vidarnag, the commander-in-chief of the Achaemenid troops at Elephantine – who we may now call Vidarnag IV – came from a famous family of Persian aristocrats, at least one of which (i.e., Vidarnag II) was a close friend and ally of Xerxes, and like him may have enjoyed a devotion to Zoroastrian teachings. Therefore, it can be argued that by destroying the temple of Yaho at Elephantine, Vidarnag IV was in fact following a family tradition by promoting proper religious ceremonies in the place of worship built by his grandfather.

“Perhaps it is just a coincidence that these people are all named Vidarnag and had nothing to do with Vidarnag II, Xerxes’s friend” said I.

*“It can’t be a coincidence,” [Holmes] cried, at last springing from his chair and pacing wildly up and down the room; “it is impossible that it should be a mere coincidence.”<sup>97</sup>*

### **The Greek Inscription from Sardis**

Holmes then continued with another pieces of evidence. The Greek inscription from Sardis was copied in Roman times, but the original Greek version probably dated to the reign of Artaxerxes I (*ca.* 427 B.C.E.) or Artaxerxes II (*ca.* 366-5 B.C.E.):

- (1-5) In the thirty-ninth year of the reign of Artaxerxes, Droaphernes, the son of Barakes, *hyparkhos* of Lydia, [consacrated] a statue (*andrias*) of Zeus-Baradates.
- (5-11) He (?) ordered the custodians of the cult [of Zeus] who have the right to be allowed into *adyton* and coronate the god not to participate in the mysteries of Sabazios, for those have brought their victims for burning, and [mysteries of] Angdistis and [mysteries of] Mâ.
- (11-13) They (?) ordered Dorates the custodians of the cult to abstain from these mysteries.<sup>98</sup>

This inscription is usually hailed as an evidence for the Achaemenid support of local religious systems.<sup>99</sup> The inscription, while allows adherents of the cult of Zeus to practice their religious ceremonies, forbids them from participating in mysteries of Sabazios, Angditis, and Mâ.

As their name indicates, these rituals were considered mysterious and only a few initiated were allowed to partake in them.<sup>100</sup> Our knowledge of mystery cults in Greek religion is limited, but we know that most of them were related to a main mystery cult, that of Dionysos.<sup>101</sup> The details of rituals carried out in each mystery cult is unknown, but we know that it involved a wide variety of practices, some of which was looked down upon even in the liberal Greek society. The Greeks considered Sabazios a foreign deity, not even admitted to the outskirts of Olympus. Sabazios always seemed to have been regarded as a savage and primitive form of Dionysos. A ritual characteristic of the mystery of Sabazios, was the

practice of cannibalism performed in some of these mysteries. This practice, considered “eating the god,” derived from a version of myth of Dionysos in which the Titans, the ancestors of man, killed, cooked, and roasted their divine victim on fire.<sup>102</sup> It appears that a similar ritual involving burning dead matter on fire prompted the Achaemenid official Droaphernes to ban the ceremony.

“Though both very interesting, you realize that neither of the events you mentioned above date to the reign of Xerxes” I said to Holmes. He nodded in agreement and said: “True, but these two references nonetheless show that a taboo on burning dead matter on fire continued to be held in certain circles in the Achaemenid Empire, all with close ties with Xerxes.

### **Xerxes, Daiva, and Fire**

“But what does all of this have to do with *daiva* and Xerxes, and what you told me the other day in the street about *nasa* and fire?” Said I with discontent. Holmes replied:

*“Patience, my friend, patience! You will find in tie that it has everything to do with it.”<sup>103</sup>*

Holmes then continued that it is long known that the Zoroastrian ideology revolves around an eternal struggle between good and evil. This doctrine emphasizes the absolute responsibility of each person for his/her own fate and it is linked with the duty to engage strenuously in the battle of good against evil. In Zoroastrianism this marked qualities of self-reliance and moral vigor in an individual.

Furthermore, there was the doctrine that in attaining his/her own salvation the individual added, however minutely, to the sum of goodness in the world, and thus gave nobility to daily endeavor. Such endeavor was not limited to spiritual and moral striving, but included the observance of purity laws, whereby the creations must be kept as free as possible from pollution, and so be fit for the indwelling of their guardian *Amesha Spentas*. Detailed injunctions about the application of these laws came to be gathered together in the compilation known as *Vendidad* (“Law against *daivas*”). Some of these prescriptions may have been pre-Zoroastrian in origin, since they are in

accordance with widespread usage concerning what was generally regarded in ancient times as unclean; but others, supporting Zoroaster's unique teachings about the creations, are themselves unique. These deal at length with how earth, water, and fire should be kept clean from contamination of *nasa*, i.e., polluting dead matter.

In this regard, *Vendidad, Fargard* viii, 81-96 is particularly illuminating.<sup>104</sup> The Mazda-worshipper is urged to pause instantly and purify the fire which has been polluted by dead matter (*nasa*) being burnt on it. Death penalty is also prescribed for anyone putting *nasa* on to fire. There are also instructions for the nine-fold purification for any fire that has been thus polluted, and the one who purifies the polluted fire would receive great rewards in afterlife:

*Creator of the corporeal world, Most Holy Spirit, just! If Mazda-worshippers, walking or running, riding or driving, come upon a fire on which carrion (Nasa) is being cooked, . . . what should they, the Mazda-worshippers, do? Then said Ahura Mazda: ' . . . they should slay the cooker of carrion, they should remove the pot, they should remove the container of bones. From that fire they should kindle afresh blazing tinder, or twigs which nourish fire, so that by taking up the fire-sustaining tinder one may bear (it) away and separate (it), so that the (polluted) fire may go out as swiftly as possible. The first time, as much (blazing tinder) as a man can hold, that he should lay down on earth, a good span away from the fire on which carrion was cooked. (From this) he should (again) bear away (blazing tinder) and separate it, so that the (second) fire may go out as swiftly as possible. The second time, as much (blazing tinder) as a man could hold . . . . The ninth time, as much (blazing tinder) as a man can hold, that he should lay down on the earth . . . , so that the (eighth) fire may go out as swiftly as possible. If (then), O Spitama Zarathushtra, one duly brings (to the ninth fire) fuel of sandalwood or gum benzoin or aloe or pomegranate, or of any other sweet-smelling plants, from*

*whichever and to whichever side the wind shall carry the fragrance of the fire, from that side and to that side Fire, son of Ahura Mazda, will turn, slaying thousands of invisibles demons born of darkness, wicked, slaying twice as many sorcerers and withces. Creator of the corporeal world, Most Holy Spirit, just! If a man brings a carrion-burning fire (thus purified) to an appointed place, how great will be that man's reward after the seperation of body and consciousness? Then said Ahura Mazda: As great as if in this material life he had brought 10,000 (pure) embers to an appointed place.<sup>105</sup>*

Holmes then added that this comes as no surprise, as, among the sacred elements, fire has a special place in Zoroastrian ideology. As one of the *Amesha Sepandas*, fire was among the Ahuraic forces opposed to the abhorred daivas. There are three grades of fire in Zoroastrianism,<sup>106</sup> the highest being the *Atash Bahram*. This is regarded as the greatest earthly representative of cosmic fire, the seventh creation, hence the sacred center to which every earthly fire longs to return.<sup>107</sup> In fact, in his own teachings, Zoroaster associated fire with one of the great divinities of his revelation, *Asha* or *Arta*.<sup>108</sup> *Asha* is in origin an amoral Indo-Iranian concept, that of Order, and as such is imbued with morality, as verbal Truth or Righteousness, is an action which conforms with moral order.

*Asha* or *Arta* thus penetrates all ethical life, as fire penetrates all physical creation.<sup>109</sup>

I interrupted Holmes and reminded him that sacrificial offerings to fire was, nonetheless, an essential part of Zoroastrian religion and has been emphasized in Zoroastrian teachings.<sup>110</sup> For example, *Yasht* 29.7 encourages making an offering of fat from a sacrificial cattle to fire,<sup>111</sup> or in the *Aitareya Brahmana* one finds a dialogue between the gods and sacrificial animals, with the latter conscious of their destiny and submissive to it.<sup>112</sup> Holmes concurred and explained that Zoroastrian teachings provide a practical solution to this dilemma: obviously there was no escape from slaughtering animals, but by slaying them ritually Zoroastrians believed that they killed only the body and the creature's spirit was released

to ascend to heaven. Interestingly enough, the animals themselves demanded to be sacrificed facing the fire so that Agni may guide their spirit to gods in heaven.<sup>113</sup>

Holmes then emphasized that we should bear in mind that sacrifice in the presence of fire does not mean sacrifice to fire. In fact, Herodotus gives us an accurate description of sacrifice by orthodox Zoroastrians:

*When about to sacrifice, they [the Persians] neither build altars nor kindle fire, they use no libation, nor music, nor fillets, nor barley meal; but to whomsoever of the gods a man will sacrifice, he leads the beast to an open space and then calls on the god, himself wearing a crown on his cap of myrtle for choice. To pray for blessings for himself alone is not lawful for the sacrificer; rather he prays that it may be well with the king and all the Persians; for he reckons himself among them. He then cuts the victim limb from limb into portions and having seethed the flesh spreads the softest grass trefoil by choice, and places all of it on this. When he has so disposed it a magus comes near and chants over it the song of the birth of gods, as the Persian translation relates it; for no sacrifice can be offered without a magus. Then after a little while the sacrificer carries away the flesh and uses it as he pleases.*<sup>114</sup>

Holmes further added that there are other particularly relevant textual references. For example, Zoroaster says: “At the offering made in reverence (to fire) I shall think of truth (*asha*) to the utmost of my power.” (*Yasna* 43.9). Further, Zoroastrians are recommended to always pray in the presence of fire, either a terrestrial fire, or sun, or moon on high (*Menog-i Khrad* 53.3-5). The terrestrial fire did not have to be elaborate and could have been as simple as a hearth fire. Therefore, every individual was to install his/her own hearth and do not allow the fire to die as long as he/she lived.

In addition to private hearths, a Zoroastrian temple cult of fire also existed. Maintaining this fire was obviously more sophisticated.<sup>115</sup> Wood was supposed to be

burnt in this fire, and offerings made five times a day, with purity of fire and material burnt on it strictly observed. The sacred fire was carried from one temple to another, being escorted by priests armed with swords and maces to symbolize the warrior nature of fire and its ceaseless struggle against all that is opposed to *asha* (truth).

Instructions on what should and should not be burnt on fire are to be found in *Bundahishn* (18.20-24). The preferred fuel was wood, but *naphta* fire was also venerated. Later documents state that the Magi were responsible for keeping the fire ever burning and reading, before the fire, incantations, an hour every day, while holding before the fire a *barsom*. And this brings us to the ambiguous phrase *artaca brazmaniy* in the Daiva inscription.

### **Artaca brazmaniy**

Holmes reminded me that the opposition between *Arta* (truth, an Ahuraic entity) and *Druj* (lie, a daivic entity) was an essential aspect of Zoroastrian ideology.<sup>116</sup> It is interesting that the words *drauga-* (lie), *draujana-* (liar), and *durujiya-* (to lie) occur frequently in Achaemenid royal inscriptions, but their opposite, *arta* (truth) and *artavan* (truthful) are only to be found in the Daiva inscription (XPh). The phrase in which *arta* seems to have been emphasized reads as: *Auramazdam yad- artaca brazmany(a)* (lines ). This phrase has been translated as “to worship Ahura Mazda *artaca brazmany(a)*,” but it seems that the academic community has reached no consensus on the exact meaning of *artaca brazmany(a)*. This is partially because the Old Persian form poses some morphological ambiguity. On the other hand, the phrase is simply transcribed from Old Persian in Babylonian and Elamite versions of the XPh, thus suggesting that *artaca brazmany(a)* may have referred to an old, established religious ritual.

It is, however, generally accepted that the first word, *artaca* is derived from *arta* and thus may convey some connection with *asha* or fire. The second word, *brazmany(a)*, may have been related to *barsom* or the bundle of sacred twigs used in Zoroastrian religious rituals.

Barsom too has a significant role in religious rituals



of Zoroastrianism. In fact, in *Menog-i Xrad* (67. 28) Zoroaster warns Ahriman: “I shall break and conquer and enfeeble your body, and those of demons (*daiva*) and fiends, wizards and witches, through *hom* and *barsam* and the true religion.”<sup>117</sup> Procedure for proper cutting of twigs, making a bundle, and using the barsom in rituals are to be found in several Zoroastrian texts, including *Vendidad* (19.17-18) and *Menog-i Khrad* (57.28).

## Conclusion

At this point, Holmes paused and asked me about his chain of reasoning. I admitted that it seems strange than convincing to me. Holmes replied:

*“All this seems strange to you . . . because you failed at the beginning of the inquiry to grasp the importance of the single real clue which was presented to you [i.e., the significance of burning dead matter on fire]. I had the good fortune to seize upon that, and everything which occurred since then has served to confirm my original supposition, and, indeed was the logical sequence of it. Hence things which have perplexed you and made the case more obscure have served to enlighten me and to strengthen my conclusions.”*<sup>118</sup>

It has been argued that Cyrus II, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, was a devout Zoroastrian,<sup>119</sup> but a consideration of textual sources suggest that, apart from his alleged Zoroastrian orientation, Cyrus acknowledged other religions in his empire. This respect for other religious beliefs was more a matter of pragmatism on Cyrus’s part, as he saw no logical or practical reason to attempt to proselytize the whole empire into Zoroastrianism, either by coercion or promotion.<sup>120</sup>

Cambyes also seems to have followed the religious policy of his father, showing respect to deities of newly conquered lands, in his case Egypt.

The accession of Darius I to the Achaemenid throne provided a boost to Zoroastrianism. However, Darius, a shrewd military man raised in the tumultuous years of the early empire-building, just like his predecessors, proved to

be a pragmatic ruler. He soon realized that in order to rule, in peace and order, the cornucopia of people which formed the Achaemenid Empire, he needs to advocate a policy of religious tolerance. Thus, people were allowed to carry on with their religious beliefs and practices as long as they paid their tribute on time and obeyed the imperial authority diligently.<sup>121</sup>

Xerxes, on the other hand, as the crown prince, enjoyed a dramatically different upbringing. He obviously received substantial Zoroastrian teachings which, among many other topics, included instruction on proper procedure for making sacrifice to fire. Through his Zoroastrian teachings, Xerxes learned that the king, as the master of the realm, is held in the same relation to the temple fires as the master of the house to the hearth fire.<sup>122</sup> The king was directly responsible for the purity of fire and appropriate performance of fire rituals including sacrificial offerings to fire, as he was responsible for upholding *arta*, i.e., the divine order and truth.<sup>123</sup>

In the meantime, however, to his dismay, Xerxes learned that throughout his vast empire there were people who practiced rituals involving burning dead matter (*nasa*) – a representation of a daivic creature – on fire which, obviously, was in contradiction to Zoroastrian teachings:

there were among these countries  
(some) which worshipped and  
performed religious services to the  
daiva.

Thus, early in his reign, Xerxes conceived a religious reformation and had a royal decree composed<sup>124</sup> (XPh) to eliminate whatever he deemed against Zoroastrian teachings, specially the offerings of dead matter on fire, a repulsive practice forbidden in Zoroastrianism and totally unacceptable to a devout Zoroastrian such as himself:

*By the favor of Ahura Mazda I  
eradicated these daivadana and  
proclaimed (as follows): The daiva shall  
not be worshipped (any more).*

Further, he instructed the people to follow the Zoroastrian procedure if they still insisted on offering sacrifice to fire:

*Thus, wherever formerly the daiva were worshipped, there I worshipped Ahura Mazda artaca brazmaniy (by burning branches on fire).*

Xerxes was most probably alone in his crusade, scarcely finding equally pious individuals to share his devotion to Zoroastrian instructions on a trivial religious practice or cared as much about this matter which had little bearing on the smooth operation of the Empire. Soon the irrelevance of Xerxes's order became obvious; the decree was withdrawn, either later during his reign or shortly after his assassination in a palace coup in 465 B.C.E. Copies of the inscriptions which recorded the decree (XPh) were discarded. A certain individual stationed at Persepolis collected the discarded inscriptions and used them as a bench in the Garrison quarter. Other inscriptions found their way into equally unusual places elsewhere in the Garrison quarter, the Harem building, and in a drainage on the platform at Pasargadae, a degrading location unattested for any other royal inscription.

Xerxes's son and successor, Artaxerxes I (465-422 B.C.E.), toned down his father's strict religious policy and allowed more freedom. Xerxes's efforts, however, was not completely in vain, as, presumably early in his reign, Artaxerxes I institutionalized Zoroastrianism as the official religion of the Empire, as evidenced by reformation of the imperial calendar at around 441 B.C.E. with months named after the leading Zoroastrian deities.<sup>125</sup> Further, Artaxerxes dispatched Ezra and Nehemiah to institutionalize the law of the Yehud in Judae, as a consequence of which the 'ola sacrifice with emphasis on burnt-offering gave way to other kinds of sacrifice in which burnt-offering was not crucial. Further, Nehemiah emphasized on burning wood on the altar which finds close parallel in proper kindling fire in the Zoroastrian tradition.

Xerxes's crusade found echoes in later Achaemenid times, as evidenced by how Droaphernes the Achaemenid official at Sardis forbid people from partaking in the mysteries of Sabazios, Angditis, and Ma, or Vidarnag, the commander-in-chief of the Achaemenid troops at Elephantine destroyed the temple of Yaho for offering dead matter on fire, or Arsames, the satrap of Egypt, discouraged the Jews from burnt-offering at their temple at

Elephantine. However, by around 400 B.C.E., the religious policy of the Achaemenids changed, as Artaxerxes II introduced the worship of other deities, other than Ahura Mazda, into the Empire. Statues of Anahita and Mithra were set up in different parts of the Empire and people were obliged to worship them. It seems that this development, at least in theory, but also most probably in practice, rendered Xerxes's reform and edict obsolete by default.

At this point Holmes brought his remarks to closure and said:

*"What do you think of my theory [now]?"*

*"[I still think] it is all surmise."*

*"But at least it covers all the facts. When new facts come to our knowledge which cannot be covered by it, it will be time enough to reconsider it."<sup>126</sup>*

*"But, do you realize that you have based your entire reasoning on the abhorrence of burning dead matter on fire." Said I. Holmes replied:*

*"The ideal reasoner . . . would, when he has once been shown a single fact in all its bearings, deduce from it not only all chain of events which led up to it, but also all the results which would follow from it. As Cuvier could correctly describe a whole animal by the contemplation of a single bone, so the observer who has thoroughly understood one link in a series of incidents, should be able accurately to state all the other ones, both before and after."<sup>127</sup>*

I then replied that, despite Holmes's elaborate explanation, there is still ample evidence for religious practices involving burning of dead matter in fire throughout the Achaemenid period. Holmes smiled and explained that in a vast empire such as that of the Achaemenids, even the idea of assigning a "religious guard" by the Empire to chase down and punish those who

betray strict religious teachings is ludicrous. The Achaemenid Empire neither had the resources, nor the necessary intelligence or control network, or the desire to begin with, to implement such restriction on its population.

Holmes further added that every established religion has a canon. This canon include fundamental concepts of a religious system, and its guidelines for life and afterlife. Such canon should be taught to the general public if the religion in question aims to attain a grass-root foundation. In absence of a society-wide religious teaching, the average member of the society would only remain a nominal adherent and the path is open to different readings and religious practices in different segments of the society.

The Zoroastrian religion did have a standard canon; but, the lack of a standardized religious teaching for the general public restricted the knowledge of the Zoroastrian canon to the priestly, noble, and royal circles. The average member of the Achaemenid society may have had some general knowledge about Zoroaster the prophet and his teachings, but his knowledge of religious nuances was obviously vague and his observance of religious obligations less strict than one with modern perceptions would expect. Further, the Achaemenid policy of tolerance toward local religions opened the way to several religious systems coexisting under the Empire, each with its own distinct and sometimes contradictory traditions. Therefore, at a given point in the Achaemenid history in a given corner of the Empire a follower of a Greek or Egyptian cult may have been burning dead matter to please their respected deity, whereas next door, a Zoroastrian was singing hymns in praise of fire and abhorrence of the latter practice.

It was late and I could see fatigue in Holmes's eyes. I thanked him once again for looking into the case and left his residence. As I walked down the Baker Street I wondered,

*“[c]ould there be . . . some radical flaw in [Holmes's] reasoning? Might he not be suffering from some huge self-deception? was it not possible that his nimble and speculative mind had built up his will theory upon faulty premises? I had never known him to be wrong, and*

*yet the keenest reasoner may occasionally be deceived. He was likely, I thought, to fall into error through the over-refinement of his logic – his preference for a subtle and bizarre explanation when a plainer and more commonplace one lay ready to his hand. Yet, on the other hand, I had myself seen the evidence, and I had heard the reasons for his deductions. When I looked back on the long chain of curious circumstances, many of them trivial in themselves, but all tending in the same direction, I could not disguise from myself that even if Holmes's explanation were incorrect the true story must be equally outré and startling.”<sup>128</sup>*

## **Acknowledgment**

The initial inspiration for writing this paper in its present format came from “A Mysterious Affair of Style: The Ninevite 5 Pottery of Northern Mesopotamia,” by Michael Roaf and Robert Killick, *Iraq* XLIX(1987), 199-230.

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## **Footnotes:**

- 1- B. Fagan, *Time Detectives*. New York, Simon & Schuster, 1997.
- 2- “Archaeology is about Facts; if you want the Truth, go next-door to the Philosophy Department!” Indiana Jones quoted in John Bintliff, “Why Indiana Jones Is Smarter than the Post-Processualists,” *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 26/2(1993), 100.
- 3- In “A Scandal in Bohemia.”
- 4- Mentioned in “The Noble Bachelor,” in Doyle 1950, 449.
- 5- “The Sign of the Four,” in Doyle 1950, 135.
- 6- E. F. Schmidt, *The Treasury of Persepolis and Other Discoveries in the Homeland of the Achaemenids*. OIC 21, Chicago, 1939, 11-2.
- 7- E. E. Herzfeld, *A New Inscription of Xerxes from Persepolis*.

SAOC 5, Chicago, 1932.

- 8- E. E. Herzfeld, "Xerxes' Verbot des Daiva-Cultes," *Archaeologischen Mitteilungen aus Iran* 8 (1936), 56-77; R. G. Kent, "The Daiva-Inscription of Xerxes," *Language* 13 (1937), 292-305.
- 9- Schmidt 1939, *op. cit.*, 12.
- 10- G. G. Cameron, "The 'Daiva' Inscription of Xerxes in Elamite," *Welt des Orients* 2(1959), 470-6.
- 11- D. Stronach, "Excavation at Pasargadae: A Third Preliminary Report," *Iran* 3(1965), 19.
- 12- D. Stronach, *Pasargadae*, Oxford, 1978, 151-2.
- 13- "A Scandal in Bohemia," in Doyle 1950, p. 244.
- 14- Kent 1937, *op. cit.*, 293; Stronach 1978, *op. cit.*, 152.
- 15- Kent 1953, *op. cit.*
- 16- Herzfeld 1937, 1938, *op. cit.*
- 17- Cameron 1959, *op. cit.*
- 18- Grilhot 1974: 156, 1978: 30, n. 65, 1983: 216, 1987: 30; Malbran-Labat 1990: 83.
- 19- P. Lecoq, *Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide*, Paris, 1997, 105.
- 20- R. Schmitt, *The Old Persian Inscriptions of Naqsh-e Rostam and Persepolis*. Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum I.II, London, 2000, 88-95.
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- 22- "The Red-Headed League," in Doyle 1950, p. 269.
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- 24- Herzfeld 1936, *op. cit.*; *idem.*, *Altpersische Inschriften*, AMI Ergänzungsband, Berlin, 1938, 27-35.
- 25- Kent 1937, *op. cit.*; *idem.*, "Old Persian Texts," *JNES*

II(1943), 302-6; *idem.*, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon*, Second Edition, New Haven, 1953, 150-2.

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33- E. Herzfeld, *The Persian Empire: Studies in the Geography and Ethnography of the Ancient Near East*, Wiesbaden, 1968, 351.

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36- Kent 1937, *op. cit.*, 305. Hartmann 1937, *op. cit.*, 159.

37- Hartmann 1937, *op. cit.*, 159.

38- Levy 1939, *op. cit.*

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42- Lecoq 1997, *op. cit.*, 105.

43- U. Bianchi, "L'inscription 'des daivas' et le Zoroastrisme des Achéménides," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 192(1977), 3-30.



- 44- Cf. Bianchi 1977, *op. cit.*; Assmusen 197: 113; M. Schwartz 1985: 691; J. M. Balcer, *Sparda by the Bitter Sea: Imperial Interaction in Western Anatolia*, Chico, 1984, 253.
- 45- M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, Vol. 2, Leiden, 1982, 175.
- 46- M. A. Dandamayev, *Persien unter den ersten Achameniden*, Wiesbaden, 1976, 226.
- 47- R. Ghirshman, "Le Daivadana," 1977.
- 48- "The Boscombe Valley Mystery," in Doyle 1950, 310.
- 49- Hartmann 1937, *op. cit.*, 159.
- 50- Cf. H. S. Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran*, Leipzig, 1938, 364-6; J. Duschesne-Guillemin, *La religion de l'Iran ancien*, Paris, 1962, 156; G. Widengren, *Les religions de l'Iran*, Paris, 1968, 138; C. Herrenschmidt, "La religion des Achéménides; état de la question," *Studia Iranica* 9(1980), 326.
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- 53- A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White, "'Xerxes' Destruction of Babylonian Temples," *Achaemenid History II: The Greek Sources*. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt, eds., Leiden, 1987, 69-78.
- 54- For the most recent look at the question see A. Kuhrt, 1997, 302-4.
- 55- H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "The Personality of Xerxes, King of Kings," *Archaeologia Iranica et Orientalis Miscellanea in Honorem Louis Vanden Berghe*, L. de Meyer and E. Haerinck, eds., Ghent, 1989, 551, 557.
- 56- Cf. A. Kuhrt 1995, 680; Briant 1996, 567-70; Wiesehöfer 1996: 47-55.
- 57- "The Red-Headed League" in Doyle 1950, 276.
- 58- Gray, *Foundations of Iranian Religion*, Bombay, 1925, 175-85.
- 59- É. Benveniste, "Hommes et dieux dans l'Avesta," *Festschrift*

fur Wilhelm Eilers, Wiesbaden, 1967, 144-7.

60- "The Sign of the Four," in Doyle 1950, 140.

61- "A Study in Scarlet," in Doyle 1950, *op. cit.*, 118.

62- "Silver Blaze," in Doyle 1950, *op. cit.*, 516.

63- "The Episode in the Barrel," in Doyle 1950, *op. cit.*, 177.

64- R. T. Hallock 1969, 1973, 1977, 1978, 1985.

65- G. G. Cameron 1948, 1958, 1965.

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67- H. M. Koch, *Die religiöse Verhältnisse der Dareioszeit*, Wiesbaden, 1977.

68- The opinion that the Elamite title *haturmakβa* which in at least four PFT's appears in association with the *lan* ceremony is some sort of priest who tends the ritual fire has been forcefully rejected, cf. Boyce 1982: 136, with previous bibliography).

69- "A Case of Identity," in Doyle 1950, 290.

70- Now see P. R. Bedford, *Temple Restoration in early Achaemenid Judah*, Leiden, 2001.

71- For example, the temple of Apollo of Magnesia, see M. N. Tod, ed., *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions*, Oxford, 1933, pp. 12-3; E. Meyer, *Die Entstehung des Judenthums*, Halle, 1986, 19-20. For restoration of Egyptian temples by Darius I see.

72- Cf. R. de Vaux, "The Decrees of Cyrus and Darius on the Rebuilding of the Temple," *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 63-96.

73- On problems on the actual end of constructions at the temple see G. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest*, Sheffield, 1993, 848-9.

74- H. Kreissig, *Die Sozialökonomische situation in Juda zur Achamenidenzeit*. Berlin, 1973.

75- Cf. J. Morgenstern, "Jerusalem – 485 B.C.," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 27(1956), 101-79, "Jerusalem – 485 B.C. (continued)," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 26(1957), 15-47, "Jerusalem – 485 B.C. (concluded)," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 31(1960), 11-29.

- 76- Morgenstern 1956, *op. cit.*, 171-4.
- 77- Morgenstern 1960, *op. cit.*
- 78- For review see K. G. Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah*, Atlanta, 1992, especially Ch. 2.
- 79- Morgenstern 1960, *op. cit.*, 17-20.
- 80- B. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord*, Leiden, 1974, 6.
- 81- *Ibid.*, 21.
- 82- J. Milgrom, *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology*, Leiden, 1983.
- 83- R. Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Toward an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose*, Missoula, 1976; A. E. Hill, "Dating the Book of Malachi: A Linguistic Reexamination," in *The World of the Lord Shall Go Forth. Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, Winona Lake, 1983, 77-89; *idem.*, *Malachi*, The Anchor Bible Vol. 25D, New York, 1998, 80-4.
- 84- E. M. Meyers, and C. L. Meyers, *Haggai, Zachariah 1-8*, The Anchor Bible Vol. 25B, New York, 55-6.
- 85- Ahlström 1993, *op. cit.*, 878-9.
- 86- L. C. Allen, "'For He is Good...': Worship in Ezra-Nehemiah," In *Worship and the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of John T. Willis*, M. Patrick Garaham, R. R. Marrs, and S. L. McKenzie, eds. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 284, Sheffield, 1999, 25.
- 87- Boyce 1982, *op. cit.*, 189-90.
- 88- This is probably the same Bagoses mentioned by Josephus as a commander in the army of Artaxerxes II, who imposed on the Jews a tax of fifty shekels for every lamb they sacrificed. He also punished the Jews for the murder of Jesus, the high priest, who was slain by his brother John (Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Chapter VII).
- 89- A. Cowly, *Jewish Documents of the Time of Ezra*, London, 1919, No. 30.
- 90- Cowly 1919, *op. cit.*, No. 32.
- 91- Cowly 1919, *op. cit.*, No. 33, Line 10; see also H. L.

Ginsberg, "Aramaic Letters," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, J. B. Pritchard, ed. Third Edition, Princeton, 1969, 492, n. 20.

92- E. Bresciani, "The Diaspora: Egypt, Persian satrapy," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism* Vol. 1: *Introduction; The Persian Period*. Edited by W. D. Davies and L. Finkelstein, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 389-90.

93- M. Bogoliubov, "Titre honorifique d'un chef militaire achéménide en Haute-Egypte," *Acta Iranica* 2 (1974), 109-14, with references to earlier work.

94- *Ibid.*

95- J. M. Balcer, *A Prosopographical Study of the Ancient Persians Royal and Noble c. 550-450 B.C.*, Lewiston, 1993, 125-6, no. 116.

96- *Ibid.*, 125, no. 114.

97- "Light in the Darkness," in Doyle 1950, 59.

98- After L. Robert. "Une nouvelle inscription de Sardes. Règlement de l'autorité perse relatif à un culte de Zeus," *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belle-Lettres* 1975, 306-30.

99- F. Gschnitzer, "Eine persische Kultstiftung in Sardeis und die "Sippengötter" Vorderasiens," in *Im Bannkreis des Alten Orient*, Innsbruck, 1986, 45-54. See also J. Wiesehofer.

100- U. Bianchi, *The Greek Mysteries*, Leiden, 1976.

101- J. E. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, Cambridge, 1903, especially Chapters VIII and X.

102- W. F. Otto, *Dionysos*. Fourth Edition, Frankfurt, 1980, 120.

103- "Light in Darkness," in Doyle 1950, 59.

104- Boyce 1968, *op. cit.*, 65.

105- After M. Boyce, *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*, Manchester, 1984, 62, with some modifications.

106- M. Boyce, "On the Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire," *JAOS* 95/3(1975), 454-65.

107- M. Boyce, "On the Sacred Fires of Zoroastrianism," *BSOAS* 31(1968), 66.

- 108- Boyce 1975, *op. cit.*, 455.
- 109- M. Boyce, "Zoroaster the Priest," *BSOAS* 33(1970), 29.
- 110- Especially in *Nirangistan*, see S. J. Bulsara, *Aerpatastan and Nirangastan*, Bombay, 1915, under "Animal for dedication" and "Sacrifice of Dedicated Animals." See also M. Boyce, "Haoma, Priest of the Sacrifice," *W. B. Henning Memorial Volume*, M. Boyce and I. Gershevitch, eds. London, 1970.
- 111- Cf. G. G. Cameron, "Zoroaster the Herdsman," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 10(1968), 278.
- 112- See *Aitareya Brahmana*, A. B. Keith, trans., Harvard Oriental Series XXV, Cambridge MA, 1920, 136.
- 113- Keith, trans. 1920, *op. cit.*, 139.
- 114- Herodotus I.132, after Boyce 1982 *op. cit.*, 180.
- 115- For rituals involved see Boyce 1968, *op. cit.*
- 116- J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *La religion de l'Iran ancien*, Paris, 1962, 191-2.
- 117- M. Boyce, "Haoma, Priest of Sacrifice," In *W. B. Henning Memorial Volume*, London, 1970, 64.
- 118- "A Study in Scarlet." In Doyle 1950, 60.
- 119- See most recently: M. Boyce, "The Religion of Cyrus the Great," In *Achaemenid History III: Method and Theory*, A. Kuhrt and H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, eds. Leiden, 1988, 15-31.
- 120- Of course, when matters boiled down to essentials of Zoroastrian teachings, we see that even a "liberal" ruler such as Cyrus showed some reservations. For example, Xanthos of Lydia, mentions, in his account on the event surrounding the conquest of Lydia by Cyrus, that a storm broke out over the pyre prepared for burning Croesus:

*Now while in great haste they [the Persians] were stretching a purple canopy over Croesus, superstitious fears fell upon the people, who were alarmed by the darkness and the storm. . .; at the same time, the oracles of the Sibyl and the sayings of Zoroaster came to their minds. . . the Persian claim that it was from [Zoroaster] they derived the rule against burning dead bodies or defiling*

*fire in any fire.*

121- Darius, although practiced a policy of tolerance, was by no means completely oblivious to what was deemed against Zoroastrian teachings in his Empire. Perhaps one of his most important religious reforms was the prohibition of human sacrifice by Carthaginians referred to by Pompeius Trogus in his *Historiae Philippicae* (summarized in the third century C.E. epitome by Justin), as well as forbidding them from eating dog meat in the same edict. See Justin, *Epitoma Historiarum Philippicarum* XIX.1.10.

122- On the special importance of the king's own hearth fire in Vedic and other Indo-European fire cults see A. B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, Cambridge MA, 1925, 625-6.

123- For a comprehensive look at the role of king in Zoroastrianism see R. C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, London, 1961, Chapter 14.

124- Rash behaviors of this sort, with little or no concern for repercussions, was not unusual of Xerxes. One can think of at least another occasion when he issued an edict on spot and stripped Queen Vashti of her rank when she refused to put on her finest clothes and appear before Xerxes's guests (as told in the Book of Esther Chapter 1).

125- S. H. Taqizadeh, *Old Iranian Calendars*, London, 1938, 13, 33; E. J. Bickerman, "The 'Zoroastrian' Calendar," *Archiv Orientalni* 35(1967), 197-207.

126- "The Yellow Face," in Doyle 1950, *op. cit.*, 577.

127- "The Five Orange Pips," in Doyle 1950, 343.

128- "A Break in the Chain," in Doyle 1950, *op. cit.*, 195-6.