

The Influence of Mesopotamian Thoughts on the Religious Beliefs and Customs of Achaemenid Persians

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ABSTRACT

The Achaemenids established a plethora of ties with neighboring cultures and civilizations, among which, the culture and civilization of Mesopotamia, which had developed and flourished long before the Achaemenids, is of particular interest. Following the integration of the Achaemenid Persians with the Mesopotamian people, they were highly influenced in various ways by the ancient culture of the latter. In this process, the beliefs and thoughts of the people of Mesopotamia established a profound effect on those of the Achaemenid Persians, in that many Mesopotamian deities were introduced to the realm of Persian beliefs while some ancient Babylonian and Assyrian customs overshadowed the life of the Persians, some going as far as being embedded in their culture. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of Mesopotamian thoughts on the religious customs and beliefs of the Achaemenid Persians.

Keywords: Achaemenid, Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Assyria

Introduction

The influence of Mesopotamia during the Achaemenid period has been extensively studied by researchers. In overall, examining the mutual effects of cultures and civilizations therebetween is mostly a challenging task. Many cultural elements may have arisen at two or more points, simultaneously and independent of each other and, under the influence of the environmental factors of the same area. It should not be forgotten that the history of culture and civilization of a vast land known generally as the Iranian culture and civilization is not rooted in the Aryan or Achaemenid dynasties and the kingdom of Cyrus the Great for that matter. Putting aside any prejudice and the on basis of abundant findings and data, it is trivial that the Aryans, like other tribes who came to this land later, initially had a primitive culture and civilization, but were able to feature heavily in the history and culture of this land simply by exploiting the rich culture of this land and through their own solid ethnic characteristics. Among these, one of the cultures and civilizations with most influence on the Achaemenids was arguably those of the ancient Mesopotamia. Many native gods were worshiped in Babylon, while during the Achaemenid reign, the Persian gods set foot in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates (i.e. the Mesopotamia). There is a wide range of Babylonian evidence from the reign of Artaxerxes I revealing that many people honored and worshiped gods from other lands, among which are Mithra, the Aramaic Shamash, the Jewish Yahweh, and the Egyptian Isis. As a result of this coexistence of the gods, an integration of religions emerged. This research seeks to determine and clarify the influence of Mesopotamian thoughts in the religious beliefs of the Persians while examining some beliefs and customs of the ancient Mesopotamian people, it has been clarified that what was the impact of Mesopotamian ideas on the religious beliefs of the Persians. Moreover, this study seeks to determine whether the religious beliefs of the Persians affected those of the people of Babylon, and in what aspects were the Persians influenced by the customs of the Babylonians. This research is organized in two parts and seeks to answer the aforementioned questions by carefully examining the reliable sources.

Religious beliefs

There has been an extensive debate on the prevailing religion of the Achaemenid period, as most scholars concur that it is not abundantly clear what the dominant religion was in this era. The region of Pars, Anshan and Parsumash, which was a remnant of the Elamite Persia and had now become the hub of the Achaemenid rule, remained untouched by the influence of the Zoroastrian religion. It is safe to argue than integration of pre-Zoroastrian Aryan religion, along with Zoroastrian inputs and heritage that was accepted from the Median era, in addition to the influences of local religions, formed the religious body of beliefs in this era¹ (Bayani, 2002). The most important point is that the Achaemenids accepted everything they had received as a religious heritage and made innovations in accordance with their social and political conditions as a measure to strengthen the foundation of their government. The Achaemenids, who inherited and observed the policy of religious tolerance of Cyrus the Great, honored the variety of religions within the empire, the result of which was the influence of the religions from a plethora of empires whose people enjoyed relative in the national religion of the Achaemenids. According to the royal inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings, the Achaemenids placed Ahura Mazda at the head of the gods and thus worshiped him. After Ahura Mazda, there were other deities who were considered hierarchically lower and each had a separate dynamism and various manifestations. These deities were the manifestations of the sun, moon, stars, water, wind, earth and fire. The word Izad (i.e. deity), which is equivalent to the modern god and is found in the Avesta, and refers to both Ahura Mazda and lower deities. Ahura Mazda had a superior position among these deities² (Gershevitch, 1968). Herodotus states that “Iranians sacrifice for the sun, moon, earth, water, wind and fire. These are the gods they sacrifice to.”³ Christensen believes that the ancient religion of the Aryans was based on the worship of the forces of nature and celestial matters⁴. The Greek philosopher Plato, who died in 347 BC, considered Zarathustra to be the founder of the Magi religion, which he believed was the best form of worship for the gods.⁵ In his inscriptions, Darius mentions deities of the imperial gods that, along with Ahura Mazda, are the guardians of the Persian kingdom. In several royal inscriptions, other gods are vaguely referred, but their names are not mentioned. It was Artaxerxes II of the Achaemenid dynasty, who finally mentions Anahita and Mithra along with Ahura Mazda. On the other hand, evidence has been found in Babylon that shows that indigenous belief systems were constantly influencing the royal family, and it is very likely that local priests cohabited with Iranian priests in the Achaemenid royal court, thus having mutual influence on the king and other courtiers. The worship of stars in the Mesopotamian religion is of paramount importance in relation to the Achaemenids. The people of Mesopotamia believed that each of the stars in the sky was a deity or a representation thereof. Because the sun and moon were considered brighter and larger than the others, the sun-god of Shamash and the moon-god of Sin were considered larger and more significant than the other gods⁶ (Javan, 2007: 183). The people of Mesopotamia believed that every human being has a god unique to him/her, and when he/she was disappointed in his/her wishes from the superior gods, resorted to his/her unique deity and asked him to mediate his/her wishes before the greater celestial gods. Each of the unique and personal gods was among the large and small stars in the sky, and perhaps the belief that everyone still has a star in the sky originated from this belief. Hence, the number of gods in Mesopotamia was as countless as the number of stars, and not only every city and every nation, but also every person had a god for himself in the sky where it resided. This is why they drew the star symbol above their inscriptions, and among the Chaldeans the term “El” and “Ilu” meant star, and it seems that the words Allah in Arabic and Elohim in the Torah all were derived from the aforementioned term. Some of the Most prominent deities of Assyria and Babylon were:

- Anu: the god of the sky;
- Assyria: the great god and lord of all gods;
- Bel or Enlil: the god of wind, air, earth, and storms;

¹ Shirin Bayani: *History of Ancient Iran, Volume 2, Tehran, Samat Publications, 2002, p 209*

² Ilya Garshevich: *History of Iran (Achaemenid Period), translated by Morteza Saghebfar, Tehran, Jami Publishing, 2005, p. 568*

³ Herodotus: *History of Herodotus, translated by Morteza Saqibfar, vol. I, Tehran, Asatir Publishing, 2010, p. 163*

⁴ Arthur Christensen: *Iran during the Sassanids, translated by Rashid Yasemi, Tehran, Sedaye Moaser, 1999, p.13*

⁵ Morteza Ravandi: *Social History of Iran, Volume I, Tehran, Negah Publishing, 2005, p. 496*

⁶ Musa Javan: *Social History of Ancient Iran, Tehran, Alam Publishing, 2007, p.183*

- Ea: ruler of the water depths;
- Ishtar: the god of the planet Venus, the goddess of war and fertility;
- Marduk: king of the gods, city-god of Babylon;
- Nabu: god who calls and warns and writes the destiny of human beings;
- Gibil: the god of fire;
- Shamash: the sun-god;
- Sin: the moon-god (Izadpanah, 2002: 143)⁷.

Ano was considered a great god who resided in the sky and his realm is guarded by two other deities and in front of him is a scepter and a crown of dominion (it is possible that the painting of the winged aura with a crown on top in the Assyrian and Achaemenid belief is originated from here). After the integration of Achaemenid Persians with the people of Mesopotamia, some Mesopotamian gods were gradually introduced to the realm of Persian beliefs and were thus honored and worshiped as deities. Examining the texts of the Avesta clearly indicated that these stars were worshiped in the religion of Zoroaster more than other religions of that period. One of the cases that shows the influence of Mesopotamian thoughts on the Achaemenids was the introduction of the goddess “Ishtar” of the Babylon and Assyria, the goddess of the Venus and the goddess of love and war. The evidence from the Achaemenid inscriptions reveal that, during the reign of Artaxerxes II of the Achaemenid dynasty, Anahita was worshiped alongside Ahura Mazda and a statue and temple were built for Anahita by his order. Anahita is the goddess of water and fertility. Western Iranians worshipped Ishtar as Anahitish who later became known as Anahita (Boyce, as cited by Bahrami, 2002)⁸. In addition to Mary Boyce, Arthur Christensen believes that Anahita is the very same Ishtar, as there were similarities in the type of worship between the two deities.⁹ Achaemenid Artaxerxes II erected statues of Venus in Babylon, Susa, Hamedan, Sard and Damascus. Obviously, such a belief could not have been explosively propagated all at once by Artaxerxes II unless it had already begun priorly, as the development of the Yasht 5 of Avesta, which is specific to Anahita, probably took place at this time. John Boyer Noss argues that “Among all the gods, Ishtar was worshiped by all, and since she was the deity of fertility, like the planet Venus, which was considered the queen of the heavens and the stars, her worship transcended Babylon and spread to the lands of Palestine and Egypt, and even the Zoroastrians could not resist him. After its introduction in Iran, its name was changed to Anahita, and was regarded as high as Ahura Mazda”¹⁰. According to Herodotus, the Persians had learned from the Assyrians to sacrifice before this heavenly goddess, whom the Greeks called “Aphrodite Anaites” or more simply “Anaites” (Book 1 - Paragraph 131, as cited by Saghebfar: 163)¹¹. Therefore, along this line of cultural influence, building statues and temples for the gods and also sacrificing before the gods was also practiced by Achaemenids originating from Mesopotamian beliefs, as Persian did not practice such deeds before Artaxerxes II. In this regard Herodotus argues that: “Iranians do not build statues for their gods, nor do they build temples and altars, as they consider such acts foolish.” (ibid: 162)¹²

Another influence of Mesopotamian beliefs on the Achaemenids can be traced to the fact that the Achaemenid kings always emphasized in their inscriptions that they gain their legitimacy from Ahura Mazda, and this is probably an act inspired from the kings of Babylon and Assyria in Mesopotamia, as Hammurabi attributes his reign to the will of the gods and states in his inscription that:

“At that time, Anu and Enlil commanded me, Hammurabi, His Majesty the Prince, the worshiper of the gods, to spread truth and righteousness in the country, to destroy evil, and to make the country bright and shining, and to bring happiness for my people.”¹³

Darius says in an inscription in the role of Rostam:

“As Ahura Mazda witnessed this land in turmoil, he bestowed it upon me, made me king. I am the king. Ahura Mazda wanted me to put it in its place.”¹⁴

⁷ Mehrdad Izadpanah: *Introduction to the Ancient Religions of Iran and Mesopotamia*, Tehran, Nashr-e Mohor, 2002, p. 143

⁸ Mary Boyce: *Zoroastrians, their beliefs and religious customs*, translated by Askar Bahrami, Tehran, Ghoghnoos Publishing, 2002, p.88

⁹ Arthur Christensen: *Mazdaism in Ancient Iran*, translated by Zabihullah Safa, Tehran, Hirman, 2003, p.80

¹⁰ John Bayer Noss: *Comprehensive History of Religions*, translated by Ali Asghar Hekmat, Tehran, Scientific and Cultural, 2002, p.66

¹¹ Herodotus: *History of Herodotus*, translated by Morteza Saqibfar, vol. I, Tehran, Asatir Publishing, 2010, p. 163

¹² Herodotus: *History of Herodotus*, translated by Morteza Saqibfar, vol. I, Tehran, Asatir Publishing, 2010, p. 163

¹³ Javan. M. (n.d.). *The social history of ancient Iran*, p. 176

¹⁴ Sharp, N. (2003). *Achaemenid imperial commandments*, Tehran, Pazineh Publishing, p. 87

Hammurabi has placed his code under the protection of the sun-god Shamash. Darius also introduces Ahura Mazda as the legislator and writes:

“O man! Ahura Mazda command should not seem disgusting to you. Do not leave the right path. Do not seek rebellion.”¹⁵

In the Achaemenid inscriptions, Ahura Mazda practically bestowed upon the king the power and wisdom to rule. It is implied from the inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings that the king considered himself the representative of Ahura Mazda on earth. The kingdom was a divine gift bestowed on the king by Ahura Mazda. Therefore, the Achaemenid emperor was the only excellence that was considered worthy of worship and praise on earth after Ahura Mazda. Inhabitants of Mesopotamia believed that the kingdom had a divine origin. According to the Sumerians, kingdom had descended from heaven to earth. Assyrians undoubtedly believed the same. From their point of view, the king was a superhuman being appointed only by the gods. The sanctity of the king, especially in the Assyrian paradigm, emerges through a supernatural and frightening sphere, which according to religious texts has been a characteristic of the gods. As in the time of the Sassanids, an aura was usually carved around the king's head and it was said that if the king lost the support of the gods, this aura would be taken away from him. According to the people of Mesopotamia, the gods were omnipotent and immortal beings, inhabiting the heavens and far from human reach, but in need of worship and sacrifice, which was the purpose of the creation of man. Thus, every city belonged to a god. The king was considered his viceroy on earth, whose most important duty was to build temples and to sacrifice and take lands and collect spoils to decorate temples and maintain the gods. Every war between two cities was considered a dispute between their gods, and whenever one of them prevailed, the statue of the defeated god would be taken to the city of the winner, as one of the gods of Babylon remained in Elam for about a thousand years.¹⁶ Mesopotamians believed that the king was the mediator between the gods and the people and the representative of the former in face of the latter. Therefore, it is likely that the fact that Achaemenid kings constantly pointing out that they derive their legitimacy from Ahura Mazda is influenced by this Mesopotamian belief. The Achaemenid king, as mentioned, was considered the viceroy of the gods on earth and the absolute power of the kingdom of was considered divine bestowment. In Babylon and after the integration of the Kassites, who adopted the local language, religion, and customs of the Babylon, the local Kassite deities were worshiped alongside the native Mesopotamian ones. during the Achaemenid reign, the Persian gods set foot in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates (i.e. the Mesopotamia). There is a wide range of Babylonian evidence from the reign of Artaxerxes I revealing that many people honored and worshiped gods from other lands, among which are Mithra, the Aramaic Shamash, the Jewish Yahweh, and the Egyptian Isis¹⁷. As a result of this coexistence of the gods, an integration of religions emerged. Achaemenid kings had great respect for religious affairs. Cyrus and Darius were proponents of religious toleration and freedom. The Achaemenids allowed the inhabitants of the areas under their command to follow their own religious beliefs and creeds, while they were also dedicated to the restoration and preservation of religious buildings and monuments. Although the Achaemenid kings worshiped their great god, Ahura Mazda, they also honored the gods of the defeated nations and sought to attract their blessings. Therefore, Persian kings respected not only the Persian deities but also the those of the Egyptian, Babylonian, and Greek cultures among others. Furthermore, it is noteworthy in the acquaintance and encounter between the Persians and the Jews of Babylon, various Zoroastrian beliefs found their way into Judaism. As we know, before the Achaemenids conquered Mesopotamia, the kings of Babylon transferred many Jew prisoners to Babylon. Parts of the Torah that formed after this encounter clearly indicate the influence of the Iranian religion. Belief in two separate realms, i.e. the world of good and the world of evil, the belief in heaven and hell, resurrection and judgement day were inspired from the Persian religion into Judaism and then to other religions¹⁸. Zoroastrian clerics were present along with the Persians living in Mesopotamia to address their religious needs. Therefore, many teachings of

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Izadpanah, M. (n.d.). *Introduction to ancient religions of Iran and Mesopotamia*, p. 119

¹⁷ Olmstead, A. (n.d.). *History of the Persian Empire*. Translated by Moghadam, M. (1993). Amirkabir publications, p 634

¹⁸ Ibrahimpour, D. (2001). *Anahita*. Tehran, Afrasyab Publications, p. 104; Christensen, A. (n.d.). *Iran during the Sassanids*, p. 21; Boyer Nass, J. (n.d.). *Religion of man*, p. 447

Zoroastrianism gradually spread throughout the area. One of the reasons for the influence of Persian beliefs on the beliefs of the Jews of Babylon was that the Persians were permissive and not strict in their religion and respected foreign religions, unless they were accompanied by threats of revolt against their patriotism.

Customs and Festivals

Nowruz and Sizdah Bedar (Nature's day)

Nowruz celebrations were common among the tribes living in Mesopotamia before the arrival of the Aryans in Iran, and it seems that the Persians inherited this custom from the inhabitants of this region. Many sources mentioned this celebration as to be that of the people of Mesopotamia. This large festival is depicted on the body of a tall, one-meter high marble cylindrical vase, retrieved from the ruins of a temple in Uruk¹⁹. According to the sources, this celebration was held for twelve days from the first of the month of Nisan, which coincides with the month of Farvardin, until the twelfth day, and it was also of paramount importance²⁰. Its formation is on the one hand rooted in the ancient beliefs and myths of the societies of that time, and on the other hand, derived from natural events and phenomena, performed with the purpose of being in harmony with nature. As previously implied, the gods of Mesopotamia were numerous, but after the rulership of Babylon over Mesopotamia, the gods of this land were overshadowed by the god of Babylon, Marduk. Marduk was the god of Babylon and the myths of creation were all attributed to him. These myths, which have Sumerian roots, were apparently inscribed during the Hammurabi era. Hammurabi sought to bring Marduk to the peak of greatness and was able to place him as the head of the gods. At his command, they transformed and distorted old stories and narrations and made a story as follows:

At the beginning of creation, Tiamat (the god of water) rebelled and warned the gods. Gods nominated Anu (the god of the sky) to destroy him, but he turned away from the battle. So Marduk ascended and saved the gods and defeated the Tiamat and set a boundary for the sea. He created man from clay to be a servant and to serve and to maintain the needs of the gods. Anu resigned from his greatness over the gods and his position reached Marduk, who became the king of the gods.

After that, every new year in Babylon, a great feast was commemorated in honor of Marduk. On the first day of the year, all the gods, led by Marduk, gathered at the temple of Esagila to celebrate Marduk's victory and to show legitimacy of the king by Marduk during a special ceremony and to forgive his sins and determine the fate of the year ahead. Meanwhile, the month of Nisan coincided with the beginning of spring (Aries) and the awakening of nature. The first days of Nisan were spent preparing and clearing the temples. On the fourth day, the whole myth of creation was recited before Marduk. On the fifth day, the statue of Nabu, Son of Marduk was brought to Babylon from Borsippa, and then the ceremony of the king gaining legitimacy from Marduk began. The great priest took the royal insignia from the king and struck him on the cheek, forcing him to kneel before Marduk and, while reciting the prayer, assured the god that he is not going to do anything wrong and enforces the law correctly. The great priest then assured the king that he had been favored by the god and returned the royal insignia to him, and struck him on the cheek a second time as a sign that the king's sins would be forgiven. On the eighth day, Marduk was placed in a ceremony of the gods, in which Marduk actually reigned. On the tenth day, they marched with Marduk to the New Year's Temple outside the city. On the eleventh day, the gods and the people pledged allegiance to Marduk again, which was also a demonstration of Marduk's victory, chosen by the other gods, and finally the feast was over on the twelfth day, and the gods were returned to their temples²¹. This ceremony was of special importance. As we have seen, it was a reminder of the victory and triumph of Marduk, the lord of the gods, a celebration of the beginning of the new year and the resurrection of nature, and an opportunity to renew the allegiance of the gods to Marduk and also an opportunity to renew the allegiance of the people to the king. Yet the most important feature of this ceremony was that the king, as the representative of the gods on earth, would maintain his legitimacy therein. The Achaemenids adapted the

¹⁹ Majidzadeh, Y. (2001). *History and civilization of mesopotamia, Volume III*. Tehran, University Press, p.18

²⁰ Steel, Ph. (2011). *History of Mesopotamian culture and civilization*, translated by Mohammad Sadegh Shariati, Tehran, Sabzan Publishing, p.87; Curtis, J. (2010). *Mesopotamia and Iran during the Achaemenid period*, translated by Zahra Basti, Samat, p.110

²¹ M.A.Dandamayev and E.Grantoskii : " the kingdom of Assyria and its relations with iran , Acta Iranica , 1987 , p36

general form of this New Year celebration from the Mesopotamians, while changing the content and details of the ceremony.

Sizdah Bedar (Nature's day)

There are some debatable points on the Sizdah Bedar (Nature's day) as well. As mentioned earlier, the people of Mesopotamia considered the stars of the sky to be gods, and following the integration of the Achaemenid Persians with the people of Mesopotamia, many of these stars were introduced into the realm of Zoroastrian beliefs, and hence were attributed unique hymns and Yashts. They were eventually worshipped as deities and were thus involved in managing the affairs of the universe. The star of Tir or Tishtrya in Avesta pertains to the god of rain. Similar deities also existed in other religions of the Old Testament. For example, there were two gods called the god of rivers and the god of waters among the Egyptians, both of whom were worshiped in times of drought. In Avesta, it has been repeatedly quoted that the source of water is located in the star of Tishtar. The eighth Yasht of Avesta is called Tishtar. The fourth month of the year and the thirteenth day of each month were named after this god, which were respectively called the Tir month and the Tir day²². Zoroastrian Iranians named each day of the month after one of the gods. For example, the first day was named Hormozd, and in the same way, the thirteenth day of the month was called Tir rooz (meaning day), which belonged to the rain-god. In fact, the naming of the days after the deities took place after the integration of Persians with the people of Mesopotamia was done and was not an imitation on their side. As such, various Yashts were authored in the Avesta for every day and every deity, which included prayers and supplications related to that deity. The eighth Yasht is dedicated to Tir or Tishtar and includes sentences in praise of the rain-god. Since rain and water were very important for the people engaged in farming of this region they worshiped and honored the rain-god in the arms of nature with the beginning of the new year, on the first day belonging to him – i.e. the 13th of Farvardin - in the hope they have a rainy year ahead. By studying chapters of the eighth Yasht of the Avesta (Tishtar Yasht), the philosophy behind this honoring is further clarified. In Tishtar Yasht, there is a fight between the land demon and the rain-god. Tishtar is the star of rain and the god of water and abundance, and Apaosha is the demon of drought that traps the waters and prevents Tishtar from working. Near the ocean, the land demon and the rain god engage in a fight which lasts three days. Tishtar was defeated and complains before Ahura Mazda that if people worshipped me and offered me blessings, I would have gained strength and overcame the demon of land. As such, Ahura Mazda grants him more power, enabling him to defeat the land demon. Consequently, he goes to the ocean and ripples the seas, and then rises the clouds and fogs and blows the south wind. He guides the clouds to the plains and sends down rains²³.

Mourning and burial ceremonies

Funeral rites and burials are important customs for comprehending ancient civilizations. These customs and traditions allow us to understand an aspect of the religious practices of the people and consequently part of their culture. According to Herodotus, after the death of Cassandane, the wife of Cyrus the Great, official mourning was declared (Book II, paragraph 1)²⁴. Darius II Ochus also declared some official mourning for his father Artaxerxes II. People shaved their heads in mourning. Members of the Persian army shaved their heads in mourning for Masitius, the great cavalry commander, and even cut off the hooves and tails of their horses and mules and began to mourn. Our only comparable evidence of burial and mourning rites from the Babylonian sources pertains to the Nabonidus Chronicle. The similarities in the description of the funerals for the members of the royal family of Babylon may allow us to use them as evidence to gain an overall image of the Persian mourning rituals. The Nabonidus Chronicle state that people shaved their heads to mourn the death of the king's wife, hence confirms Herodotus' claim about ancient rites, as in an earlier entry, he recorded the death of Nabonidus's mother, Addagoppe of Harran, in "Dur Kurashu." According to this chronology, Nabonidus and his army mourned for three days, after which the people mourned for a period. The funeral rites related to the death of the king's mother are

²² Ibrahimpur, D. (1998). *Yashts. Tehran, Asatir publications*, p.325

²³ *Ibid.*, p 232

²⁴ *History of Herodotus, translated by M. Saghebfar, Volumes I, p. 233*

described in more detail on the memorial stone installed by Nabonidus. There two copies of this tablet found in the city of Harran.

Examining these texts, Brucius argues that:

“According to this tablet, people took off their clothes and beat themselves during the mourning period. People who gathered from all over Babylon, sacrificed animals such as cattle and sheep as part of a mourning ceremony to honor the dead. In columns one and two of the text, it seems that the narrator of the text is the mother of the king, calling herself Nabonidus's mother, Addagoppe of Harran. In the text, the close relationship between Addagoppe and Nabonidus is often referred to by this phrase:

“Nabonidus, my only son, the child of my body”, which also later used by Nabonidus himself:

“Nabonidus, the king of Babylon, his son, came out of her belly”

While Addagoppe speaks of his and her son's religious faith in Sin, the god of the moon, Nabonidus celebrates her religious life by holding a proper funeral for his mother. According to this text, the routine was as follows: “Before the body was buried in a secret place, it was soaked in fragrant oils, dressed in precious clothes and adorned with precious stones. Preparations for the mourning began with the sacrifice of cattle and sheep in front of the tomb. The king and high-ranking officials from all over the empire gathered to take part in the mourning, which lasted seven days. People would pour ashes to mourn, take off their clothes and hit themselves. At the end of the mourning, the people shaved their heads and started returning to their homes after the king's blessings”. As such, the Achaemenids were also influenced by the Babylonian culture in their practice of mourning.

Other customs and traditions of the Persians

The Achaemenids also adopted other customs from the people of Mesopotamia. Raising the hand in the figures of the Achaemenid kings is an exhibition of respect and greetings, as the kings after Cyrus have also shown it in their figures. Similar methods of paying respect and homage are notable in Mesopotamia, especially in the figures of kings and nobles and even gods. When Xerxes sits on his bed next to his father at the ceremony, he raises his right hand with a bent elbow. With this move, the Crown Prince shows his respect similar to when Darius shows his respect to the symbol of God. Ahura Mazda, which is symbolically represented, greets the emperor in a similar fashion. It seems that raising the right hand was unique to the king and the crown prince. It is interesting that in the murals of Persepolis, there are only two groups of tribes that have done this, namely Assyrians and Babylonians²⁵. The two heads of the satrapy delegation walk to the throne, raising their right hand as a respect to the king. Walter Hinz says that the Persians celebrated good news by placing the branches and leaves of the plant on the way through the houses and burning fragrant substances²⁶. This custom was probably adopted also from the Babylonians because when Cyrus the Great entered Babylon triumphantly, as the Babylonian documents show, and also according to Herodotus, the people of Babylon greeted him by covering the streets with plant leaves and entering, and celebrated his entrance. During the Achaemenid Empire, it was customary for women to be involved in military campaigns. Cassandane, the wife of Cyrus the Great, died in Babylon, and evidence reveals that Cambyses was accompanied by at least one wife on the campaign of Egypt²⁷. During Xerxes' campaign of Greece in 480 BC, the Masitius family went to Sardis with the king's caravan and apparently stayed there until the king returned from Greece. Queen Damaspia accompanied her husband, Artaxerxes I, on a campaign, and her body was returned to Persia with that of the Artaxerxes himself in 425 BC²⁸. Evidence clearly indicates that the presence of Persian women in army transfers was normal. The question is to know to what extent it was customary in the armies of the Near East to bring courtly and noble women with them into campaigns, and from whom did the Persians learned this custom from. There is also evidence indicating that women accompanied the Babylonian army. The Babylonian chronicle states that the royal family gathered in Babylon alongside the Nabonidus army. This custom can also be considered to be derived from the Babylonians, although this evidence is inconclusive. The story of Cyrus' birth is also taken from a long story that can be traced back to the story

²⁵ Walther Hinz: *Cyrus and the Persian*, translated by Parviz Rajabi, Tehran, Mahi publishing, 2010, p. 381

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 392

²⁷ Maria Brucius: *Achaemenid women*, p. 122

²⁸ *Ibid.*

of Sargon of Akkad. Sargon states "My humble and miserable mother conceived me and gave birth to me in secret, and placed me in a basket of straw on the water and sealed it with bitumen."²⁹ This child was saved from death by a peasant, and later he became the cupbearer to king and became close to him and thus gained a lot of power and influence in the court, to the extent that he rebelled against the king and deposed him and sat on the throne of Akkad and announced himself the king of the world. Therefore, the background of this story can be found in Mesopotamia and it is clear that the story of the birth of Cyrus can also be attributed to this. Many people welcomed him and celebrated his arrival. Many Persian customs were adapted from the Medes, which were themselves adapted from the Assyrians.

Conclusion

Mesopotamian culture and civilization originated in the time of the Sumerians and Akkadians and reached its climax during the Assyrian and Babylonian eras. The Achaemenids inherited these ancient civilizations. Although the Achaemenid period is known as the period of harmonization of cultures and religions of different nations, it seems that the Babylonian culture, which was culturally fertilized by the Persians for several centuries before the conquest of Babylon, was not greatly influenced by other imperial cultures, and the cultural evolution that took place in Babylon during the Achaemenid period was related to its internal expansion and was not much influenced by the Persian Empire. The Achaemenids were influenced by Mesopotamian culture and thoughts in various fields. Religious beliefs and Mesopotamian gods infiltrated Achaemenid beliefs, and some of their gods were worshiped as deities among the Persians. The Persians also adopted various customs from the people of Mesopotamia, the effects of which can be evident to this day.

²⁹ Izadpanah, Mehrdad: *Introduction to ancient religions of Iran and Mesopotamia*, p. 107

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