

Академияи илмҳои Ҷумҳурии Тоҷикистон  
Институти забон ва адабиёти Рӯдакӣ

Эраҷ Баширӣ

Таъсири Миср дар  
тамаддуни Эрони бостон



Душанбе - 2007

**ББК**  
**Э -**

**Мухаррири масъул *Назарзода Сайфиддин***

**Китоб дар асоси қарори Шӯрои илмии Институти забон  
ва адабиёти Рӯдакӣ чоп мешавад.**

**Э - Эрач Баширӣ.  
Таъсири Миср дар тамаддуни Эрони бостон. -Душанбе:  
«Деваштич», 2007. ... сах.**

**ISBN**

---

**The Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan**  
**Rudaki Institute of Language and Literature**

# **The Impact of Egypt on Ancient Iran**

By  
**Dr. Iraj Bashiri**  
The University of Minnesota, U.S.A.

*Manuscript Editor*  
*Nazarzoda Sayfiddin*

Dushanbe  
2007

Copyright c 2007, by Iraj Bashiri

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form whatsoever, by photograph or mimeograph or any other means, by broadcast or transmission, by translation into any kind of language nor by recording electronically or otherwise, without the permission in writing from the author, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in critical articles and reviews.

## Foreword

I became acquainted with Dr. Iraj Bashiri in the summer of 2001 (1378 A. H.) when I served as our country's Cultural Attaché in Tajikistan. He was browsing the books in the Cultural Center's library. After we became acquainted, he told me that he is an Iranian, originally from Behbahan; but that he has lived most of his life in the United States and is a Professor at the University of Minnesota. That first recollection of him conjures up a special sense of tranquility and dignity about him. Of medium height with clear, hazel-colored eyes, and a wide forehead, he speaks with deference and eloquence. He is acquainted with the poetry of most modern Iranian poets, including myself. In fact, he has a collection of my published poems from which he has translated some of his favorite pieces. His website on Central Asia and Iran includes an exclusive page for Persian poetry on which he presents his translations of the works of Perso-Tajik poets.

I asked him, "What brings you to Tajikistan?" It turned out that he had come to Dushanbe at the invitation of the people of Tajikistan to participate in the anniversary of the republic's Independence. As I got to know him better, I learned that his commitment to Tajikistan had much deeper roots than I had imagined. He had been cooperating with the universities and the scientific centers of the republic since 1990. He has an honorary doctorate degree from Tajikistan State University and, along with Mr. Rafsanjani, has been elected academician and international member of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan--the only two Iranians so privileged in the world.

His infectious zeal for learning and teaching inspires respect. He has authored and published twelve books in such diverse fields as *Shahname* studies; Hafiz studies; Ancient Iranian history; Samanid history; appreciation of life, poetry and the time of Kamal Khujandi; understanding *Nowruz*; understanding Sadeq Hedayat, especially his *Blind Owl*; and recognition of the prominent figures in the literatures and cultures of Tajikistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. His account of the life and his analyses of the works of the world-renowned author Chingiz Aitmatov have opened a new vista for the West on the works of the Kyrgyz author. What made me respect him even more was that, in spite of over forty years of absence from Iran, he had remained dedicated to Persian culture, literature, and history. Even his accent has retained the nuances of his native Persian.

\* \* \*

The essay that you are about to read is yet another example of Dr. Bashiri's interest in the ancient history of Iran. In this brief essay, he casts a deep, exacting, and scientific look at some recent finds in Egypt that shed light on the inter-relationship between the civilizations of Iran and Egypt. And, as is his wont as a scholar, he has analyzed the facts without prejudice. Wherever the ancient civilization of Egypt proves more progressive, he acknowledges the superiority. The most important and thought-provoking aspect of the research is its latter part where Dr. Bashiri presents his assessment, an assessment that is at once innovative and groundbreaking. He clearly shows that after Iran's domination of Egypt was complete and Iranian Kings ruled Egypt, some of the Iranian monarchs were numbered among the great and beloved pharaohs of Egypt. They were accepted by the populace and were revered as sons of *Ra*. Also in this project, Dr. Bashiri finds certain resemblances among the tombs of the pharaohs in the

Valley of the Kings and the cliff tombs of Darius I and the other kings of Iran buried at *Naqsh-i Rostam* and *Pasargadae*.

The innovative and groundbreaking aspects mentioned above have their precedence in Dr. Bashiri's earlier works, especially in his structural analysis of *The Blind Owl* of Sadeq Hedayat. By relating *The Blind Owl* to its two essential sources, i.e., *The Buddha Karita* and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, he shows that in its deep structure, the story of *The Blind Owl* is based on the life of the Buddha, on man's unending desire to free himself from the Wheel of Life, and on man's utter disappointment when he discovers that he is condemned to yet another birth. This analysis, too, is groundbreaking and innovative.

\* \* \*

I have no doubt that this work will attract the attention of the talented and educated circles in Iran. In fact, before the publication of this book, I shared the results of Dr. Bashiri's research with Professor Baha al-Din Khurramshahi. He, too, found the work worthy of attention. Without much further ado, therefore, I turn your attention to Professor Bashiri's work entitled, "Which of the Achaemenian Kings of Iran have also been the Pharaohs of Egypt?"

**Dr. Sayyed Ali Musavi Garmarudi**

Bahman 10, 1385

January 30, 2007



## Preface

For many years, ancient Iran has been a part of my teaching and, similarly, an understanding of the relationship between Iran and the ancient world has constituted a considerable portion of my research. Recently, however, my views regarding these matters have changed significantly. One reason is that I have become better acquainted with Egyptology and with the pervasive influence of the concept of *ma'at* in the lives of the ancient Egyptians. The other is a better grasp of the role of *farr* in Iranian cosmology, mythology, and history.

While researching the topics covered in this volume, I kept two matters in mind; I would like to share those matters with the reader. The first concerns the physical resemblances that exist between some monuments in Egypt and the structures in the *Naqsh-i Rostam-Perspepolis* complex in southwestern Iran. My contention was that resemblances alone, no matter how remarkable they might be, would not be sufficient proof of the influence of one culture over the other, in this case of ancient Egypt over nomadic Persia.

The second reason concerns such concepts as the *farr* and *ma'at* that sustained the divine right of kings in both cultures. Upon analysis, it became apparent that those forces had the capability of prompting kings and pharaohs to undertake incredible tasks. Did not Darius I create the *Bisitun* to solidify his claim to the *farr* that glorified his rule? And did not Ramesses II build the *Abu Simbel* complex in Nubia to convince the temple priests and the people of Egypt that he was the strongest upholder

of *ma'at*? Stated differently, resemblances between buildings and temples must be corroborated by the abstract, spiritual beliefs that require their construction.

A concise version of the research in this volume was presented at a conference at the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan on September 7, 2006. Following the conference, Dr. Mamadsho Ilolov, the President of the Academy, and I discussed the feasibility of publishing the findings in a volume that would be accessible to English speakers, as well as to speakers of Tajiki, Farsi, and Russian. We agreed that the research should be published and he appointed Dr. Saifiddin Nazarzodah to assist me in the preparation of the manuscript to be submitted to the Academy.

In the preparation of the volume, I have benefited from the generosity of many colleagues and friends in the United States, Tajikistan, and Iran. In this brief introduction, I will be able to acknowledge the contributions of only a few of them. In Tajikistan, I would like to thank Dr. Ilolov for enabling me to make the results of my research accessible to a wide audience and Dr. Nazarzodah for his technical assistance while preparing the manuscript. Lola Hojiboeva transcribed the Persian texts into Cyrillic, and Zulfiyah Rahimova oversaw the publication process. I would like to thank both of them for their contributions. Similarly, I would like to thank Dr. Ulmas Mirsaidov, the former President of the Academy, and Professors Rahim Masov and Askarali Rajabov of the Institute of Archaeology and History of the Academy for their continuous support of my work in Tajikistan. In the United States, I would like to thank Maria Zavialova for editing the English text and for translating the summary provided by this author into Russian. Professor James Parente alerted me to the significance of the impact of Egypt on ancient Greek civilization, and Dr. Steven Rosenstone, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts of the University of Minnesota, encouraged me to carry on my main project on Faith and Reason

---

of which the present study is a part. Carol Bashiri formatted the texts, organized the illustrations, and prepared the camera-ready copy. She has contributed to and supported all my projects selflessly. I would like, also, to thank Dr. Charles Speaks and Barbara London for their interest and assistance at various stages of the project. In Iran, I would like to thank Dr. Sayyed Ali Garmarudi for editing the Persian texts and writing the "Foreword." He has supervised the publication of the Persian version of the study as a separate volume, and as an essay in the journal *Farhang* (Culture). For all those, and for his generous support of my research on Mullah Sadra Shirazi, I thank him profusely. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Baha al-Din Khurramshahi, whom I have not had the honor to meet, for his generous support of the project. I thank all of the above-mentioned, and many others, for their contributions and remain the sole person responsible for any shortcomings.

**Iraj Bashiri**  
Minneapolis  
February 2007



# Introduction

Nearly three thousand years before the birth of Christ, the first dynasty in Egypt came into existence. Over the subsequent centuries, dynastic rule became the fulcrum of law, order, and government not only in Egypt but also in world civilizations as a whole. By the end of the early dynastic period (c. BC 2700), the Egyptians had laid a solid foundation for government and devised ingenious methods for building a prosperous social, political, and economic future. It is important that those who study ancient civilizations, therefore, pay particular attention to this developmental phase of a civilization that precedes most ancient cultures. Indeed, some ancient cultures, like ancient cultures of Nubia and Persia, are understood best in this context.

Egyptians are among the first in the world to devise a writing system. In fact, they created two quite different writing systems, one for religious purposes and the other for everyday life. They were called sacred and common writing systems, respectively.<sup>1</sup> Egyptians were also among the first to establish schools, at their palaces to begin with, and in temples and educational institutions later on. Writing was done on clay tablets followed by writing on papyrus once their civilization became more advanced.

Like the peoples of Mesopotamia, the Egyptians were well versed in mathematics, astronomy, and medicine.<sup>2</sup> Egyptian

---

<sup>1</sup> Herodotus, 1942, p. 135; these languages are known today as hieroglyphic and demotic, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Ravandi, vol. 1, p. 104.

scientists, for instance, calculated the degree of the rise and fall of the Nile for taxation purposes and for building dams to retrieve land for cultivation.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, they used water for producing geometrically perfect level ground for the base of pyramids, as well as for moving and placing gigantic rocks in the construction of pyramids and temples. This is not to mention the accuracy with which they built pyramids and the dexterity with which they cut and raised obelisks.

The early pharaohs, like Snefru (BC 2613-2589), established standards for the arts. Once inaugurated, these standards remained in force for centuries. In fact, the main feature of ancient Egyptian artistic tradition was its unchangeable nature. For centuries, before the heretic pharaoh Akhenaton (BC 1350-1334) abolished the trend, Egyptian artists followed a choreographed tradition that had been sanctioned by the early Egyptian masters. Over the centuries, this tradition produced many artifacts including jewelry made out of turquoise, and statues made out of various types of stone. Altogether, in spite of a lack of innovation, the work of ancient Egyptian artists bespeaks a very high standard of workmanship. The value of this art was so high to the Egyptians that immediately following the Amarna experience when Akhenaton had passed on, the traditional standards in the arts were revived and perfected.

Ancient Egyptians were good architects. They used mud brick for building ordinary structures and stone for building pyramids and temples. A good example of ancient Egyptian workmanship is the pyramid of Khufu at Giza. It is not only the tallest but also the most perfect structure of its type. Neither is pyramid building the only major architectural feat in which they excelled. Ancient Egyptians also built some of the most impressive temple complexes of their time. The *Karnak* Temple at Luxor and the *Dair al-Bahri* complex contributed by Pharaoh Hatshepsut (BC

---

<sup>3</sup> Ravandi, vol. 1, pp. 189-190.

1498-1483) are examples of Egyptian masonry work. The *Abu Symbel* complex of Ramesses II (BC 1279-1212) is mostly carved out of the side, and the interior, of a mountain. In these tomb and temple complexes, the ancient Egyptians have left to posterity an enormous legacy pertaining to both the material and the spiritual aspects of their lives.

By the time of Tuthmosis I (BC 1524-1518) pyramid building had long come to an end. Tuthmosis I, therefore, opted to be buried in a cliff tomb. Thereafter, many pharaohs and dignitaries were entombed in cliff tombs, creating one of the largest tomb complexes in the ancient world. Today the treasures that have been discovered in the tombs of sixty-two rulers buried in the "Valley of the Kings" assist us in deciphering not only the life circumstances of the ancient Egyptians, but also in explaining some of the seemingly unexplainable aspects of the ancient cultures that came into contact with ancient Egypt. The culture of ancient Iran is one such culture.

After centuries of trial and error, the ancient Egyptians became very good administrators. From his capital, Amunhotep III (BC 1386-1349) governed a far-flung empire. He created a comprehensive cultural, political, and economic network among the powers of the time using two things. The first was small stone *scarabs* (clay tablets in the shape of beetles) for conveying information and carrying out negotiations whereby the inhabitants of the Kingdom and beyond were made aware of the pomp and glory of the court of Amunhotep III. The second was Nubian gold for acquiring the goods that his subjects needed. When Amunhotep III sat in audience, kings and dignitaries from around the world came to his festivities and paid homage. The visitors would parade before him, deposit the best that their land

produced—ivory, precious stones, fabrics, exotic animals and birds—and leave, glad to have taken a glimpse of the son of *Re*.<sup>4</sup>

Ancient Egyptians were good agriculturalists. Originally hunters and gatherers, they moved from the plains to the banks of the Nile and used the fertility of its soil to their advantage.<sup>5</sup> The main device they used for agriculture, other than the stone, wooden, and bone implements, was the *shaduf*, an ingenious method for raising water to high ground for cultivation. In fact, many of the implements prevalent in the Middle East as late as the early part of the twentieth century were either the same or similar to those used by the ancient Egyptians. About this, Stewart Anderson says, "On farms and in villages, in shops, shipyards and factories, today's Egyptians provide startling mirrors of Egypt's pharaonic past as captured by pharaonic artists."<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the most intriguing concept developed by the ancient Egyptians is that of *ma'at*.<sup>7</sup> A multifaceted concept, *ma'at* serves as the basis of life in this world and as a guarantor for resurrection in the next. At the heart of the concept of *ma'at* is the idea of the divine right to rule. The divine aspect enables the ruler to perform extraordinary feats such as provision of water in an arid land, creation of life force and growth in plants, and ability to resurrect the dead. A pharaoh who has been just, i.e., a pharaoh who has provided work for his people and who has not unbalanced the *status quo*, would be rewarded by becoming Osiris after his death. In his new position, the pharaoh would then help his subjects by creating prosperity for them while they lived, and by assisting them to resurrect after they died. The latter was the most crucial aspect of the lives of the ancient Egyptians. It defined their entire

---

<sup>4</sup> Further down, we shall discuss the relevance of Amunhotep III's court to the Persian *Nowruz* celebration at the court of Darius I the Great.

<sup>5</sup> Osimi, M. S. *Soviet Tajik Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, p. 429.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, 1983, pp. 24-32.

<sup>7</sup> Morenz, 1996, pp. 112-36.

*raison d'être* and made them perform any task that would bring the pharaoh closer to his duty of maintaining *ma'at* and, as a result, aid their own progress toward the attainment of resurrection. If the pharaoh were to fail in becoming Osiris, his kingdom and subjects would become doomed. Vulnerable to destruction and perdition, they would be wiped off the face of the earth without any prospect of rising from the dead.

The concept of *ma'at* was tied to the Egyptians' very purpose in life. Non-Egyptian rulers of the land, Nubians and Persians, for instance, had no alternative but to create an atmosphere in which their new subjects could live a purposeful life. This would not happen without these rulers' ability to prove to the Egyptians that the change of rulership did not affect *ma'at*. In other words, they had to assure their Egyptian subjects that Nubian and Persian pharaohs could be as divine as the Egyptian pharaohs and, thus, good candidates for becoming Osiris. The fact that the pharaoh of Egypt, after the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty, was officially recognized as the son of the Sun god *Re* was not sufficient to establish the legitimacy of the non-Egyptian pharaoh. He had to prove it himself.<sup>8</sup>

It is not possible, in a brief essay, to enumerate the contributions of the ancient Egyptians to the world cultures that followed. What I intend to do in this article is to cast a cursory look at the main achievements of the ancient Egyptians, especially those that impacted the cultures of ancient Nubia and Persia. This can be accomplished by showing how these rulers imitated the great deeds of the pharaohs in creating astounding structures, as well as by exploring their attempts at maintaining *ma'at*. The paper consists of an introduction, two main parts, and some concluding remarks. Part one examines the achievements of the Egyptians in building pyramids. It shows whether the maintenance of *ma'at* had anything to do with the building of some two hundred pyramids in

---

<sup>8</sup> Morenz, 1996, p. 73.

Nubia. Part two examines the impact of ancient Egyptian culture on Persia. The premise of this part is that early Achaemenian monarchs, especially Darius I, made a genuine effort to make Egypt an integral part of the Persian Empire. It will be shown as well that Darius I's immediate successors also tried their best to convince their Egyptian subjects that they were being ruled by divine pharaohs, pharaohs who would resurrect and bring about their resurrection as well. The concluding remarks summarize the contributions of the essay to a better understanding of the interaction between ancient Egypt and its conquerors, the ancient Nubians and the upstart Iranians.

## **Egypt and Nubia**

Early Egyptian rulers were buried in modest tombs in the sacred grounds of *Abydos*, in the south, where *Osiris* was buried, or they were buried in *Saqqara*, the abode of *Sokar*, the god of the dead. The Pharaoh Zoser (same as Djoser, BC 2686-2649) is regarded to be the first pharaoh to build a mortuary complex. Since Zoser's mortuary complex became the blue print for future mortuary complexes, even after the art of pyramid building gave way to the building of cliff tombs, it is important to explain what a mortuary complex is. At the heart of the complex is a pyramid or a cliff tomb that serves as the pharaoh's resting place. Depending on circumstances, this can be a spectacular structure like Khufu's pyramid or it can be a simple cliff tomb.

The mortuary temple, usually built in front of the tomb, is where the body of the deceased was prepared for burial. This, at times, could be a very large building (for instance Queen Hatshepsut's *Dair al-Bahri*) in which other functions took place. In general, however, the mortuary temple was a modest building

of one or two stories. The size of the building, however, did not increase or decrease its importance within the complex. (Figure 1: Pharaoh Zoser and Queen Hachepsut running in their *heb-sed* courts.)

The rejuvenation, or *heb-sed* court, was also part of the mortuary complex. This building was usually adjacent to the tomb but it could sometimes be placed at a distance from it. The function of the *heb-sed* court had to do with life more than with death. In fact, the *heb-sed* court was one of the most important buildings in the complex; it was here that the ability of the pharaoh to carry out his office as the maintainer and sustainer of *ma'at* and a savior of his people was tested. On the walls of the *heb-sed* court were depictions of such activities as running and javelin throwing. Always present in these pictures was the pharaoh's sandal-bearer. After every thirty years of rule, the pharaoh was required to appear in the *heb-sed* court and pass several tests of prowess and sagacity. (Figure 2: Zoser's Step Pyramid; Mortuary Temple in the foreground; *Hep-sed* court in the upper left-hand corner.)

Following the advice of Imhotep, his chief architect, Pharaoh Zoser abandoned the practice of building low *mastabah* burial tombs past rulers were partial to and opted for a tomb with multiple *mastabahs*, one on top of the other, each *mastabah* being smaller than the one below it. The refining of this structure led Snefru to the creation of the Red pyramid that followed the completion of his two unsatisfactory pyramids—the Maydum and the Bent Pyramids—at *Saqqara*. Before the age of pyramids came to a close, more than a hundred pyramids were built seven of which stand out. It is interesting to note that these seven pyramids not only reflect the state of *ma'at* in Egypt, but also show how *ma'at* was intertwined with the rise and fall of the Old kingdom.

During the period of the construction of the Maydum, Step, and Bent pyramids, the ancient Egyptians, in their longing for physical and spiritual perfection, experimented with various

methods of achieving it. At that time, *ma'at* moved the nation in the right direction. During the middle years of the Old Kingdom, when *ma'at* was at its zenith, wonderful things happened. The beauty and the majesty of the North pyramid, and indeed the Great pyramid, are indicative of the prosperity that the Egyptians enjoyed, both in their fields and at home. One could say that they, i.e., the pharaoh and the populace, spoke *ma'at* and acted *ma'at* and reaped its benefits in their fields and in their lives. The breakdown of *ma'at* at the end of the Old Kingdom threw the whole society into a tailspin. The consequences of the breakdown are evident in the building of the Second, but most prominently, the Third Pyramid at *Giza*.

Why did the ancient Egyptians build such massive structures as the pyramid of Khufu at *Giza*? There are several reasons. One is that they intended to keep the divine right of the pharaoh a secret. The divine right of the pharaoh, as you recall, was tied to *Osiris* and to resurrection. Knowledge about it had the potential of undermining *ma'at* on which the whole of the life and death cycle was built. The other reason is that they needed to preserve the body and the wealth of their deceased pharaoh so that he could make the journey through the underworld, be resurrected as *Osiris* and, in turn, resurrect them. This process required the mummification of the body, burial in several embellished coffins, and in a massive, sealed sarcophagus. Yet another reason was to keep the sarcophagus and the wealth of the pharaoh visible to the gods but hidden from the public. Fortunately, in this regard, gods like *Amun* and *Atum*, were imagined to inhabit the deepest recesses of temples and, indeed, of the universe. They could see everything without difficulty. As for the public, as long as *ma'at* was maintained they would not attempt to rob the tombs. But once *ma'at* was interrupted and bad times arrived, the tombs were the first to be entered and desecrated.

The nether region journey of the pharaoh was not an easy one to provide for. Pharaohs spent their entire life preparing for their

death. After death, the body had to be buried in a tomb chamber decorated with depictions reflecting the various stages of the pharaoh's life, his prowess, his accomplishments in war, and his ability to maintain *ma'at*. This chamber, during the age of the pyramids, was usually located in the heart of a pyramid and had an outlet for the *ka* of the pharaoh to ascend and join the underworld. The depictions provided specific direction for the sun god's journey through the underworld. Included in them were prayers for the various stages that the deceased traversed. Only when the pharaoh arrived at the abode of the gods, bedazzled the gods with the prosperity of his realm, and it was accepted that he had maintained *ma'at* would he become *Osiris*. Only then prosperity would continue in Egypt and the pharaoh's subjects would become *Osiris* after they died.

It is not the purpose of this essay to provide details about aspects of Egyptian burial practices. It is, however, the premise of the paper that traces of intercultural influences are significant for understanding later developments in these cultures, and that cultural traditions can be used by rulers for gaining legitimacy, as well as for establishing law and order among recently conquered populations. We shall demonstrate that the ancient Nubians and Persians employed one or the other of these measures to gain the hearts and minds of the Egyptians. Let us begin our study with the Nubians.

There are six cataracts on the Nile that served as the main natural barrier between Nubia and Egypt in ancient times. Once the Egyptians surmounted those barriers, the gate to the wealth of Nubia, especially its gold mines, was opened to them. The pharaoh Snefru invaded the south and brought back a great deal of booty including cattle and slaves. Over time, occasional raids changed to oppression and to exploitation, especially after the conquests of Senusret III (BC 1878-1841). At that time the Egyptian priests traveled south to study the cultural traditions of

the *Kushites*.<sup>9</sup> Wherever those traditions did not correspond to *ma'at*, they lectured the *Kushites* on the proper manner of handling their affairs. For instance, when the Egyptians saw that slaughtered animals were placed in burial chambers with the body of the deceased, they outlawed the practice. Tuthmosis I went as far as bringing the sons of the defeated chiefs to Egypt to be educated at the Egyptian court.

To further familiarize the Nubians with Egyptian culture, the pharaohs built temples to *Amun* and to themselves by the side of *Gebel Barkal* or Pure Mountain and assigned priests to familiarize the Nubians with such fundamental concepts as *ma'at*. For centuries the Nubians had no option but to accept their fate. The might of the pharaohs was too overwhelming to resist. The four statues of himself that Ramesses II had placed at *Abu Symbel*, in Nubia, and the depiction of Nubian slaves in chains beneath his feet, kept the Nubians from questioning Egyptian activities in their land.

The situation was reversed in the eighth century BC, when Egypt became weak and fragmented. Four independent rulers sat in Tanis, Leontopolis, Sais, and Hermopolis. The King of *Kush*, Piye (BC 747-716),<sup>10</sup> taking advantage of the fragmentation and lack of *ma'at* in Egypt, assembled the chiefs of his tribes, invaded the north, reestablished *ma'at*, and returned to his homeland.<sup>11</sup> While in Egypt, Piye celebrated the *Opet* festival, a clear indication that he felt quite at home at Thebes.

---

<sup>9</sup> In this study, the terms *Kush*, for Nubia, and *Kushite*, for Nubian are used interchangeably.

<sup>10</sup> Also referred to as Piankhi.

<sup>11</sup> In a way, one could argue, that in returning to his homeland, he was following the custom of the Egyptians. They, too, did not want their souls to be where their ancestors were not able to reach them and recognize them.

*Kushite* rule in Egypt did not last long; but during the ninety or so years of their rule the Nubians made Egypt a united kingdom again. In fact, the Nubian pharaohs built as many temples and monuments at Memphis, Thebes, and Abydos as they built in *Kush*. Traditionally, new dynasties would interfere with the religious affairs of a defeated nation. They would take away certain rights and dismiss key officials in charge of governmental and religious structures. Piye was different. He treated the Egyptians with respect. As for the four upstarts, he did not punish them. Rather, he appointed them as the new governors of the provinces they had dominated. To control the south, he appointed his sister, Amenirdis I, as the Adoratrice of *Amun* at *Karnak*.

Of the five *Kushite* pharaohs of Egypt, Taharqa (BC 690-664) is the most well known. He was crowned at Memphis and seated at Thebes. In emulation of Ramesses II, who had taken on the mighty Hittites, Taharqa confronted the Assyrian king, Senakherib, in Palestine, and defeated him. Like Ramesses II, he built many monuments all over Egypt and *Kush*. Of his portico kiosk at *Karnak*, that originally had comprised many massive columns, only one column, albeit an impressive one, remains.<sup>12</sup> Taharqa was also a pyramid builder. His pyramid, the largest (80 feet high) in Nubia, started a tradition in pyramid building that resulted in the construction of some two hundred pyramids built by kings, queens, and nobles of Nubia.

Nubian architects had no previous experience in building pyramids. It is interesting to note that rather than carrying the rocks up the structure one by one, or pulling up a ramp, the Nubians used the *shaduf* to raise them up to their desired height. Since the *shaduf* stays close to the base of a pyramid, the sides of the Nubian pyramids tended to be steeper than those of the Egyptian pyramids. Additionally, the building of the Nubian pyramids was not as shrouded in mystery as the building of the

---

<sup>12</sup> Clayton, p. 193.

Egyptian pyramids. There were no treasures placed in the Nubian pyramids. In fact, the Nubian pyramid was solid with no chambers or passage-ways inside it. (Figure 3: Nubian Funerary Chamber is located beneath the pyramid.)

Another difference is the entrance to the pyramid. The Egyptians hid the entrances to the pyramids very skillfully while for the Nubians the entrance was the most visible feature. The actual burial place of the Nubian pharaoh was carved out of the bedrock beneath the pyramid proper. The entrance to the funerary chamber is directly under the edge of the pyramid, but under the ground. To reach that entrance, however, one must descend a long underground staircase that is accessed through a flat door some distance from the pyramid.<sup>13</sup>

The decorations on the walls are not different from those in Egyptian tombs. They include the Nubian versions of the Egyptian deities. It is the funerary chamber, however, that displays the distinct features of the two cultures. Since the Nubians did not believe in an afterlife, in a Nubian funerary chamber there are no mummified bodies and, therefore, no sarcophagi. The reason for this is simple. Nubian rather than Egyptian ceremonies prevailed at events to which the general public was not invited. Traditionally the Nubians placed their dead on funerary beds. Here, too, the pharaoh was placed on a funerary bed; the rest of the rituals proceeded in the Nubian manner as well. There was no weighing of the heart of the pharaoh against the feather of the goddess Ma'at or any of the other rituals that preceded the mummification of the body of an Egyptian pharaoh.

Again, the purpose of this paper is not to study Nubian architecture or funerary processes, but rather to ask why the Nubians built two hundred small and large pyramids. Were the

---

<sup>13</sup> Grzymiski, p. 6.

pyramids built as status symbols, as some have explained, or were there other cultural, political, or social reasons involved? This question might not have a single answer, but it cannot be denied that the Nubian pharaohs were expected by the Egyptians and their own people to provide for their resurrection. Of course the populace had to see the rituals performed in front of their eyes to believe that the foreign pharaoh was not devoid of the power of *Osiris* to resurrect them. Clayton describes the impact of Egypt on Nubia in this way:

The Kushite kings wholeheartedly embraced almost all the old Egyptian burial customs—embalming, the provision of splendid carved stone *ushabtis* and other funerary accoutrements. They betrayed their Nubian origins, however, in the practice of laying the royal body on a bed in the tomb and, nearby, burying chariot horses standing in teams of four (for a quadriga) to accompany their master.<sup>14</sup>

The *Kushites* often employed the Egyptian hieroglyphic script to record their deeds on the walls of their temples and funerary chambers. In fact, it was with the aid of the Egyptian hieroglyphic script that scholars studying the *Kushite* language eventually deciphered the *Kushite* alphabet. To read and understand the *Kushite* texts properly, however, there is need for a Nubian Rosetta Stone to be uncovered.

Shabaka, King Piye's brother, tells us a story that goes to the very heart of the Nubians' understanding of the concept of *ma'at* and their concern that it had to be maintained. It also shows that the Nubians knew the Egyptian language and used it to their advantage.

Shabaka reports that when going through some documents in Egypt, he came across a very old text. Recognizing its value, and

---

<sup>14</sup> Clayton, p. 192.

the worm-eaten state in which it was, he had it copied into a rather large stele to be placed in the archives. Over the centuries, the stele became useless and was discarded. Then somebody gave the stone to a stonecutter who made it into a millstone for grinding wheat. In more recent times, the millstone was discovered and was recognized to be a stele. Fortunately, a good part of the writing, especially on the edges, was still intact because it was fashioned as an under, rather than as a round over millstone. (Figure 4: the Shabaka Stone)

Known as the Shabaka Stone, the content of the stele sheds light on the nature of the Egyptian god *Ptah* and points to a wonderful picture of a religion that is based on thought and which advocates the building of societal norms on the basis of abstract ideas dictated by the one god. Here is the theology that emerges from the Shabaka Stone, “*Ptah* thought the world then said it in words. His words brought the world into being.” This Memphite philosophical approach to creation (as we shall see further below) resonates in later Median and Judaic traditions. Shabaka and the Nubians as a whole recognized the fact that *ma'at*, more than anything, dealt with an orderly society, a society in which justice prevailed. And that was not possible without the creation of a harmonious working and living environment and without the promotion of the arts and the sciences, the craft of the priests of the time.

Although the Nubian pharaohs tried to convince the Egyptians that they respected *ma'at* and did all they could to maintain it, in reality they held to Nubian cultural mores. Recall that the greater part of the Egyptian pharaoh's time was spent on the preparation of his burial complex. The pyramid or cliff tomb safeguarded the body and wealth of the pharaoh. The mortuary temple created a setting where the pharaoh could be judged regarding his actions and whether he and Egypt were doomed or not. The *heb-sed* court assessed the pharaoh's fitness so that the priests could prevent any difficulty that the failure of the pharaoh

to resurrect would create for *ma'at*. All three components were vital for the maintenance of *ma'at*. Nubian pharaohs either ignored these essential requirements of *ma'at*, or did not understand them fully. Consequently, the Egyptians did not recognize the *Kushite* rulers as pharaohs who could bring about their resurrection.

## Egypt and Persia

From early times ancient Egypt was ruled by pharaohs who wore either a white or a red crown. The crown of Lower Egypt was red, that of Upper Egypt was white. The crown could be adorned with a *wajit* (cobra) symbolizing Lower, or with a *neket* (vulture) symbolizing Upper Egypt. (Figure 5: the red crown of Lower Egypt on the left; the white crown of Upper Egypt; the combined crowns)

The pharaoh of Upper and Lower Egypt could combine the symbols and adorn the single crown with both a *wajit* and a *neket* as shown on Tutankhamen's crown below. (Figure 6: Tutankhamun's crown combines the *wajit* and the *neket* as one symbol)

This, however, was not the extent of the use of headgear in ancient Egypt. The gods of ancient Egypt wore distinct crowns as deities, and often a modified form of a pharaoh's crown.

### *The Triple-atef Crown*

Although a discussion of divine and royal crowns is outside the purview of this article, there is one crown that demands our attention. It is called the *hemhem*, or the triple *atef* crown. The *atef*

is a simple crown worn by *Osiris*, the eldest son of *Nut*. It is the white crown decorated with two ostrich feathers. The *hemhem* is a pharaonic crown that combines three *atef* crowns. It is protected by two *uraeses* (cobras) at the bottom. They peak out from the two sides. The *hemhem* was first worn by the pharaoh Akhenaton and later on by Iuput (BC 754-715), one of the rulers who came to power during the transition from Libyan to Nubian rule. (More about the possible use of this crown by Iranian pharaohs of Egypt later.) (Figure 7: the *Atef* crown or the crown of Osiris on the left; the *Hemhem* or the Triple *Atef* crown)

Ancient Egyptians became familiar with the name of Cyrus the Great as the father of Cambyses III (BC 529-521), who conquered Egypt (BC 526) and became their first Iranian pharaoh. They revered Cyrus for his greatness but never wrote his name in a *cartouche* because he had never been the pharaoh of Egypt.<sup>15</sup> They wrote Cambyses's name in a *cartouche* and referred to him as *Mesutire* "Offspring of *Re*."<sup>16</sup>

The reasons for Cambyses III's invasion are not known. There are different opinions, three espoused by Herodotus for instance, that need not be discussed here.<sup>17</sup> Prior to the invasion, he had served his father for eight years as the governor of Babylon, acted as king while his father fought the Scythians in the east, and fought restive tribal chiefs after his father's death.<sup>18</sup> To assure that there would be no uprising while on his Egyptian campaign, according to Darius I, he murdered his brother, Bardiya,<sup>19</sup> and formed alliances with the Arabs who owned the wells in the Sinai desert. In Egypt, he fought the Egyptians valiantly before he entered Memphis and had the pharaoh of Egypt transferred to

---

<sup>15</sup> *Cartouche* is an oval encircling the name of a king or queen.

<sup>16</sup> Clayton, p. 198.

<sup>17</sup> Pirnia, vol. 2, p. 486.

<sup>18</sup> Ravandi, vol. 1, p. 387.

<sup>19</sup> Pirnia, vol. 2, p. 481.

Susa.<sup>20</sup> Then, using Thebes in the south as the center of operations, he dispatched an army of 50,000 men to capture the Oasis of Amon and he himself led the rest of his army to Ethiopia. He did not, however, see to the acquisition of necessary supplies. As a result, his expedition went very badly, so bad that his men were reduced to cannibalism. Of the force that was sent to Amon not a man returned.

Historical documents from Egypt indicate that initially Cambyses III treated the Egyptians with the same magnanimity that his father had treated the Babylonians. The Egyptians, too, reciprocated; they called him the pharaoh of United Egypt.<sup>21</sup> Cambyses III's goodwill, however, did not pass the test of time.<sup>22</sup> The apparent amity was brought to an end by the losses outlined above and his ignorance of Egyptian culture. For instance, when Cambyses III returned to Memphis, angry at the way his campaigns had fared, the Egyptians were celebrating the discovery of a new sacred *Apis* bull. He interpreted the festivity as the Egyptians' reaction to his double misfortune.<sup>23</sup> In retaliation, he stabbed the *Apis* bull, killed many of the Egyptian temple priests and a number of prominent Iranians, including his own sister. In addition, he desecrated temples and mocked the many ancient gods of the land. The rumor of his madness created chaos in the Iranian heartland, leading to the claim of a pretender to be the king's slain brother, Bardiya. It took Darius I seven years of constant warfare to bring all the unruly satraps into the fold.<sup>24</sup>

Cambyses III's stay in Egypt was short and violent. He showed no real appreciation of Egyptian culture. He even angered many of his own people, especially when he burned the mummy

---

<sup>20</sup> Ravandi, vol. 1, p. 387.

<sup>21</sup> Pirnia, vol. 3, pp. 568-572.

<sup>22</sup> Pirnia, vol. 2, pp. 502-505; Sami, 1970, p. 359.

<sup>23</sup> Pirnia, vol. 2, p. 497; Ravandi, vol. 1, p. 387.

<sup>24</sup> The Satrap system was originally introduced by Cyrus the Great.

of his archenemy the pharaoh Amazis.<sup>25</sup> The act not only deprived the pharaoh of his afterlife, but also contaminated the sacred fire that Zoroastrians revered. Before leaving Egypt, Cambyses III appointed Ariand (also Ariandes) as the governor of Egypt.<sup>26</sup>

During the excavations at Pasargadae, a stele was uncovered that depicted a ruler of Iran with a triple *hemhem* headgear. The headgear looks exactly like the one worn by Iuput, one of the restive rulers, who emerged in the north after the Libyan invasion, and claimed rulership. On the stele, Iuput is depicted emerging as *Horus* from the Lotus life source.<sup>27</sup>

For a long time the depiction on the stele was called "the Winged Genius."<sup>28</sup> Gradually the futility of the name caused it to be changed to "Cyrus the Great." Today both names are acceptable. However, there is a historical problem with the appellation. Cyrus never captured Egypt. He captured Babylon. He left the capture of Egypt for his son. Why should Cyrus be wearing a *hemhem* crown? (Figure 8: stele currently attributed to Cyrus the Great or to the winged genius)

The figure wearing a triple *Atef* crown, I believe, is that of Cambyses III, the conqueror of Egypt. He became the first Iranian pharaoh of Egypt and as such the first Iranian eligible to wear the *hemhem* crown. His life, difficult and tragic as it was, ended in Egbatana in present-day Syria either at his own hand or of an uncertain malady (c. BC 521). He was buried in Pasargadae.

It could be that when Cambyses III was in Egypt, in preparation for his homecoming as the conqueror of the two lands of Egypt, he ordered a stele depicting himself with the triple *atef* crown to be made and shipped to Persia. When he died on the way

---

<sup>25</sup> Pirnia, vol. 6, p. 1528.

<sup>26</sup> Pirnia, vol. 3, p. 563.

<sup>27</sup> Clayton, 2001, p. 189.

<sup>28</sup> Cf., Ghirshman, 1964, p. 129.

and there was no celebration in which the stele could be used, it lost its original purpose (cf., the Shabaka Stone).

From the depictions of Darius I on the walls of Persepolis and elsewhere, it is apparent that he preferred the nomadic headgear of the Persians.<sup>29</sup> His son Xerxes I, and his grandsons, too, followed his tradition of wearing the nomadic headgear of the Persians. The stele, therefore, did not participate in any other ceremonies.

Two thousand five hundred years later, when the archeologists discovered it, Cambyses III's conquest of Egypt was no longer in the memory of either the Iranians or the scholars working with ancient Persia. The only king who was known, and of whom the Persians were proud, was Cyrus the Great. It was appropriate, therefore, to name the stele Cyrus the Great. At the present, when a vast amount of information is available on Egypt and Persia, however, it is not only reasonable, but imperative, to revisit the stele for yet another name change. Compare the headgear of Iuput (BC 754-715) with that of Cambyses III (ruled Egypt BC 526-521), below. (Figure 9: Pharaoh Cambyses III on the left; Iuput)

## The Two Distinct Worlds of Darius I

### 1. *King of Kings of Iran*

Darius I the Great ruled for thirty-five years (BC 521-486). He was born in BC 550, most likely in the eastern provinces of greater Iran. Upon the mysterious death of Cambyses III, he rushed from Egypt to the Persian heartland and, aided by a party

---

<sup>29</sup> Regarding the nomadic background of the Persians, Herodotus says, "Now the Persian nation is made up of many tribes. Those which Cyrus assembled and persuaded to revolt against the Medes were the principal ones on which all of the others are dependent." See, Herodotus, 1942, p. 71.

of six noblemen, eliminated the pretender, Gaumata, and assumed the rulership of the newly formed Empire of the Medes and the Persians.<sup>30</sup> He was twenty-eight years old. In Egypt, he had commanded the Immortals<sup>31</sup> and had served as the king's spear bearer and bodyguard.

While Cyrus the Great and his son Cambyses III both carried the divine right (*farr*) to rule, Darius was not so endowed. His claim to the Achaemenian throne, therefore, needed divine sanction. To gain Ahura Mazda's benevolence and the support of the Persian people, he fought nineteen battles in one year. A bas-relief, commemorating his efforts for the unification of Iran, speaks for itself. "Saith Darius the King: 'This is what I did by the favor of Ahura Mazda in one and the same year after that I became king. XIX battles I fought; by the favor of Ahura Mazda I smote them and took prisoner IX kings...'"<sup>32</sup> Additionally, to further establish his legitimacy, Darius married Cyrus the Great's daughter, Attosa.

After Elam, Media, Assyria, Parthia, Margiana, and Scythia joined Persia and formed the Persian Empire, Darius's stance changed from consolidator to expansionist. To the east he captured the Indus valley and pushed the Scythians as far back as Sughdia. To the west, he crossed the Bosphorus and the Danube, pursuing fleeing Scythians deep into European territory. He then concentrated his energy on administration. He knew that through efficient administration he could provide a successful defense for the Eastern borders of his empire and that a good and just administration would produce a grateful citizenry. The latter, he

---

<sup>30</sup> Pirnia, vol. 3, p. 627.

<sup>31</sup> The personal bodyguard of the monarch whose number was maintained at ten thousand.

<sup>32</sup> Kent, 1953, p. 131; In his Bisutun inscription, Darius I states that Egypt was among the lands that turned against him but, according to Pirnia (vol. 3, p. 540), this might not have been the case

thought, was instrumental not only in gathering a good military force but in providing necessary supplies for it as well. In BC 517, when he heard that Ariand, the governor of Egypt who had been appointed by Cambyses III, had been maltreating the populace, he had him put to death.<sup>33</sup>

Following Cyrus's lead Darius allowed his subjects to retain their languages, religions, and cultures. He also reformed the tax system so that the farmers paid a tax relative to the yield of their land rather than a fixed amount. He introduced a coinage, *darik*,<sup>34</sup> and banking, and he improved agriculture by building *qanats*<sup>35</sup> and canals, and instituted a system of wages for the various tasks requiring hired labor.<sup>36</sup>

In BC 499, the Ionians set fire to the city of Sardis in Asia Minor (Anatolia). This attack, in addition to several Greek uprisings in Persian-held domains, convinced Darius that the time had come to curb the excesses of the Greek city-states. The Greek and Persian armies met at Marathon in BC 490. Darius's army, commanded by Mardonius and Datis, could not withstand the joined forces of the Greek city-states. Accepting defeat, Darius returned to Persia. Before he died at Persepolis in BC 486, at the age of sixty-four, Darius I chose Xerxes, his son by Attosa, to succeed him.<sup>37</sup> At the time, the country had been defeated by Greece and Egypt was in revolt.<sup>38</sup>

Darius I was born in BC 549. He became the King of Kings of Persia and the Pharaoh of Egypt in BC 521. He was twenty-eight

---

<sup>33</sup> Pirnia, vol. 3, p. 566.

<sup>34</sup> *Darik* was a gold coin (89% gold), named after Darius I, who encouraged the establishment of a banking system in the empire.

<sup>35</sup> Underground conduits for carrying water along vast stretches of the desert.

<sup>36</sup> For details, see Sami, 1970, pp. 4-10.

<sup>37</sup> Pirnia, vol. 3, p.687.

<sup>38</sup> Ravandi, vol. 1, p. 392.

years old at that time. According to Herodotus, when he was twenty years old, Cyrus the Great accused him of plotting against him. Darius's father, Hystaspes (also Vishtasp or Vishtaspa), assured Cyrus that his son would never undertake such an act of treason and warned Darius of the danger.<sup>39</sup> Herodotus also provides a glimpse of Darius in Egypt. A young Greek, Syloson, made a gift to young Darius of a robe to which Darius had taken a fancy. Later on, at Susa, Syloson introduced himself as a benefactor of the king and asked Darius to reward him for his kindness in Egypt with giving him Samos.<sup>40</sup>

During the reign of Cambyses III (BC 530-522), Darius served as the king's bodyguard. After the Bardiya (same as Smerdis and Gaumata, BC 522) incident, as mentioned, Darius fought nineteen battles and subjugated nine kings.<sup>41</sup> In BC 517, he returned to Egypt and showed a great deal of interest in Egyptian culture.<sup>42</sup> In fact, he tried very hard to create an understanding between the people of the ancient kingdom of Egypt and his own newly formed semi-nomadic people. The Egyptians obliged by helping him realize some of his dreams, among them the possibility of acquiring immortality.<sup>43</sup>

What did Darius I's Iranian background teach him about immortality and what did he learn from the temple priests in Egypt? For us to understand Darius's complex world, it is necessary to probe deeply into the value systems of both those worlds and discover points of similarity on which Darius and his advisors might have drawn to make the government of Darius I's vast empire not only possible but also successful. There is no

---

<sup>39</sup> Herodotus, p. 112-13.

<sup>40</sup> Herodotus, p. 280.

<sup>41</sup> Ravandi, vol. 1, p. 390.

<sup>42</sup> Ravandi, vol. 1, p. 520.

<sup>43</sup> Pirnia, vol. 4, p. 1132.

doubt that Darius intended to fuse the two worlds together rather than impose the values of one on the other. About imposition of values, Ravandi says, "Cyrus [III] and Darius [I] never tried to impose their tribal customs on others. They knew very well that Babylon and Egypt were superior in culture to them."<sup>44</sup>

The Suez Canal Stele, written in Old Persian, Elamite, and Assyrian on one side and Egyptian on the other, very clearly illustrates the two worlds of Darius. On the Persian side, he is the King of Kings of Iran and the deputy of Ahura Mazda on earth. On the Egyptian side, he is the son of *Nut* and the pharaoh of Egypt. Except for the name Darius, it would be impossible to know that the stele is describing the same person. The Iranian side reads as follows:

Section 1 ... A great god is Ahura Mazda who created the yonder sky, who created this earth, who created man, who bestowed myrth to human, who made Darius king, who enabled Darius to become the king of a country that is big and which has good horses and good men.

Section 2 ... I am Darius, the great king, king of kings, king of a land populated by many different races, king of this large land and beyond, son of Vishtasp, the Achaemenian.

Section 3. ... Saith Darius the King: I am a Persian; from Persia I seized Egypt; I gave order to dig this canal from a river by name Nile which flows in Egypt, to the sea which goes from Persia. Afterward this canal was dug thus as I had ordered, and ships went from Egypt through this canal to Persia thus as was my desire.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Ravandi, vol. 1, p. 408.

<sup>45</sup> Kent, 1953, p. 147.

The side in ancient Egyptian treats Darius (Antaryush) as a pharaoh with scant reference to his Persian identity and rulership:

Antaryush (Darius), who is the offspring of *Nut*,<sup>46</sup> accomplished all that the gods had started... Master of all, who encompasses the face of the sun, when he was still in his mother's womb and had not descended to earth, *Nut* called him her own son... commanded him... stretched her arm that carried the bow in his direction to annihilate his enemies, as she had done for her own son, *Re*... he is magnificent. He eliminates his enemies in all lands. Antaryush, the king of Lower and Upper Egypt, is immortal. Great king, son of the Achaemenian Vishtaspa. He is the son of *Nut*. He is magnanimous and world conquering. All in foreign lands bring gifts to him and manage his affairs...<sup>47</sup>

From this point on, the stele is damaged and the text is unreadable. On ancient steles, usually the same text is written in several languages. The Rosetta Stone, for instance, is in Greek, as well as in two Egyptian writing systems: Demotic and Hieroglyphic. By reading the Greek, the reader will have a good sense of what the Egyptian says and can amend the shortcomings of one text by supplying the information from the other.

The Suez Canal stele does not allow that, pointing to the fact that Darius was talking to two different audiences, using the language of each to relate to that particular audience. In other words, he wanted to be the King of Kings to the Iranians and the Pharaoh to the Egyptians in such a manner that each people felt absolutely convinced that he was their king or pharaoh, as the case was. Needless to say that these were two awe-inspiring positions,

---

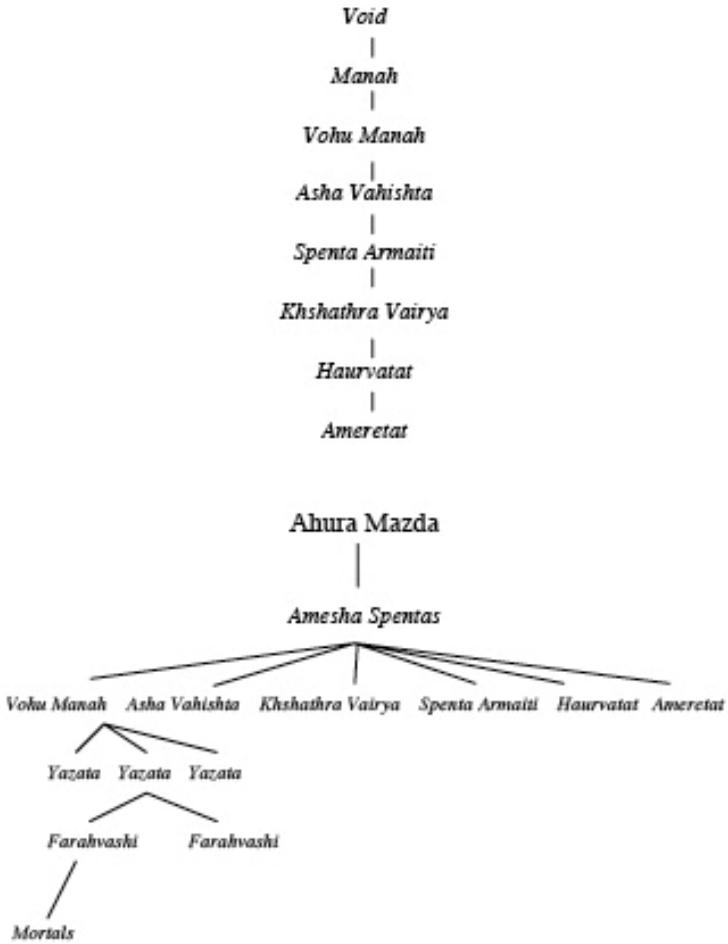
<sup>46</sup> According to the Egyptians, *Nut* (*Nit* in the Persian translation) was the mother of all Egyptian gods. Pirnia, vol. 3, p. 570.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

each with its own particular worldview and set of responsibilities. It was important for Darius, therefore, to understand the profound concerns of each and relate to those concerns to the best of his ability. The *mu'bad*s and the temple priests facilitated this understanding for Darius by showing him how the Iranian Ahuric Order and the Egyptian concept of *ma'at* could be combined to bring Persia untold prosperity.

### ***The Iranian Creation Story***

The Iranian creation story consists of two parts: cosmogony, the story of how the gods were created, and cosmology, the story of how the cosmos and therein our universe and life came into existence. According to the *Great Bundahishn*, a thought seed, *Manah*, emerged from the Void or Abyss and was confronted with a choice between *Vohu* (good) and *Aka* (evil). *Manah* chose *Vohu* and became *Vohu Manah* or the good thought or spirit. *Vohu Manah* then gave rise to *Asha Vahishta* (righteousness) that, in turn, gave rise to *Spenta Armaiti* (beneficent devotion) in charge of the earth. The combined powers of *Vohu Manah*, *Asha Vahishta*, and *Spenta Armaiti* created *Khshathra Vairya*, a benevolent society that sought *Haurvatat* (perfection), leading to *Ameretat* (immortality). In later Iranian theology, these deities were collectively called the *Amesha Spentas* (holy immortals) and appeared as aspects of the chief god Ahura Mazda. The *Spentas* organized Ahura Mazda's world with the help of the *Yazatas* (lower gods) who were in touch with the *farahvashis* (souls of the faithful). The Iranian view of the hierarchy according to which the gods operate is summarized below:



Configuration of Iranian Deities

Iranian cosmology is conceived in two successive stages. One is without interference of *Aka Manah* or evil and the other includes evil. The world that is created while evil is absent, begins

with the creation of the sky out of shining metal. It arches over the rest of creation. Water is created out of the substance of the sky and earth out of water. Similarly, earth gives rise to plants, plants to the sacred white bull and the sacred white bull to the first man. This world, in the second phase, is shattered by the intrusion of evil and all its residents are eliminated. Only the seed of the first man goes to the moon, is purified by the sun and returns to earth in the form of a rhubarb plant with two stocks attached to each other at the stem. As brother-sister/ husband-wife, *Mashiya* (male) and *Mashiyanah*, they produce the races of man.

Although at the time of creation all humans were equal, as their numbers grew, the deity decided to introduce the same hierarchy that governed the lower gods into his creation. Thus, choosing *farr* as the distinguishing factor, he bestowed its strongest degree to *Gayomart*, whom he chose as his deputy on earth. The rest of the people then fell below *Gayomart* into some degree of *farr*. To enable *Gayomart* to rule justly, he, and he alone, was given the power to learn the ways of divine rulership to implement it on earth. This ability, too, was included in the *farr*. As a result of the possession of *farr* by a mortal ruler, the will of the creator flowed into his creation and bestowed prosperity to all. If a ruler proved to be incompetent (cf., Jamshid), the *farr* was withdrawn and reinvested in one who was capable. During the time when the *farr* was withdrawn and not given to a new king, evil reigned (cf., the absence of *ma'at*).

## 2. *The Pharaoh of Egypt*

### *The Egyptian Creation Story*

Now that we are familiar with Darius's Iranian worldview, let us review what he could have learned from the Egyptian temple priests about their beliefs. According to one Egyptian creation myth, in the beginning there was the *Ogdoad* or Chaos. Everything was formless, even the gods. In fact, formlessness itself had its own god (*Hok*) and goddess (*Hoket*), as did moistness whose god and goddess were called *Kuk* and *Kuket*, respectively. The deepest and the most hidden aspect of the *Ogdoad* was hiddenness represented by the most well known of the eight gods, *Amun*, and his consort *Amunet*. The abode of the *Ogdoad* is the primordial waters ruled by the god *Nun* and his consort *Nunet*.

At some point, in this chaotic, primordial sea a new god appeared, a hidden god called *Atum*. Married to *Mat*, *Atum* set out to create a world that was substantially different from the world of the *Ogdoad*. He decided to bring order out of chaos. And he intended to do that all by himself. As a creator god, he created a mound called *Benben*; he then stood atop the *Benben* and, either by spitting or by masturbation, released the creating life force into the sea of *Nun*. This act extracted air and moisture from *Nun* and made them visible. *Atum* then assigned these two new elements to his children *Shu* (male) and *Tefnut* to control. As a part of the generative creative process, *Tefnut* gave rise to *Geb* (male) and *Nut*. Following the same process, they were given the control of the earth and the sky, respectively. In the depiction of Egyptian deities, *Nut* appeared as a woman whose body arched across the sky. She wore a dress decorated with stars. *Geb* appeared as a man with a goose on his head lying down below the arch of the sky goddess *Nut*.

Let us stop for a moment and assess what *Atum* had achieved. Like *Amun*, *Atum* was a hidden deity. But unlike *Amun*, he favored visibility and order. He took the fundamental elements for life from the *Ogdoad*, made them functional and gave them to members of his family to organize and control. The most important of these elements for Egypt were water and land. This was not to downplay the significance of air without the existence of which water and land were useless, or the sky that eventually embodied the entire creation.

In ancient Egypt, water was the most valued commodity. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Nile determined the prosperity and demise of Egypt on an annual basis. It was because of water that land became fertile and it was with the help of air that it brought about vegetation and animals.

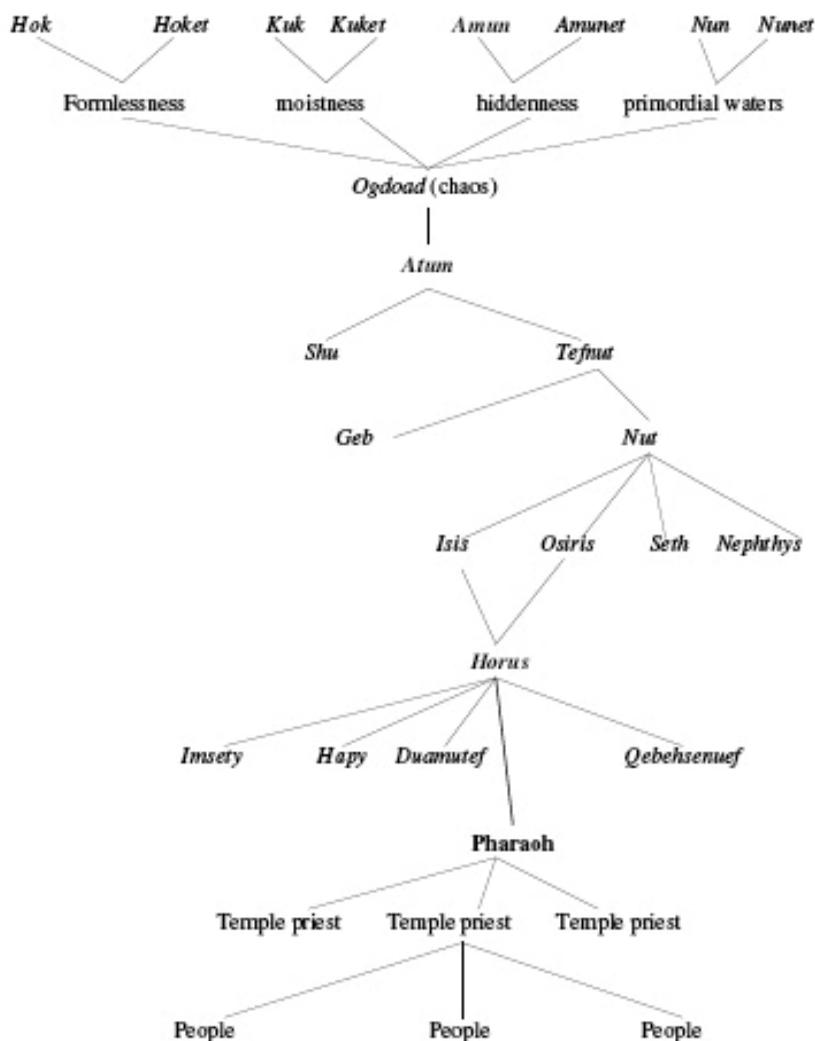
Returning to the creation story, the world that *Atum* carved out of Chaos and gave his children and grandchildren to govern had the germ of life, as we know it, within it. For the life force to be freed and to convert *Atum's* elemental world into a purposeful world, there was need for a catalyst. The children of *Geb* and *Nut* served as that catalyst. Called *Isis*, *Osiris*, *Seth*, and *Nephthys*, these children, who are also referred to as the "political" gods, interacted with each other and infused life into *Atum's* elemental kingdom.

Of the four, *Osiris* was the builder. He intended to civilize not only Egypt, but also the entire world. His brother *Seth* was the destroyer. He killed *Osiris*, cut him into pieces, and scattered the pieces throughout the land of Egypt. *Isis* was the perfectionist and the immortalizer. She gathered the pieces of her brother/husband and put him back together. Most importantly, she brought *Osiris* back to the world of the living.

With the perfection and the immortality that *Isis* contributed, the world of *Atum* became complete. All it needed was a god who would take this perfect and immortal world, translate it into human terms, and make it run. The task fell on *Horus*, the son of

*Isis* and *Osiris*. He was given the responsibility of connecting the world of *Atum*, represented by *Osiris*, to the world of human beings. *Horus* chose the most accomplished among the humans and revealed the secret of good rulership, *ma'at*, to him. Known as the pharaoh, this individual became responsible not only for the lives of his people when they lived, but also for their resurrection in the afterlife. He did this by praying to *Atum*, maintaining *ma'at*, and serving as an example of prowess, sagacity, and above all, justice.

*Horus* and the pharaoh each played two crucial roles. *Horus*, the falcon god, was all deity. Through his father, *Osiris*, he was experienced in maintaining perfect *ma'at*. He also had a human aspect through which he connected to life on the earth plain and with the pharaoh. The pharaoh, on the other hand, was all-human and of the world of the humans. In spite of being a powerful human, he also had a divine aspect that connected him to *Horus* and thereby to the world of the gods. This connection enabled him to see things and do things that ordinary people were incapable of seeing and doing.



The gods of ancient Egypt

Darius I tried very hard to bring these two worlds—the world of Ahura Mazda and the world of Atum—together. On his monuments and in his words we see Ahura Mazda as the most prominent force in his life. Serving as a model, he tried to show his Iranian subjects that they could provide prosperity here below and spiritual fulfillment in the hereafter for themselves as long as they stayed truthful to their religion and to their king. Abundant literature already exists regarding the prosperity that Darius I brought to Iran during his thirty-five years of his rule; therefore, we shall not dwell on that aspect of his rule.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, he spoke to his Egyptian subjects in their own language. Like the pharaohs before him, he undertook superhuman tasks, like rehabilitating the canal built by Necho (BC 610-595), as a consequence of which Egyptian trade was expanded as far as Gibraltar and India.<sup>49</sup> He also ordered the building of roads, such as the “Royal Road,” and the construction of a temple at the *Khargah* Oasis and by repairing others at *Busiris* and *el-Kab*.<sup>50</sup> His Egyptian and Iranian subjects, each in their own world, contributed to the building of those roads and monuments and, consequently contributed to the grandeur of the Empire.

Darius cared deeply for the well being of ordinary Iranians and Egyptians. He made sure that the *Farahvashis* of his Iranian subjects connected correctly with appropriate *Yazatas* and *Spentas* and filled the spirit of his people with the blessing of Ahura Mazda. He also made sure that his Egyptian subjects did not lose their connection with *Horus* and that their trust in his, and their own resurrection, remained steadfast. He made sure that they participated in building a mortuary complex and practiced *ma'at* by speaking *ma'at* and acting *ma'at*. In other words, he realized that his own lifelong activity as the pharaoh was pivotal to the

---

<sup>48</sup> See, Dodson, 2000, p. 196; Bashiri, 1988, pp. 598-602.

<sup>49</sup> Cf., Herodotus, 1942, pp. 197-98.

<sup>50</sup> Cf., Clayton, 2001, p. 199.

outcome of the resurrection of his Egyptian subjects. The remainder of this article, therefore, will be devoted to showing that Darius I tried very hard to prove to the ordinary Egyptians that their opportunity to resurrect had in no way been diminished by his not having been born in Egypt.

## **Darius I's Mortuary Complex and Its Relationship to *Ma'at***

It was mentioned earlier that the Nubians, by building symbolic pyramids, tried to convince the ordinary Egyptians that they were doing their best to maintain *ma'at*. We also demonstrated that maintaining *ma'at* was not so much in the building projects that a pharaoh undertook but in what those structures stood for, especially in terms of rituals and prayers, and in relation to their overall impact on the lives of the pharaoh and his subjects. In other words, the acceptance of the pharaoh at the court of *Osiris* and his resurrection had immense consequences for himself and his subjects. The pharaoh who neglected the building of pyramids, or the other required buildings, courted doom for himself as well as for all those who relied on him for their resurrection.

Normally, when we think about Egypt, we think about the pyramids and cliff tombs, monuments that we recognize as the most impressive and lasting from the era of the great pharaohs. But in reality pyramids and cliff tombs are not as important as some of the less visible but required structures in a mortuary complex. The pyramid and the cliff tomb assured all those who worried about the safety of the pharaoh while he traveled in the underworld that no physical harm would come to his body or his wealth before he presented himself to *Osiris* and the other gods.

What is of paramount importance to understand is that it was not so much the safety of the pharaoh that was on the mind of the Egyptian commoner who toiled on a pyramid or a cliff tomb, but the surety of his own resurrection that was tied to the resurrection of the pharaoh. To the Egyptian mind, therefore, the pyramid or the cliff tomb was a requirement in the same way that it was a requirement for the pharaoh to be buried in one.

The next building of significance was the mortuary temple. This, as we have seen, could be a very large complex or a small, two-story building. In any event, the part of the building that was used as the mortuary was always a very mysterious building, an enigma to the outsider. No one but those involved in the burial ceremony were allowed to enter that part of the building. Its walls were usually solid and burning torches lit the interior. The significance of the mortuary temple rested in the fact that in it the heart of the pharaoh was weighed against the feather that the goddess Ma'at wore on her head. (Figure 10: the feather of the goddess Ma'at)

If the pharaoh had been just, he kept his heart; otherwise a monster devoured it. A pharaoh whose heart was not weighed against the feather of Ma'at—that would typically be a non-Egyptian pharaoh who had ignored building a mortuary temple and thus had not undergone the trial—was not able to travel in the underworld unharmed; rather, he faced great difficulties and perished. As we know, the subjects of such a pharaoh, too, perished both physically and spiritually. They died physically because the Nile would not bless them with water and they died spiritually because the subjects of a pharaoh who did not measure up to the standards of Ma'at were not blessed with *Osiris's* assistance to resurrect. In short, even though they did not know exactly what went on in the mortuary temple, the existence of one was enough assurance to the ordinary Egyptian that the pharaoh was on the right path to *Osiris* and that *Osiris* favored them.

The third and last of the three structures that had lasting significance in the life and death struggle of the ancient Egyptians was the rejuvenation or *heb-sed* court. This was where the pharaoh trained his body and mind. The depictions on the walls of the *heb-sed* court showed the pharaoh jogging or throwing a javelin. He or she performed all that was necessary to keep a healthy body and a sharp mind.

The *heb-sed* court was also where, every thirty years, the pharaoh demonstrated to the satisfaction of the temple priests that he was physically and mentally capable of maintaining *ma'at* and gaining resurrection for himself and his subjects. Since this was probably the most important part of the complex, its building began early in the pharaoh's rule and its walls reflected the gradual progress of the pharaoh towards resurrection. The presence of his sandal bearer at his side at all events showed that no other officials were present to help the pharaoh in carrying out the required exercises. (We shall speak about these structures and their relation to ancient Iran further below.)

As is evident from the discussion above, *ma'at* was a “contract” between the ruler and the ruled, a contract in which the two ends of the continuum of power met and engaged in specific activities that would achieve a common goal. The role of the pharaoh was to usher in divine inspiration, implement divine rules, and create a just society, a society that would be worthy of being resurrected. The role of the subjects was to carry out whatever tasks were necessary to enable the pharaoh to resurrect. In our example, the Nubians either did not pay attention to this subtle but profound spiritual bond between the pharaoh and his subjects, or did not believe in its efficacy. In any event, they paid a great deal of attention to the formal aspect of *ma'at*, i.e., creation of an orderly society. But they did not bother with the substantive aspect of *ma'at*, such as weighing the heart, mummification, and undergoing tests of prowess and sagacity.

This material is written on the premise that, unlike his Nubian predecessors, Darius I did pay special attention to *ma'at* as a mainstay of ancient Egyptian culture. It suggests that Darius I respected the maintenance of *ma'at* to strengthen the spiritual life of Egypt in the same way that he followed the dictates of *farr* to strengthen his divine bond with the people of Iran. Doubtless, in order to achieve such a lofty goal, he had to ignore some of his Iranian mores and learn a great deal about mundane and spiritual rules governing ancient Egyptian life. He also learned that the best way to achieve his goal was to create a *modus vivendi* with the Iranian *mu'bad*s and the Egyptian temple priests. His *Naqsh-i Rostam*-Persepolis mortuary complex is indicative of his profound understanding of the role of *farr* in Iranian society, and the role of *ma'at* in Egyptian society. Even if one were not aware at all of the synthesis of Iranian and Egyptian beliefs in the building of the complex, one would still be filled with awe upon viewing it. Richard N. Frye articulates that awe in the following:

Persepolis was virtually unknown to the Greeks before Alexander's conquests. The tombs of the later Achaemenid kings are hewn from the mountain behind the palace complex while Darius, Xerxes and two other kings are buried at Naqsh-i Rostam in the vicinity. From the Old Persian inscriptions and the Elamite clay tablets found at Persepolis it seems that this remarkable complex of palaces was not used for any governmental activities, or for the reception of foreign envoys. Nor was it a religious centre, for no temples or cult buildings have been excavated. Yet the ruins of Persepolis today proclaim it as a wonder of the ancient world. The countless tall columns which once stood in the halls must have been exceptionally impressive, especially to the visitor approaching the platform on which the buildings were erected from across the plain now called Marv-i dasht. The pillars and square buildings were the glory of Achaemenian

architecture, the former more slender than Greek prototypes, and adorned with bull capitals.<sup>51</sup>

Frye then goes on to explain the purpose for which such a complex might have been created:

What was this impressive group of buildings on the plain of the tombs of the kings? One may speculate that the site was sacred or taboo to ordinary people, or that some event in the life of Darius made this area of special importance for him. ... Perhaps the whole area was a kind of national sanctuary where the religious archives or the fire of the king were preserved in the building at Naqsh-e Rostam called Ka'bah of Zoroaster. Perhaps Persepolis and vicinity played a role only for the New Year's festival, or solemn acts of the crowning or burial of kings. We do not know whether one or all of these surmises was true, but we can say that Persepolis, or Parsa, as it is called in the Elamite tablets, did have a special significance for the Achaemenid kings and for Persians.<sup>52</sup>

Historians and archeologists, who have worked the ancient Iranian sites and analyzed ancient Iranian materials, have generally viewed the ancient Iranian scene and the development of the ancient Iranian culture along the same lines as Frye. This view, although well documented, has certain flaws. It is an isolationist view that ignores ancient Iran's vast network of international relations, and it ignores the Iranian Shah's spectrum of responsibilities that went beyond Susa and Persepolis. The Shah had to see to the well being of a diverse population in a multinational empire. This statement is not to find fault with Frye, who is one of the most insightful scholars in Iranian studies, but to

---

<sup>51</sup> Frye, 1966, p. 126.

<sup>52</sup> Frye, 1966, pp. 126-27.

point out that since the early days of archaeology and history, many studies have appeared that shed light on the culture of ancient Egypt. These studies must be accommodated so that we can acquire a better understanding of the Iranians' relationship with ancient Egyptian culture in a thorough and coherent way. In fact, as we see throughout this article, many of the ethical, artistic, and administrative accomplishments of the Persians can be traced to influences coming into the nomadic Persian culture of early Iran from the ancient Egyptian culture. The nomadic culture of the Persians could not resist the superior ancient Egyptian culture that had come under its sway. In fact, some of those traits have, over the centuries, become established Iranian cultural mores.

In what follows, we shall view Darius I as the pharaoh of Egypt.<sup>53</sup> This requires that we allow pharaoh Darius to emerge as the ruler that the Egyptian temple priests envisaged him to be. In other words, we should allow ourselves to view Darius as pharaoh with the same reverence that we envisage him as the most beloved of the King of Kings of Iran. This approach would not only add an important dimension to our understanding of the dynamics of early Iranian history, but it also might have implications for eastern Mediterranean studies, as well as for a better grasp of the relationship between Greece and Egypt in antiquity.<sup>54</sup>

Over the centuries, the land of Egypt had consisted of Lower Egypt, Upper Egypt, Lower and Upper Egypt combined, as well as greater Egypt comprising Nubia, Libya, Syria, and parts of Mesopotamia. An extension of Egypt to encompass Persia, therefore, was not an unusual thing for Egyptian administrators to accomplish. In fact, even though Egypt was conquered and ruled by the Hyksos, the Libyans, the Nubians, and the Persians, in the

---

<sup>53</sup> For Darius as the King of Kings of Iran, see Bashiri, 1988, pp. 598-604.

<sup>54</sup> Cf., Herodotus, 1942, p. 142.

eyes of the Egyptian temple priests, it was always Egypt that ruled those lands, albeit an Egypt that had lost its *ma'at*, a weak Egypt. This statement is supported by the section of the Suez Canal stele that is written in Egyptian and the manner in which the temple priests have identified the land ruled by Darius, the offspring of *Nut*. In other words, they considered Iran to be a satrapy of Egypt with the same authority that the *mu'bads* regarded Egypt to be a satrapy of Iran. The dexterity of Darius in administering his empire rested in the fact that he compromised with both of those very influential groups.

Reaching a compromise with the priests was not difficult in that even in *ma'at*-related issues the priests were likely to make compromises. For instance, according to *ma'at*, the ruler of Egypt must always be a man. Nevertheless, there were Egyptian female pharaohs, like Hatshepsut, who ruled with a firm hand and left a legacy as rich as any of the men pharaohs of Egypt. The priests were also fickle. They sided with the whims of the ruler of the time. For instance, they agreed with Tuthmosis III and erased every mention of Hatshepsut after she passed on. The same treatment was extended to Akhenaton who went against the *ma'at* and to the Hyksos.

Darius I, if he were to survive as pharaoh of Egypt, especially if he wanted to be enumerated as a great ruler on the wall of the Hall of Records,<sup>55</sup> he had to make similar compromises. Just ponder the wording on the Egyptian side of the Suez Canal stele. It is clear that Darius felt quite comfortable being referred to as the son of *Nut*. That is perhaps why the Egyptians loved him as their divine ruler, called him *Setutre* (Likeness of *Re*), and wrote his name in a *cartouche*. No other Achaemenian monarchs who ruled Egypt, except for Cambyses III who was called *Mesutire* (Offspring of *Re*), were given such divine names.<sup>56</sup> Under the

---

<sup>55</sup> For Hall of Ancestors or Hall of Records, see Clayton, pp. 12-13.

<sup>56</sup> Clayton, pp. 198-201.

prevailing social, political, and religious circumstances, Darius seems to have come up with a marvelous compromise regarding where the capital of the Empire would be. With the approval of the Egyptian priests the capital was to be in the Iranian part of the Empire, and with the approval of the Iranian *mu'bad*s, a mortuary complex for the pharaoh would be built in Zoroastrian Iran. The creation of the required atmosphere for the execution of the plan was the responsibility of the *mu'bad*s and the priests.

Once it was established for the temple priests and the Iranian *mu'bad*s that the King of Kings wished to rule the lands captured by Cyrus and Cambyses as one nation, and once the debate over the location of the capital in the country was settled, the next steps in the process could be undertaken. The tomb, of course, could be a pyramid, a cliff tomb, or a gabled tomb like the one built for Cyrus the Great. After the King of Kings and Pharaoh chose the form; the temple priests and the *mu'bad*s compromised on its location, appropriate design for the interior of the funerary chamber, as well as the *heb-sed* court.

Iranians are an Indo-European people. Their pre-Achaemenian rulers who had left tombs in the region were the Medes. The next logical step in designing a royal tomb, therefore, was to study the Median tombs that existed and create designs that would speak to Egyptians and Iranians alike. The early tombs on the plateau were “gable-roof” tombs. Two slabs of large heavy stone were placed such that they formed a gable, reminiscent of an Indo-European house. Gable-roof tombs at Sialk and the tomb of Cyrus the Great are examples. (Figure 11: Median rock tomb on the left; Median ossuary)

The Medes, on the other hand, used rock tombs that had their genesis in ossuaries dug into the face of the bedrock. The front of the ossuary was decorated with several concentric squares carved into the rock surrounding the entrance. The figure of a god or of the person buried in the ossuary was depicted in front or above the entrance. The individual depicted stood in the posture of

adoration.<sup>57</sup> In addition to the ossuaries, there were also some impressive cliff tombs. The front of the rock tombs looks like a porch with simulated columns carved out of the rock, on both sides of the entrance.<sup>58</sup> There were no impediments devised to prevent entrance to the tombs. The tomb of Darius, and the tombs of the other Achaemenians buried at *Naqsh-i Rostam*, synthesize the features of the ossuaries and the cliff tombs with features from mortuary temples in the Egyptian Valley of the Kings. This actually is expected from an emperor who wants to create a vast homogenous empire for his family to rule.<sup>59</sup> (Figure 12: the tomb of Darius I the Great)

Like the tomb of Tuthmosis I, the tomb of Darius I was built high above the ground. In fact, like the cliff-tomb of Tuthmosis I, the rock face beneath the entrance was chiseled off to prevent any reentry. The façade of the tomb resembled the Median rock tombs, including the porch with simulated columns carved out of the bedrock. Outside the entrance, the king is depicted paying homage to the sacred fire. Beyond the porch, the carved concentric squares of the ossuaries are reshaped into a stylized form of the goddess Ma'at, as she sits in front of the tomb she guards.<sup>60</sup> Today that design is interpreted as either a "cross" or a

---

<sup>57</sup> Ghirshman, 1964, pp. 130-133.

<sup>58</sup> Ghirshman, 1964, p. 85-90.

<sup>59</sup> About the Iranians' readiness to adopt new things, Herodotus says, "There is no nation which so readily adopts foreign customs as the Persians. Thus, they have taken the dress of the Medes, considering it superior to their own; and in war they wear the Egyptian breastplate." See, Herodotus, 1942, p. 76.

<sup>60</sup> Ma'at was the daughter of the sun god *Re*. Darius was the Likeness of *Re*. Ma'at's image appears on sarcophagi as a young girl with wings that are outstretched. The most prominent depiction of her as the guardian of the tomb is at the entrance to the tomb of Queen Nefretari. She sits there with a feather in her hair and with her arms outstretched waiting for the queen's resurrection.

"plus," neither of which makes any sense, especially as decoration for the tomb of one of the greatest monarchs of Iran and Iranian-born pharaohs of Egypt. (Figure 13: the depiction of the goddess Ma'at above the entrance to the tomb of Queen Nefretary) Interestingly enough the same shape can be interpreted also as a stylized form of the Persian deity Ahura Mazda (*Faruhar*), that hovers over the lands that Darius regarded as his.<sup>61</sup>

Only after all these details were agreed upon, construction on the tomb of Darius I began. Although Darius I's tomb is the most prominent at *Naqsh-e Rostam* it is the tomb of Xerxes that is executed the best. Actually, the tombs of the Achaemenians, like the pyramids and cliff tombs of the Egyptian pharaohs, are unmarked. We recognize them on the basis of the depictions and the texts that appear on them as a part of their decoration. It is unlikely that the pharaoh Cambyses III received a similar Egyptian burial at Pasargadae. There exists the remnant of what could have been a mortuary temple for him. The remnant of a tomb, almost completely destroyed, that might have looked like the tomb of Cyrus the Great is also attributed to Cambyses III.

The difficulty, however, was not so much the design and execution of the tomb, but the substantiation of the necessity for building one. Did Darius I, a Zoroastrian, need a tomb? Zoroastrians exposed the body of the deceased in a *dakhma* high up on a mountaintop. There the birds of prey and elements took care of the rest. A tomb usually housed a mummified body. The body was prepared for burial in a mortuary temple adjacent to the tomb and was placed in a sarcophagus in the funerary chamber in a pyramid or a cliff tomb. How were these very different practices to be reconciled? How were rituals to be performed for the same

---

<sup>61</sup> Like pharaohs Narmer and Ramesses II, Darius, too, had images that depicted him as a vanquisher of evil foes. These, however, can be found in other places such as at Behistun. See, Ghirshman, 1964, pp. 234-237.

person at the same time and keep both the Persians and the Egyptians spiritually fulfilled?

As long as keeping the affair secret was concerned, there was no problem. The Egyptian priests were masters at that.<sup>62</sup> Recall that ordinarily the Egyptian pharaohs had two tombs. One was usually at Memphis, the administrative center of the realm, and the other one at the religious center of *Abydos*, where *Osiris* was buried, or at *Saqqara*, the abode of *Sokar*, the god of the dead.<sup>63</sup> Often the pharaoh was buried in both places, whereby one tomb served as the pharaoh's real resting place and the other as a cenotaph. In ancient times nobody knew which tomb was the pharaoh's resting place and which was a cenotaph.

Is it possible that the *mu'bad*s and the Egyptian priests agreed to have two—an Egyptian and a Zoroastrian—funerals for Darius I? In that case, at the time of his death, he would have needed both a tomb and a mortuary temple attached to it. According to this scenario, the priests would perform the rituals in the mortuary temple. This exercise would have been futile, of course, if there was no *heb-sed* court to launch the record of the good and bad deeds of the pharaoh.

The body then would be taken into the funerary chamber in the cliff tomb and placed in a sarcophagus. From there the *mu'bad*s would take the body and, according to Zoroastrian rites, expose it in a *dakhma*. Would Darius I allow his body to undergo those rituals? We do not know. But we know that the pharaohs before him underwent these rituals as a routine part of their royal obligation. Besides, Darius I was always mindful of the feelings of the old lady on the banks of the Nile whose entire hope for resurrection was tied to the activities of her pharaoh. Even if for her sake, Darius would have agreed to undergo the ritual.

---

<sup>62</sup> See, Herodotus, 1942, p. 125.

<sup>63</sup> Brier, 1999, p. 20.

Additionally, the interior of Darius I's tomb, too, testifies to the fact that during his rule, hope for resurrection had been a part of the belief system of some Achaemenians. Not many people have seen the interior of Darius's tomb. However Olmstead, who had entered it, describes the interior in some detail. The existence of a number of sarcophagi in the funerary chamber is the most telling evidence about Egyptian burial activities taking place at *Naqsh-i Rostam*:

The low door in the center leads into the now desecrated tomb chamber. Within are four niches sunk into the rock, each containing three massive sarcophagi intended for Darius and the more favored members of his family.<sup>64</sup>

Sami, too, sheds some light on this. He describes some artifacts found at Persepolis. These include statues of Egyptian deities, agate *Horus* eyes, Hieroglyphic writing on the remains of an Egyptian statue, and artifacts carrying the names of the Egyptian pharaohs Necho, Psamtik, and Amasis. The most interesting item on the list of funereal artifacts is "pieces of cylinder vessels made of lapis-lazuli and used in religious rituals." Could these be canopic jars?<sup>65</sup>

As mentioned, every Egyptian tomb complex had a mortuary temple. The mortuary temple could be large and expansive, or it could be a modest building. For instance, *Ka'ba-i Zardusht* could have been a mortuary temple by itself or, like the entrance to the mortuary temple of Ramesses III (BC 1182-1151), the entrance to the temple. When the *mu'bad*s and the priests worked out a scheme for the mortuary temple in the predominantly Zoroastrian

---

<sup>64</sup> Olmstead, p. 229.

<sup>65</sup> Sami, 1970, p. 290. Canopic jars are four jars used to hold the internal organs removed at the time of mummification.

land of Iran of the time, they were not worried as much about the size as they were about its appearance. On that, too, they had to arrive at a compromise. The form of the temple had to conform to the shape of a *chartaq* (lit., four arches) of the type under which Zoroastrian fire ceremonies were performed. And, in order for the *chartaq* to be used as a mortuary temple, they agreed that, rather than open on all sides, all the walls would be closed in the manner of Egyptian mortuary temples.<sup>66</sup> There would be no writing or depictions of any type on the solid walls. Little did they know that insisting that the mortuary temple be a closed *chartaq* provided a reason for posterity to describe the building as a Zoroastrian structure albeit nondescript.<sup>67</sup>

The building we are referring to is the one standing directly in front of the tomb of Darius I. It is a square tower usually referred to as *Ka'ba-i Zardusht* (Zoroaster's Cube). A similar building is also found in Pasargadae but it is not as well preserved. Probably *Ka'ba-i Zardusht* was preserved better because, until it was unearthed in more recent times, most of it was covered by sand.<sup>68</sup> Regarding this structure, Wilber says the following:

In front of the tomb of Darius are traces of mud-brick wall that probably enclosed a sacred precinct. Within this enclosure stands the so-called *Ka'ba-i-Zardusht*, or Shrine of Zarathushtra, a replica of the much less well-preserved *Zandan-i-Sulayman*, or Prison of Sulayman, at Pasargadae. There is no general agreement as to the purpose of the two structures. They may have been tombs, temples, or religious archives. If tombs, they would have housed the remains of the predecessors of Darius and of Cyrus. If they were fire

---

<sup>66</sup> For the use of *chartaq* as Zoroastrian fire temple, see, Ghirshman, 1962, p. 150.

<sup>67</sup> Sami, p. 44.; Wilber, 1989, p. 107; Pirnia, vol. 6, p. 1601

<sup>68</sup> For a detailed description, see Ghirshman, 1964, p. 227.

temples, their plans are ill-suited to contain the eternal flame.<sup>69</sup>

In view of Wilber's correct identification that the structure could not have been a tomb or a fire temple, as well as the discussion of the cliff tombs of the Achaemenians, especially the sarcophagi in Darius I's funerary chamber, and Darius I's interest in the afterlife, it is possible to assume that the building under discussion could have been a modest mortuary temple modeled on the mortuary temple of Ramesses III.<sup>70</sup> (Figure 14: Compare the cube attributed to Zoroaster, on the left, with the entrance to the mortuary temple of Ramesses III)

There is a difference, but it can be easily accounted for. The mortuary temple of Ramesses III has Egyptian figures and texts carved on its façade. The Iranian version is quite simple. There are some Middle Persian Sassanian writings and some Greek text but nothing from the time of Darius or immediately thereafter. Besides, this was a building that went out of use with the demise of the Achaemenians, possibly the early Achaemenians. After the relationship between Iran and Egypt deteriorated and was no longer the same as under the early Achaemenians, the building became obsolete and forgotten.<sup>71</sup> Its falling out of use might account for the fact that the structure was swallowed by sand and not rescued by the faithful. Additionally, as it was discussed in the context of the cliff tombs themselves, it is not clear whether these structures were built for actual, practical use; or whether they were mere cenotaphs and the mortuary temple a prerequisite for the authenticity of the ritual (cf., Nubian burial practices outlined

---

<sup>69</sup> Wilber, 1989, p. 107.

<sup>70</sup> For Ramesses III's mortuary temple, see Clayton, 1994, P. 162.

<sup>71</sup> For Xerxes I's treatment of the Egyptian priests, see Dodson 2000, p. 196. See also Bashiri, 1988, pp. 2364-2369, for an account of Xerxes I's life and achievements.

earlier). (Figure 15: the remains of a building currently referred to as the prison of Sulayman)

The only unresolved issue would be why a similar structure should be found in Pasargadae as well. I have already discussed the role of Cambyses III as the first Iranian pharaoh of United Egypt. A mortuary temple could have been built for him at Pasargadae. This mortuary temple might have never been completed or, unlike the mortuary temple of Darius, it was not well protected. Our discussion here, of course, is not concerned with the mortuary complex in Pasargadae. But if we recall our discussion regarding the duty of the priests which included the building of mortuary temples as early as possible during the reign of a pharaoh, it follows that after five years as pharaoh, Cambyses III might have had some structure in which to be buried. We also need to consider the fact that the *Marvdasht* plain presented a better site, especially with regard to the mountainside used for the tombs of the first four monarchs of the line of Hystaspes, than Pasargadae. That and the green *Marvdasht* plain persuaded the *mu'bad*s and the temple priests to give preference to *Marvdasht* over Pasargadae.

With the tomb and the mortuary temple in place, the *Mu'bad*s and the priests had to accommodate just one last structure: the pharaoh's *heb-sed* court. As you recall, this court was used for the pharaoh's jubilee festival that took place once every thirty years. This is also the place where the pharaoh trained his mind and body and proved to the priests that he was sound of mind and strong enough bodily to rule the country for another thirty years. Depictions of the pharaoh and indications of his prowess decorated the walls of the *heb-sed* court.

Darius I, who ruled for thirty-five years, was bound to have had a *heb-sed* festival. And the place where his *heb-sed* court could be is the palace that later on was called Persepolis. Much is written about Persepolis (*Parsa*, to be exact), especially about its location, local and international standing, and the possible reasons

for its creation. But much of the discussion evades reality and focuses on the legendary aspect of Iranian culture. The reason for mystifying Iranian history, by bringing into it accounts of Iran's mythical and legendary personages, is a separate issue worthy of a separate article. Here we shall dwell on the naming of *Parsa* and the role of Darius as its builder. (Figure 16: Depictions of Pharaoh Darius I at Persepolis demonstrating his prowess)

The name *Takht-i Jamshid* was devised for the building by those who discovered it after centuries of neglect following the Arab invasion. This name means the "throne of Jamshid," Jamshid being a mythical ruler of the Iranian peoples with a zest for hunting. Two things seem to have motivated those who named the building. One is the fact that popular belief knows Jamshid to be the founder of Iranian traditions, and the other is that on the doorways the king is depicted to be fighting lions and imaginary beasts. Jamshid, however, is a mythical king. The reliefs on the doorways of the structure are real, as was the identity of the royal personage who fights the lions and griffins. We suggest that the monarch depicted is Darius I the Great of Persia. The question is: Why would Darius, at a relatively mature age, want all those who visited his court to know that he was very strong? Besides, why was the king's parasol carrier in attendance in almost every depiction? (Figure 17: Darius and his parasol carriers on various door jambs in the palace of Persepolis)

These questions and more can be answered if, as explained above, we view *Parse* as a part of the royal *Naqsh-e Rostam-Persepolis* mortuary complex and properly relate these two sites to the so-called *Ka'ba-i-Zardusht*. While the King of Kings of Iran did not care to be depicted killing lions, the pharaoh of the United Lands of Egypt did. Similarly, while the King of Kings of Iran did not require his sandal bearer to attend at his recreation site, the pharaoh of Egypt did. The fact that the *mu'bad*s replaced the sandals with the parasol so that the servant has something to carry

but the bare feet of the King of Kings do not come into contact with the sacred earth indicates that the practice continued.

*Parsa* is related to Jamshid also because this legendary king is believed to have been the founder of the *Nowruz* (Iranian New Year) tradition. The ceremonial aspect of the tradition finds its model in the ceremonies at the court of Pharaoh Amunhotep III. When Amunhotep sat in audience, kings, princes, and dignitaries from all over his vast Egyptian domain visited him. They brought him gifts that were unique to their land and received Nubian gold in exchange for their largesse. On the side of the stairs of *Parse*, Darius, who modeled his administration on that of Amunhotep III, shows us his version of the ceremonies. At the sides of the steps of *Parse* are depicted satraps and dignitaries who gradually move in the direction of the monarch to deposit their gifts and pay homage. The Suez Canal stele describes the event at the court of Darius I this way: "All in foreign lands bring gifts to him and manage his affairs."<sup>72</sup> This is the same language that is used in describing the court ceremonies of Amunhotep III when he sat in audience. (Figure 18: top, subject nations pay homage to Pharaoh Amunhotep III; satraps and dignitaries pay homage to Darius I the Great)

## Concluding Remarks

We know Darius I as the *Shahanshah* (King of Kings) of Iran very well, but we know very little about Darius I as the second Iranian Pharaoh of Egypt. Similarly, we know Darius I as the upholder of the Ahuric Order and a follower of the *farr*, but we hardly know him as the sustainer of *ma'at*. Darius I was a complex individual capable of connecting with the two worlds of Iran and Egypt at the same time. In Iran, he introduced the Ahuric Order

---

<sup>72</sup> Pirnia, vol. 3, p. 570.

and executed it, through the *farr*. In Egypt, he maintained *ma'at* to the best of his ability as a foreign pharaoh, even if it meant allowing the creation of structures that were not Iranian and adopting customs that could potentially displace genuine Iranian tribal customs.

This article, by investigating the cultural developments in ancient Egypt that have influenced early Achaemenian nomadic culture, shows that Darius I's innovations were instrumental in inculcating Egyptian culture into the early Iranian nomadic life. It also shows that the monuments that have remained from the time of Darius I—*Naqsh-i Rostam*, *Ka'ba-i Zardusht*, and *Parsa* synthesized Median, Iranian, and Egyptian motifs into a new and vibrant art form that requires scrutiny. Concentrating on the Iranian aspect of the culture, scholars dealing with ancient Iran have highlighted and publicized the apparent Iranian motifs in the *Naqsh-i Rostam*, *Ka'ba-i Zardusht*, and *Parsa* mortuary complex. Close examination of the site, however, indicates that alongside the rich Iranian motifs, there are subtle Egyptian motifs that are congruent with the general purpose of the site as a burial complex.

This paper dealt with burial practices of the Egyptians that could have been picked up by the Iranians. The influence of ancient Egypt on early Achaemenian nomadic culture, however, goes far beyond that. There are social, political, and cultural influences that, like stylized flora in a carpet, have become absorbed into the fabric of Persian culture. The difference is that the flora in the fabric do not grow, but cultural mores do. We need to identify and understand those early influences; because, understanding them would go a long way towards revealing nuances of Persian culture that we have not yet even dreamed of.



## Selected Bibliography

- Anderson, Stewart. "Mirrors of the Past," *Aramco World Magazine*, July-August 1983.
- Bashiri, Iraj. "Darius I the Great," *Great Lives from History*, vol. II, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Xerxes I," *Great Lives from History*, vol. V, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Firdowsi's Shahname: 1000 Years After*, Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Mazdian Cosmology," *Zoroastrianism and Its Value in the Development of Civilization of Near and Middle East People*, Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, 2003.
- Brier, Bob. *The History of Ancient Egypt*, The Teaching Company, 1999.
- Clayton, Peter A. *Chronicle of the Pharaohs: The Reign-by-Reign Record of the Rulers and Dynasties of Ancient Egypt*, Thames & Hudson, 2001.
- Dodson, Aidan. *Monarchs of the Nile*, The American University in Cairo Press, 2000.
- Frye, Richard N. *The Heritage of Persia*, The New American Library, 1966.
- Ghirshman, Roman. *The Art of Ancient Iran from its Origin to the Time of Alexander the Great*, Golden Press, 1964.
- Grzymalski, Krzysztof. "Sudan: The Land of Pyramids," *Aramco World Magazine*, July-August 1991.
- Herodotus. *The Persian Wars*, The Modern Library, 1942.
- Kent, Ronald, G. *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon*, American Oriental Society, 1961.
- Morenz, Siegfried. *Egyptian Religion*, Cornell University Press, 1996.
- Olmstead, A. T. *History of the Persian Empire*, The University of Chicago Press, 1970.
- Osimi, M. S. *Soviet Tajik Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV, Dushanbe, 1981.

- Pirnia, Hassan. *Iran-i Bastan* (Ancient Iran), vol. 3, Sazman-i Kitabha-ye Jibi, 1963, p. 170.
- Ravandi, Morteza. *Tarikh-i Ijtima'i-i Iran*, vols. 1-6, Amir Kabir Publishers, 1976.
- Sami, Ali. *Paitakhtha-i Shahanshahan-i Hakhamaneshi: Shush, Hegmatane, Takht-i Jamshid*, Pahlavi University Press, 1970.
- Wilber, Donald, N. Persepolis: *The Archaeology of Persia, Seat of the Persian Kings*, The Darwin Press, 1989.

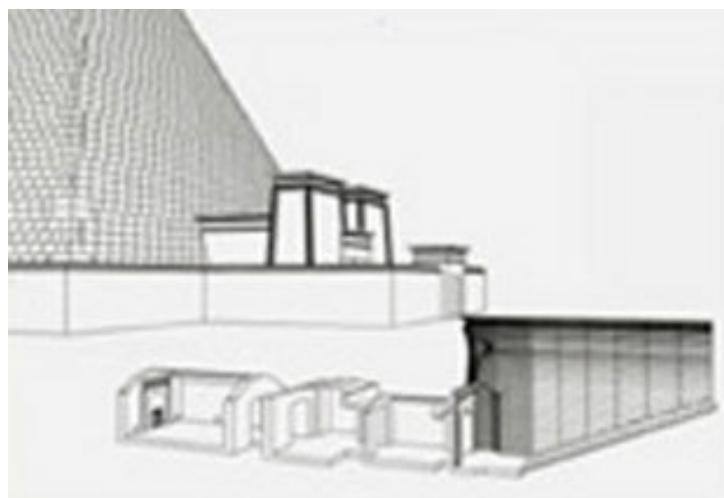
# Illustrations



1



2



3



4



Red crown of  
Lower Egypt



White crown of  
Upper Egypt



Combined crowns

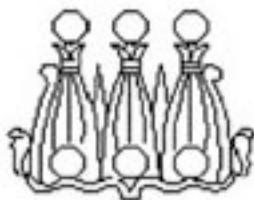
5



6



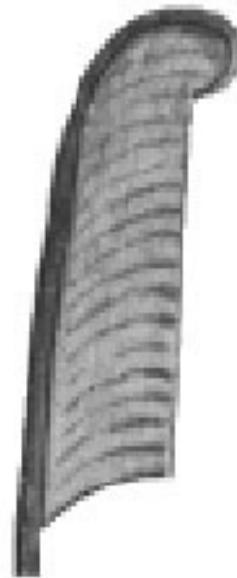
7



8



9



10



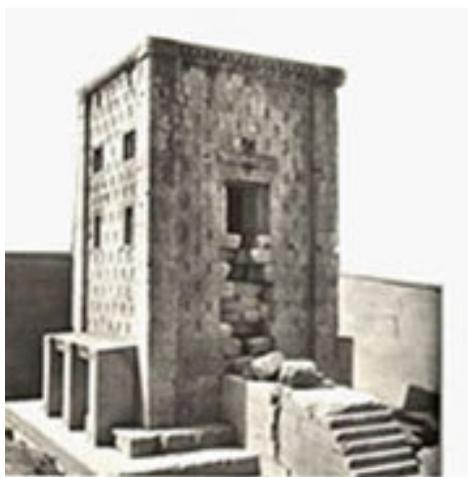
11



12



13



14



15



16



17



18

