CHAPTER FIVE

CAMBYSES (530-522 B.C.)

The death and entombment of Cyrus

Cyrus, for all his ambition and conquests, left a fair fame behind him; and Aeschylus, who had no cause to love the Persians, accorded him a generous epitaph: "Cyrus, fortunate, whose rule brought peace to all ... No god resented him, for he was wise". Yet although the Achaemenian king established a pax persica over a great part of the world, making it possible for men to travel and trade unhindered from the Hellespont to the Indian border-lands, he himself died fighting, striving, it is said, to subdue the semi-nomadic Massagetae on his empire's north-eastern frontier. His body was brought back to Pasargadae, and there placed in his tomb. These events took place in 530 B.C.; and some two hundred years later, when Alexander had the tomb opened, the body of the great king was found, according to Aristobulos, lying in a golden coffin on a platform with legs of beaten gold. Metal, like stone, is recognised under Zoroastrian law to be a barrier against impurity, so the polluting corpse was enclosed securely even within its stone sepulchre; but because it was that of a king, it was gorgeously attired in richly coloured garments, with weapons and adornments of gold and precious gems. There was also a table by the coffin, on which probably offerings had been placed.

Within the precinct of the tomb, Aristobulos related, stood a small building, made for the magi who 'ever since the time of Cambyses the son of Cyrus had kept watch over the tomb, the duty passing from father to son throughout that period. They received from the king a sheep and fixed quantities of wheat-flour and wine every day, and every month a horse to be sacrificed for Cyrus'. In the light of known Zoroastrian usage it thus appears that Cambyses, as a dutiful son, endowed religious services, with offerings to be consecrated daily for his father's soul.

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2 Herodotus I.201 ff.; on this and the other accounts of his final battle, see Dandamaev, Persien, 103-4.
3 See Dandamaev, op. cit., 104 n. 421.
4 Apud Arrian, Anabasis VI.29.1.4 ff.
5 Ibid.
Unleavened bread, meat and wine are offerings essential for certain basic ceremonies, and the sheep would have provided fat also for the oblation to fire ⁶ (which could have been made, with ritual propriety, to the hearth-fire in the priest’s own dwelling.) The monthly sacrifice of a horse was a costly gift, fit for a king; and it may have been chosen partly for this reason, partly because the horse was regarded as a creature of the sun, and so perhaps was linked with sun-filled Paradise on high.⁷ Such offerings may be assumed to have been ancient traditional ones, continued by Zoroastrians. The first three—sheep, wine and wheat-flour—figure in royal offerings recorded in Sasanian times; and they were still being regularly made for the sake of the dead in conservative Zoroastrian communities in Iran in the latter part of the twentieth century A.C.⁸

**Cambyses in Egypt**

Having performed his filial duties towards his dead father and established his own rule in the land, Cambyses set out in 525 to accomplish what Cyrus had, it seems, long planned, namely the conquest of Egypt, ‘taking with him, with others subject to him, some of the Greeks over whom he held sway’.¹⁰ Service in this way in the imperial armies must have vied with trade throughout the Achaemenian epoch as a means of bringing peoples together and spreading customs and ideas.

Egypt was then under the rule of Psammetich III, who had just succeeded his father Amasis—a usurper who in 569 had seized the throne from Apries, the last legitimate pharaoh of the 26th (Saite) dynasty. There was considerable discontent in the land; and at Cambyses’ coming some Greek mercenaries deserted to him from the Egyptian side, and the Egyptian admiral, Udja-Hor-resenet, surrendered the fleet without a blow. A hard-fought battle on land ended in victory for the Persians. Thereafter Memphis was taken, and Psammetich made captive.

Egyptian records show that, though pillage and disorder followed the conquest, Cambyses soon restrained his troops and tried to repair much of the damage they had done. This was evidently part of a policy similar to that which his father had pursued in Babylon, whereby he strove to be recognized as the legitimate ruler of the land. In his efforts to present himself as rightful successor to the Saites and founder of a

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⁶ See HZ I 148 ff.
⁷ See HZ I 154-5 with n. 49.
⁸ See HZ I 111, 151.
⁹ See Boyce, Stronghold, 157 ff.
¹⁰ Herodotus II.1.