

KHAETVADATHA INSPIRED BY ELAMITE INFLUENCE

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In “*The Archaeology of Iran*” (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K. 1999, pp. 163-3), D.T. Potts explains at length the practice of Ruhushak among the ancient Elamites residing in pre-Zoroastrian Iran and defines it as ‘son of the sister-wife of X’, which he adds is supported by M. Lambert and Vallat who are also illustrious authorities on Elam. It is also worth noting that all of them regard it as “an element of the royal titulary signifying legitimacy rather than genealogical affiliation”, a notion which seems to have entered into the Magian concept of preserving the king’s royal Khvareh to enforce his inherent right to the throne and royal title.

It is not known who exactly first noted the existence of the practice of Khaetvadatha but George Rawlinson’s observations about it in *The Seven Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World* (Volume II, John B. Alden, New York, 1884, pp. 64-5) speak for themselves.

“The charge seems to have been first made either by Xanthus the Lydian, or by Ctesias. It was accepted, probably without much inquiry, by the Greeks generally, and then by the Romans, was repeated by writer after writer as a certain fact, and became finally a stock topic, with the early Christian apologists. Whether it had any real foundation in fact is very uncertain. Herodotus, who collects with so much pains the strange and unusual customs of the various nations whom he visits, is evidently quite ignorant of any such monstrous practice. He regards the Magian religion as established in Persia, yet he holds the incestuous marriage of Cambyses with his sister to have been contrary to existing Persian laws. At the worst forms of incest of which the Magi and those under their influence are accused, Herodotus does not even glance. No doubt, if Xanthus Lydus really made the statement which Clemens of Alexandria assigns to him, it is an important piece of evidence, though scarcely sufficient to prove the Magi guilty. Xanthus was a man of little judgment, apt to relate extravagant tales, and, as a Lydian, he may have been disinclined to cast an aspersion on the religion of his country's oppressors. The passage in question, however, probably did not come from Xanthus Lydus, but from a much later writer who assumed his name, as has been well shown by a living critic. The true original author of the accusation against the Magi and their co-religions seems to have been Ctesias, whose authority is far too weak to establish a charge intrinsically so improbable. Its only historical foundation seems to have been the fact that incestuous marriages were occasionally contracted by

the Persian kings; not however, in consequence of any law, or religious usage, but because in the plenitude of their power they could set all law at defiance and trample upon the most sacred principles of morality and religion.

Rawlinson also rejects “a minor charge preferred against the Magian morality by Xanthus or rather by the pseud-Xanthus” that divorce was very common where the Magian system prevailed; and the mere assertion of the writer who impersonated Xanthus Lydus will scarcely justify us in affixing even this stigma on the religion.” What he further observes reveals the crux of the problem: “Upon the whole, the western Magism, (I would add as against the eastern Zoroastrianism) was “less elevated and less pure than the old Zoroastrian creed.” As we have already noted, there is no reference at all not only to Khaetvadatha in the Avesta or eastern Zoroastrianism but also to the Magi's themselves, which indicates that Khaetvadatha is a much later concept most apparently adopted in the western Iran due to its wide prevalence among the Elamites, the original inhabitants of ancient Iran who ultimately got merged into the Iranian race thus becoming indistinguishable from it.