

Gaumātā - the rebel Māghavan

The Māghavans

The *Māghavans* (the Magians, the Biblical Magi; Gk: Māgā / singular Māgus) were the initial spiritually and socially active members of the common Indo-Aryan peoples (the Iranic & the Vedic peoples) of the early Bronze Age in their Primal Homeland in Central Asia. They possessed knowledge and were prepared to travel vast distances in their missionary zeal to disseminate their gift of knowledge. In Vedic Sanskrit, Māghavans, were, at first those who ‘possessed and distributed gifts’. But, after the bitter schism, which occurred among the Indic & Iranic peoples during the early part of the middle Bronze Age (about 1,900 BCE) the word took a whole new meaning among each separate group. In the Ṛg Veda Varuna became the head of ‘*assurās*’ and Indra the head of ‘*dēvās*’. The Vedic ‘*assura*’, Mēdhā was converted to Ahurā Mazdā by Zarathushtra. Some Vedic *assurās* were then also assimilated as Avestan ‘*ahurās*’. In Ṛg Veda¹, Lord Indra is considered a Māghavan.

Western scholars, studying the Avesta have sometimes incorrectly labelled the Avestan Maghavans as Fire Priests. They may have occasionally acted as Zarathushtra’s Fire Priests of the Fire Temples in the absence of priests during their travels as missionaries in faraway lands. They were certainly not Zarathushtra’s ordained priests, who were called *Āhravans*. The priests were called *Māghupats*, a designation, which over millennia became *Māghubads* during Sassanian times, and then *Maubads* / *Mobads* & *Mobēds*.

The *Mobēdān-Mobēd* was appointed as the spiritual leader, *the Pontiff* (the *Zarathushtrōtōma* of the Holy Avesta) from among all the Mobēds of the Sassanian Empire, commencing during the reign of the first Sassanian Emperor, Ardeshir I (224-240 CE). The Grecian polytheism and idolatry, encouraged by the hellenic Parthian Governors was overthrown. The Fire altars, which had fallen into disuse, were restored and step by step the ancestral Faith of Zarathushtra with its ritual ceremonies re-established. He raised the priesthood to a position of honour and dignity. To ensure uniformity, an *Assembly of the Māghupats* was convoked. It has been recorded that 40,000 of the most highly respected and learned Maghupats from all parts of the Empire were assembled. They reduced their own numbers to 4000, then to 400 and finally to 40, from whom 7 candidates, known most for their piety and learning were selected. The 7, in turn, chose Ardā Virāf *as the first Pontiff* of the Sassanian Empire. His book, ‘*Ardā Virāf Nāmēh*’ in the Pahlavi language was later to be translated into Greek and Latin during the reign of Khusru I (531-579 CE). The Avestan scriptures were rewritten with revisions and re-explanations and commentary in Pāzand. Meanwhile, colonial Europe was still reeling under the yolk of Romans occupation.

Dante Alighieri’s plagiarism and expurgation of the Pontiff’s vision

The Ardā Virāf Nāmag, the book written by the Pontiff relating the vision of his journey to Heaven, Hell and Purgatory was recreated by **Dante** between 1308 & 1321 (**Italian name Durante degli Alighieri ca. 1265-1321**). This was done several centuries later from the original translations by Greek and Latin scholars who had attended the world’s first University at Gondeshahpour established under the Sassanian rule of Khusru I - the Great (531-579 CE). But the general trend to this day is still sometimes in denial, even among some intransigent academics. Dante’s expurgation of Ardā Virāf’s original vision, a clear plagiarism was first originally simply titled ‘*Comedia*’, meaning *Comedy* and was later christened ‘*Divina*’, meaning *Divine* by Giovanni Boccaccio in 1555. It has remained the ‘*Divine Comedy*’ ever

since and by default *Dante has since even been elevated to the stature of a visionary prophet for his alleged vision - “Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso” taken from Ardā Virāf’s original Book, the ‘Ardā Virāf Nāmēh’ describing the Pontiff’s vision of Hell, Purgatory and Heaven.*

In CE 550, the establishment of the *University of Shahpourgard* (at Gondeshahpour) with Aramaic as the medium of teaching had encouraged a phase of dialogue and enlightenment. Promoted and financed by the State, *Dēhgan Dānēshwar* had written the ‘*History of Airan (Khudāi Nāmēh)*’, which was later extensively used by Daikiki and Firdawzi to compose the Shahnameh. The Emperor,

Khusru I had the works of Plato, Aristotles and other Greek philosophers also translated into Pahlavi. This also led to the early origins of Sufism, which was to take deep root later, during the Islamic period. The Avestan Scriptures were rewritten with revisions and re-explanations in Pāzand.

The first Sassanian Emperor, Ardeshir I (224-240 CE) had managed to unite the Māghupats to form the **Great Council of the Nation**. The precepts of the Faith had been collected in a sacred volume to set a standard, which required all to conform to. A necessity to explain the Zand Text with a translation and interpretation was found. Thus, a nation well supported by priesthood and with a strongly centralised religious institute was re-established after an absence of nearly 500 years of the Achaemenid era. Its basis was good justice and an army kept alert on a war footing – *“There can be no power without an army, no army without money, no money without agriculture and no agriculture without justice.”*

On his deathbed Ardeshir I placed the crown on his son’s head and said, *“Never forget, that as the King you are, at once, the defender of the Faith and of the Nation. Consider the Fire Altar and the throne as inseparable as to sustain each other.”*

In the Gatha’s Zarathushtraⁱⁱ called himself an Āthravan. He described the missionary **Māghavan Brotherhood Guild**ⁱⁱⁱ as “great, magnanimous, eminent in wisdom” - his very term for the enthusiastic zeal of their fellowship, the brotherhood guild during his own life time. With the passage of time, as the long march southwards and then eastwards and westwards began (about 100-300 years) after the death of Zarathushtra, similar **Brotherhood Guilds** would have been also established in the newly settled lands, the more notable ones being in Bactria (Av: Bākhdhi), Ekbātānā, Media (Av: Hagbātānā, Mānda) & in Babylon (Av: Bābilu).

Gaumata, the rebel Māghavan

One ambitious Māghavan, Gaumātā (literal Vedic Sanskrit & Avestan meaning ‘the Cow, as the sustaining mother / Mother Earth’) was the Head of the Guild of Māghavans in Babylon. Obviously influenced by the supreme spiritual power he had held and the fact that a power vacuum had occurred following the sudden death of Khāmbujia (Cambyses II, son of Cyrus the Great on Mar. 11, 522 BCE) after his conquest of Egypt he decided to have his own way. Repeated in history, it is a sad travesty that position, power, pomp, praise should lead to the pre-empting of pretentious pride, with all the consequences that go with such misplaced presumptions. Gaumata, in his acquired glory declared himself ruler of all of Greater Iran. He first had the legitimate heir, Bārdiya (second son of Cyrus the Great) eliminated and then usurped the Achaemenid throne by impersonating the murdered Bārdiya. He was also variously named and had aliases in history - Pirtiya in Elamite, Bārdiya in Old Persian, and Bārziya in Akkadian. He was called the *‘(false) Smerdis’* by Herodotus in his *‘Histories’* and as Spenta-dātā (Gk: Sphendadates) in the surviving fragments of Ctesias. He appears to have reigned for about a year (Mar 11, 522 to July 29, 521 BCE) in the, then Achaemenid capital at Susa.

But, after Bardiya was murdered the rightful heir to the Achaemenid (Hakhamani) throne according to the family lineage was Darius, son of Vishtāspā, King of Varkānā (for the detailed Achaemenid Dynasty genealogy of these events see the ‘The Hakhamani Dynasty’ below).

Gāvbaruvā (meaning one who tends cows; Gk: Gobryas), astute Commander-in-chief of the Babylon forces who had helped Cyrus the Great in the conquest of Babylon (BCE) was elected with a group of seven to deal with this unforeseen situation. He captured this rebel Māghavan, Gaumātā, pretender to the throne. His group of seven, thus, helped Darius the Great, the rightful heir ascend the Hakhamani throne as King of Kings of Greater Iran (Sep 522 BCE). As a reward for his help, Gāvbaruva was given the honour as the lance carrier (ārštibara) of the Great King.

In this way, he is represented on the Bēhistun (also called Bisotun Bistun & Bisutun) inscription at Kermanshah (below) and on Darius' tomb at Naqsh-e Rustom (519 BCE).



Part of Naqsh e Rustom Tombs and Rock Inscriptions of Achaemenian and Sassanian Kings at Bēhistun. The tomb of Darius I (the Great) is in the centre.



Enlarged relief (5 x 3 meters) depicts King Darius I, his 'bow carrier', Intaphrenes and his 'lance carrier', Gāvbaruva (Gk: Gobryas). Darius inspects a row of nine representatives of conquered peoples, their necks tied. A tenth figure, badly damaged, that of the rebel Māghavan, Gaumātā is lying under the king's feet. While artists were making this monument, Darius defeated foreign enemies (520-519 BCE); these victories were duly celebrated by a change in the initial design, adding two new figures to the right.

Above these group of thirteen people is the Fravahar, symbolic representation of the Great King's *Khwārēna*.



Enlarged bas relief (left) showing the mutilated body of the captured Gaumātā, lying under Darius I's foot. Most records talk of Darius having put Gaumātā to death by crucifixion. On the right is a bas relief showing the aged Babylonian army commander, Gāvbaruva who had previously helped Cyrus the Great in the conquest of Babylon (Bābilu / Bābiru in these inscriptions).

Cuneiform rock inscriptions in Old Persian (western dialect of the Avestan language)

They tell the story of the King Darius's conquests (translated below). The text consists of four columns and an appendix and has a total length of about 515 lines. Here, King Darius describes how Ahuramazda, the One Creator chose him (522 BCE) to dethrone the usurper, Gaumātā (521 BCE).

When the carvings were completed, the ledge below the inscription was removed to prevent any possible tampering with the inscriptions. This allowed the monument to survive (but made it impossible to read the texts from the observation sites at ground level): -

Some highlights of the Bēhistun Inscription in the cuneiform script.

The inscriptions are in 3 languages: 1) Old Persian (the western dialect of Avestan language) 2) the complex cuneiform script of Babylonia (which has some 500 characters) and 3) the Akkadian language.

In 1818, the British explorer, Sir Robert Ker Porter made the first recorded drawing of the monument from ground level. The first serious attempt to examine the rock relief was made by Henry Rawlinson in the summer of 1835. He must have been a skilled mountaineer, because he managed to climb the cliffs several times in order to view the cuneiform texts. Precariously balanced on the craggy rock ledges and using makeshift contraptions of rope and props Rawlinson realized that the writing system was still unintelligible. But, since he had already recognized the word, 'Dārāhiyāvāōush' (Darius) elsewhere he was slowly able to utilize the same letters in the 'Old Persian' script of the monument. Soon, he received some notes from the German scholar, Georg Friedrich Grotefend who had made

some progress in the decipherment of the Persian cuneiform alphabet. Rawlinson was at last able to break the code. The first lines would have been indeed a big surprise to him: -

'I am Dārāhiyāvōush the king, son of Vishtāspa, of the Hakhamanishya dynasty, king of kings. I am king in Pārsā. My father is Vishtāspa. Vishtāspa's father is Arshāma, Arshāma's father was Āriyārāmnō, Āriyārāmnō's father was Chishpāish, and Chishpāish's father was Hakhamanish.'

This list was more identical to the list of kings in the *Histories* of the Greek Herodotus (7.11), where these names are given as Darius, Hystaspes, Arsames, Ariaramnes, Teispes and Achaemenes. Within a short period Rawlinson was able to establish the meaning of all 42 signs of the 'Old Persian' (Avestan) alphabet.

In 1837 he returned. With the help of an agile man it took him one year to translate about half the cuneiform text. Since Rawlinson knew the 'Old Persian' language and had read the Holy Book, the Avesta, he was soon able to read the entire text and to understand grammar, syntax and vocabulary of the language of one of the three texts at the monument. In 1838 he submitted his first results to the Royal Asiatic Society in London and the Society Asiatique in Paris. Eight years later, he started to publish his article 'Persian Cuneiform Inscription at Bēhistun, Deciphered and Translated' in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.

The Bēhistun Rock Inscriptions of Darius I

Underneath is a literal translation of a panel with a cuneiform text in the 'Old Persian' (the western dialect of the Avestan) language, telling the story of the King Darius's conquests. The text consists of four columns (#1, #2, #3, #4) and an appendix (#5) and has a total length of about 515 lines. Here are a few select lines relevant to our topic:-

"By the greatness of Ahurāmazd(ā), there was a lot of good (building) that my father, King Darius did and ordered (to be done)."

"This empire which Gaumātā, the Māghavan had robbed Cambyses of..... . Then, Gaumātā, the Māghavan robbed Cambyses of both Persia and Media and the other lands."

"I restored to the people the pastures, the cattle, the household (slaves), and the houses that Gaumātā, the Māghavan had taken from them."

"When I saw this earth, (that) it was in commotion, then he gave it to me."

"If you do not hide this testimony (and) do tell it to the people ..."

"If you see this inscription or these images (and) do not destroy them..."

"Ahurāmazdā (is) the great Creator, who put in place this wonderful (work) that is seen, who put in place happiness for man, who bestowed reason and physical ableness upon King Darius."

"That Āçina was led bound to me."

"He fled with a few horsemen."

"Then, I went off to Babylon against that Nidintu-Bel."

"Afterwards, the whole people/army conspired to leave Cambyses (and) went over to that one, (Gaumātā)."

"For the second time the Babylonians conspired to leave me."

"Afterwards, the Babylonian army conspired to leave me and went over to that Arxa."

"Afterwards, there was a certain Gaumātā; he rose up from Paitiyauvad".

"There, I smashed that army of Nidintu-Bel's greatly."

"He killed the people/army in large numbers."

"Afterwards, I sent an army in pursuit."

"Afterwards, Vivana went with the army in pursuit of him."

"This is what I did, by the greatness of Ahurāmazdā, in one and the same year after I became king."

"Afterwards, a certain Āçina, son of Upadarma, rose up in Elam."

"He went to the town of Patigrabana in Parthia."

"He went beyond the land of Raga in Media."

“That Cambyses had a brother called Smerdis, having the same father and mother as Cambyses.”
 “And the lie became much (abundant) in the land, both in Pārsā and in Māndā and in the other lands.”
 “Afterwards, there was a certain Gaumātā; he rose up from Paitiyauvad”.
 “I am Smerdis, who is the son of Cyrus. I am king.”
 “Go forth! Crush that army, which does not call itself mine!”
 “Afterwards, I sent (off) that Persian and Median army that I had at my disposal.”
 “The Persian and Median army that was at my disposal was insufficient.”
 “I killed that Gaumātā, the maghavan, who called himself Smerdis.”
 “There, that Nidintu-Bel who called himself Nebuchadrezzar came with the army against me to fight a battle.”
 “Afterwards, I with a few men killed that Gaumātā, the Maghavan and those men who were his foremost followers.”
 “Afterwards, I impaled (crucified) that Vahahyazdata and the men who were his foremost followers in the town of Uvadaicaya in Persia.”
 “Go, strike Vivana and that army which does not call itself King Darius’s!”
 “For this reason did Ahurāmazdā, as well as the other divinities there are, bear me aid.”
 “May Ahuramāzdā protect me from evil - both my house and this land.”

Below is a comprehensive genealogy tree of the Hakhamani Dynasty to help follow the events above.

HAKHAMANI (*Gk: Achaemenian*) DYNASTY

The first recorded tribal chief, gaining control as the consolidator of the ten tribes in Parsava was:-

Founder Hakhamanus 700-675 BCE (*Gk: Achaemenes*)

Hakhamanus/ Hakhamanish (in western dialect Avestan language) means ‘friend of Manu’/ ‘of Ārya(n) lineage’. (Avest: ‘*Hakha*’ means friend & ‘*Manus*’ - of the origin of Manu)

He led a contingent from *Pārshuā* and *Ānzān* to defeat

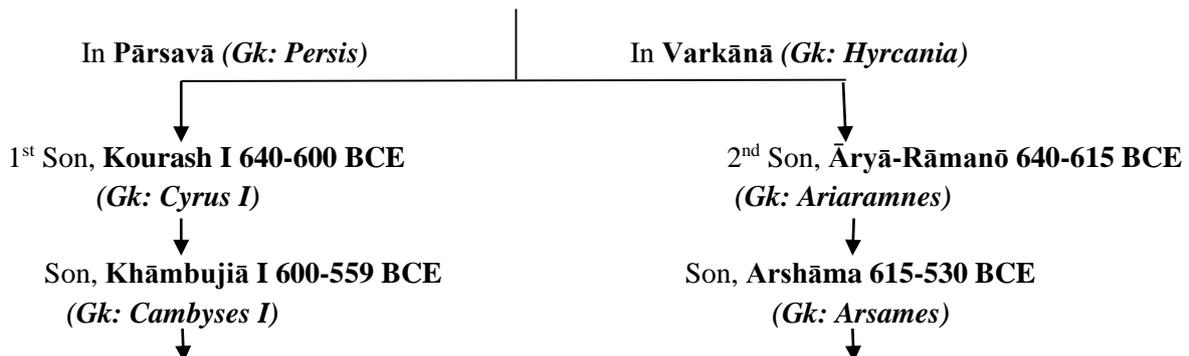
Si(n) Ākh Arbā 706-681 BCE (*Gk: Sennacherib*) in the Battle of Halulinā 681 BCE

He consolidated his forces to establish a principality, which slowly progressed into a mighty empire.

Son, **Chishpāish 675-640 BCE (*Gk: Teispes*)**

Clay tablets indicate Anshan was at first located “just north-west of Shushan, Capital of Elam paying tribute to Elam.”

Gold tablet found in diggings with inscriptions lists the lineage of Kings of Ānshān and of Hyrcania. Clay tablets mention ‘Chishpāish as father of Kourash I 640-600 BCE and Ārya-Rāmanō 640-615 BCE. “1st son, Kourash I went further south in quest of more fertile lands and flowing waters to establish the land of Parsava”. 2nd son, Āryā-Rāmanō established the land of Varkānā (*Gk: Hyrcania*).



Son, **Kourash II 559-529 BCE**
(Cyrus the Great lived 599-529 BCE)
(Gk: *Cyrus II*)

↓
Son, **Khāmbujiā II 529-Mar 11, 522 BCE**
(Gk: *Cambyses II*)

↓
Khāmbujiā's sudden death had created a power vacuum, which was filled by the pretender to the throne – Gaumātā, 522-521 BCE, Head of the Guild of Māghavans in Babylon. Darius I invaded Babylon, captured Gaumātā and had him crucified July 29, 521 BCE.

Son, **Vishtāspa 530-522 BCE**
(not the same King as of the era of Zarathushtra)
(Gk: *Hystaspes*)

↓
Son, **Dārāhiyavāōush 521-486 BCE**
(Gk: *Darius I*)

↓
Son, **KhshyayaArsha 486-465 BCE**
(Gk: *Xerxes I*)

↓
Son, **Ārtā-KhshyayaArsha I 465-424 BCE**
(Gk: *Artaxerxes Longimanus*)

↓
Son, **KshyayaArsha II 425-424 BCE**
(Gk: *Xerxes II*)

↓
Sogdianus 424 BCE

↓
Son, **Dārāhiyavāōush II 424-404 BCE**
(Gk: *Darius II*)

↓
Son, **Ārtā-KhshyayaArsha II 404-358 BCE**
(Gk: *Artaxerxes Mnemon*)

↓
2nd Son, **Kourash 407-401 BCE**
the rebel prince & Satrap of Sardis.
This Cyrus, the Rebel Prince was Xenophon's Cyrus the Younger. Xenophon (429-357 BCE) had joined his forces (instigated by the Spartans), but the rebellion was crushed by his ruling brother, King Artaxerxes II in 401 BCE. The rebel Prince Cyrus was killed in battle.

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Son, **Ārtā-KhshyayaArsha III 358-338 BCE**
(Gk: *Artaxerxes Ochus*)

↓
Son, **Ārtā-KhshyayaArsha IV 358-338 BCE**
(Gk: *Artaxerxes Ases*)

↓
Son, **Dārāhiyavāōush III 336-330 BCE**
(Gk: *Darius III*)

↓
Son, **Ārtā-KhshyayaArsha V 330-329 BCE (in exile)**
(Gk: *Artaxerxes V*)

↓
Alexander III (the Great) 330-323 BCE
(Aves & Pah: *Iskander*)

ⁱ Māghavan: Indra in Ṛg Veda 6.7.23, 6.9.51, 8.11.38, 8.15.28, 6.8.35, 6.12.10, 8.11.39, 5.15.24.

ⁱⁱ Āthraivan: Fire Priest in Yasna Haptanghaiti 42.6

ⁱⁱⁱ Zarathushtra's 'Glorious Māgāi Brotherhood': Gatha Ahunavaiti, Yasna 29.11 & Gatha Ushtavaiti, Yasna 46.14.

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