

IN THE STATE OF AHAMONIYANS OF CENTRAL ASIA

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Annotation: This article provides information on the conquest of Central Asian territories by the powerful Achaemenid state, the resistance of Bactria, the Massagetae, and the Saka against the Achaemenids, the social, economic, and political life of Central Asia during Persian rule, and the changes that occurred there.

Keywords: Bactria, Massagetae, Cyrus II, Darius I, Tomyris, Herodotus, Saka, Central Asia.

In the 6th century BC, several states and tribes existed in Central Asia. Among them were Bactria, the Saka, the Massagetae and the Sogdians. These territories were conquered with great difficulty by the Achaemenid rulers Cyrus II and Darius I. The Persians divided these regions into satrapies, collected large amounts of taxes from them, and conscripted the population for compulsory labour. Under the Achaemenid state, the peoples of Central Asia participated honourably in the famous Greco–Persian wars. In the second quarter of the first millennium BC, the land of Iran was under the rule of the Median kingdom. In 550 BC, Cyrus II, from the Persian lineage, defeated Astyages and took the throne, and shortly thereafter subdued several states in Ancient Asia. In 539 BC, he conquered Babylon. To expand his empire, Cyrus II organised military campaigns, he conquered neighbouring states one after another and thus brought the lands from the Mediterranean to India under his control. The subsequent campaigns of Cyrus II were directed towards our region, Central Asia. Initially, he encountered Bactria. The information regarding the first relations between the Achaemenids and Bactrians is not sufficient. Ctesias reports that in the clashes between Cyrus (Cyrus II) and the Bactrians, neither side gained an advantage, and the Bactrians recognised the Achaemenid ruler by mutual agreement. By the time of Darius I, Bactria is firmly listed among the possessions under Achaemenid rule. Darius appointed the Persian Dadarshi as his satrap in Bactria. [3, p. 35].

Cyrus II subjugated Parthia, Aria, Margiana, Bactria and Sogdiana. It is believed that near the Syr Darya, around present-day O‘ratepa, Cyrus II founded a new strong fortress. This powerful fortress, named Kurushkat (the city of Cyrus), was also built as a fortification against nomads. Kurushkat (in Greek, Kiropolis) was destroyed by Macedonian Alexander in 329 BC. By 530 BC, although the Achaemenids had established their rule over the territory from the Indus Valley to the Mediterranean, nomadic tribes in Central Asia lived independently.[7, p. 68].

Cyrus II invaded the Massagetae with his army in 530 BC. At that time, Queen Tomyris, whose husband had passed away, was the ruler of the country. Herodotus vividly describes Tomyris's bravery against Cyrus in his work "Histories". Confident in his strength and luck, Cyrus, having conquered Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, and the countries of Asia Minor, amazed by his successes, ordered a bridge to be built over the Araxes River. He sent gifts and letters to Tomyris through his envoys, proposing marriage to her. However, his true intention was clear to Tomyris. [8, p. 42].

In the battle between the two, the Massagetae achieved victory. Cyrus II himself perished as well. Tomyris placed the severed head of Cyrus II into a blood-filled bag, seemingly as a gesture symbolising a 'blood feast'. When Darius I's troops advanced against the Saka, a shepherd named

Shiroq led the majority of them into a desert pass known to no one else, causing most of them to be slain. However, the struggle did not cease. Skunha led the fight against the Persians in Saka territory. In this battle, which took place in 519–518 BC, the Saka were defeated by the Persians. Many Saka were killed and many taken prisoner. Their leader Skunha was captured, and a new leader was appointed in his place. In short, it was only after the Persians had overcome the heroic resistance of the local population in Central Asia with difficulty that they fully subjugated these territories.[5, p. 113].

There is no information about how much tax the Achaemenid rulers Cyrus II and Cambyses collected from the peoples of Central Asia. However, after Darius I came to power, he divided the territories under his rule into satrapies and recorded in his 'History' how he divided our regions and how much tax he imposed on them. The peoples up to the Bactrians paid 300 talents of tax. This is the twelfth province. (One talent is 25.92 kg of silver.) The Sakas and Caspians paid 200 talents. This is the fifteenth province. The Parthians, Khwarezmians, Sogdians, and Arians paid 300 talents. This is the sixteenth province. [1, p. 74 - 75].

The subject territories paid taxes not only in money but also with goods. From these taxes, the luxurious palaces of the Persian kings were built in Persepolis, Susa, and Ecbatana. For example, regarding the construction of the palace in Susa, Darius I's inscriptions report: "The gold used here was brought from Lydia and Bactria. The blue stone 'kapa-utaka' (lapis lazuli) and 'sincabrush' (semi-precious stone - sardonyx) were brought from Sogdiana. The 'Akhshaina' stone (ferozum) was brought from Khwarezm." Moreover, Herodotus provides information about another form of tax during the Achaemenid period – the water fee taken from artificial lakes for the fields. The historian emphasises that for opening the dams of the lakes, the Persian king "receives a large sum of money in addition to the usual tax" [4, p. 64].

The Achaemenids also conscripted peoples of Central Asia into military service. According to Herodotus' information about the Bactrian soldiers who participated in the Greco-Persian wars, "The Bactrians' attire resembled that of the Medians, and they were armed with bows and short spears. The weapons of Bactrian cavalry were similar to those of infantry soldiers. In the years of Marathon (490 BC) and Salamis (480 BC), Bactrian cavalry were noted as the most courageous part of Xerxes' army. From the garrison archive on Elephantine Island (near the southern borders of Egypt), it is known that at the end of the 5th century BC, a Khwarezmian warrior named Dargamon served here. The discovery of Scythian warrior figurines testifies that Scythian cavalry were also part of the garrison of the Persian army in Memphis, one of the major military bases in Egypt. While enumerating the composition of Xerxes' forces that opposed them, Herodotus, It also mentions the Bactrians, Sacae Amordi, Parthians, Khwarezmians, Sogdians and Sacae. The culture of the 6th-4th centuries BCE is studied based on written and archaeological sources. They indicate that the peoples of Central Asia reached a high level in crafts, jewellery, tailoring, pottery and construction. Large ancient cities and fortresses such as Kyzyltepa, Uzunqir, Erkurgan, Afrasiyab were developed. Written sources report that gold, silver, ruby, turquoise mines were exploited, crafts were advanced, and trade relations were conducted with the Eastern countries of Central Asia.

In the 5th-4th centuries BC, the first coins spread in Central Asia. The art of jewellery was highly developed, as exemplified by the gold and silver items found in the Amu Darya treasure discovered in 1877, currently preserved in the British Museum. Each city had an inner citadel (ark). In the agricultural estates around the cities, large families belonging to the paternal lineage lived. Peasants' fortresses consisted of living quarters and household rooms. Archaeologists have found traces of canals and irrigation channels that brought water to the fields around the cities and fortresses.[6, p. 39].

In conclusion, the Achaemenid Empire incorporated the territories of Central Asia into its domain through large military campaigns and overcoming strong resistance. In this process, peoples such as the Bactrians, Sakas, Massagetae, and Sogdians fought bravely against the invaders, but ultimately Achaemenid rule was established. During this period, the regions were divided into satrapies, a centralized administrative system was implemented, tax collection intensified, and the local population was involved in the empire's military-political life. At the same time, as a result of Central Asia becoming part of a vast empire, trade, economic, and cultural connections also developed.

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