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The Function of Non- Iranian Languages in the Persian Achaemenid Empire

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ABSTRACT

In the Achaemenid Empire(331-559 B.C.)there were different tribes with various cultures. Each of these tribes spoke their own language(s). They mainly included Iranian and non-Iranian languages. The process of changes in the Persian language can be divided into three periods, namely , Ancient , Middle, and Modern Persian. The Iranian languages in ancient times (from the beginning of of the Achaemenids to the end of the Empire) included :Median,Sekae,Avestan,and Ancient Persian. At the time of the Achaemenids ,Ancient Persian was the language spoken in Pars state and the South Western part of Iran.Documents show that this language was not used in political and state affairs. The only remnants of this language are the slates and inscriptions of the Achaemenid Kings. These works are carved on stone, mud,silver and golden slates. They can also be found on coins,seals,rings,weights and plates.The written form of this language is exclusively found in inscriptions. In fact ,this language was used to record the great and glorious achievements of the Achaemenid kings. It was also used to be a remnant of the greatness of the Persians. There are no recorded works of the other three languages of Ancient Persian era at the time of the Achaemenids. The question raised in this research is: what functions did the non- Iranian languages have in the Achaemenid Empire? The non Iranian languages of this era were Akkadian, Elamite,and Aramic.Akkadian , a branch of Semetic languages, was used in the region of Middle Roudan(Mesopotamia) 3000 B.C.This language had two major dialects which were: 1. Babylonian dialect being used in the Southern parts of Middle Round and 2. Assyrian dialect which was in common in the Northern parts of Middle Roundan. Due to these reasons ,this language is also called" Assyrian- Babylonian" .Akkadian is one of those three languages which possessed inscriptional functions and it was used in Bisoton inscriptions. Another language was Elamite. The Elamites had a privillaged status in the history of ancient West Asia. They lived in mountainous areas ranging from Mesopotamia to Iranian Platue,including the Zagrous mountains ,Lorestan and current Khuzastan. The Elamite language is an independent one. It has no connection with any other ancient languages. Like Akkadian, Elamite had an inscriptional function and was used in Bisoton. This language was used as an official language in the Achaemenid Empire for quite a while.In Persepolis excavations , many inscriptions were found in Elamite and they were

mainly connected to financial and accounting documents. The third non-Iranian language was Aramic. It was a collection of dialects from the family of Semetic languages. It was used in Middle Roudan in ancient times between 7th century B. C. to 7th century A.D. This language gradually took the place of other languages. The Aramics were busy doing office services in Akkadian Administrations. They were also admitted doing secreterial jobs in State offices in the Achaemenid Empire. The Achaemenids used the Aramic language in their country's affairs. Some scientists coined the term "Aramic Kingdom" for the Aramic language used in the Achaemenid Administration. Some written documents obtained from the Achaemenid era prove that Aramic was the official and administrative language of that time. The method used in this research work is descriptive - analytic and the data are library source based.

INTRODUCTION

At the time of the Achaemenid Empire, besides Iranian languages in ancient times, other non-Iranian languages were used as well. The Achaemenids rapidly conquered a major part of the civilized world of that time. They inherited various civilizations and cultures which were so well known in this regard. The written inscriptions left from their time represent their brilliant civilizations and civilized society. The Achaemenids didn't need that time to instruct their employees and clerks to do all the office jobs of the country. Therefore, they applied the best and the most practical approaches. They used Iranian languages and scripts, especially the non-Iranian ones in various ways to fulfill their correspondences. In this research, attempts have been made to evaluate how non-Iranian languages such as Elamite, Akkadian, and Aramic were used.

1. The Function of the Elamite Language

The Elymais lived in a mountainous area which extended from Mesopotamia to the Iranian plateau including the Zagros mountains, Lorestan and Khozestan. Names such as Susa, Anzani and Anshani have been attributed to them as well. The common term for the name and language of this tribe is the word Elamite. (Khanlari, 1382:141/1). The Iranian called them (Uja) or (Huja) and the old Roman and Greek writers knew them as (Uxii). In Telmod they are known as Huz and in Syriac language they are mentioned as Hu^za^{ya}. This term is visible in the current name of Khuzestan province. (Oranskij, 1385; Fry, 1377:84; Kent, 1953:175). Elamite, the language of one of the most ancient governments of Old Asia, Elam, where the capital was Susa, was very common in the south west and the valleys of the Karoon and Karkheh rivers in the current Khuzestan province.

According to Cameron, many especial elements of the Elamite language are identical with those of a language which is found in Caucasia and is known as the family of the Caucasian languages. However, there have been some resemblances between the phonological and syntactical elements of this language with Tamil accent in Dravidic language in the north of India. Many of these elements had similar ancient samples in languages spoken by the Kasi, the Lulubi, and the Guti in central Zagros, the Halidi in the mountains of Armenia, the Hori, and a few tribes in the Little Asia and probably the Atrosk in Italy. The similarities seen between Elamite and other languages are naturally signs of language closeness not language unity. (Group of writers, 1377:1/144). The Elamite language has

no connection with Sami and other Indo- European languages, and it is a separate and unique language. The Elamite language kept its position in the Iranian Plateau and was used as the second writing language in the Persian Achaemenid Empire after the entrance of the Arian tribes to Iran. (Khanlari, 1382:1/142; Lecoq, 1997:57). The history of the Elamite language is divided into four eras: 1. The ancient Elamite (1500- 2600 B.C) 2. The middle Elamite (1000- 1500 B.C) 3. The modern Elamite (550-1000 B.C) 4. The Achaemenid Elamite (330- 530 B.C). Thirty thousands muddy inscriptions together with some other pieces of inscriptions found in research work done in the north –east of Persepolis fortifications in 1933 and 1934, were all written in Elamite language and Cuneiform script. In the next year, a smaller collection containing 750 inscriptions and pieces were found in the ruins of treasury belonging to the thirteenth to twenty eighth years of Darius I reign (494 – 509B.C). The deciphering of these documents - obtained from the treasury- showed that they belonged to the thirteenth year of Darius I reign and the seventeenth year of his grandson, Xerxes I. (458-492 B.C)

The inscriptions of the fortifications are about the official regulations for the transformation of food commodities. The texts can be divided into two categories: Documents concerning great and extensive operations or drafts allocated to the final consumer. The documents of the treasury are mainly concerned with the payments of silver cash to workers who did some special tasks. These inscriptions include some holy names in connection with pre- Zoroastrian beliefs. Among the second group of fortification inscriptions, there are some documents which are directly connected to religious rituals. (Boyce, 1363: 196; Tafazoli 1376: 24). Throughout the history, the Elamite wrote their inscriptions into the following scripts. 1. The Hieroglyphic Elamite or proto-Elamite script. This script was invented in 2900 BC. We can find pictures of animals, jars, vases, and similar things drawn on inscriptions written in this script. Some of these inscriptions have been found in Sialk Hills in Kashan. This script had 150 signs. (Group of writers, 1377: 1/144; Hinz, 1371: 33-34).

2. The linear script of the Elamite. What is left from this script includes 18 inscriptions which are related to the reign of Kotic-Inshoshink, the Elamite king (2183-2203B.C). This script contains 80 signs, some of which have been deciphered. (Hinz, 1371:36; group of writers, 1377: 1/145).

3. The Elamite Old Hieroglyphic script .The Elamite invented the Elamite script by changing the Akkedi Hieroglyphic script. This can only be found in inscriptions belonging to the 18th to 23rd centuries BC. The first one is a convention between Hit, the Elam king, and Naram Sin, the king of Akkad in the 23rd century B.C, and the second one is related to (Siwe- Paler- Kuhpak), the Elam king in the 18th century B.C. 4. The Elamite script of the Older Middle. Inscriptions written in this script are related to 7th and 8th centuries B.C (The time of the new Elam dynasty). The Elamite Middle and Old Hieroglyphic script had 174 signs and 25 logograms. 5. The Elamite New Hieroglyphic script. The use of this script goes back to the time of the Achaemenid (330 – 559 B.C) and from 4th to 6th B.C. The Achaemenian kings wrote many of their inscriptions both in Ancient Persian and Elamite script. Besides these inscriptions, the

written clays of Baro and the Persepolis treasure were written in this script as well. This script had 113 signs. 6. Akkedi hieroglyphic script. Due to the political and cultural impact of Akkad, the Elymais wrote many of their inscriptions in Akkedi Hieroglyphic script. (Group of the writers, 1377:1/145). The Elymais had some achievements in governmental and audit affairs. In the systematic governmental affairs of the Achaemenian court, especially during the reign of Darius I, the Elymais along with the Babylonian had an effective role. The best secretaries of the Achaemenid were Elymais and extensive archives and documents obtained from Achaemenians existing to the current time are in the Elamite script and language. (Rajabi, 1380:2/66). Besides Ancient Persian and Akkadi (Babylonian) scripts, the Great inscription of Bisuton and some other inscriptions were written in Elamite script, too. The inscription of Bisuton is the most important inscription of Darius I in which he explains how he was enthroned and defeated the rioters as well as Bardia, the usurper. This is the most voluminous inscription of ancient Persia. (Tafazoli, 1378: 24-25; Diakonov, 1382:134 ; Hinz,1371; Huart ,1363:72).

2. The Akkedi language

The family of Ham and Sam languages is divided into two branches of Hami and Sami. The Sami branch includes languages which are the oldest ones and had close connections with Iranian languages or the speakers of these languages lived in some pieces of lands where later on the Iranian tribes settled or even the speakers of these languages established political, social and religion relationships with the Iranian. The oldest language of this branch is the Akkedi, the remnant of which goes back to 2800 B.C. This language which is the eastern accent of Sami branch was sometimes called Babylonian and Assure. It is the language of a tribe of the Sami who entered the land of the Sumerians, somewhere between the Euphrates and Tigris and adapted their culture and civilization. When Babylon became the capital city, the Old Babylonian language was made. Compared with the Old Akkedi, it was more evolved. At the time of Cyrus, the Great, when the Persian Achaemenid Empire conquered Babylon, the language of this government was called the new Babylonian. The script by which the Akkedi language was written, was the same script known as hieroglyphic taken from the Sumerian. The Iranian adapted hieroglyphic script from the Babylonians. (Khanlari, 1382: 1/7- 146).

Besides three languages of ancient Persian, Akkedi (Babylonian), and Elamite, the Egyptian language was used in Egypt as well. These languages were mainly used in official inscriptions, namely, in the stories related to the conquerors of Darius I, the rocks of Bisuton, on the writings of the walls of the palaces of the kings, on the golden inscriptions inserted in the pillars, on the pillars installed due to the inauguration of canals, on cylindrical seals, and in economic as well as financial affairs the Babylonian language was used. Also, the local language was the official language in Egypt. (Diakonov, 1382:134).

3. The Aramaic language

The Aramaic were Sami people who lived in Mesopotamia and Sham two thousand years before the Christ. The Aramaic established the

state of Kalde in Babylonia in 625 B.C. This government was toppled down by Cyrus, the Great, in 539 B.C and he annexed Babylonia as a province to the Persian Achaemenid Empire. (Abolghasemi, 1380:138)

Aramaic is one of the Sami languages from which the oldest written works has been found in scripts belonging to the 8th and 9th centuries BC. (Tafazoli, 1376:23). At the time of the Achaemenid Empire, Aramaic was the international language in Asia; especially from Egypt to India. In these places, some documents have been found which are written in this language. Although the Elamite language was used in Elam and the Babylonian Language was common in Babylonia, all members of the Persian government applied the Aramaic language. (Ghirshman, 1364:182-183; Lecoq, 1997:56).

The Persian and Medes nobles and aristocrats, who were often trained as military men, naturally did not accept to do secretarial jobs, so the job was done by the obedient tribes. The Aramaics who were experts in this field, undertook the job and in this way extended their own language as the official and state language in the Achaemenid Empire. (Zarinkoob, 1364: 1/52). The Achaemenid government used the Aramaic language as its official language and it was used all through the reign of this kingdom all over the territories controlled by it. The Aramaic language had different accents. The accent which was used in the Achaemenid Empire, was called "Empire Aramaic" by the German Iranologist, Joseph Marchovart.(Abolghasemi, 1380: 138).

Little by little, all Northern Sami languages (Akkedi, Phoenician, Jewish) were replaced by Aramaic, and even its literature as well as its writing prevented the enhancement of the Greek language in Asia. The Aramaic language was best developed between 300- 650 B.C. This language is divided into two eastern and western branches. The eastern branch of this language is relevant to Iran and the Iranian languages. (Khanlari,1382:1/149).

With small changes that were made in the alphabet of the Phoenicians (western Sami) by the Aramaic in the 10th century B.C, a very simple form of script was invented which was known as Aramaic , taken from their own name. Later on, this script was used by different tribes ranging from the west of Asia to the Southern and Central part of it. (Rajabi, 1382:1/149).

The Aramaic secretaries were busy working in the offices of the Assyrian government. They served the Achaemenid after the establishment of their Empire. In the ancient world, The Aramaic language was used as a go-between language in communications for many centuries. (Tafazoli,1376:23).

The governmental and administrative language of the Achaemenid Empire was Aramaic. The Aramaic secretaries were used to apply the language.

The administrative court of the Achaemenid Empire was directly under the supervision of the court (formalities) minister. The administrative court was a critical and determining organization. With its organized establishments, the administrative court made it possible for such a great kingdom to rule over so many different nationalities with various cultures and languages ranging from Greece to Indus, Karazm and Sen to Egypt and

Libya, and a part of Ethiopia. The problem of connecting these various Satrapies, the procedure and the language used to do so was itself a demanding task, and only a disciplined court with a perfect management system was capable of receiving taxes and paying the tributes. This court was under the control of a court minister. The documents of this organization were written in Aramaic language, hence to do so, Aramaic clerks or secretaries or at least those who were familiar with Aramaic language were needed to do the court affairs. The Aramaic secretaries worked under the supervision of Achaemenid clerks, thus, on one hand, these clerks can't have been unfamiliar with the language of their secretaries, and on the other hand, the secretaries were also forced to know the language of their employers. (Rajabi, 1381:3/34-229). It seems that the Iranian clerks dictated the required materials to the foreign secretaries and they immediately translated the given materials into Aramaic or any other languages. Therefore, firstly, commands and orders were verbally given by the Iranian high ranking clerks and authorities and after repeating them for several times, they were finally recorded on special muddy inscriptions and were sealed by an official afterwards. (ibid: 235)

These secretaries had deserved status and benefited from different privileges because not only did they know how to read and write but they also had to acquire some rudimentary judiciary and office information as well. (Ehtesham, 2535:51).

In Aramaic language, the term Posor (Sofor) Sopor was used for the word 'writer'. This was a term which was used for secretarial jobs. With a little change, the Iranian used it as Dipir (ibid: 50).

The Aramaic secretaries used the special methodological structure of the expressions and wrote Faravartak or the king's orders. The Aramaic script had already existed in Susa court and it was also used in other courts which were gradually developed in Ecbatana, Babylonia, and the Persepolis. (Ibid: 51-52).

From the structures of the court inscriptions, one can understand that to produce an inscription several steps were needed. The name of the person who gave the order and the name of the clerk who implemented the order were mentioned. The chief of the office knew what was going on. The important point was that the seal of a person who was somehow concerned with the inscription should never have been forgotten. It seems that the best way to keep the seal safe was to hang it from one's neck. (Rajbi, 1381:3/235).

The Aramaic was not only the official language but it was also used as a script in ancient Persian inscriptions. Besides the three texts of inscription of Bisutun which are written in ancient Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian languages, one text is written in Aramaic which seems to be in the form of a directive found by archaeologist in Elephantine in Egypt. These quadruple texts have some slight differences with one another which help us to get more information. (Rajabi, 1380: 3/214)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this research is descriptive-analytical, which is one of the common styles of historical research. Scientific data in research is based on historical sources, achievements of archeology, inscription and numismatics.

CONCLUSION

In the Persian Achaemenid Empire whose territory was limited to Sayhun (Sir Darya) and Jayhun (Oxus) in the North, the Persian Gulf and the Oman Sea in the South, Mesopotamia in the West, and Send in the East, there were different tribes with different cultures. Although the language of the public was Old Persian, the Achaemenid also tried to use other non-Iranian languages which had various functions among the civilized tribes of the Empire. This is one of the most outstanding features of the Achaemenid, for they adapted the good features of the culture and civilization of other tribes in order to improve their own civilization.

Notes

1. Josef Marquart(1864 –1930) –A renowned German Orientalist- was the teacher of Iranian and Armenian philology at Berlin university from 1910 up to his death.
2. The term Dipir is composed of two parts: the first part is Dipi taken from Old Persian and Dib from middle Persian.(Mackenzie, 1372: under the term Dibir; kent,1953: 191) If we consider the second part of it as a converted form of the ancient Iranian term ‘Bara’ which means carrier or bearer, then the term secretary (Dabir) means a person who carries or bears an inscription. But if the second part is taken from the root of Var , then the mentioned term would mean the protector of an inscription or manuscript(Yarshater, 1368: 68).

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