



BĀR I. FROM THE ACHAEMENID THROUGH THE SAFAVID PERIOD

Reliefs on stone from the Achaemenid period, particularly the relief found at the treasury site at Persepolis in the excavations by the American archeological mission in 1936, depict an audience given by Darius (521-485 b.c.), and the Greek historians supply further information. The formalities were as follows. The audience seeker addressed his request and stated his reasons to the head of protocol, who explained the procedure to him and on the appointed day escorted him to the king's presence. The king in full regalia sat erect on a high-backed chair, wearing a tall hat called *kidaris* and holding a long scepter in his right hand and a lotus flower in his left hand. Behind the king stood his personal servants and his bodyguard (Ghirshman, fig. 255). In the relief depicting Darius's audience, the heir apparent Xerxes appears in equally fine array, standing at his father's right side and also holding a lotus leaf in his left hand, while his right hand is raised as a signal that he is about to speak.

In later periods, high-ranking officers, officials, and nobles also attended royal audiences. Each had a preallotted place, and the nearness of his place to the king marked the importance of his rank. Likewise, being seated was rated higher than standing, and being on the king's right higher than being on his left (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Mohl, IV, p. 612 vv. 3007ff.). If anybody was put in a place



lower than one befitting his rank, it was a sign that he had incurred the royal displeasure (Bayhaqī, pp. 32ff.). In the Sasanian period, the king sat on cushions on a golden throne, and the crown was hung on a chain in such a position that it seemed that the king was wearing it when he sat down. These practices remained in vogue under the first Islamic dynasties in Iran, who took the Sasanians as their model. At the Sasanian court, a curtain was kept hanging between the king and the audience seeker until the latter reached his place, when it was drawn aside. This custom was maintained, likewise in imitation of the Sasanians, at the Omayyad and 'Abbasid caliphal courts but is not mentioned in accounts of the courts of the Islamic dynasties in Iran. As soon as the audience seeker saw the monarch, he was required to kiss the ground. In later periods, kissing the king's throne or his hand and signet ring was also customary. At the caliphal court, kissing the ground was not at first required, as it was thought sufficient that the person being received in audience should say "Peace upon you, O Prince of the Believers, and God's mercy and blessings!" In later times, however, this was superseded by ground kissing, and, although initially the heir apparent, sons of the caliph, Hashemites, judges, theologians, ascetics, and Qur'ān reciters were exempted, ultimately they too had to conform to the originally Iranian custom (Šābe', p. 31; Jāhez, *Tāj*, p. 7; von Kremer, II, pp. 246ff.).

After kissing the ground, the person being received was bidden by the king to stand. He then waited for the king to question him. In the Sasanian period he commenced his reply with the words "May you live for ever" (*anōšag bawēd*), sometimes adding "and attain success!" (*ō kāmāg rasēd*). In later times also, it was usual to express such a wish, e.g., "May the king's life be long!" (*Kār-nāmag*, ed. Sanjana, 9.16.20, 10.7.9, 12.13, 13.9.15; *Šāh-nāma* I, p. 318 v. 1289; VII, p. 362 v. 81; Ṭabarī, I, pp. 824, 1048; Bayhaqī, 2nd ed., pp. 63, 65, 73, 75).

In Achaemenid times, the person being received had to hold his hand in front of his mouth while speaking to the king, in Sasanian times a handkerchief (Ṭabarī, I, p. 1036; *Šāh-nāma* VII, p. 362 v. 88; Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, pp. 343, 367; Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, p. 400). He stood to attention with his arms crossed while the king was speaking (*Šāh-nāma* IV, p. 218 v. 2528; VII, p. 362 vv. 80, 87).

In addition to these formalities, there were several precise rules which had to be observed by the person being received and others attending an audience. One was that nobody might speak except in answer to a question from the king. Anyone bidden to speak must speak slowly and briefly and not repeat



himself. Correcting the king's words, mentioning adverse omens, exaggeration, backbiting, laughing, spitting, and blowing the nose were not permitted. All those present had to observe the rule of silence and, as far as possible, refrain from coughing and sneezing. Those who were to come close to the king ought to have previously used the toothpick so as to have good breath, but ought not to use strong scent. At the 'Abbasid court, the person being received was required to wear black, the color of the 'Abbasid flag, but nobody might wear red shoes because red was the color of the caliph's shoes. It was also impermissible to drink water at the caliphal court. Other courts, however, were less exacting; visitors to the Buyid, Il-khanid, Timurid, and Safavid courts were allowed to sip water, and special cups for this purpose were placed in the audience hall. On leaving the king's presence, the person who had been received had to walk backward for some distance to avoid turning his back on the king. Furthermore, nobody could enter the palace precincts on horseback unless the king had previously authorized him to do so. When audiences were granted to persons who had come from abroad and did not know the language of the country, an interpreter was summoned (Plutarch, *Themistocles*, pp. 27ff.; *Kār-nāmag*, 10.7.9-13, 12.4.13; *Šāh-nāma* I, pp. 98 v. 355, 144 vv. 369f., 146 v. 375, 172 vv. 687f., 302 vv. 1084f., 315 vv. 1288f., 324 vv. 1365f., 488 vv. 22ff.; IV, pp. 218 vv. 2526ff., 532 v. 2059; V, p. 170 v. 827; VI, p. 24 vv. 230ff., 652 vv. 1308ff.; VII, p. 282 vv. 3340f.; Ṭabarī, I, p. 859; III, p. 59; Šābe', pp. 32, 33f., 35f., 52, 57, 59, 68, 74f.; Jāhez, *Tāj*, pp. 7, 28, 69, 112, 125f.; Mas'ūdī, *Morūj*, ed. Pellat, I, p. 288; Yāqūt, *Odabā'* V, pp. 349, 355; Gardīzī, ed. Ḥabībī, p. 136; Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 93).

In pre-Islamic times, women had the right to seek and attend audiences (*Šāh-nāma* I, p. 315 vv. 1281ff.). The king's spouse is seen beside him in pictures on vessels which have survived from the Sasanian period (Ghirshman, *Iran, Parthians and Sassanians*, figs. 244, 259). Likewise at the courts of the Mongol Il-khans and Tīmūr, the monarch's mother, wives, and daughters took part in audiences, sitting or standing beside or behind him in positions determined by the rank of each; furthermore they themselves gave audiences, at which they received not only women and male relatives but also unrelated men (Carpini, IX, 13. vi, 14. viii; *Nachtrag*, 7, 8. Ebn Baṭṭūṭa, II, pp. 387f., 406; Jovaynī III, plate facing p. 101; Clavijo, pp. 244f., 268). But at the courts of the caliphs and other dynasties in Iran in the early Islamic period, no women were present at audiences except dancing girls.

In order to reach the royal presence, the audience seeker of whatever rank or



sex had first to obtain permission from the head of protocol. This official was usually a military man of noble birth, sometimes a close relative of the ruler (Jāḥeẓ, *Tāj*, p. 28; Mas'ūdī, *Morūj* I, p. 288; *Šāh-nāma* I, p. 172 v. 687). The Samanids and Ghaznavids, however, appointed Turks, and Maḥmūd Ġaznavī even chose good-looking young slave soldiers who from time to time took his fancy (Bayhaqī, pp. 134, 159f., 329f.).

In the Achaemenid period this office was held by the *hazārapati* (Greek *chiliarchos*), i.e., the commander of the royal bodyguard. In the Sasanian period the holder was called the *handēmāngarān sālār* (Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 113, 394f.). In the *Šāh-nāma* he is mentioned as the *sālār-e bār* (head of protocol) and *pardadār* (keeper of the curtain). The corresponding official at the 'Abbasid court was the *ḥājeḥ al-ḥojjāb* (head chamberlain), who had a large staff of chamberlains under him. Since *ḥājeḥ* is the Arabic translation of *pardadār*, it may be inferred that at the Sasanian court the *sālār-e bār* had likewise been in command of the chamberlains. In the Samanid and Ghaznavid periods the chamberlains were designated *ḥājeḥ* and their chief *ḥājeḥ-e bozorg*, and under the Saljuqs these terms remained in use together with *bārbeg* for the former and *amīr-e bār* or *oloḡ bārbeg* for the latter (Rāvandī, pp. 128, 367, 390). Under the Il-khans officers of the bodyguard (*kezīk-kešīk*) held positions similar to those of the *ḥājeḥs* of earlier times and were headed by the *amīr-e kezīk* (Rašīd-al-Dīn, pp. 543, 908, 958). At Tīmūr's court the function was performed by three royal princes, who were called *mīrzā* (short for *amīrzāda*, son of the *amīr*). In the Safavid period all matters relating to royal audiences were handled by an official named the *īšīk āqāsī bāšī*, who was assisted in his task of keeping order at such gatherings by guards known as *yasāvolān-e soḥbat* (macebearers in attendance; *Taḍkeratal-molūk*, ed. Minorsky, p. 64; Anṣārī, p. 51). The designation *īšīk āqāsī bāšī* endured throughout the Qajar period; under the Pahlavi dynasty it was changed to *ra'īs-e tašrīfāt-e darbār* (head of court protocol). In all periods of Iranian history, holders of this office enjoyed high status and great influence. Not infrequently they were privy to conspiracies, which led in some cases to the deposition or murder of the ruler and sometimes also to their own rise to higher rank (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, chap. 69; Šābe', p. 71; Jāḥeẓ, *Rasā'el*, pp. 159f.; Gardīzī, pp. 136, 160f.; *Jorfādaqānī*, pp. 40, 92f., 127, 157; Bayhaqī, pp. 12, 33, 58, 325f., 433, 865f.; Rāvandī, pp. 159f., 233, 235, 254f., 264; Jovaynī, II, pp. 211f., 258f.; Rašīd-al-Dīn, pp. 543, 546f., 908, 919, 1065f.; Qāšānī, p. 124; Clavijo, pp. 283f.).



Throughout the history of Iran, it was always customary that the person being received should bring gifts for the king and accept gifts from him. For governors of provinces and envoys from other kings, this was essential. Under the Il-khans and Tīmūr the practice was considered so important that anyone who had failed to bring a gift could not hope to gain access to the khan. The expressions *tegšīmīšī* and *uljāmīšī* (*kardan/yāftan*), which were in use in the Mongol period, meant “to bring gifts and be received in audience” (Jovaynī, I, p. 213; III, p. 46; Rašīd-al-Dīn, pp. 542, 543, 809, 831, 879, 881, 891, 896; Qāšānī, p. 54, etc.). If the donor was a man of importance, the gifts were laid out on the audience day in the presence of the person being received and displayed publicly before they were carried to the king in the audience hall. Carriers of such gifts are portrayed in the reliefs flanking the steps of the Apadāna at Persepolis (*Šāh-nāma* I, p. 318 vv. 1290f.; II, p. 268 vv. 872f.; V, p. 242 vv. 1692f.; VI, p. 234 vv. 1987f.; Bayhaqī, pp. 52, 53, 471, 474; Carpini, IX, 12. v.; Clavijo, pp. 159, 168, 218f., 243f., 327f.; *Ālamārā-ye šafawī*, p. 449; Moḥammad Rafī‘ Anšārī, pp. 51f.; *Taḍkeratal-molūk*, pp. 14, 96; Kaempfer, pp. 24, 66, 106, 271, 276f.; Tavernier, pp. 130, 146).

Audiences were normally held in a hall in the palace, but in spring and summer sometimes in the palace garden, in which case the crown and throne were carried to the garden and a parasol was erected. In Achaemenid times the hall of the Apadāna was used for audience ceremonies, in late Sasanian times halls in Kōsrow’s palace. Rulers in Islamic times held their audiences in buildings specially constructed for the purpose. The great khans of the Mongols were still tent dwellers and therefore gave audience in tents, but under the Il-khans reception in the palace gradually again became customary. From Tīmūr’s reign there are reports of audiences in both palaces and tents. In the Safavid period use of tents finally ceased, and as in old times the royal audience, now called the *majles*, took place in a palace—at first at Qazvīn, later at one of many fine edifices such as the ‘Alī Qāpū (q.v.), Čehel Sotūn, Kāk-e Bāḡ-e Golestān, Kāk-e Bāḡ-e Bolbol, and others at Isfahan. For an audience day, the floor of the hall was laid with carpets, and its walls were adorned with colorful screens, pictures of battles and feasts, and portraits of kings; the hall was embellished with flowers, lamps, censers, and artificial trees bearing jewel-studded leaves, fruits, and birds; the pools were beautified with floating flowers and fruits, and the *jets d’eau* were put into play. Armed guards wearing splendid uniforms and gold or silver belts stood in rows inside the hall and outside. Sometimes animals tethered with golden chains, such as lions, leopards, tigers, camels, elephants, and horses were put on display in



front of the palace. For special audiences, such as those held on Nowrūz and Mehragān festival days or for reception of envoys from foreign courts, the pageantry was greatly increased (Christensen, p. 397). Envoys arriving from abroad normally spent several days in the capital before they were received in audience; sometimes, particularly in the Safavid period, they were guests of the government during the whole of their stay in the country (*Šāh-nāma* I, pp. 144 v. 366, 172 vv. 684f.; III, p. 364 vv. 844f.; VI, p. 146 vv. 277ff.; *Šābe'*, pp. 14f., 79; Gardīzī, p. 200; Bayhaqī, pp. 48f., 50, 380, 470f., 655, 713f.; Jorfādaqānī, p. 132; Jovaynī, III, pp. 98, 101; Rašīd-al-Dīn, pp. 947f.; Banākatī, pp. 464f.; Qāšānī, pp. 45f., 133; Clavijo, pp. 206ff., 237ff., 241, 269ff.; *Ālamārā-ye Šafawī*, p. 593; Ḥasan Rūmlū, pp. 88, 92, 482, 484, 487; Qāzī Aḥmad, pp. 6, 63, 85, 89; Olearius, pp. 130f.; Tavernier, pp. 123f.; Kaempfer, pp. 206ff., 252ff.; Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, p. 397).

Royal audiences fell into two categories: (1) the private audience (*bār-e kāšš*) for reception of dignitaries of the kingdom and foreign princes and envoys or for consideration of state business, (2) the public audience (*bār-e 'āmm*) for reception of members of the public. Nowrūz and Mehragān audiences were similarly divided into celebrations for the elite (*kāšša*) and the public (*'amma*). On the first five days of each festival the king held public audiences for commoners, and on the sixth day he began a series of private audiences for dignitaries, nobles, and members of the royal family. Members of the nobility were not allowed to attend the public audiences (Bīrūnī, *al-Āṭāral-bāqīa*, pp. 218f.; idem, *Tafhīm*, p. 253; Nezām-al-Molk, p. 60; Mas'ūdī, *Morūj* I, p. 311).

In ancient Iran, the royal audience formed such an important part of the system of government that the audience and the monarchy were thought to be inseparable; if ever the audiences ceased, the monarchy too would cease (*Šāh-nāma* V, p. 176 v. 912; VII, p. 12 vv. 88f.). For this reason instruction in the rules of the audience ceremony was part of the education of royal princes (*Šāh-nāma* II, pp. 200 v. 88, 218 v. 190; IV, p. 684 v. 3865).

At both public and private audiences one of the king's principal duties was to hear complaints. For this reason the term "(hearing of) grievances" (*maẓālem*) was sometimes used instead of "audience" (*bār*) in the Islamic period. Every ruler vowed at the start of his reign that he would sit to hear grievances once or twice a week on prescribed days (*Šāh-nāma* V, pp. 102 v. 35f., 232 v. 11; VI, pp. 162 v. 33f., 180 vv. 25ff.; Bayhaqī, pp. 195, 472, 675; Ebn al-Aṭīr, X, p. 459; Bondārī, p. 7). From the viewpoint of members of the public, the king sitting in audience was their last legal resort, as he had power to give redress to those



whose rights had been violated by his officials and courtiers. The king could also grant pardons. If an offender was admitted to an audience, this was taken to mean that he would probably be pardoned. Therefore, in the popular view, the measure of a king's justice was his willingness to sit in audience. A king who was *farāḳbār*, i.e., held audiences frequently, was thought to be a just ruler, while one who was *tangbār*, i.e., did so seldom, was considered unjust. The people did not forgive a king who neglected to hold audiences on the prescribed days unless there were compelling reasons such as a journey, war, sickness, death of a relative, receipt of bad news (*Šāh-nāma* I, p. 162 v. 586; III, p. 8 v. 50; IV, p. 220 vv. 256ff.; VI, pp. 4 vv. 8ff., 222 v. 752, 702 v. 1899; VII, p. 278 v. 3298; Bayhaqī, pp. 199, 703, 747; Ṭabarī, I, p. 871; Rāvandī, pp. 254, 277; Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 113; idem, *Aufsätze*, p. 106).

Even so, there was always the risk that chamberlains might abuse their power or that courtiers might contrive to prevent commoners from gaining access to the king (*Šāh-nāma* VI, p. 162 vv. 33f.). Various precautions against this danger are mentioned; for example, the king might get rid of suspected chamberlains, or he might hold public audiences in a field outside the palace precincts after giving instructions that petitioners should wear red clothes so as to catch the king's eye. Such precautions were evidently more theoretical than practical, and, although certain kings are reported to have observed them, the reports often have a fabulous aspect like the story of Anōšīravan's "chain of justice" (*Tārīḳ-e Sīstān*, p. 265; Neẓām-al-Molk, pp. 13, 55f.; Rāvandī, p. 131). On the other hand, there are many recorded instances of deception by kings who summoned men to audiences and arrested or even killed them as soon as they arrived. The best-known case is the murder of Abū Moslem (q.v.) in 137/755 by order of the perfidious caliph al-Manṣūr; having obeyed a summons to an audience, he was escorted to the audience hall and killed by the caliph's guards right there. Similar foul play was not uncommon in later times, notably under the Samanids, Ghaznavids, and Saljuqs (Gardīzī, pp. 160f.; Bayhaqī, pp. 66, 68f., 97, 99; Rāvandī, pp. 259f.).

In the long run, however, such abuses and crimes did not detract from the prestige of the royal audience. At all times the audience was an important part of both court ceremonial and governmental administration. See also *darbār*; *salām*.



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