



BARDIYA

BARDIYA, the younger son of Cyrus the Great. The name is derived from proto-Iranian **bardz*-“be high.” In the Elamite version of the Behistun (Bīsotūn) inscription he is called Pirtiya, but the Akkadian version and private documents from Babylonia have the Median form Barziya. He is called Smerdis by Herodotus (3.30), Mardos by Aeschylus (*Persae* 774), Mergis by Justin (1.9), and Merphis by Hellanicus (Jacoby, *Fragmente* 1, p.449). On the other hand, Ctesias (*Persica* 29.8) calls the minor son of Cyrus Tanyoxarces (Old Persian **tanu-wazraka* “large bodied”; cf. also Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 8.7,11 where he is called Tanaoxares). Both names, Bardiya and Tanyoxarces, imply that the prince was of exceptional physical strength, and it seems probable that Tanyoxarces was a nickname of Bardiya. According to the Behistun inscription (1.29-30), Cambyses and Bardiya had the same father and mother. Herodotus (3.2 and 30) also says that they were full brothers, their mother being *Cassandane*, daughter of Pharnaspes, an Achaemenid. Ctesias’s assertion (29.2) that the wife of Cyrus and mother of his sons was Amytis, daughter of the last Median king Astyages, is apparently wrong.

Darius in his Behistun inscription (DB 1.30-33) says that Cambyses, after becoming king but before his departure to Egypt, slew Bardiya and that the assassination was kept a secret from the people. However, according to Herodotus (3.10), Bardiya (Smerdis) went to Egypt with Cambyses and spent some time there. Later Cambyses sent him back to Susa out of envy, because Bardiya alone could draw the bow brought from the Ethiopian king. Then Cambyses had a dream in which he saw his brother sitting on the royal throne.



As a result of this dream Cambyses sent his trusted counselor Prexaspes from Egypt to Susa with the order to kill Smerdis. Herodotus gives two versions of the murder. According to the first, Smerdis was killed in a hunting field near Susa; the other version says that Prexaspes drowned him in the Erythrean Sea. The murder was kept secret and was known only to Patizeithes, a Magian whom Cambyses had left in charge of the royal palace before he went to Egypt, and a few others. This Magian had a brother, who looked very much like the dead Bardiya and even happened to have from birth the same name. Patizeithes persuaded him to raise a rebellion against Cambyses and proclaim himself king, claiming to be the real son of Cyrus. For some time he was able to pass himself off as the dead Bardiya (see Herodotus, 3.61-62).

In the Behistun inscription (DB 1.36, etc.) this impostor is called “Gaumāta the Magian” (*maguš*; the Akkadian version adds “a Mede,” see DB 1.15). The name has been preserved by Justin (1.9) in the form Cometes as the name of the Usurper’s brother. Justin says that it was Cometes who killed the prince Mergis and that the assassination took place after the death of Cambyses. As seen from the Behistun inscription, Gaumāta rose in revolt against Cambyses on March 11, 522 b.c., claiming to be Bardiya. As Herodotus (3.62-65) narrates further, news came from Persia to Cambyses when he was in Syria on his way back home that his younger brother had usurped the throne. However, Prexaspes assured Cambyses that he had slain Bardiya. Then Cambyses died in the spring of 522 b.c., confessing to the murder of his brother. But after the death of Cambyses Prexaspes consistently denied that Bardiya was dead. Finally Darius records in the Behistun inscription (1.48-61) that on 29 September 522 b.c. he slew Gaumāta with the help of six noble Persians and became king.

According to Ctesias (29.8-14) Cyrus on his deathbed appointed Bardiya (Tanyoxarces) governor (*despotēs* “lord”) of the Bactrians, Choramnians (i.e., Chorasmians), Parthians, and Carmanians. When Bardiya flogged a Magian, Sphendadates by name, for some misdeed, Sphendadates in revenge told Cambyses that his brother was plotting against him. Then at the order of Cambyses Bardiya drank bull’s blood and died. Sphendadates, who was very similar in appearance to Bardiya, dressed in the prince’s clothes and pretended to be the minor son of Cyrus. After Cambyses’ death he became king. Five years after the assassination, the mother of Bardiya learned from a eunuch that her son was dead and that the king was really Sphendadates. Before that time the disappearance of the prince passed quite unnoticed by



everybody except Cambyses' accomplices Izabates, Artasyras, and Bagapates. Ctesias agrees with the Behistun inscription in dating the assassination of the prince before Cambyses' expedition against Egypt, which was conquered in the summer of 525 b.c. Since it took some time for Cambyses' army to get there, and the assassination became known only in September, 522 b.c. (see DB 1.55-57; cf. Herodotus, 3.68), Ctesias might be right in dating the death of the prince to 526 b.c.

If we believe Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* 8.7.11, 8.8.2), at his father's death Bardiya (Tanaoxares) had been designated satrap of the Medes, Armenians, and Cadusians. When Cyrus died his sons started quarreling (see also Plato, *Leges* 3.694-95; and *Epistulae* 7.332A).

Some modern scholars (e.g., Olmstead) believe that the man who revolted against Cambyses was his true brother and lawful heir and that Darius killed him, calling him Gaumāta and inventing the story of the false Bardiya in order to justify his own seizure of the kingship. However, this must remain hypothetical (see [gaumāta](#)).

According to the Behistun inscription (DB 3.21-28) in 522 b.c. a Persian, Vahyazdāta by name, raised a rebellion against Darius, also claiming to be Bardiya, son of Cyrus.

Bardiya left a daughter, Parmys by name, whom Darius married when he became king in order to legitimize his position (see Herodotus, 3.88).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text; see also W. Brandenstein and M. Mayrhofer, *Handbuch des Altpersischen*, Wiesbaden, 1964, pp. 110, 114.

M. A. Dandamaev, *Persien unter den ersten Achämeniden*, Wiesbaden, 1976, pp. 108-58.

Idem, *Politicheskaya istoriya Akhemenidskoï derzhavy*, Moscow, 1985, pp. 64-85.



I. Gershevitch, "The False Smerdis," *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 27/4, Budapest, 1979, pp. 337-51.

Kent, *Old Persian*, p.200.

F. W. König, *Der Falsche Bardiya: Dareios der Grosse und die Lügenkönige*, Vienna, 1938.

A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, Chicago, 1948, pp. 107-10.

J. Wiesehöfer, *Der Aufstand Gaumātas und die Anfänge Dareios' I.*, Bonn, 1978.

Search terms:

□□□□ bardia bardiaa