



CUPBEARER

CUPBEARER, Parthian *tkrpty*, loanword in Armenian *takarāpet* (cf. Pers. *taḡār* “trough,” Arm. *takar* “barrel”; Hübschmann, *Armenische Grammatik*, p. 251 no. 639). The Parthian form is attested as the title of one *Zōdkirt in the inscription of Narseh at Paikuli (ca. 293 c.e.), in a list of officials, following the scribe of accounts of the realm and preceding various lords and knights (Frye, p. 376; Humbach and Skjærvø, III/1, p. 128). In Achaemenid times, under **Cambyses**, the son of a high noble served as cupbearer; the cupbearer of **Artaxerxes I** (465-25 b.c.e.) was the Hebrew Nehemiah. He was a eunuch and possibly entertained the king, as well as serving him (cf. Ganymede, the Phrygian youth who served as cupbearer of Zeus), but it is unlikely that the earliest Achaemenid cupbearers were eunuchs, for Hellanicus claimed that the Persians learned **castration** from the Babylonians (see Cook, p. 136). In his first-person narrative Nehemiah reported (2:1ff.) that after he had heard of the ruined state of the walls of Jerusalem he served his lord wine with a sad countenance. The king observed that his cupbearer lacked his customary cheer and, upon being apprised of the reason, sent Nehemiah with letters and powers to restore Jerusalem and appointed him governor of Judah. The cupbearer appears thus to have enjoyed special access to the Achaemenid monarch, who usually feasted on the other side of a curtain from his company, and, if with them, then always still of different wine. The scope of the cupbearer’s influence appears to have been considerable in view of the fact that it was customary for the king to consider petitions when slightly inebriated, so that the verdict might be favorable; the Sasanians continued this practice (Cook, pp. 139, 141). The royal banquet (Mid. and NPers. and Arm.



loanword *bazm*), moreover, was the focus of Persian and Armenian social and political life; precedence in seating was carefully regulated and minutely observed (Garsoïan, pp. 30ff.). The danger of abuse of such power is recounted in the *Datastanagirkœ* (1184 c.e.) of the Armenian Mxiṭ'ar Gos: "If cupbearers associate with wizards, let them be tortured to death" (cited in Awetik'ean et al., II, p. 839).

In Arsacid Armenia the hereditary office of cupbearer (*takarāpetuṭ'awn*) belonged to the house of Gnuni, who possessed ancestral holdings in Ayrarat and Vaspurakan. Their name was evidently derived from *gini* "wine"; a scion of this house, Gnēl, served as cupbearer to the king of Armenia (Moses of Khorene, 2.18). This dynastic house, which can be traced back to Orontid times, was of middling stature, contributing 500 horse to the royal armies (the least a noble house is recorded to have given is 100; the Mamikoneans, commanders-in-chief, contributed 1,000; see Toumanoff, pp. 205-06), yet it received also the office of *hazarapet* "[chiliarch](#)". Similarly, Pacorus, cupbearer to the Parthian king, commanded his forces in the campaign in Israel of 40 b.c.e. (see Avi-Yonah, p. 60). Arthur Christensen (*Iran Sass.*, p. 394 and n. 4) suggested that the Sasanian *taghārbadh* was "something like a grand master of the court," but this definition seems unnecessarily general. More likely the cupbearer performed largely his stated function, from thence exercising influence on other facets of court life or achieving advancement to additional posts.

See also [sāqī](#).

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