



XERXES I. THE NAME

XERXES, name of two Achaemenid rulers and of some later princes.

i. THE NAME

Xerxes is the common Greek (*Xérxēs*) and Latin form (*Xerxes*, *Xerses*) of the Achaemenid throne-name which in Old Persian is spelled *x-š-y-a-r-š-a* (with the initial *a-* of the second element being spread into medial position) and must be interpreted as four-syllable *Xšaya-ršā* (thus first P. Tedesco in Herzfeld, pp. 97 f. and Hoffmann, p. 85, fn. 15).

This form and the secondary contracted form **Xšayaršā* are reflected more or less accurately in Bab. *Ḫi-ši-'ar-šá/ši*, *Ḫi-ši-(i-)ar-ši/šú*, *Aḫ-ši-ia-ar-šú*, *Ak-ši-ia-ar-šú*, *Ak-ši-ia-mar-šú* (with many other variants; cf. Dandamayev, pp. 82 f., no. 145; Tavernier, pp. 23 f., 66 ff.; Zadok, pp. 207-24, no. 283), Aram. *ḫšy'rš*, *ḫšyrš*, *ḫšyrš* (cf. Porten and Lund, p. 356a), Bibl.-Aram. *ḫšwrwš* (with the wrong vocalization “*Aḫašwērōš*”), and Eg. *ḫšjrš*, *ḫšjṛrš* (cf. Vittmann, p. 164). From all those renderings are different both El. *Ik-še-ir-(iš-)šá* (cf. Hinz and Koch, p. 750), that is, /*Kšerša*/ or the like, and Gk. *Xérxēs* (originating in **Xérsēs* by distance-assimilation *x—x* from *x—s*), which apparently render a shorter two-syllable form **Xšairšā* or even monophthongized **Xšēršā*; this medially shortened form must have existed already in Old Iranian (probably in spoken Old Persian) and was not created only in Greek (with a quite regular intermediate **Xeírsēs* or **Xeírēēs*) and Elamite respectively. The longstanding view that Gk. *Xérxēs* goes back to the attested Old Persian form through **Xérxēs*, **Xā'rxās*, and OIran. **Xšāršā* must be given up for phonological



reasons (see esp. Schmitt, 1996, pp. 88 f.), and a common explanation for both the Elamite and the Greek form (which are remarkably similar to each other) must in any case be preferred.

Old Persian *Xšaya-ṛšā* is a compound with the verbal stem *xšaya-* “ruling” as the first element and the *n*-stem noun **ṛšan-* “hero, man” as the second element; the original *n*-stem paradigm, however, is preserved only in the nominative form, whereas the other cases are remodeled analogically in one way or another (see Kent, p. 65a); with the primary meaning “ruling over heroes” it is close to Ved. *kṣayád-vīra-* “id.” with a similar formation.

Minor bearers of this ancient royal name in later times include the following two:

1. A king of Sophene (Western Armenia). He fled when Antiochus III besieged the royal capital Arsamosata (Iran. **Aršāmašāt*) in 212 B.C.E. because tribute payments had been stopped by his father (probably Arsames, the founder of Arsamosata). But at the same time, he asked for negotiations and indeed was graciously received by Antiochus, who demanded only relatively small tribute from him (Polybios 8.23.1–5); he took Antiochus’s sister Antiochis to wife, who later eliminated him (see H. H. Schmitt, esp. pp. 28, 93); he is known also from his coinage (see Alram, p. 68).

2. A son of Mithridates VI Eupator of Pontos (see [PONTUS](#)). Still a child, he was captured with some of his brothers and sisters (among them, one Darius and one Cyrus) during the revolt against Mithridates that preceded the king’s suicide. The children were handed over to Gnaeus Pompey, who displayed them in the triumph awarded him in Rome in 61 B.C.E. for his victories in the East, including those over the king of Pontos and his allies (Appianus, *Mithr.* 108, 117).

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