

## Xerxes I (Khshayarsha) King of Persia (485-465 BCE)

Contributed by Akbar Nemati

Xerxes I (meaning "ruler of heroes" although his real name was Ahasuerus) "Xerxes" is the Greek transliteration of the Persian throne name Khshayarsha or Khsha-yar-shan, In the Hebrew Bible, the Persian king 𐎧𐎫𐎲𐎠𐎹 Ahashverosh (Ahasuerus in Greek) probably corresponds to Xerxes I was king of Persia of the Achaemenid dynasty from 485-465 BCE. He was son of Darius the Great and Atossa, daughter of Cyrus the Great.

I am moved to pity, when I think of the brevity of human life, seeing that of all this host of men not one will still be alive in a hundred years' time.

Xerxes I (reigned 485 - 465 BC)

Persian monarch.

On surveying his army.

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Xerxes became king of Persia at the death of his father Darius the Great in 485, at a time when his father was preparing a new expedition against Greece and had to face an uprising in Egypt (Herodotus' Histories, VII, 1-4). According to Herodotus, the transition was peaceful this time. Because he was about to leave for Egypt, Darius, following the law of his country had been requested to name his successor and to choose between the elder of his sons, born from a first wife before he was in power, and the first of his sons born after he became king, from a second wife, Atossa, Cyrus' daughter, who had earlier been successively wed to her brothers Cambyses and Smerdis, and which he had married soon after reaching power in order to confirm his legitimacy. Atossa was said to have much power on Darius and he chose her son Xerxes for successor.

Xerxes, who had by then been away from Asia rather long for a king with such widespread responsibilities, returned home and left Mardonius in charge of further operations. The real end of the invasion came with the Battle of Plataea, the fall of Thebes (a stronghold of pro-Persian forces), and the Persian naval loss at Mycale in 479 BCE. Of the three, the Persian loss at Plataea was perhaps the most decisive. Up until Mardonius was killed, the issue of the battle was probably still in doubt, but, once leaderless, the less organized and less disciplined Persian forces collapsed. Time and again in later years this was to be the pattern in such encounters, for the Persians never solved the military problem posed by the disciplined Greek hoplites.

After quelling the revolt of Egypt, Xerxes finally decided to pursue the project of his father to subdue Greece, but made lengthy preparations for that. Among other things, remembering what had happened to Mardonius' expedition a few years earlier (his fleet had been destroyed by a tempest in 492 while trying to round Mount Athos), he ordered a channel to be opened for his fleet north of Mount Athos in Chalcidice. He also had two boat bridges built over the Hellespont near Abydos for his troop to cross the straits.

The expedition was ready to move in the spring of 480 and Xerxes himself took the lead.

During his reign he put down uprisings in both Egypt and Babylon, but his efforts to invade Europe were thrown back by Greece in 480. He was assassinated by his chief minister, Artabarus, in 465 and succeeded by his son Artaxerxes I. Ascending the throne upon the death of his father, he subdued a rebellion in Egypt, and then spent three years preparing a great fleet and army to punish the Greeks for aiding the Ionian cities in 498 bc and for their victory over the Persians at Marathon in 490 bc.

Xerxes's Hall of the 100 Columns is the most impressive building in the complex. It is also the most crowded--a jumble of fallen columns, column heads, and column bases.

The Gate of Xerxes at Persepolis shows that the Winged Lion was placed at the corner of one entrance. When you stood in front of the gate you saw a lion with four legs and when you were inside the gate you also saw a lion with four legs.

The Greek historian Herodotus gives as the combined strength of Xerxes' land and naval forces the incredible total of 2,641,610 warriors. Xerxes is said to have crossed the Hellespont by a bridge of boats more than a kilometer in length and to have cut a canal through the isthmus of Mount Athos.

Xerxes died in 465, assassinated probably upon order by one of his sons, Artaxerxes, who succeeded him.

In the Laws, Plato compares Xerxes to Cambyses in that, as him, he was victim of his education at the court, unlike his father Darius, who was not a son of king (Laws, III, 695c-e). And he goes on to say that it is almost impossible for someone raised in an extremely rich family to become virtuous, and to explain thus why there was no other great king of Persia after Darius.

Artaxerxes continued building work at Persepolis. It was completed during the reign of Artaxerxes III, around 338 BC. In 334 BC, Alexander defeated the Persian armies of the third Darius. He marched into Iran and, once there, he turned his attention to Persepolis, and that magnificent complex of buildings was burnt down. This act of destruction for revenge of the Acropolis was surprising from one who prided himself on being a pupil of Aristotle. This was the end of the Persian Empire.