

The Armenian-Iranian Common Ritual Festivals

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Abstract: Armenia-Iran has had relations for thousands of years. Their cultural interactions, especially, have not yet been investigated multilaterally and objectively. Some of the celebrations, which were celebrated before Christ, are celebrated by Armenian as their religious celebrations. Some of these are common between Iranian and Armenian. In this paper, the author wants intentionally to investigate these ritual common festivals. The findings of present investigation may describe the relation and accessibility of the rite, religion and history of these two countries during the year longs.

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1. Introduction

The relations between Iran and Armenia have a long precedence from historical, cultural and economical point of view, which, one of the important factor is their neighboring and their neighborhood.

In this regard, the first truthful evidence is Bistoon inscription, which is wrote during Darioush the first Achaemenian and in the concept Armenia is called ad Armina. (Kent, 1952, p115)

Before that time, the Armenian also have close relation with the Media, even at war with Assyrian, they help them during the storming toward the Neinava. Considering to the equality of both races and their relationship and closeness of their countries from geographical point of view, it seems that both races also have common points in various cases, such as their celebrations and rites.

Here, their common ritual celebration will be investigated and each related celebration is compared and discussed according to both countries traditions.

2. Iranian Nowsard (Naurooz) and Armenian Navasard

Nowsard or Navasard (Naurooz) festivals have been in ancient Aryan races as an olden common tradition. In ancient Armenia the first month of the year was called Navasard. Navasard was celebrated in the 11th August, in the ancient Armenia calendar. Kings, courties and others were attended in this festival and the celebration had a special gloriousness. Some of athletic tournament, such as: horse race, harness racing and foot-race carried out, the poet read their own poets and the musicians blowed out their own music. Releasing doves was another formality in this festival. The Armenian used many kinds of masks in Navasard festival, some people believed that mask was ran the evil spirits off.

The rhapsodists (public musicians) were reading and dancing.

Navasard is just celebrated between some Armenian societies. The Armenian come together and compete with each other, the winners are the victors of the Navasard. It says that the Armenian gods and the Goddess had their own special rites. The proper rite for Armazd (Ahura Mazda) had established at the beginning of Navasard (the first month of the year).

To the Zoroastrians, the sixth day is called the "Naurooz Bozorg" or "greater Naurooz" as it is celebrated as the birthday of Holy Zarathushtra. The sixth day of the month of Farvardin is the day of Ourmazd.

Anania Shirakasi (Seventh Century) and Johannes Imastaser (1129-1045) say:

Nowsard is the name of one of the Hig daughter. Hig is the Father of Armenian mythos.

The day after Amanor, they celebrated one of their most important and gloriousness celebrations and all of people of all ages attended to the festival and drench each other with water.

Taghizadeh believed that the Armenian adopted Nowsard festival from Iranian and they changed in to John the Baptist festival after believe in Jesus Christ. He advocates: "in case of adoption of the Iranian festivals by Armenian, it can be said that it will be truth in the first celebration of Nowsard or Vanature festival" Armenian celebration which will be changed into John the Baptist celebration and also Nowsard 15th celebration with Anahid festival and may be in seventh parabola festival or "Vah Vah" festival "likely is another type of Vahagan", which is believed that is the same as Iranian Varsarghaneh.

He added that after adoption of the Jesus Christ Armenian used their calendar but they changed their paganism festivals into Christianity festivals. It

is understood from "Agatankghos" that the Gregore was chosen the first day of Nowsard which was "Amanor" festival as John the Baptist reminiscence. He expressed that Gregor is determined the seventh day of the third month of the Armenian for the same apostles and this was encountered with the day which Gregor established some churches in order to infix the sacred relics remaining from these Saints and was brought from Qeysarieh.

The other author "Gregor Arozroni" about 690 BC declared that this second feast was one of the Armenian Gods fest from the first, "Vah, Vahan" and Zarbar Demon, was Zarmad and the first feast (first of Nowsard) was Armazd feast, he added two other feasts into the list of the Armenian church which were altered from the Armenian pagan time.

Changing of the feast of Armenian pagan time into Christianity feast is actual in Taqizadeh point of view, but the factor of this changes was Gregor Noor is not sure.

3. Iranian Nowsard Tradition

Nowsard is one of the most ancient traditions that is celebrated in Iran and in many other countries from Ma'ad era. Now means bright and Sard means year, then Nowsard means New Year.

Nowsard tradition is one of the especial and common Aryan tradition which is called Nowsard by Iranian, Navasard by Indian, Nosarej or Navsarji by Kharazmis, Nowsard by Soqdis and Navasard by Armenian.

Abo-Reyhan Biruni wrote about Nowsard in Soqd:

"Soqdis divided their months in accordance with the fourth part of the year. First of Nowsard from the month of Soqdi was the first of summer; the first day of Nowsard was new year for Soqdis which is the Great Naurooz. He also wrote about Nowsard in Kharazm: "Navarsachi, the first day is the beginning of the year and it is new day."

Taqizadeh wrote about Nowsard: "Nowsard is not the name of the first day of Iranian year or is not the well-known Naurooz (the first day of Farvardin = small Naurooz), but it is the name of the Great Naurooz, which celebrated on sixth of Farvardin and it was equal with the first day of Armenian Navasar and Nowsard, the Soqdis month and Nowsarej the month of Kharazm. This day was very great by Iranian and it was really the first day of Iranian year. After first leap year, beginning of the year back 5 days off, this actual Naurooz, became the sixth day of the year. Iranian were celebrated this day as second Naurooz (Great) and it showed continuously the actual Naurooz. Beginning of summer, or perhaps Nastoris (beginning of year) and their ritual tradition "12 apostle" is not denominated from Iranian

Naurooz (small), but it denominated from Iranian Nowsard (or Great Naurooz) which was coalesced with it on that year, whether on that time Iranian tradition encountered with Sunday June 28, just the seventh Sunday after the first festival. It was Nastoris custom that splashing water on each other, whether Iranian had the same custom in sixth day (day of Mazdad) of Farvardin (Great Naurooz or Nowsard Naurooz).

4. Iranian Baregandan and Armenian Barekandan

The other common festival between Iranian and Armenian is the Baregandan or Barekandan. In addition to the similarity of the name, this festival is similar in tradition and its pursuance too. According to calendar, the prior to weekly feasts, as Greater Lent, (with the exception of the feast preceding Holy Nativity) are called Barekandan. And Iranian and Armenian are celebrated it the day before Lent begins. Baregandan is celebrated on Sunday and run on 8-10 days. The word Baregandan means "good living" or "good life", as are called to live cheerfully, joyfully and to be happy on these days preceding fasting period. In Baregandan all people are uninhibited in their actions.

Armenia Great Lent begins on Sunday and it will be continued for seven weeks, and Easter will come after these seven weeks. Due to variability of Easter, pursuance of Baregandan is variable in different years.

The latest Saturday before Great Lent is called "Bon-Baregandan" by Armenian. Baregandan was celebrated in ancient Armenia before adoption of Christianity. This day is celebrated because winter and the problem of winter time were finished from one side and the glad tidings of beginning of spring together with happiness are started from the other side.

Armenian was celebrated this day together with their friends and family one week before the Great Lent and they lay the cloth and prepare some amusement in relation with this festival. The actors use masks and some athletic competition effectuated and actor showdown.

Armenian was used mask during hunting, because they believed that mask can escape the unmanageable spirits. Bargendan was celebrated before the fasting time in Iran. In ancient time Iranian were celebrated the last days of the month of Shaaban and Bargendan was celebrated in seven to ten days. Alaameh Dehkhoda declared that:

"Bargendan, peg a stone or carnival is the feast which is celebrated in Shaaban due to arrival of Ramadan"

He described that: Peg a stone, Bargh Anaz, or carnival is a feast which is celebrated at the end of

Shaaban. The last day of Shaaban is called Carnival by Ali Akbar Nafisi and he described:

"Bargendan is a festival which is celebrated in the last days of Shaaban and it is called carnival and it means the feast of the end of fasting time."

5. Iranian Tirgan and Armenian Vartavar

Tirgan or Vartavar is one of the most ancient festival common between Iranian and Armenian. It is celebrated from the time of the Ma'ad (Media) era. Tirgan or Vartavar was celebrated during harvest time. Armenian was splashing water on each other and were prepared athletic completion. It seems that Tirgan or Vartavar is Aryan especial festival and it doesn't any relation with any religion.

Armenian interested in Vartavar and all Armenian of around the world celebrate it. Armenian calendar during ancient Armenia was like Iranian calendar and a year had 12 month and each month consists of 30 days; each day had an especial name. the five remaining days was called "Havliast" by Armenian and was added to the end of the 12th month of the year and by these five days the year had become 365 days. Armenian was celebrated vartavar during the first day of "Havlitas" and during the festival they were released doves and sprinkled water on each other.

The Armenian researcher have been attributed Vartavar to Astghik and Anahid. Astghik was the goddess of water, beauty, love and fertility. One of the Armenian researcher in Israel expressed that people celebrated Vartavar and they offered her red roses as a celebration ("Vart" means "rose" in Armenian).

Agatangoes and Khurnansi expressed that "Majan" was son of Ardashes, the Armenia King. He was fought by "Meeds" and "Krows" in Ararat campaign and won them. Majan became the priest of "Aramazd" temple and after death he was buried in "Bagauan" province and he was adored as God of hospitality and patron. On this occasion a glorious festival was celebrated in Bagavan region every year and Armenian from whole the world were gone there and were attended to the feast; and this is Vartavar.

Hayo alishan stated that the Armenian who were resided in around of Ararat mountain, after Noah rak was gotten stuck in mud, were cherished and celebrated memory of Noah storm, after they were adopted Christinaity. They superposed Vartavar with transfiguration of Jesus Christ. He stated that Tirgan and Vartavar was celebrated in Iran and Armenia simultaneously since long time ago, but Vartavar is celebrated 98 days following Easter from 28 of July till the first of August.

According to a tradition, Armenian did not eat apple the days before Vartavar and they offer apple to each other during the feast.

Tirgan or water splashing feast is celebrated from the time of the Ma'ad (Median) era. A year was divided into 12 months in Iranian calendar, which was 360 days. The remaining 5 days were added to the 8th month and were called "Khamseh Mostaraghe". Each day of a month had an especial name of a God. Whenever name of a month and a day was similar, Iranian were celebrated that day. Bable Talmud and Jerusalem Talmud are the ancient documents which refer to celebration of Tirgan in Ma'ad era.

In Zoroastrian religion, tir means the goddess of rain. There is a hymn in Avesta which is praised the rain goddess; due to her efforts, the earth is blessed with rain and the farmlands are irrigated.

Formerly, the researcher of 4th century were believed that celebrating of Tirgan is related to an occasion in Sassanian era and this was because of the importance of Tirgan feast and Iranian favorite to celebrating of Tirgan feast at that time. Abo-Reyhan Biruni stated that the fought between Touranian Afrasiab and Iranian Manouchehr and thrown an arrow y Arash Kamangir in order to determine the Iranian and Touranian speech was the reason of celebrating Tirgan.

During Safavid era Tirgan was celebrated in most part of Iran and the King Abbas was interested in this celebration and attended to the feast. Pieter, the Italian torist Dolavale and Don gracia De Cielo Ofigo were Spanish ambassador to oversee the celebration in attendance of King Abbas.

The Dr. stated that "Tirmysner (13th of Tir), Tirgan feast was the most well-known feast after Naurooz, which was celebrated in all around the Iran on 13th of Tir in month of Tir.

Tirgan feast was an interested festival for some Giulani and Mazandarani poets. Now it is only celebrated amon some villages in the provinces of East of Guilan and wes of Mazandaran. One of the traditions of this festival was fortune telling. It was in this manner that a first child of a family and the last child of another family, who know each other for a long time, went to spring bank and took a bowl of water and brought back home. Women and men of each family made a wish and threw a sign such as earing and bracelet into the water. During the night they came together and a minor girl sat close the bowl and ceremony is started, Tabari Khan should sing a song at least in the number of each attended. Tabari Khan is sang a song and themarker who made a wish can understand his answer about his wish by the singer hint.

Iranian and Armenian ancient tradition is due to ethnic, national and geographic closeness of both countries, then naturally Armenian Vartavar and Iranian Tirgan was celebrated simultaneously from long time ago.

Iranian Sada and Armenian Diarend Araj festival is one of the Iranian-Armenian common festival. "Fire Festival" is called Sada or Sade by Iranian and Diarend Araj by Armenian. This is one of the Aryan especial festivals from the ancient time.

Armenian is celebrated the festival forty days after took birth of Jesus Christ on February 13th, and it means look forwarded to. Pagan spring festival in honor of Mihr, the God of fire, was taken over by the church to commemorate the bringing of the Babe Jesus to the temple, where Mary sacrificed two doves according to the custom of purification. There was an old devotionalist man, Simon, who lived in Jerusalem. He required God had long life to see Jesus. When Mary arrived Jerusalem temple, he came to the temple and he fondled Jesus and praised to God. Owing to the fact that the sky was darkening, when Mary arrived Jerusalem, people look forwarded her and Jesus by lamplight and fire burning. In this manner Armenian church is celebrated Diarend Araj on February 13th together with burning fire.

Due to deletion of the Armenian pagan festivals effects, there is not enough information about "feast of fire" from ancient Armenia. Fire had women characteristics and water had men characteristics, due to ancient Armenia traditions, and they had deep aid with each other. In accordance with some Armenian stories, there was "Aramazd", "Astghik" and "Ourmazd" home in the top of "Pagat" mountain and a little inferior there was house of eternal fire. There was a big spring at the mountain slope. Fire and water were sister and brother. Thus nobody wasted the ash, but they clear by brother's "water" treas. In addition to water and fire, ash was also divine.

On the afternoon of the 13th of February, which is the day before the church festival of the purification, a pile of wood consisting usually of thorn-wood, cane, and straw is gathered in the churchyard. The entire community comes together in the church on the night of the same day, each person provided with a candle. The candles are lighted from the church light, and after the priest has blessed the pile, it is set ablaze from all sides, after which the candles are put on. As soon as the fire has died down, the candles are relighted from the glowing embers which are regarded as sacred, and carried a small portion of the fire back to their homes to make new glowing fire from the "blessed fire" of the temple.

Jashn-e Sade (feast of fire) is similar to Armenian Diarend Araj festival among Iranian. Sade

fell not on the winter solstice, but forty days after it, namely on the 10th (Aban) day of the month of Bahman. Ancient Iranian divided the year into two parts: 7 months as summer and 5 months as winter.

Ferdowsi the famous Iranian poet expressed that King Hushang, the 2nd King of the Mythological Peshdadian dynasty established the Sade tradition. It is said that once Hushang was climbing a mountain when all of a sudden he saw a snake and wanted to hit it with a stone. When he threw the stone, it fell on another stone and since they were both flint stones, fire broke out and the snake escaped. This way he discovered how to light a fire. Hushang cheered up and praised God who revealed to him the secret of lighting a fire, and celebrated this discovery. Sade is celebrated until 7th century and Mardavij, one of the Iranian King, was celebrated Sade very gloriously. After Mogul attack, this festival passed into silence gradually, but Zoroastrian and some villages in Khorasan are celebrated it now.

6. Mehregan in Iran-Armenia

Mehregan is one of the common Iranian festivals. In the Zoroastrian religious calendar, Mehregan is celebrated on the sixteenth day of the seventh month. In Armenian calendar Mehregan was the 8th day of the 7th month, which was changed by changing the calendar into 21 days. The last day is called Great Mehregan.

Mehr was one of the Gods in ancient Iran. He called Mθra in Avesta and Mihr in Pahlavi, which draw more attention due to Mithra religion.

According to Pahlavi text, he was ethereal referee and interface. He was eminent in ancient Iran and his name was mentioned together with Ourmazd, the Greatest God, and Anahid. In Armenia Mithra was very beloved and the Armenian like him and to hold him in respect. He was so beloved in Armenia and his especial feast was celebrated very gloriously in the fourteenth of the month of Mahgan which was equal to February. One of the Armenian day is called like this.

Conclusion

It can be said that due to neighboring and congenerous of Iran and Armenia, they have more cultural similarity in their religion. These common cases can be seen in their ritual festivals, which is shown the impressionability of the Armenian from Iranian, whether in culture, religion, language and ritual festivals.

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