THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE
OF THE PAIKULI INSCRIPTION

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I

One of the great barriers to studies of early Sasanian history is probably the fact that materials written in Iranian languages are confined to a few inscriptions of Sasanian kings, legends of the coins, and so on. It is true, not a few literatures in Islamic period refer to some of historical episodes on the Sasanian dynasty, but they have almost no value as sources of the historical study, because they are merely historical folklores narrated on the tradition of the epical literature.(1)

Under these circumstances, the inscription found in Paikuli, inscribed by the order of Narseh I, a son of Shabuhr I, provides a lot of information about the early Sasanian history. E. Herzfeld made an attempt to decipher the inscription, but could not succeed in making clear the whole of the inscription partly because it was too badly damaged. In the 1970s, however, H. Humbach and P. Skjærvø attempted to reconstruct its text, which enabled us to get the outline of the story described in it.(2) But it seems doubtful whether the narration Narseh told can be accepted as a historical fact. The aim of this paper is to make an analysis of the narrative structure and to show that it has the nature common to other Iranian epical literatures. In this study, I adopted the theoretical hypothesis which I presented in my paper “On the narrative structure of Bisotun inscription (in Japanese).”(3)

II

There are found lots of stories about acquisition of kingship in old Iranian epics, for example, Cyrus II in Herodotus, Faridun, Ardashir I, Darab in Shah Nama, etc. They are made up of the following chain of

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motifs in the deep structure;

\(<\text{Positive Situation I}\> : <\text{Occurrence of Negative Situation}\> : <\text{Negative Situation}\> : <\text{Previous Announcement}\> : <\text{Battle}\> : <\text{Victory / Enthronment}\> : <\text{Positive Situation II}\>

This chain is frequently found out not only in epical literatures such as Shah Nama, but also in so-called historical documents such as the Bisotun inscription, though it is considerably transformed under the structural restriction the form of records of historical events impose on it.

\(<\text{Positive Situation I}\>\) This motif is shown by the authentic succession to the throne from Cyrus II to Cambyses II.

\(<\text{Occurrence of Negative Situation}\>\) This is shown by the lost of the qualification for the king and the occurrence of the chaotic situation which results from a king’s absence. The former of the two items is optional. In the Bisotun inscription, Cambyses II loses the qualification for the king on account of his murder of his brother Bardiya (Smerdis) and the disturbance of the order in the empire. His departure to Egypt stands for the temporary absence of a king and means the occurrence of a kind of vacancy (=a chaotic situation). In the story of Jam šid, his golden age corresponds to Positive Situation, and his fall which resulted from his habit of telling lies in his later years to Occurrence of Negative Situation.

\(<\text{Negative Situation}\>\) This is shown by the usurpation of the throne by an opponent. The usurpation by Gaumata a Median priest in the Bisotun inscription corresponds to this motif. Structurally appearance of a villain like him requires as a precondition the existence of vacant situation. In Cambyses, his absence from the empire is equivalent to it.

\(<\text{Previous Announcement}\>\) This is divided into two sub-motifs, \(<\text{Previous Announcement}\>\) and \(<\text{Prevention of the Realization}\>\). These motifs tend to be deleted or transformed in so called historical narrations because they are more fantastic than realistic. In the Bisotun inscription, Gaumata’s behaviour to murder men who know his secret is from his fear that the disclosure of his identity may lead him to the downfall. So he manages to prevent the realization of his fear. This fear corresponds to \(<\text{Previous Announcement}\>\), and the murder to \(<\text{Prevention of the Realization}\>\).

\(<\text{Battle}\>\) This is divided into two sub-motifs. The first is Darius' murder of Gaumata by the coup-d'etat, and the second his suppression of
many rebellions over the empire in one year. These two motifs are also attested in “Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Bābagān (Book of the Deeds of Ardashir, the son of Babag)."

\textit{<Victory/Enthronement> : <Positive Situation II>} This chain of motifs is inevitable. In Darius, it played an important role for the emphasis of his authenticity.

I discussed that this structural frame lies in the deep structure of the Bisotun inscription. This structure may, I think, also be true in the inscription of Paikuli.

\section*{III}

There are conflicting views about the reliability of the description by Narseh. Much the same conflict is also found in evaluations of the inscription of Bisotun. In the case of Darius,\textsuperscript{(4)} some students regard his declaration as true and recognize him as the justified successor to the throne. On the other hand, judging from some irrational statements observed in the inscription, others premise that Darius fabricated the story to his own advantage, and think of him as the usurper of the throne.

This is also the case in Narseh I. According to Henning, the object of the inscription was to tell us why, and how, Narseh ousted his great-nephew, Bahram III, from the kingship. So he decided that Narseh was ‘a mean spirit’\textsuperscript{(5)} R. N. Frye also supported his view.\textsuperscript{(6)} If the discussion is reasonable, the whole of the inscription will turn out to be just a made-up story.

The other view is stated by Skjærvø\textsuperscript{(7)} He criticizes Henning’s view, and prefers to accept the description as the historical fact. The main point of his opinion is that the inscription does not show any mean-spiritedness on the part of Narseh, and that as far as the inscription goes, the impression of Narseh gained from the inscription agrees with the statements of the later Islamic historians, Tabari and Al-Tha'alibi, who regarded Narseh as a good, competent and god-fearing ruler. The intention of Narseh, he says, was to show that he did not provoke the conflict by claiming the crown for himself, but Wahram who had been seduced by the ungodly Wahnām for selfish purpose was the originator of the conflict. Thus he concluded that Narseh used the inscription as proof of the legitimacy of his ascension to the throne of the Iranian empire.
In other words, the cause of this conflict seems to be derived from the difference of the point of view whether we should accept the contents as true, or recognize that Narseh intended to fabricate the narration. This problem has the similarity to that of reliance of the contents of the Bisotun inscription. In the case of Darius, direct descendants of Cyrus II broke off because of the murder by Cambyses II of his brother Bardiya and Cambyses' death at Damascus on his way to Iran. Darius from the collateral line, murdering the illegitimate king Gaumata, ascended to the throne. This abnormal situation about Darius' ascension urged him to make a justification for his legitimacy. He used the inscription in order to persuade people of the legitimacy of his ascension to the throne.

As for the lineage, Narseh is also complex as well. After the death of Ohrmazd I, not his son but Wahram I, a son of Shabuhr I, and a brother of Narseh, ascended to the throne. And then the kingship was succeeded to Wahrām II, a son of Wahrām I, and Narseh was appointed to the king of Armenia. Having ousted the rebellions in Khorasan and Sistan, Wahrām II appointed his son Wahrām III to the king of Saka. After the death of his father, Wahrām III ascended to the throne, but soon he was killed by Narseh, a brother of his grandfather. As it was general in ancient Iran that the eldest son succeeding to the throne, Wahrām III was the legitimate successor to his father, whereas Narseh was unusual as the successor. It was because of this abnormality that he wanted to justify his legitimacy by means of the Paikuli inscription. Thus it may be inferred that this abnormality of the succession to the throne was in the background of the purpose which both of the inscriptions had in common. For the inscription of such a nature to achieve its own purpose, it is necessary that the whole of his insistence accords with the traditional ideology of kingship old Iranian people take for granted. In other words, Narseh has to prove that his behaviours are in agreement with those of the past kings of Iran. They are not necessarily actual kings in the history. What is most important to the historical view of old Iranian people is that his behaviours follow those of mythical kings, Jamshid, Faridun, Manuchihr, whose behaviours are regarded as norms of legitimate kings. It is only when people accept Narseh as the legitimate king following the precedents that he can get the wide support of people. This requirement probably made it inevitable to transform the form of the inscription into a kind of narration which fitted in with the Iranian
way of thinking.

IV

The outline of the inscription is as follows.(8)

(1) Introduction (§1-2)

Nerseh declares that he is descended from the lineage of the Sasanian dynasty, which is one of the requirements the legitimate king has to fulfill.

(2) Main part (§§3-90)

(a) From the death of Wahram II till his meeting with dignitaries at Paikuli (§§3-32)

Narseh, King of Armenia, as staying in Armenia when Wahrām II, King of Kings, died. After his death, Wahnām, a son of Tatrus, attached the diadem to the head of Wahrām III, King of Saka, with the help of Ahriman and the devils. But Narseh was not informed of this. Later, Wahnām informed the dignitaries, advising them to accept Wahrām III as King of Kings and adding threats against those who would oppose him. A group of dignitaries wrote to Narseh asking him to come from Armenia and take back his throne. Narseh set out for Iran. When he arrived to Paikuli in Asorestan, they all came to Xāvān i Nikartā to meet him.

(b) The actions of Wahrām III and Wahnām until the surrender of Wahrām and the punishment of Wahnām and others. (§§33-62)

On hearing about this, Wahrām and Wahnām marched from Xuzestan to Armenia. Wahnām enlisted the help of Adurfarrobay, King of Meshan The King of Meshan swore allegiance to Wahrām. On the way to Asorestan, the army Adurfarrobay came to the Lord of Undigan. The Lord arrested them (?) and sent them to Narseh. Narseh wrote a letter to Wahrām and advised him to give in, pointing out that he had no right to take the throne in such an inappropriate way. Wahrām was then surrendered. When Wahnām saw that his cause was a lost one, he realized his defeat and his plight. He was captured by a party sent by Narseh, and was in a degrading manner sent back to him. Wahrām learnt about the capture of Wahnām. Narseh took measures to punish the rebels.

(c) The correspondence between Narseh and the dignitaries over the succession, and Narseh's acceptance of the throne (§§63-90)

Narseh called for a meeting and sent to the dignitaries the message, in
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which, reminding them what had been the procedure from Ardashir I onwards in determining who was the most suitable to become King of Kings of Iran, he stated that someone who was more righteous and better than Shabuhr I and was able to keep Iran in peace and confident should ascend to the throne. The dignitaries were content and answered that they had reached the conclusion that Narseh was the most suitable for King of Kings of Iran. Narseh then wrote to the dignitaries a second time, asking them to satisfy themselves absolutely that he fulfilled all the requirements of ancient formula. The dignitaries answered that this was surely the case, and asked Narseh to accept the throne. Narseh then accepted the throne.

(3) Conclusion (§§91-95)

There was peace and friendship with Rome. A lot of kings and lesser rulers acknowledged Narseh as King of King Narseh claimed the whole realm anew and dealt in befitting fashion with everybody.

V

The narration is analyzed under the frame of the structure mentioned above as follows.

<Positive Situation I> Though Ardashir and Shabuhr were ideal kings to Narseh, he does not always give the positive evaluation to the following Kings. For example, considering the remarks of the dignitaries advising him to ascend to the throne (§§80-81)⁹:

(But) because—(ever) since (?) the gods gave glory and rulership to the family of Sāsān [and (ever since) His Majesty Ardaxšēr], King [of King?], who was your grandfather, in the name of the gods had made the whole realm...—(because ever since then) nobody else has been similar to You [whom...] the gods have favoured (?) [and (who) by Your?] fortune (?) and wisdom and Own [courage (?) have kept?] oppression [away from Erān?] Šahr,...

it is clear that Narseh, who overcame the hardship Iran had confronted since Ardashir, was considered to be the greatest king. This corresponds to the conclusion that he put a stop to the struggle between Rome and Iran, and established the peace and friendship (§91).

<Occurrence of Negative Situation> In the Bisotun inscription, this situation was shown in the from of the absence of Cambyses II. In Jamshid,
it was shown in the form of the departure of xvarnah on account of his habit telling a lie. Structurally, the absence of a king is equal to the death of a king. In the case of Narseh, the occurrence of this situation is shown in the form of the appearance of the temporary vacant period after the death of Wahram II. Moreover, there is usually a motif preceding the occurrence of this situation in many stories. This motif plays a role to lead to the following situation. It corresponds to Cambyses' actions as a tyrant in the Bisotun inscription, and to his arrogance and habit telling lies which mean the loss, in the case of Jamshid, the qualification for a legitimate king entrusted by God.

Such a motif is deleted from the text of the Paikuli inscription. However, the political situation surrounding the early Sasanian dynasty suffices to compensate for the lack of this motif in the inscription. Wahram II faced a Roman invasion under the emperor Carus in 283. The capital Ctesiphon was occupied by the Romans. He concluded a treaty of onerous terms with them, and the Romans regained the province of Methopotamia, which had been under Persian domination since Shabuhr’s conquests. About 288, the Roman emperor Diocletian placed Tiridates, an Arsacid prince who had fled to Roman domains, on the throne of at least part of Armenia, which was under Sasanian control. But Wahram II by his inaction acquiesced, perhaps because Sasanian control had become weakened over some sections of Armenia\(^\text{10}\). As the conflict between the two forces, Narseh and Wahram III, broke out after the death of Wahram II, the political unification within the empire did not seem fully to be kept. Sasanian empire was in such an unsettled state of affairs under the reign of Wahram II. These circumstances suggest that he was practically lost the qualification for the king, because, from the view of the ideology of kingship, a righteous king entrusted by God must be ever-victorious and lead the country to prosperity and peace.

\(<\text{Negative Situation}>\) This motif corresponds to the establishment of Wahram III and declaration of his enthronment by Wahnam. Structurally it means that Iran was captured by the illegitimate king not having the qualification for a king. In this sense, the function of Wahram III is equivalent to that of Gaumata and Zahhak in the story of Jamshid. But there is a great difference among them. Neither of Gaumata and Zahhak meets either of the requirements for a legitimate king, the loyal lineage and the divine conferment of kingship, while Wahram III, a son of Wahram II, was
in the position of the crown prince. If we attach a high value to the former of the two requirements, we oblige to think of Narseh as the usurper of the throne. In this sense, Henning's decision that he was a mean-spiritedness is understandable. But in the Iranian ideology of kingship, a king who is not entrusted by God is considered to lack the qualification for a king, even though he meets the former requirement. In other words, a righteous king has to meet both of the requirements. A man without the confidence of God should not be allowed to ascend to the throne, even if he is in the position of the crown prince. The suitable example is found in the story of King Nodar.

After Nodar was killed by Afrasiyab the king of Turan, Afrasiyab ascended to the throne in the realm of Iran. Iran was in vacancy. Iranian nobles assembled a meeting to decide the next king of Iran. Nodar had two sons, Tûs and Gustahm. But Zal claimed that they were not suitable for a king saying that they do not possess the kingly glory, because a king, according to him, must be from the lineage of the royal family and possess the glory God granted. They searched out Zaw, a son of Tahmasp, who came from a line of Faridun and possessed the kingly power and wisdom. Zaw ascended to the throne and led the whole realm into prosperity again. It is clear that the trust by God preceds the royal lineage. It was also the reason Darius was justified notwithstanding that he came from the by-family of the Achaemenian dynasty. If a man who lacks the trust of God, even if the crown prince, ascends to the throne, it is the sacred duty of people to exclude him from the throne.

When we think of the Paikuli inscription from such a point of view, we can easily understand the role of Wahram III in the narration. He is the king supported by the wicked Wahnam who gained the help of Ahriman, is therefore equivalent to the usurper of the kingship. Furthermore, if and Wahnam is identified with the son of a certain Tatrus, it will make it easy for the Iranian people to imagine Wahram III to be a puppet governor backed up by a foreign ruler similar to Afrasiyab.

<Previous Announcement> This motif seldom appears directly on the surface of a story in the form of a historical document. If, however, the function of the motif is to draw out by previous announcement of ascension of a new king in place of a present king the counter-actions of the present king for preventing the realization, the correspondent element can be obser-
ved in the Paikuli inscription. For example, it may be recognized in the decision by the dignitaries against Wahnam's declaration of ascension of Wahrām III to the throne (¶13-15).

"He (/they) ... the family of Sāsān (?) and the men (?) of the whole realm the King of Armenia (?) is the greatest and the best. And for (?) the rule of the realm [there will] also hereafter [be] reliance [on?...]. [And that which?] may be [...] , that we shall do now, so that when he assumes the rule [of the realm] (?), then Ėrānshahr [will be peaceful and confident ?]."

Though it is hard to grasp the content from only the original text, it is possible to premise the sense that, if Narseh grasps the kingship, Iran will be peaceful and confident.

Another characteristic of <Previous Announcement> is that it is done regardless of the hero's will. It is announced either directly to the hero or to someone related to him. In stories the latter is frequently observed. In some of them the motif appears in the form of the message through a dream. In Faridun story, the ascension of Faridun is announced in the dream of Zahhak, and in Ardashir story, the ascension of Ardashir in the dream of Babag. In others, it appears in the form of the message by a benevolent wizard. In the story of Kay Qubad, it is revealed to Zal through the speech of a sage that Qubad will be the true king of Iran. This story is noteworthy in comparison with Narseh. Zal sends Rustam for Qubad to Mt. Alburz. When he meets Qubad, Rustam tells him to be the king of Iran. On coming back to Iran, Qubad ascends to the throne. In the case of Narseh, messengers go to him in Armenia and inform of him the message to advise his return. In the message it is clearly stated that Narseh is King of Kings and will keep Iran safe till the last. After that, he is consistently called nशक MLKA\textit{n MLKA} (Narseh King of Kings). That is to say, the motif is realized in the message to Narseh. Of course, it is also possible to premise the existence of such a sage as in Qubad. Therefore, though greatly transformed, the motif <Previous Announcement> can be identified in the Paikuli inscription.

<Battle> This motif is easy to identify. Structurally it corresponds to the battle between the army of Narseh to realize the previous announcement and that of Wahrām II to prevent it. Cosmologically it is equivalent to the battle between the good army of Ohrmazd and the bad one of Ahriman.
In the stories about acquisition of kingship, the motif <Battle> plays a very important role for justification of a new king. The remarkable example is the story of Faridun.

Zahhak trembling with the fear to Faridun asks nobles to put their signatures on the written oath in order to strengthen his army. Kava, a smith, appears in the place, and blames Zahhak for his unlawful actions. Then, going out of the palace, he makes a speech in a market to urge the audience to rise and go into actions against Zahhak. He marches together with many approvers to Faridun who raised in secret for fear of Zahhak. When he is informed the actual situation where people are in torment from the tyranny of Zahhak, Faridun decides to do battle against him. Leading the army, he goes to Zahhak’s palace in Jerusalem.

These motifs can be identified in it.

1. People’s decision to back up Faridun and to rebel against Zahhak.
2. The assembling of the people at Faridun, and request to him for the rebellion.
3. March to the palace of Zahhak.

More abstract forms of them are as follows.

(I) Decision to rebel against the present king and to support the hero.
(II) Movement of the place to the hero. Request to him for the rebellion, and his acceptance.
(III) Movement of the place for the battle.

When we compare Narseh’s and Faridun’s, the parallelism between them becomes more evident. The parallelism of the motif (I) is evident. The motif (II) may need a supplementary explanation. As far as we read in Shah Nama, we can infer that Faridun did not know about the misgovernment of Zahhak until Kava informed him of the situation of Iran. Narseh did not know the situation as well. It is stated in the inscription that Wahnam did not inform him about that matter (§4). The parallelism in details is evident. As for the motif (III), the movement of Narseh to Asorestan corresponds to the movement of the place for battle. It is true that the places for the battle are different in both stories. In Narseh’s, Asorestan is the target of the battle, to which the army of Wahram moves, while in Faridun’s, Jerusalem is the target, to which the army of Faridun moves. The direction of the movement is in the reverse (Narseh’s: enemy → hero; Faridun’s: hero → enemy). But this is only the variation from the diffe-
rence of the surface structure.

\textbf{\<Victory/Enthronment\>} Narseh and the dignitaries exchange letters over the enthronement of new king. This seems to deviate structurally from the story of acquisition of kingship. Many stories develop straightly into the enthronement after the legitimacy of a king is established by the victory over the enemy. Naseh never shows his ambition for the throne, and asks the dignitaries to determine the new king in light of the earlier procedures. The impression we get from the inscription is that he is a good, impartial ruler competent for a king. But this image of him is difficult to accept easily as what he is. The legitimate kingship is conferred by God, and God himself determines a person to confer it on. The person appointed to the new king shows fully the ability fitting for a king in the battle. As a result, people accept him as the new king. Therefore, to ascend to the throne to satisfy one's own desire matches to show that he is an illegitimate king which is not entrusted by God. This is evident in the letter Wahnam sent to the dignitaries in Asorestan (§§6-8);

§6: [And (?) wish to establish (?) [him/myself? in] an exalted position (?)].

§7: And of (?) this [I am?] capable, (namely) to kill [the Princes] and Grandees and Nobles and to give their possessions (/estates) to the Garmaeans (?)).

§8: And from/of my own family (?) and the Garamaeans I shall make [...my own?] property. And when I have firmly established my own property (or: (it as) my own property), then I shall destroy [the enemies of?] the King of Sakas.

In the passages, the scheme of impartial Narseh versus ambitious Wahnam is outstanding. That is, A righteous king has to display that he never has any ambition for the ascension to the throne. The more deviated a king's enthronement is from the norm of the usual succession of the throne, the more necessary it is. It will be reasonable to think that Narseh needed this episode to justify his own behaviour.

\textbf{\<Positive Situation II\>} This motif corresponds to the conclusion of the inscription (§§91-95).

The conclusion of this paper is that the inscription of Paikuli is constructed within the structural frame that traditional stories of acquisition
of kingship have in common, in order to proclaim that Narseh is the legitimate king in light of the ideology of Iranian kingship. Therefore, the contents of the inscription should be regarded as not the historical document in which the events are recorded faithfully but a kind of narration in which the historical events are partly reconstructed under the restriction of the narrative structure.

Notes


(9) All the quotations from the inscription follows Skjørvø.