

Herald 361

Chapter 361 The Salt Market

The traditional way the salt would be extracted was that the brine (seawater) coming out of the pipe in the wooden box would be collected, and then proteins such as egg white, blood, or some other additive be mixed with the brine.

This would be done to further refine the seawater and cause the remaining dirt and residues to coagulate so that they could be skimmed off.

Finally, this water would finally be taken to large, lead pans, or even wooden boards, and left to dry with the aid of sunlight and wind, until a somewhat pure salt could be produced.

Alexander's plan was to simply skip the boring evaporation stage, and directly boil off the brine in enormous boilers made from cast iron.

These 600-liter boilers would be needed to be boiled for 6 hours, and as the water level would start to go below the halfway mark, more seawater would be added to keep to water level high, while constantly heating and stirring the huge pot.

This constant addition of brine would go on for a whole week until the entire 600-liter pot would become completely filled with salt.

After achieving this step, the pot would be taken off the heat, and the resultant salt be allowed to cool and crystallize, netting Alexander around 1.2 tons of salt (salt is around twice as dense as water).

And to get this 1.2 tons of salt Alexander would need around 12 tons of concentrated brine which itself would come from around 400 tons of seawater with the average ocean salinity being around 3 percent.

And the number of briquettes that would be needed to create this salt would be around 2,000, or about 10 tons of coal, giving the technique a fuel cost of just 40 ropals for 1.2 tons of salt as 50 briquettes cost 1 ropal, or about 3 ropal per 100 kg.

Whereas if firewood was used that would have been 100 ropals per 100 kg.

Which was why nobody used it.

With the cost calculations complete, Alexander then went on to do the capacity production, and since it took around a week to collect the brine and another week to make the salt, making the production a two-week cycle, he simply divided his total coal supply for a fortnight with coal required per unit cycle.

So, with Alexander deciding to use half of the coal excavated for the briquette, it got him around 14,000 tons of coal or 3.5 million briquettes, capable of making 4000 tons of salt per month.

While producing around 5,000 new jobs, with most of them being the woodcutters Menicus had temporarily borrowed.

Alexander assumed a low price of 2 ropal per kilogram of salt to find that this plant would net Alexander annually a minimum of 96 million ropals, and introduce 48,000 tons of new salt to the market.

And this amount of money was based on the price of salt in Zanzan, which was on the low side because it was a major port city and the salt from Adhan could be easily transported to Agnirat and then easily transported by sea, significantly cutting down costs.

This meant that the price of salt inland could vary by up to five and in some remote locations even ten times.

This presented Alexander with a huge market to draw from as he made some reasonable estimates about the size of the salt market in Adhania.

From his experience of ruling Zanzan, and giving out generous amounts of salt to the populace, he found that an average peasant family of 8 people (the husband, wife, children, and the husband's parents) would need around 40kg of salt, or 5 kg per head.

This amount of salt was the entire annual demand for a peasant as almost the entirety of this quantity would be used to smoke meat, dry fish, and pickle vegetables in preparation for winter.

For example: curing a kilo of meat took roughly 100 g of salt while curing 1 kg of fish roughly took 250 to 350 g of salt.

And the amount of salt that would be used as seasoning or flavoring was minuscule in comparison and the peasants would get the vast majority of their bodily salt needs naturally from their diet of meat, fish, and vegetables, requiring them to buy at most about a kilo or two of salt per head per annum for consumption.

Hence with a population of an estimated 80 million, the annual need for salt was around 500,000 tons, with Alexander's new plant capable of meeting about 10% of it alone.

This was an enormous capacity for something that did not exist even a month ago, being rivaled only by a few other salt production centers of Adhania like Adhan and Kuleef, but with the production cost being only a fraction of theirs at 0.25 ropals per kilogram of salt.

With this price, Alexander was sure he would be able to under-price any salt in the market other than Adhan's, as the salt there was really effortless to collect.

But here Alexander had another advantage.

In the traditional salt pan method, naturally much dust, sand, and dirt would be blown onto the sand, an inevitability of the process.

But Alexander would be much purer because the boiling would be done indoors, and so it would not be contaminated by dust and debris that wind evaporation would inevitably bring.

He would also use large sieves when adding the brine to the boiling pot, managing to catch many types of dirt in the fine net.

Hence by quality, Alexander's salt quality was the finest in the world, pure white and with large clear crystals, a condiment worthy to grace a noble's table.

Alexander was sure he would be able to charge a premium for the product, maybe up to twenty times the regular amount.

Or even more given how many of Adhania's customs revolved around salt, such as how the importance of a guest was determined by how close or far away one was sat from the salt cellar.

And how intricate some of these salt cellars were, to the point they became an absurdity, used as status symbols in the circle of nobility.

But all these advantages did not necessarily mean that Alexander was stepping on Ptolomy's toes.

The salt market just in Adhania was big enough for both of them to co-exist comfortably.

Because even though 48,000 tons a year sounds like a lot, in the grand scheme of things it was really not.

For example, in Alexander's previous life, in the middle ages, just one single saltern in the Northern German city of Lüneburg produced 30,000 tons of salt per year!

A saltern was like one set of salt-producing pools, and a salt-producing city would have multiple such salterns.

But even this did not make the city the center of salt trade in Europe.

That distinction belonged to Venice.

And all of that had to be remembered along with the fact that Europe at that time had around 60 million people, a third less than Adhania.

So Alexander was free of increase significantly without any market restrictions, his only bottleneck- the supply of coal.

And this did trouble the pasha as he knew such easy surface coal would soon run out and he would have to dig deeper to exact the valuable rock.

And digging deeper would mean costs- multiple times the cost, a problem Alexander was unable to solve currently.

Speaking of costs, the major portion of the cost in salt selling came in the form of transportation costs.

Ships were still okay, but the cost of transferring salt inland through non-existent roads in small, merchant carts drove up the prices madly, largely erasing Alexander's advantage in lower production cost.

And this was something Alexander would not be able to mitigate for the time being.

Alexander did not know the exact circumstances of roads in Zanzan, but relying on his experience, he was confident in saying that they would likely range from abysmal to non-existent.

And it would take a long time for him to fix these, both because of manpower and material constraints and because the lands did not belong to him yet.

And the last part was problematic not just for Alexander's authority, but because these nobles would be able to put heavy tariffs and even arbitrarily stop and seize any of Alexander's products traveling through their land, stifling his trade.

And given that all the pashas were enforcing a semi-embargo on him currently, it meant that a large part of the salt market was cut off from him.

While Ptolomy for once in his life was in a much better position to capitalize off of this, as his family had spent generations building a huge road network throughout the province of Adhan, designed to quickly and efficiently distribute the royal family's salt.

And because of this, Alexander was of two minds on how to sell his salt.

One was that he would sell most of the salt in bulk to Ptolomy or Farzah.

And then these men could use their vast trade network to distribute it to all over the country.

Or, the second option was that he could export his salt outside of Adhania.

Both had their pros and cons, and Alexander was in flux on which to choose.

Chapter 362 Wedding Day (Part-1)

If Alexander sold his salt to Ptolomy and Farzah in bulk, then it would be those men who would be the main beneficiary of the lion's share of the profit.

After all, the most profitable part of a business was being the middleman, having no headache about production, or about selling the product to the customers.

So if Alexander used these men as a middleman for his product, he would not be able to sell the salt at a premium directly to the customers but these men would be.

Though it could also be argued that these men would also have to bear the cost and logistics of selling the salt inland.

As for option two, Alexander did have a large number of candidates to choose from.

There was Thesos with its vast number of city-states, there were the warring states to his south and there was even Thebias who were his immediate neighbors to name just a few.

But the problem with this was that Alexander did not have a strong navy or even a navy to speak off to protect these goods from pirates or other hostile powers, both foreign and domestic.

So if he wanted to do bulk trading he would have to rely on other powers' protection, like Ptolomy, Pasha Farzah, or even Cantagena.

And all of them would want a slice of the pie, and most likely a large one.

Hence Alexander was left with quite a dilemma.

A dilemma he was unable to resolve before his wedding day came.

On that day, Alexander woke up relatively late, around 10 pm, had a hearty breakfast and then started preparing to get ready for the wedding ceremony scheduled to be held in the afternoon as per Adhanian custom.

And funnily enough, when he was having breakfast, he had asked about Cambyses, to which one of the many maids had told him that Cambyses had been busy with her wedding preparations from almost dawn in Ophenia's room.

'Well I guess that's women for you,' Alexander had then commented, before going to his room for his own preparation.

And in there was Gelene, who happily said, "I'm glad these new clothes suit you master," as she helped Alexander put on his wedding dress.

Alexander put on a soft tunic he usually slept in as underwear as his very first layer of the garment.

Then came the armor- linen thorax, followed by chainmail.

This was standard practice for him as Alexander did not just never leave his manor without his armor.

In fact, he rarely left his room without it.

And he would even force his women to wear such similar protection, sometimes much to the chagrin of some of them, who would complain about the weight, heat, and general discomfort.

And one day, when Alexander was chastising Cambyse for not wearing her armor, as the freest of the bunch, she even angrily shot Alexander directly to his face, "For a man as big as you, you sure have a scaredy heart."

This had caused the couple to stop talking for almost a week.

Alexander thought back on these trivial tidbits as after the three layers of linen, leather, and metal came a light blue full-sleeved shirt.

And as he was putting it on, the happily mused, 'Thank goodness it's the middle of winter.'

If it had been even spring, not even summer, Alexander had no idea how he would have dealt with the heat wearing so many layers.

"This shirt is quite good. I'm impressed," Alexander praised as he felt the linen on his skin, while Gelene helped him tie his buttons.

He particularly liked these elliptical-shaped buttons, made of cast iron, and embedded with tiny gemstones, making them sparkle in the bright sunlight.

"Thank you, master," Gelene smiled as she finished buttoning the shirt and then handed him the waistcoat.

Gelene being here helping dress Alexander was an obvious choice as the girl getting married and this black beauty did not get along.

And so Cambyses was being dressed by Ophenia and Mean.

Alexander put on the jet black vest, but did not tie the button, as he asked, "Pass me that ribbon-like cloth."

Alexander was asking for his tie.

Gelene had been very curious how a man would use this ribbon when she was making the cloth, and quickly bought it to him, eagerly waiting to see its use.

And Alexander very expertly showed her its use, as he lifted his collar and skillfully put on the black tie, all while giving a detailed commentary of what to do, how to do it, and when to do it.

"*Clap*, *clap*, *clap*," Gelene could only wordlessly clap at the expert demonstration.

It seemed that her master had done this a million times.

Which was quite an accurate statement as putting on a tie had become a muscle memory or even almost a robotic action for Alexander.

Alexander centered his tie knot using a small, clear mirror in front of him, which was among the very first batch of such products his workshop had produced.

And as he was doing so, Gelene could not help but marvel at the mirror, "To think mirrors could be so clear and pretty!"

Satisfied with the tie's center, Alexander properly buttoned the vest and then at last put on his masterpiece- the suit.

Navy blue in color and thick, it was a typical suit that snugly wrapped around the body as

Alexander paid particular attention to make sure the lapel or the collar of the suit was dead and centered, before checking his cuffs embroidered with three golden buttons to make sure they did not overlap fully with his shirt, leaving just a bit of the shirt out.

And as Alexander's top half was dressed, Gelene found her master in his current state very fetching.

She, or anyone for that matter had never seen such type of attire but still found it very charming.

This was in part because Alexander was physically quite handsome, with a strong body, chiseled face, and an impressive aura, making the suit metaphorically fuse with him.

But another part was because the suit was a derivation of the military uniform worn by European nobility, and the full sleeves, the thick clothing, and the tight fitting of the cloth gave off an imposing feeling similar to a suit of armor.

And in this time period, where military prowess was always revered, this naturally attracted the favor of the opposite sex.

After the suit, Alexander then quickly put on his pants over his linen trouser, them being just plain navy blue pants, thus matching the suit's color.

A belt with a silver buckle, and then lastly came the socks and polished leather shoes.

Surprisingly, the shoes of this time were not too different from those of the 21st century.

Nobles wore shoes made from leather or velvet, while peasants would use wooden shoes or even those made from tree bark.

But the basic shape and design were still the same, and as he tied the laces, he felt a nostalgic feeling, a feeling that he had returned to his time and that he was about to go to work, or a meeting, or a formal gathering.

A feeling he had missed very much.

"How do I look? Are there any creases?" After being done, Alexander lifted his arms and then even spun around to give Gelene a 360-degree view, asking for her opinion.

Alexander had asked all his clothes be ironed before he put them on.

And for that Alexander had even invented the world's very first iron.

It was just a kettle where hot water would be poured inside, the lid would be shut and then the flat bottom surface would work as a straightening surface.

And it did not need to be hot water too.

Coal, woodchips, or other kindling would work just as well.

"Perfect, master. Perfect. I have never such a dress suit someone so well!" Gelene had an excited, almost squeaky tone to her voice.

She loved the design of this 'suit' finding it very elegant.

And she was sure that once Alexander showcased this new type of cloth to the public, a market for this among the nobles would be instantly created.

A demand she very much planned to capitalize on.

And this was a part of Alexander's plan, to replace Adhania's cultures and customs with his own.

But while he liked this very suit quite a lot, he still a bit snobbishly regretted that it was a bit too mono color-ish.

Light blue shirt, black tie, and navy blue suit were all too close to each other, and though this would be perfectly fine with 99% of the populace, Alexander thought with his too refined a taste the suit was a bit bland.

As he wanted to show off the new clothes, Alexander originally wanted to make the suit much more flashy and colorful, with bright reds, blues, and whites.

But time and material constraints, as well as the unavailability of many colors made Alexander settle for this deep, almost authoritative color.

"Thank you. You did a great job with this new type of cloth. I'm impressed," Alexander replied with a smile to Gelene's compliments.

Then he put on some perfume made from various exotic oils like frankincense, opopanax, and myrrh, combed his hair back to give himself a sleek look, and afterward, with having nothing to do but wait for Cambyses to finish her dress up, decided to pour himself some diluted wine.

They would be required to go the Temple of Gaia together and so the lord pasha was forced to wait upon his lady, in a role reversal of the usual.

Chapter 363 Wedding Day (Part-2)

Alexander approached the stairs leading down to the outer hall with Cambyses's right arm locked with his, the girl wearing a full-sleeved, high-collared smoking red gown, a gold banded tiara jeweled with rubies of all shapes and sizes, garnet ear-rings and crimson-colored high heels.

And as she looked down through her translucent veil on the gathered maids and staff arranged in two neat rows standing opposite to one another, she looked with a fairy gracing them with her glance, her powdered white face garnished by a vermillion blush on her beautiful chin and her bright lips decorated with claret lip-stick.

Cambyses had always had a preference for red, as even in her time in the mercenary, she wore a bright red armor.

And her dress on the most important day of her life also reflected that preference.

Alexander escorted Cambyses down the large carpet to the attention of all the dressed and in attention maids and servants, both of having a light smile hanging off their faces.

And trailing behind Cambyses's long, slashing gown adorned with pearls and rubies were Alexander's three women, Ophenia, Gelene, and Mean, all wearing the same outfit with different colors.

Ophenia and Gelene had already shown Alexander their wedding dress, while Mean too wore that exact same design but one of pink color with blue sapphires as jewels.

Behind them came the royal and noble guests.

There was the Queen mother who wore an emerald green gown with strings of emeralds sewn in concentric circles, her crimson hair coiled into ringlets and dressed up with golden chains.

And as the mature woman walked forward swaying her hips, the bountiful breasts jiggling seductively, all the servants quickly lowered their heads with a tinge of blush on their faces at the heavenly woman.

Beside Seelima was her daughter Hellma, who wore the exact same outfit as her mother, and looked almost the spitting image of a younger version of her mother, even down to the cold, haughty attitude that the Queen mother conveyed to everyone around her.

The young princess matched her mother's footsteps, her tiny, cute feet placing their steps with power and authority, giving the little princess a cold, unviolable feeling, while her perfect countenance gave no one any doubt that though she was currently unripe, she would too grow up to be a head turner of a woman.

Accompanying the two stunning women was the Matrak princess and arguably the most beautiful woman of the group, Mikaya.

This was a tall title to claim as the mother-daughter duo were a deadly combination, but Mikaya did have the asset to content with them and as well as having the aid of two of her cousins cum maids.

All three women wore the same jet-black gown decorated with golden pearls that glittered and sparkled, the layer dress perfectly contrasting with their long, flowing silver hair styled with golden butterfly-styled hairpins.

And when winter sunlight gently caressed their pale white skin, all three of them seemed to shine a diamond pink. making the three sisters appear pure and clear, as if like the very angels had come to grace Alexander's wedding.

All three of them appeared unattainable to all but the most blessed and powerful men and the sacred and divine aura emanating out of them as they crossed the carpet would make no man suspect their true nature.

Even if Alexander told them, no one could have believed that these very women had just the night before enjoyed a 10-man feast and that their lower halves were still full of their gifts, their warmth still comforting them.

After the royal and high-level dignitaries was Takfiz and his grandson, the heads of the various workshops, and lastly followed by some staff member and other unimportant folks, people whose main job was to tend to the needs and wants of the guests.

But among these guests, observant people might have noticed Azira and Azura missing from the list.

And this was because they were already at the wedding venue, as was customary for the head priest or priestess of the Temple of Ramuh to wait there for their lord's arrival.

Speaking of customs, Alexander had already broken a great deal many during this short time already.

For example, when Alexander took Cambyses's hand and led her out of her home, this was actually supposed to be the job of Cambyses's guardian- whether it be her father, her brother, or as she did not have any, a legal guardian appointed by the authorities.

This guardian was a formal position and all girls of Adhania had one, and he held life and death over the woman or women under him.

And under the laws of Adhania, no marriage would be ever considered valid without the express endorsement of the girl's guardian, especially in the upper class.

In such classes, women were so sheltered that many would never leave their house before their marriage, and marriages were usually arranged by their guardians meeting their counterpart, or the boy himself, and then discussing the potential union.

And the main point of discussion was rarely about the boys or the girls themselves or their compatibility, but rather about the economic and political benefits such mergers would bring for the two families.

Trade treaties, defensive pacts, loans, land development plans, etc. all these agreements were thought to be binding not because of a contract or signing some other legal documents, but because of marriage.

Because in this time period, it was thought that marriages were the one and true of cementing one's alliance with another, as the act was seen as something witnessed by the gods themselves and considered sacred and unviolable.

So, after a marriage occurred the two families who were formerly strangers would now be related, and Adhanians were firm believers in the saying, "Blood is thicker than water."

And generally considered it taboo to harm family members.

But this custom also had also strange and unintended consequences.

For instance, no alliance was eternal, and so when an agreement fell through or alliances changed, it was very common for there to be a sudden divorce, and an almost shotgun remarriage with another person to cement that new alliance.

Of course, it had to be noted such practices were primarily between the upper classes, with the peasants having their own rules.

And perhaps it was due to such frequent marriage breakups that Adhanian nobility had developed such perverse practices.

On the point of marriage endorsement, legally there were two exceptions that a guardian's endorsement was not needed.

One was if he was declared legally insane.

And two if he had been a war prisoner for at least a year.

None of these applied to Cambyses.

But since Alexander was the authorities, he used a legal loophole to name himself as Cambyses's guardian and then naturally endorsed himself to marry Cambyses.

This was slightly unusual, but not unheard of.

Adhanian nobility had lesser reluctance with marrying close to their family, such as between first cousins, and even union between immediate family members was not unheard.

And this type of marriage was not unique of this world, as even in Alexander's previous life, incest among royalty and nobility was a common thing, fueled by the ideology of a 'pure bloodline'.

The Habsburgs family was perhaps the most famous example, followed by Cleopatra who married her brother to obtain legitimacy to rule over Egypt.

But why did Alexander go through all the legal processes of getting himself named Cambyses's guardian?

It was because he did not want to give anyone or any faction the excuse of saying Cambyses's marriage with him was not valid in the eyes of Adhanian law and so their progeny was not the rightful successor to Alexander.

Alexander led Cambyses out of the long outer hall, and out of the front door, where a red carpet guided them to an open roof carriage.

This carriage was painted ivory white, his expensive oak body embroidered with intricate gold artwork, opulently decorated with fresh colorful flowers and gemmed with various precious stones.

It was something Alexander had commissioned made, and under the golden sunlight, the carriage seemed to glitter and shine like one a fairy godmother would conjure up to take a princess to the palace.

"My lord, congratulations!" Hemicus, immaculately dressed in ceremonial armor over his actual one greeted Alexander stepping forward.

There were two entire cohorts (1,000 men) outside Alexander's manor, ready to escort their lord and his guests to the wedding venue.

"Haha, Hemicus, it's a good thing it's cold today. I'm sweating just seeing you," Alexander chuckled seeing the many layers his head guard had adorned himself with.

And Hemicus too replied with a light smile, "Yes, praise the goddess."

Alexander was then led to his carriage, a fully armored guard opening the door for his lord, as Alexander first helped Cambyses get up and afterward the couple made themselves comfortable on the velvet cushions.

"This is nice," Cambyses commented as riding a carriage without the top half, and being able to have a 360-degree vision was a novelty for her.

She caressed the solid silver railings and felt the golden handle of the doors, studied the rubies and sapphires studded in and around the exterior and interior of the vehicle, and then turned her head excitedly around to record all the hustle and bustle going on around her.

Chapter 364 Wedding Day (Part-3)

Cambyes first observed that the carriage she was on was attached to four strong, strapping horses, all adorned with bright blue and golden clothes.

It seemed this was the 'barding' Alexander was talking about.

Over her sides, she then noticed that a large number of soldiers too had similarly dressed horses which they were mounting, releasing an imposing aura as each of them held a spear and a shield in each hand and carried a crossbow on their back.

These were their escort who would guard them when they passed through the city.

And lastly Cambyes spun her head back to see all the guests get on their own, less flashy carriages, all pulled by two horses.

It went without saying the number of horses attached to a carriage delineated its significance.

And today Alexander and Cambyes were the most significant ones.

While Cambyes soaked her eyes with all the beautiful colors, clothes, and jewelry around her, Alexander placed his eyes on his bride, peering into her face through her red veil matching her dress.

And the most significant change he noticed about Cambyes was her hair.

Usually, Cambyes put her hair in a ponytail.

This was both because she liked it, and also because it was the style a maiden was expected to put on.

But today her hair was parted into six strands which were then tied together on top of her head in a complex fashion forming a cone shape, like a pagoda raising into the sky.

Clips and pins made of iron from a sword or arrow used to kill a boar were used to hold her voluminous chestnut, while chains of silver pearls wrapped around each of the six strands.

The reason behind using iron that was used to kill a boar was because in Adhnaia, boars were a symbol of virility so usage of this accessory was viewed as a way to ensure a fertile union.

"I like your hair," Alexander commented to Cambyses, drawing a coy smile from the girl.

Although they had been together for months now, and done many intimate acts, somehow remembering it was her wedding day made the girl feel shy at of a sudden.

After all the guests were ready and everything was set, Hemicus bought his horse next to Alexander, and with after receiving a nod from the pasha, signaled the carriage driver to start, thus signaling the start of the long procession.

As the long line of dignified guests exited the personal estate of Alexander and made their way into the main street of the city, the makeup of the procession looked like this.

At the very front were two rows of six soldiers, colorfully dressed and holding Alexander's standard, a bright red flag with the image of a metallic black flower.

Alexander's choice for such a design was not done out of his own thought but because this motif was a way of paying homage to his homeland.

In Thesos it was customary to use flowers in one's war banner, and even the reason the famous 'War of Flowers' 16 years ago was called such was because both the powers used flowers in the flags.

And so by using such a design Alexander sent the message to his men that they would not become Adhanians by staying here, but be just Thesisans in Adhania.

Behind these standard-bearers were the trumpeters and drummers, numbering around ten on each row for a total of forty.

They were the marching band of the group and wore feathered caps with extremely tall red plums, making them very eye-catching.

Following them were two squads of soldiers on horseback, leading the main carriage that Alexander was on.

Flanking this carriage were even more soldiers, this time on foot and marching alongside their lord, armed with Zanzan's latest weapons.

And behind Alexander's carriage were the rest of his entourage, all too guarded by rows and rows of marching soldiers, until the procession's tail constituted of the various servants of the manor, slaves, and even ordinary folk.

Alexander had declared today a city-wide holiday, with only a scant few slaves left in the industries as a precautionary security measure.

And as the reason for this holiday was known and Alexander had even invited the populace to join his procession, the roads were packed with a cheering crowd, all huddled together and craning their neck to just have a flashing glance at their lord and lady.

And as Alexander's line passed through the newly paved street, the crowd cheered and whistled and danced on the sides to the matching beats of the marching bands, as onlookers marveled at their handsome lord wearing a strange dress, was mesmerized upon seeing the pretty bride in her veil, awestruck by the magnificent carriage they were riding on, impressed by the beautiful horses pulling them and fearful of the large number of strong fearsome soldiers under their command.

"I'm gonna have a wedding just like that! Lady Zanzan is so pretty," Were the thoughts and cries of many an immature girl.

Yes.

From now on Cambyses would be titled Lady Zanzan.

While many an immature boy wished they would be able to pamper their wife just as the pasha did his.

And for others, it was about pointing at someone in the procession and introducing him to the people in the crowd, detailing how that person was connected to them.

"Look, look, there's my father. He's the soldier guarding the lord," Small boys would cheer pointing their young fingers at their father.

While some adults would describe how they knew that person who knew a person who ultimately knew one of Alexander's retainers.

The number of stories, lore, and gossip that this single parade generated would sate even the chattiest housewives gossiping mouths for a month

As a bonus treat for the crowd, it was not as if Alexander and Cambyses were the only attraction of the procession.

The people were also astonished by the carriages that followed the main carriages, smitten by the number of beauties that were on them.

Ophenia was one of them, but the one that drew the most attention was Mikaya's carriage, she and her cousins' looks and unnatural hair color standing out by far from the others.

Seelima and Hellma were also beautiful, but their cold looks and haughty demeanor caused many to shiver, while Mikaya and her company appeared friendly and casual, as the Matrak princess even shot off casual winks at a few of the lucky men.

And for a handful number of especially lucky men in the crowd, somehow looking at those faces and the smiles hanging off the three women, weirdly bought up memories of the past night, and if it was not for these noble women's pure white hair and their unimaginable status, an absurd thought would have entered their minds.

'To think there are three whores who look just like these noble ladies. What are the chances?' These men rationalized the coincidence.

While Mikaya giggled and licked her lips as the cavalcade continued, saying, "I like some of these. They look tasty."

And though the Queen mother and Hellma did not get the full innuendo, her maids sure did, and could only roll their eyes.

And then fearful of their mistress might run her mouth a bit too much, Nafia quickly asked a question, "Mistress how are you enjoying this new type of ceremony? It is certainly different..and seems fun."

Typical upper-class weddings in Adhania occurred with the groom visiting the bride's house, committing various rituals with a priest from the Temple of Ramuh as a witness, followed by a grand feast and finished by a procession where the bride would be taken to her new house, the groom's house.

But Alexander seemed to have inverted, jumbled, skipped and added a great many steps until the wedding ceremony looked nothing like the original one.

And this seemed to irk the Queen mother a bit, so could not help but interject in a dismissive tone, "Hmmm, parading us like slaves. Likes winning botty from a war. How disgraceful!"

"Hahaha, don't be like that Seelima. This is a fun event. See how these peasants are jumping around. Like cute dogs," Mikaya knew the Queen mother was not really against this ceremony.

Or else she would have not gotten in the carriage in the first place.

But this was just her expressing her displeasure at Alexander changing Adhania's customs.

As a side note, Mikaya's comment about the people around showed the true feelings the nobility held for the people.

Even when Mikaya slept around with these people, she saw them as nothing but toys and distractions.

While in the front, Cambyes in a low voice complained to Alexander, "How long do I have to smile and wave? My hands hurt, my teeth are freezing and I can't feel my lips," as the couple constantly smiled and waved towards the crowd while the parade marched on.

"Until we reach the temple." Came Alexander's reply as he took out some ropals from a coin purse in the carriage to throw into the crowd, much to the ear-splitting delight of the crowd, "Glory to the lord."

Cambyes knew well that all this opulence around her was not just because Alexander loved her.

But it was also because it was a way for him to boost this image among the people.

Which Cambyes was totally okay with.

And so she hid the face she made and chose to bear with the discomfort.

'Well I guess I just have to sit and wave,' She comforted herself.

The procession preceded as such, with much music, merriment, and delight in the air, cheerful chatter abound, until finally, the carriage approached the huge, recently renovated Temple of Gaia.

Chapter 365 Wedding Day (Part-4)

"We welcome the lord."

There was a large gathering of dignitaries and council members at the gate of the Temple, who cheered the phrase even before the parade could fully reach the temple.

Off from a distance, Alexander's eyes could spot Menes, Menicus, Krishok, and a whole more, all dressed in their best garments waiting to receive him at the gates.

They primarily wore the tunic, made of linen or wool, they were thick and vibrant, with many being heavily designed and decorated with intricate stitches and gemstones and pearls.

Colorful leather belts, oftentimes with golden belt buckles fastened to their hips and wrapped around their right shoulders was another outer tunic, appearing almost like a cloak or mantle.

That cloth of a man's attire would be usually the most heavily embroidered, with all kinds of brocades and patterns in gold and silver stitches worked into them, depicting all sorts of themes and motifs, ranging from beautiful art, eye-catching brocades and patterns, intricate and byzantine symbols, playful arabesques and much more.

Prosiac nobles might even put mundane things like the family crest, while truly the creative ones would even stitch in beautiful short stories on their external cloak using nothing but pictures.

There was even one noble who had written a 6 part story on his cloak, told over multiple balls and parties.

Alexander had found this cultural practice probably the most advanced aspect of Adhania and considered it to be something even the 21st human would find difficult to top.

Below their tunic, the gathered honored guests wore tight, fitting trousers, almost like leggings, sometimes multiple layers if the weather was cold enough, being usually brown or black, followed by colorful and stylish shoes.

While the women folk wore gowns of various colors, and neck cuts, showing different amounts of the neck and arms.

Married women usually had their hair done just like Cambyses, looking like beautiful pagodas, while the maidens could take on any hairstyles they wanted, sometimes even supplementing their natural hair with false hair to produce gorgeous styles.

All the women, just like men, had beautiful belts around their hips and they covered their feet with expensive velvet or fur shoes.

And lastly, they embellished themselves with various accessories of gold, silver, and gemstones on their neck, ear, and arms, with some even decorating their nose.

As the procession finally stopped at the new Temple of Gaia, Menes quickly and purposefully walked towards Alexander's carriage, with all the council members quickly in tow.

"My lord, welcome, welcome," Menes had a big grin on his face as he personally opened Alexander's carriage door.

"Menes! How's everything?" Alexander made some small talk as he got down from the carriage, before helping Cambyses to do the same.

In traditional Adhanian weddings, all this would have been reversed.

According to the customs, Alexander and his family would have gone to the bride's house.

And when they arrived at the front of the house, the guardian of the girl would have led the bride out of her house just like how Alexander led Cambyses out of his manor to greet the groom.

And it would be she who would open the carriage door to help her husband get down, as a symbol of her eternal willingness to aid her husband.

Getting down Alexander waited for all the other guests to join him, and once completed, the group was led into the new Temple.

As Theocles had said, the house had been once a noble's manor, but over the last two months, it had been so heavily renovated that one would find it hard to find the resemblance.

Firstly the simple walkway had been replaced with one paved using granite and onyx and mixed in with a special stone that glowed yellow in the sunlight, making the entire length of the path to the temple look like a heavenly bridge under the beautiful winter sun of the afternoon.

Expensive and beautiful flower trees had been planted along the sidewalk, with many colorful paper festoons and designs hanging off them, while overhead were rows and rows of bells and lanterns on strings, jiggling in the slight wintery breeze as if heralding the coming of heaven's emissaries.

The couple moved slowly, particularly because Cambyses was not used to wearing such high heels and had to be careful to not step on her own gown, but finally, the festive crowd entered the Temple of Gaia.

Inside, the very first thing that Alexander noticed was the huge statue of Gaia at the altar of the temple, situated at the very edge of the room.

Usually, such a sculpture would take months if not years to make, just as the one he had ordered the construction of in Adhan.

But with the magic of cement, such a thing was accomplished in weeks, and it looked to less majestic.

In front of the statue, way at the end of the room, stood three people.

There, in his simple, white, priest robe, wearing a blue chasuble on his right shoulder and a stole on his left side was Theocles.

The chasuble was similar to the cloak worn by the men, being heavily embroidered.

While the stole was a long narrow strip of cloth that Theocles wore about the neck and down to the front of his left chest, almost like a belt.

And this stole was indeed like a belt as the color and workings on it would denote a priest's rank and power, with Theocle's black stole on golden stitch workings showing off his highest authority.

Besides Theocles were the twins, wearing the similar, simple robes they had worn the first time Alexander met them.

They appeared clean and refined, their plain clothes not diminishing any of their charms, but instead letting their natural beauty shine.

They appeared like two divine dark elves.

As a side note, one might question why Gaia's sacred priestess was not there at the altar, and the reason was Alexander wanted the poor girl to enjoy this grand parade instead of their holed up in that temple and so simply made up the excuse, "The sacred priestess should be with her master, serving his needs."

Moving his eyes away the main attraction, Alexander recorded the surroundings of the altar.

The back of the altar was not walled off, but just open.

Large strong pillars with various stone work on them held the roof over the altar, and peering through them, Alexander spotted many circular tables dotted around the garden behind, with one particularly huge, rectangular one in the center.

Over on the front side of the altar, there were sitting arrangements, made exactly how a modern wedding would arrange their seats, parted on two sides, with a walkway or aisle in the middle.

Large comfortable couches were placed on the front few rows, designated for the royal members and council members, while after them came many furnished and beautiful chairs.

Overhead the tall roof hung many lit chandeliers, and dropping off them were many stings of pearls and tiny bells, with beautiful paper flowers attached to them, seeming like flowers were blossoming out of the sky.

These huge bright red, blue, pink, and golden flowers mesmerized the crowd as they looked up in awe, and even Mikaya chuckled, "If my marriage is like this, I would not mind doing one too," in a hushed voice meant for only those close to her.

And though the four other women did not say anything out of courtesy for the occasion even though they knew what Mikaya was like, they could certainly empathize with the sentiment.

"It seems the pasha really knows how to throw a party. He has spared no expense" A rare token of praise came from the unlikelyst of sources- Hellam.

Even she was moved why how much Alexander was willing to spend on Cambyses.

"That new dress he is wearing is also nice. Looks like a clothed armor." Nafia then blurted out.

It was unknown if she said it because she liked the suit, or because Alexander was wearing it.

"I heard from Lady Gelene that His Grace wanted all to gift all the men such a dress. But did not have the time and men to do it," While her sister Tafia let the others know another useless tidbit.

"My dear Alex has certainly done his best for his big day." Mikaya said nodding, and then with a giggle said, "And even if another, even richer man were to try and beat, hehehe,.... he might not have the head for it."

It was plain as day who she was referring to in this suggestive comment.

Only the king could be said to be richer than a pasha.

And this type of banter poking fun at Ptolomy was a running gag among Mikaya and Seelima.

"Come let's take our seats. The ceremony is about to start," Seelima did not like such talks in public, fearful of whose ears might pick up on the words, and so abruptly interjected the conversation, then leading the group to the very front rows seats.

And once all the honored guests made themselves comfortable, they saw Alexander and Cambyses walk up to the altar, where Theocles fully bowed to Alexander as the 'Divine son of Gaia' while Azira and Azura performed a different bow, one that nobles used to greet one another.

Finally, the main ceremony could begin.

Chapter 366 Wedding Day (Part-5)

At the altar, Cambyses took a little time to observe the new goddess- Gaia.

She was a buxom lady, wearing a loose robe and with arms stretched towards her followers, a gentle smile gracing her face.

Her hair, made of wreaths of wheat, bunches of grapes, and vines of leaves draped over the shoulder and cascaded down to her hips, while around her feet were miniature animals such as

calves, ponies, and babies, seemingly frolicking around, their small size symbolizing the greatness of the goddess.

As Cambyses scrutinized the statue of Gaia, over time, she noted several 'abnormalities' with the statute'.

The biggest one was that the statue was dressed.

Statues of all kinds, be it the gods or humans were always sculpted in their natural form, both in Thesos and Adhania.

For humans, this was to show off their glory in the most raw form.

And for the gods, it was because they were thought to be of the perfect image and so they would show off their magnificent physics to the mortals.

Just like Ramuh appeared as a great, muscular man in the Grand Temple of Ramuh, every single one of his parts and features sculpted with great care and detail, even the private parts, which were even particularly jeweled.

Whereas in comparison, Alexander's hastily made Gaia statue appeared simple and even somewhat crude, with only little embellishments and jewels embedded here and there over the cement structure.

And the flowing robe seemingly hid the goddess's power, almost as if the god was weak and shameful to show off her features.

This figure was very much different from the one Cambyses had seen over in Thesos, which was naked with huge perky breasts, a voluminous butt, a large sex in the front, and hair curled up as Cambyses had hers, the perfect image of a married, fertile woman.

Hence, seeing the goddess Cambyses had heard Alexander talk much about all covered up and coy made Cambyses feel slightly disappointed, as she did not like the conservative look.

But Alexander had done this precisely because it was different because he wanted to show his religion was different.

If his religion was all the same as the others, how could he declare himself a god?

If his religion was all the same as the others, then how many imposters would rise up from his very religion calling themselves god?

So, it was natural Alexander would practice customs and religious ceremonies opposite to that of the 'disbelievers'.

Aside from the garb of the statue, another abnormality that Cambyses found was that the statue gave a weirdly familiar feeling.

Somehow to her, the face and the figure of the statue looked as if she had seen them before.

This was natural as Alexander had made designed the statue taking inspiration from Ophenia's face, Gelene's bust, and Cambyes's butt, forming an incongruous but strangely beautiful sculpture.

A design that Alexander kept Cambyes out of the loop about.

At the altar, Alexander and Cambyes stood opposite to each other in front of the Gaia statue, with Theocles as the priest in middle, while a soldier approached them, and placed a small, portable iron stove with fire burning inside in between the couple.

This was the very first ritual of the ceremony and it involved Cambyes.

The bride received various wooden and woolen toy dolls, horses, etc from a pouch the twins carried, all of which she threw into the fire.

Traditionally this ritual was done to symbolize a girl moving from childhood to adulthood, where she would dedicate her toys to the gods, and accept her new status as a woman.

But the toys that Cambyes was throwing into the fire as not exactly hers.

They were mostly newly made, and a few that she borrowed from Mean.

This was because as neglected by her father, she did not have many toys to begin with, but also because the nomadic nature of the mercenary group meant that she had lost a lot of her original toys during all her travels, due to carelessness, misplacing them, or them simply being stolen.

But the core idea of the ritual was still there, and as Cambyes slowly threw the objects into the new stove designed by Alexander, Theocles prayed:

Ohh, Great Gaia, Merciful Gaia:

Surely You are All-Knowing:

So we beseech Thee:

Bear witness to the birth of The Consort:

The Consort of the Son whom You have favored.

This and such similar verses were repeated over and over again as each article was thrown inside until all that remained was ash.

Completed with Cambyses's ceremony, it was Alexander's turn, and it promised to be bloody and messy.

Because it required him to perform a sacrifice.

The iron stove was soon removed, and in its place was replaced a large, shallow bucket, while Azira and Azura led a newborn goat, or a kid by the rope to near the bucket.

"My lord," At the same time, Theocles brought out a sheathed sword from behind the altar and offered the sword to Alexander while kneeling, his head lowered towards the marble floor, and arms stretched towards the pasha.

This sword or other ceremonial knives would usually be offered by the bride's father as a gift to his son-in-law when they would perform this ritual inside the bride's home temple like the one huge statue of Ramuh Pasha Muazz in his inner hall, which Alexander had demolished.

But since Cambyses's guardian was Alexander, and the girl had no real next of kin, this act was performed by Theocles.

Alexander accepted the sword by gripping the lavishly designed solid golden handle which was embedded with huge rubies and sapphires, and then in one swift motion unsheathed it off the scabbard, letting the steel glint of the sunlight light.

It was a double-edged sword with gold etchings done on one side of the blade that read

'Beyond life and blood' while the other side was 'Through the heavens for all eternity'.

The crowd watched with rapt attention as Alexander bought this large sword, made using the best techniques in the world, under the soft neck of the baby goat, making it bleat helplessly as he then gripped the soft neck and sliced up the throat in a swift, strong motion, warm blood dying the golden etchings.

The lifeless goat thrashed its soft, weak legs as the blood drained out of its body and pooled into the bucket, as soon another group of soldiers removed these two articles.

The point of this act was to symbolize a man's willingness to even kill something small and weak, in order to protect his woman.

Alexander had been careful to not get any blood on his suit during the process, and with the two basic ceremonies done, only one last remained- The vow.

In fact, there were many more ceremonies in between depending on which region of Adhania one lived in, such as the couple rubbing color on them, reciting various types of religious chants, lighting candles, and worshiping the statue, to name just a few.

But Alexander had decided to keep the number of rituals to the absolute minimum and restricted them to the most common ones.

And thus came the ring, probably the most iconic article in all marriages across all times.

Alexander took out the ring from a velvet box that was in his breast pocket and then presented the iron ring with rubies studded into it and a large diamond atop to Cambyses's left middle finger.

The reason for the ring being made of iron rather than of other more precious metals was for the same reason Cambyses's hair clips were made of iron.

It was traditionally made from iron used to kill a boar thus symbolizing fertility.

And the custom behind the left middle finger was because Adhanian doctors believed that during human dissections they had found a vein running directly from that finger to the heart.

So putting the ring on that finger meant a direct access to one's heart.

As Alexander put the ring on Cambyses's finger, a shy smile grew out of the girl, while Theocles in the meantime was busy pronouncing the vows.

And these vows were slightly different from the modern ones, with the greatest difference being that there was no asking Cambyses- 'Do you take Alexander, the Pasha of Zanzan as your rightful husband?'

This was not only Alexander was the pasha and when the pasha wanted to marry you, you did not say 'No', you said 'When'.

But also because given the time period and the status women had in society, that would have been a joke.

Women had no free will of their own and were considered just tools and properties of their fathers and husbands.

So when Alexander had proposed the former way of pronouncing the vows, Theocles at first tried very hard not to appear too incredulous so as to not offend Alexander.

And then he persuaded Alexander out of it saying such a thing might cause the audience to laugh out loud, damaging the serious and formal occasion.

Hence Theocles instead carried out the vows in the traditional way, addressing the crowd and asking, "Is there anyone among us who thinks this union should not be graced by the gods? Is there anyone who believes they deserve either the man or woman more than them? If there is please speak up! Please speak up now!"

Naturally, there was no response, and so Theoles formalized the marriage with the words, "Then from now on I declare Alexander, the Lord of Zanzan and Baroness Cambyses husband and wife. Let us bear witness. Let all of Zanzan bear witness. Let the gods bear witness."\\

And hence Alexander and Cambyses were formally husband and wife.

Chapter 367 Wedding Money

Strictly speaking, all the various rituals and ceremonies that had been performed were not necessary for the marriage to be valid.

Strictly speaking, to make any marriage valid in the eyes of Adhanian law, the only thing that was needed was a public statement from the boy and girl's guardian, letting the people in the vicinity know that this boy and girl was now man and woman.

But the reasons why the many rituals and ceremonies existed were both cultural, designed to make the day more merry and memorable, and religious, as it was believed that performing such acts would draw the favor of the gods and bestow their blessings on the newlyweds, resulting in peace and harmony in the house.

And the reason behind Alexander's lavish and extravagant wedding was purposed to awe and impress his guests and retailers.

And in this endeavor, he seemed to have been mostly successful up until now, as along with Theocles's phrase, came an accompanying cheer and applause, while the couple smiled and held hands.

This would be a day for both of them to remember.

As a side note, the custom behind Theocles's phrase 'Is there anyone among us who thinks this union should not be graced by the gods' was rooted in pragmatism.

This phrase had been invented due to a necessity because once there was a rampant culture among nobles to steal a commoner's or peasant's wife.

And thus this phrase was directed at anyone claiming to already be the spouse of the woman in question.

There was also the rare occurrence where a woman would run away from her family or lie about her marital status to hitch a ride onto a noble's lap, and this tradition helped curb that too.

The putting of the ring on the bride's finger was usually the climax of the marriage ceremony, but Alexander had another extra step to add.

So he first addressed the crowd thanking them, "Gentlemen, and esteemed guests," Alexander very conspicuously left the 'Ladies' part as per the norms of the time,

"Thank you for coming and attending this humble wedding of mine out of your busy schedule," His last words drew a light smile from the crowd as then Alexander got to the main point of his speech.

"As you know it is customary in a wedding ceremony for the groom to give money to the bride's father.

"This is done as a symbol of buying his daughter from him."

"And thus a husband is legally like a father to his bride, holding the same authority of life and death over her as her guardian did. He can manage her finances, properties, and inheritance to his wishes."

Alexander finished giving the background of Adhanian, or more specifically the Ramuh's faith interpretation of marriage and gender norms.

Then Alexander gave his new religion's interpretation of this sacred act,

"In many aspects of marriage, the rules decreed in our religion of Gaia agree with that of Ramuh."

"A husband works hard all day long and naturally deserves more control of the family. He is the head and leader after all," Alexander made these points clear to show that his religion was not too different from Ramuh's so as to not cause a strong backlash from the usually conservative populace of the city.

"But there are small instances where our faiths do differ," Alexander declared in a quick, sharp tone, as in a single breath he described, "And that is that instead of giving the money to the bride's father, the groom will give money directly to his bride!"

This produced some eyebrows and hushed whispers among the crowd, spreading to even among some of the newly converted council members.

This announcement was quite the controversial one and Theocles hid a breath of helplessness seeing this.

The archpriest recalled that when Alexander said that this was the decree of the goddess, he of course did not dare reject it, but Theocles had asked his lord to hold off on that announcement for a few years, letting the new converts get used to their new way of life before burdening them with this custom.

And the exact word that Theocles used was that, 'burden'.

Because you see, very crude and almost immorally speaking, raising children was a kind of investment for the people of this time.

Sons were so much celebrated because boys could work and earn money, of which they could spend a portion of to look after their parents.

So feeding, clothing, and raising a son was worth it because it was an investment for the parents for their retirement and old man.

Good, strong, healthy sons were the 401k of ancient times.

But for the girls, they were the complete opposite.

They could not work the fields, they could barely earn any money, and worse, when they were of age, they would leave their parents to serve their husbands.

In the twisted, pragmatic eyes of the girl's parents, girls were the human equivalent of crow's eggs that they, represented in this analogy as a cuckoo were forced to raise.

So from their perspective, it was a waste of good food, money, and cloth to raise a daughter because she was destined to become another man's possession, wasting all of one's investment to benefit an unknown stranger.

These were the sad economic circumstances that gave birth to a lot of gender norms of the time which developed into problems for the people of the 21st century.

Problems such as the convention that women would stay at home and look after the house, as was done for 99% of human history due to the economic structure of the times.

Problems such as pay discrimination based on gender, because throughout almost the entirety of our history, we have been an agrarian society, and so our brain has been wired to think that since women are less stronger than men, they can work less of the field per day, and so they deserve less pay.

Problems such as the birth of the culture of female infanticide both in Adhania and in Alexander's previous timeline.

And it was a practice that sadly persisted in both the city Alexander currently resided in and the modern times he once lived in, with India being the most notable one, where more than 2,000 babies were aborted every day after they were found to be female.

While in some parts of Adhania, a female girl being born was a cause of great shame and humiliation for the family, as it was seen as a curse and sign of misfortune, and proof that the gods were dissatisfied with that family.

Problems such as only men being on high-level posts, because it would be typically only men who had the time to go out of the house and do other things, as women would be typically needed to take care of the house.

All these conventions, or as the feminists say, 'The rise of the patriarchy' did not happen because one day all the men got together in one giant hall and had a meeting where they agreed to suppress and oppress the other gender with some grand diabolical masterplan in mind.

No, they occurred naturally due to the economic hardships and circumstances of the time where each person acted in his own self-interest.

And such hardships gave rise to customs such as the groom giving money to the bride's father as a kind of reimbursement for all his efforts in raising a good, healthy daughter.

And it even gave rise to completely opposite customs such as in Thesos and India, where in the latter's case the concept of dowry to this day persisted despite the government's efforts to ease it.

The reason behind the dowry, which was a complete 180 of Adhania's custom and involved the bride's father actually giving money to the groom, was that because the woman cannot work, the bride's father should give money to the groom to look after this 'burden'.

This was another form of twisted logic pertaining to the economic situation of the times and was followed by many groups and races.

Theocles had explained these situations in detail to Alexander and had said, "My lord, I know many fathers who raise their daughters well because they believe they will get a good amount of money by marrying her. So, this is a form of protection for them."

"And I fear that giving the money to the bride and stopping the father from getting anything might make the treatment of the girls get worse, and even cause female infanticide to rise."

And Theocles lastly finished by saying, "Not to mention that because women have no right to own money or property, it will likely all end up in the husband's pocket, making the custom quite....ummm weak."

Theocles quickly stopped himself from saying the word 'useless'.

And Theocles made some fantastic points no doubt.

But Alexander gave Theocles the same answer as he gave the crowd, "The reason for giving the bride money is because women generally have no income of their own, And this will allow them to spend out of their own pockets to buy sweets for their children, give gifts to her parents, and spend on small things on herself such as a necklace or jewelry without having to hanker their husbands for it."

"And it could be even a source of emergency funds if the husband is not close by at the moment, such as being at war," Alexander reasoned, which calmed much of the crowd, mostly concerned men who feared what their wives might do with the money.

Chapter 368 Wedding Feast (Part-1)

Alexander's reasoning behind the declaration of the new customs of marriage according to the religion of Gaia placated the bubbling crowd for the time being.

Though many questions still remained.

The main one being who would possess the money and if it was the woman, then how would she protect it?

And Alexander, anticipating such questions answered on his own, "I will soon set up a marriage registry department with the city hall, where couples will be able to register their marriage and declare the amount of money given to the bride."

"This amount of money will be stored in the registry department and only the bride will be able to access it. With no one, not her father, not her husband, and not even her sons being able to spend it without her permission." Alexander declared.

And then finished by saying, "But her husband and father will be able to know how much money is left anytime he wishes by visiting the marriage registry to ensure that the woman is not mispending the money."

Alexander had intentionally added the last part because he feared that the men would not like having their wives' financial independence and that the men would fear the women spending their money on various frivolous things.

Hence the last part helped to mitigate such fears.

Though what they did not know was that Alexander planned to repel the last part along the line of his rule in the name of 'privacy' thus giving the women of this time some limited financial independence, and hoping that they would not be like sheep to the slaughter under their fathers and husbands whims.

And as for Theocles's concern about female infanticide, Alexander planned to make social, economic, and legal reforms to curb such practices.

Alexander believed that Theocles's assumption that the only reason fathers did not kill their daughters was because of the potential money to be too simplified, as it was not like all the fathers in the world were busy sharpening their knives in case their daughter turns out bad.

And so Alexander was confident with the right policies, he would be able to get the best of both worlds.

Alexander's detailed account cleared many of the doubts in the crowd, while many unmarried women in a hushed voice said to themselves, 'Oh, I like this,' and thinking of how to change their faith as they then witnessed a group of soldiers again approach the altar, this time carrying a closed chest.

The jingle and clinking sound coming from inside the chest as the wooden box swayed with the footsteps made everyone know of its contents, and when the soldiers placed the chest at the feet of Alexander, the loud thud made everyone certain of the large amount of gold coins stuffed inside of it.

Once the chest was placed, Alexander took out an iron key from his breast pocket and loudly declared, "I, Alexander, the Pasha of Zanzan, here gift my wife, Lady Zanzan 100,000 ropals as her wedding gift." before handing the key to Cambyse, thus signifying the transfer.

The huge amount of money drew gasps of shock and awe from the crowd, as this amount was a Talukder's (Viscount) annual income, while Cambyse received the key with a large grin on her face.

And with this finally done, the ceremony bit of the wedding ceremony finally came to an end.

"And now it is time for the feast to start," Alexander declared with a loud clap of the hand as the guests all slowly got up to move to the back garden dotted with dining tables.

"My lords and ladies, please let me escort you," And Alexander personally addressed this to Mikaya and Seelima and co. as he led the group to the large main table.

This table was special, not only due to its shape and size but also because unlike the other tables in which anyone would sit in any order, this table had individual, particular chairs dedicated to a specific person as indicated by a name tag placed on the table in front of it.

Each of the names was handwritten by Mikaya on a paper card using beautiful and complex calligraphy and using various colors of ink.

The twins Azira and Azura and the Queen mother and Hellma's names were written in royal Gold.

Theocle, Mikaya, and her maids' names were written in Silver.

Alexander's girls' names were written in Red.

The barons' and council members' names were written in Blue.

And finally, the workshop chief's and Takfiz's names were written in Black.

Such use of the color scheme was self-explanation, to show off the rank of the person named.

And to get Mikaya to produce this beautiful piece, Alexander had to 'sacrifice' quite a few young men to the white succubus.

It seemed that the only currency she was interested in.

Alexander and Cambyses sat at the very head of the table as was the convention in any wedding, those two seats being reserved for the bride and groom.

And this seat was also special in another way as though there were two chairs, a sheepskin was placed over them, to symbolize that though they were a couple, they were now one.

It appeared many aspects of Adhania were heavy on symbolism.

Right in front of Alexander was placed a salt cellar, a very important part of Adhanian culture as the closer one sat to this almost sacred object, the more important he was.

And today Alexander and Cambyses were certainly the most important ones.

This salt cellar was also shaped like no ordinary salt container, its appearance befitting its status of being served in front of a pasha.

In fact, it was so heavily designed that one would find it difficult to describe it as a salt cellar at a first glance.

Because unlike the shape one might conjure up when the word salt cellar or salt shaker came up, that of a conical or cylindrical tube with holes on top, the salt cellar in front of Alexander was shaped like a ship, with the body made of expensive oak, with a deck made of gold and with silver masts.

Yes, a simple salt container was shaped like a miniature ship that was about 30 centimeters wide!

And one would access the salt by opening the deck of the ship using a small handle and find that its belly was full of the white, good stuff.

Alexander did not know exactly from whom he had looted this ornate piece of absolute extravagance, whether it be from the Cantagenan when he raided Agapois's possessions, from Adhan and Ptolomy, or from Muazz, but whoever it was, it seemed somehow it had ended up in his wedding table.

And today, left of this beautiful art piece sat Azira and Azura, while to the right sat the mother-daughter duo of Seelima and Hellma.

Alexander had been unsure whether to put the two princesses right next to him as royalty or to treat them as Pasha Farzah's granddaughter.

This was because Amenheraft had basically abandoned them and hence, practically placing them further back would be more appropriate.

But since Amenheraft had not yet explicitly made that claim, and more importantly as Alexander found these, as he liked to call, 'Twin dark elves' cute, he made them sit next to him and was rewarded by a blossoming smile from the two women.

They were very happy to be seen treated as royals.

Across the table, the atmosphere was almost the opposite, with Seelima and Hellma putting on somber and dignified faces, as Adhanian etiquette required royals to be, and even making Cambyses, who sat to their left feel slightly cold.

Next to the twins were their aunt and her maid, courtesy of them being related to a Pasha, while the next two sits to Seelima and Hellma were occupied by Theocles and Ophenia as they were the highest bodies of authority of a religion and had status similar to a Pasha.

Then were seated Gelene and Mean, followed by the council member who had been declared barons by Alexander, and lastly the commoners such as the artisans.

In all, the huge able hosted around 30 to 35 men and women.

And while this strict hierarchy of seating arrangement might seem pedantic to modern people, it was extremely important in this time period where peerage and status was sometimes more important than life or death.

There were alliances that had broken due to improper sitting arrangements and to avoid such a fiasco, Alexander had even asked both Mikaya and Seelima for their input.

After the guests seated themselves, they then turned their focus to the plate and cutlery.

Over on the 'commoner' tables, this consisted of beautiful golden and silver wares, with plates made from alloys of silver and lead, golden spoons and silver goblets.

While on the 'noble' tables, it was very different.

The dinner plates were made from clear glass and decorated with designs of flora and fauna, a linen napkin dressed like a lotus flower atop it.

Next of that, each of them was given a wine goblet, but it was not made of pure glass.

It had a slight tinge of blue to it as it was made from bristol glass, making it translucent and subtly foggy, yet also dazzling.

No one had seen glass like that and even Seelima would not hold and marvel at the goblet.

And these two marvelous wares were embellished with the usual compliment of solid golden and silver cutlery such as spoons, forks, and knives.

Chapter 369 Covetous Eyes

Mikaya and Seelima were not the only ones amazed by the clarity of the glassware on display.

By now every one of the guests had picked up their goblets and was looking through them to see how the world appeared looking through them and marveling at how the light seemed to both scatter and join together when passing through the glass.

'So glass can be so beautiful! Both transparent and translucent!' The guests cried out in their hearts.

Serving glass plates instead of ceramics might seem a bit tacky to modern people, but for the people present, even plates made with solid gold would not have amazed them as much as the clear glass did.

Adhania had already an obsession with glass, and if all the people were not in such a formal setting and sitting right in front of Alexander, most would have decided to take them as 'souvenirs' back home.

After all, each one of these could easily go for prices nearing or even exceeding 5 digits.

Suddenly, while everyone was busy caressing and feeling their new tableware, a sweet voice rang out, "Pasha Alexander, you know Hellma is getting ready for marriage. Might you be interested?"

There was a light smile on the Queen's mother's face as she made this preposterous proposal.

"....."The jolly atmosphere seemed to have been hit the pause button by this sound, as everyone turned their heads woodily to find the source of this voice.

And even Hellma seemed to have been stunned with silence at this crude way of her mother asking Alexander to marry her even before the feast for his first wife's wedding could start.

This was a new low point she was seeing of her mother, a point she quickly reevaluated, when Seelima further suggested, "Of course, if the Pasha feels just my daughter is not enough, I still consider myself young!"

"....." Alexander had to fight very hard to keep a straight face at this shameless behavior.

He knew his clear glass would attract jealousy and coveting, and he was also aware of the craze Adhania had for the stuff.

But he had at least assumed that Seelima would have a bit more dignity than that, especially when she would frequently go off on the 'virtues of nobles'.

So, Alexander was now left with the task of trying to figure out if Seelima was being serious after being dazzled by the secrets of clear glass or if it was her way of driving a wedge between him and Ptolomy to fleece the glass formulae out of him through political pressure.

But whichever one it was, to make such a proposal so openly meant that without a doubt this would make its way to Ptolomy, making Alexander feel a slight headache at how to deal with that lovestruck fool.

And the worse news was that Seelima blackmailing him for the glass recipe would not be the worst thing it could happen.

No, the worst thing would be if Seelima was serious about wedding Hellma and herself to him, causing a complete fissure between Ptolomy and Alexander.

Marrying the widow Seelima would not be too controversial even in modern times.

But Hellma, aged fourteen and a beautiful girl by her own rights, might seem very young by any modern standards.

But these were not modern times.

In Adhania, girls typically tended to get married by fifteen, and in fact, there was even a law that heavily fined any girl above the age of twenty who was unmarried.

This was done due to economic reasons, as the faster one could marry a girl off, the faster she would become someone else's problem.

Health reasons as it was possible for anyone to contract an innocuous disease and simply, almost randomly die, even those in the prime of their life such the teens.

And thus the urgency to start producing children as soon as the body was able.

And lastly, it was done due to social reasons for society generally did not like seeing young, mature, unmarried women, for they were seen as lazy, rebellious, and wastrels.

And this phenomenon was of course not restricted to Adhania or even this timeline.

For example: Shakespeare's famous romance tragedy Romeo and Juliet cast Juliet as a thirteen-year-old, with her mother making mention of the phrase, 'two weeks till her fourteenth birthday', several times.

This did not mean Shakespeare was a pervert.

But that it was simply socially accepted to write such a novel about such a young character because it was the norm of the times.

And England and Europe were not the only ones who practiced this custom.

The Arabs did.

And the Indian Noble Prize-winning poet Rabindranath Tagore even wrote in his diary how distressed he was because he had not yet found a suitable suitor for his two daughters who were crossing the age of eighteen.

An eighteen age old unmarried daughter in the sub-continent was considered a shrew and spinster even as late as the 20th century.

And in the freedom-loving USA, even in the 21st century, in some places like Mississippi and New Hampshire, the age of consent to marry with parental consent for females are 15 and 13 respectively.

So, the Queen mother seriously offering her and Hellma's hand in marriage was not out of the question and thus Alexander was momentarily fluxed about how to respond to this.

Not to even mention the political implications, Alexander firstly and most importantly did not like the mother-daughter duo.

Though very beautiful, Alexander found Hellma too arrogant and cold, while Hellma found Alexander too low-born and lacking the 'spirit of a noble'.

And though stunning to look at Alexander found Seelima too scheming, and Seelima found Alexander's potential too dangerous.

There was no way this was gonna work, and so Alexander decided to answer as such, loudly chuckling the reply, "Hahaha....I'm glad to see the Esteemed Queen mother enjoying herself enough to make jokes. I'm honored, I'm honored."

And as he said this, he internally thought, 'Seelima must know this would be the answer. So what's her angel?'

But Alexander did not get to finish this train of thought, as just after finishing this, and even before the table could regain their collective breath, Mikaya thought it was time to throw her name into the ballot, and so she chirped up, "That's right Alex, Seelima and Hellma are meant for King Ptolomy. You should choose me, a chaste and modest maiden. And I will even throw in Nafia and Tajia!"

Those in the know had to clench their teeth to not gape at Mikaya's words.

'Chaste? Modest? Maiden? Do you even know the meaning of those words?' Was the thought that ran across their minds.

And for Alexander, if Seelima's proposal had made his lips twitch, this proposal wanted to make him retch.

The mere thought of sleeping with Mikaya knowing who or a more accurate word might be 'what" she was made Alexander visibly uncomfortable.

This was a 26-year-old who had not been yet able to be married off due to her near infamy in Matrak and was way past the marriageable age in Adhania, a fact that was a source of frequent conflict and chiding by her brothers and sisters to their father who blamed Pasha Farzah for spoiling her too much.

And additionally, they even blamed him for ruining Nafia's and Tajia's life, because customarily handmaids like them usually married after their mistress.

Alexander did not even bother replying to Mikaya as it was certainly a joke and Mikaya was just jumping on the bandwagon to dilute Seelima's ploy and prevent her from scheming to get the glass recipe, an act Alexander would later thank Mikaya for.

But for now Alexander stopped talking and put on an obedient face because suddenly he could feel a suspicious burst of cold air swirling air around him, and making his hair rise up.

At first, one might mistake it as being due to a sudden gust of breeze in the cold winter afternoon.

But Alexander was sure it was coming from just next to him, more precisely emanating out of the lady sitting beside him.

Cambyses, who turned to give a wide, nice grin, a grin that to Alexander looked like the maws of an engaged beast, was understandably furious.

This was supposed to be her big day, but now those bitches were talking about marrying her husband literally just minutes after their wedding ceremony had finished.

This was the real-life example of the proverbial 'Remarrying even before the spouse's body got cold'.

And thus, Alexander was extremely glad to see the waiters arrive with jugs of wine in crystal pitchers.

He could really use a drink, a desire he expressed with a signal to the waiter who poured him a full glass.

And as the pasha quenched his parched throat with wine, and more specifically the wine recipe he gave Camius, the others were more interested in the crystal pitcher.

'Another glass container!' They said in amazement, now being certain that the Pasha of Zanzan had discovered the secret of clear glass making, a conclusion reinforced by the fact that the waiters started not only bringing crystal pitchers but also trays filled with soup bowls made of glass.

The dining experience promised to be a glass bonanza.

Chapter 370 Wedding Feast (Part-2)

"Ladies and gentlemen, today's luncheon will be a bit different. I hope none of you will mind," Alexander first addressed the guests at the table.

"*Clap*, *clap*, *clap*, oohhh, I love it when Your Grace invents new food items." And was quickly greeted with an enthusiastic cheer from Mikaya, who then very naturally added, "Will they be as amazing as this clear glass?"

The cheerful, vivacious way she managed to weave in a question everyone was dying to ask was proof of her cunningness as she was basically asking, 'Where did you get this new glass from?'

Alexander ignored this part of the question, and instead answered the first, "The new dishes are all the products of my kitchen. And I will let our guests be the judge of their worth."

As Alexander said this, the waiters finished pouring the wine into all the goblets and started to bring out the first course- Fresh Pea soup.

This soup was carried in large bowls on wooden trolleys and was served to individual guests by the waiters.

The reason why it was done like so and not the usual way of presenting a bowl of soup on the table and letting the guests serve themselves was simple.

'What are we, peasants?'

Asking a guest to serve his own food was a cultural taboo, especially on formal occasions, and more so an act unimaginable for the nobles.

And hence also why there were no soup bowls on the table, but instead they were given a crystal bowl filled with the piping hot liquid.

This fresh appetizer was made of the simplest of ingredients, just peas, lettuce, and cream, cooked and mashed, and then garnished with some cheese.

And though the true nobles like the Queen mother and Mikaya were a bit surprised by the simplicity of the dish, remembering Alexander's pedigree, they soon dug into the thick, green, liquid using their golden spoons.

'Mmmm, it's quite good. Hot and creamy, but also light and refreshing,' Alexander said to himself after tasting the first spoonful.

And then looked around to see that the dish had been mostly well received.

Warm, hearty pea soup in winter was a fantastic combination and so the dish was consumed quickly and in silence, as everyone focused their attention on the beautiful and rich earthy flavors, occasionally paring it with the sweet, mild taste of the new grape wine.

After everyone had enjoyed their appetizer course, and the small, glass bowls were empty, it was time for the main course of the luncheon.

The waiters first removed the soup bowls and soon the smell around the dining table began to change as the waiters brought out the first item of the main course- Barbecued Steak!

These had been cooked in the bbq grill that Alexander had made and as the guests placed their eyes on the prime rib cuts, their mouth could not help but salivate.

These huge cuts of meat, had their outer surface charred and grilled, and a smoky, buttery smell was emanating out of them as they rested in a pool of gravy, furnished with a side of two cuts of buttered bun and garnished with salad, consisting of pickle, cucumber, radish, and lettuce which had been dressed with olive oil.

The guests were all very excited to dig into the dish and soon following Alexander's example, they placed their knives against the soft flesh and felt the meat melt away like butter under them with the slightest touch, as the perfectly cooked meat revealed its still pink core, and dressed the gravy underneath with its delicious meat juice.

The dish looked heavenly, and when it entered the mouth, it tasted arguably better, with all the butter, the salt, the pepper, the thyme, and the rosemary rub amplifying the taste of the charred, smokey flavor, making the meat sing inside.

And then came the fresh salad, made of winter vegetables, and olive oil, helping to cut through the richness of the meat and cleansing the mouth, thus making it ready for the next bite.

Alexander only enjoyed the meat and salad, skipping the butter buns and purely relishing in the taste of the exquisite cut of meat, the flavor of which also made him reminisce about his past time.

This heavy main course was followed by a second main course, which was a gravy dish named- Chicken fricassee.

This was the French version of the butter chicken, usually made of chicken, onion, mushroom, garlic, butter, and yogurt, but this time the chicken was substituted for fowl.

The guests were given this curry dish in another glass bowl, along with thick slices of soft, white bread, which they dipped into the mushroom and onion curry made from thick chicken stock.

In this cold, afternoon, such a heavy dish went perfectly, and once they were finished, many of the guests were feeling filled and a bit sleepy.

If only Alexander had arranged for them some nice, soft beds.

And with the third course done, there was lastly the dessert- Pudding.

Now, pudding did exist in Adhania, but it was savory, made of meat, flour, and raisins.

They even had their version of black pudding, made from animal blood, inside containers made of animal intestines.

But Alexander's pudding was the normal, sweet kind, made from egg, milk, and sugar.

"My lord, this is?" Mikaya was surprised seeing the yellow slice of dessert, topped off with a cream and a single, red cheery.

"It is a kind of sweet dessert. Please try,"

Alexander gestured as he took his fork to dive into this classic item.

And was pleasantly surprised to find it soft and fluffy, sweet and creamy.

He had been worried that without any oven, it would be too dense.

Alexander overcame the oven problem by simply steaming the mixture, i.e- he put the pudding mixture in a pan, made it airtight by sealing the top using dough, and then placed the entire thing in another larger pot that was half filled with water.

So as the water boiled and bubbled, it cooked the pudding mixture in the secondary vessel.

And this was the dish that had the most reaction from the people, for they tasted something so sweet for the first time in their life.

"My lord, what is this? It tastes so sweet! Amazing!" A loud roar rang across the table as Menes involuntarily exclaimed the praise.

It was so loud and the act too rude that everyone turned to look at the dressed general, who felt all eyes on him shortly after went red and drooped his head low.

'I couldn't help it. It tastes so good,' Menes reasoned to himself while his hand moved by itself cutting the heavenly dish while being careful to not take too big a chunk at a time.

He wanted to savor the moment, a sentiment that was shared by many.

As Menes went back to quietly enjoying his dessert, his outburst made the Queen mother and Mikaya scoff at all the 'barbarians' made nobles, though this momentary thought was drowned by the delicious sweetness they were tasting.

panda---nove1,com 'Is this honey? But it doesn't taste like so. It's much sweeter." Seelima tried to figure out the mystery ingredient.

'Hmmm, it's definitely not honey. Alex doesn't have so much honey. And besides, cooking honey like this would destroy it,' Mikaya knew a thing or two about cooking because Pasha Farzah liked to eat her dishes, and hence knew why honey was usually glazed over dishes, and not cooked by mixing it.

But both the women kept their curiosity in check for the moment, because this was not the place to be asking questions.

They also knew there were a million more idiots who would ask these questions for them.

So they were a bit disappointed in how anti-climactic it was when Alexander gave the answer by himself, "Hahaha, I'm glad everyone likes the new dish. It's made from eggs, milk, and a honey-like ingredient we

have discovered. Many of you might know it as the thing we use to make the sweet-water medicine with."

Alexander frankly revealed this because if he did not tell others he had sugar, how was he going to sell sugar?

Alexander's revelation made many think back on that brown powder but recalled that tasted only mildly sweet.

It was not like anything they were tasting now.

So, they were unsure whether to believe Alexander's claim or view it as Alexander's smokescreen.

But regardless, they nodded and paid many praises and compliments to the new dish, as finally the feast drew its curtain.

But this did not mean the guests left, for there was still the gift ceremony.

So Alexander and Cambyses still sat on their chair, while all the guests came to them to give their compliments and present them with their gifts, which was received by the many guards around Alexander.

This took some time, though not as long as one might imagine for Alexander had kept the actual number of guests quite short- limiting himself to the people he frequently interacted with in Zanzan, and their family, with only a scant number of merchants Heliptos and Camius had recommended.

And the only ones he had sent a written invitation to was Pasha Farzah and Ptolomy, who naturally could not make it due to the turmoil Adhan was still in, but had sent them their best regards while also promising the appropriate gifts.

And that was it.

No other nobles around the Zanzan were invited and no well-wishes from the nobility around came to greet Alexander, perfectly showcasing the freezy relationship between the pasha and his neighbors.