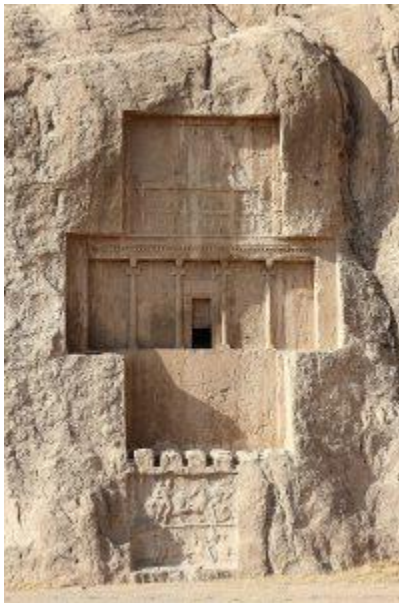


## Inscription From Darius the Great's Tomb

Source: <https://projects.swan.ac.uk/ancient-world/?p=895>

*The Persians did not produce the sort of written histories that we often use to explore a society. Instead, one of our best ways into examining the topic are a series of royal inscriptions that the Persian kings set up at key places to emphasise their power and to outline their ideology. These inscriptions very much reflect a top-down perspective on the Persian Empire so there are very real questions about how far the claims made in these documents reflect reality, but they can still be revealing. This particular inscription is part of the text that was carved onto the tomb of Darius I at Naqs-i-Rustam, a few miles from Persepolis, the most important city in the empire. (Introduction by Stephen Harrison)*



View of Tomb of Darius the Great in Naqsh-e Rustam

Image source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomb\\_of\\_Darius\\_the\\_Great](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomb_of_Darius_the_Great)

Translation (from: Kuhrt, A., *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period*. Routledge, 2007):

(1) A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this excellent thing which is seen, who created happiness for man, who set wisdom and capability down upon King Darius.

(2a) King Darius/Xerxes says: By the grace of Ahuramazda I am of such a sort, I am a friend of the right, of wrong I am not a friend. It is not my wish that the weak should have harm done him by the strong, nor is it my wish that the strong should have harm done him by the weak.

(2b) The right, that is my desire. To the man who is a follower of the lie I am no friend. I am not hot-tempered. What things develop in my anger, I hold firmly under control by my thinking power. I am firmly ruling over my own impulses.

(2c) The man who is cooperative, according to his cooperation thus I reward him. Who does harm, him according to the harm I punish. It is not my wish that a man should do harm; nor indeed is it my wish that if he does harm he should not be punished.

(2d) What a man says against a man, that does not convince me, until I hear the sworn statements of both.

(2e) What a man does or performs, according to his ability, by that I become satisfied with him, and it is much to my desire, and I am well pleased, and I give much to loyal men.

(2f) Of such a sort are my understanding and my judgment: if what has been done by me you see or hear of, both in in the palace and in the expeditionary camp, this is my capability over will and understanding.

(2g) This indeed my capability: that my body is strong. As a fighter of battles I am a good fighter of battles. When ever with my judgment in a place I determine whether I behold or do not behold an enemy, both with understanding and with judgment, then I think prior to panic, when I see an enemy as when I do not see one.

(2h) I am skilled both in hands and in feet. As a horseman, I am a good horseman. As a bowman, I am a good bowman, both on foot and on horseback. As a spearman, I am a good spearman, both on foot and on horseback.

(2i) These skills that Ahuramazda set down upon me, and which I am strong enough to bear, by the will of Ahuramazda, what was done by me, with these skills I did, which Ahuramazda set down upon me.

(3a) Man, vigorously make you known of what sort I am, and of what sort my skillfulnesses, and of what sort my superiority. Let not that seem false to you, which has been heard by your ears. Listen to what is said to you.

(3b) Man, let that not be made to seem false to you, which has been done by me. That do you behold, which has been inscribed. Let not the laws be disobeyed by you. Let not anyone be untrained in obedience. [The last line is unintelligible]

Below analysis is a contribution from **Aidan Kee**, an Ancient History student, who assessed an inscription from the tomb of Darius I as part of his coursework for the module.

#### **Aidan's analysis:**

'Although [...] the Achaemenid History Workshop profoundly transformed our understanding of the Achaemenid empire, members of that group devoted surprisingly little attention to the role of religion.' [1] So, Lincoln shows, the question of Achaemenid religion is far from answered in scholarship. Therefore, considering the religious aspect of the inscription, it is a useful source of evidence on the subject, especially in relation to Achaemenid kingship. Darius thanks the help that Ahuramazda has given him in his journey to kingship multiple times in the passage. [2] Its

placement at the site of Darius' tomb means that the text is what Darius wishes to be remembered for, clearly revealing the importance of Ahuramazda to his reign.

Zoroaster, a prophet considered active around 1000 BC, allegedly produced the *Gāthās* setting out 'a dualistic system in which *aša* (truth, rightness) is opposed to *druj* (lie, deceit) with Ahuramazda as the supreme deity.'<sup>[3]</sup> Whilst Zoroaster may not have been a historical figure, the rough estimate of when he lived usefully provides us with a rough date for the commencement of the oral tradition conveying the *Gāthās*. Considering this oral tradition that carried the *Gāthās* from this time through to Sasanian times, where it was eventually textualized, it stands to reason that it reflected Achaemenid religious ideology in order to survive.<sup>[4]</sup> Therefore, whilst the Achaemenids may not strictly have been Zoroastrians, it is likely that the Achaemenid Ahuramazda is very similar to its Zoroastrian counterpart. Thus, in the inscription where Darius attributes his 'wisdom and capability' to being gifted to him by Ahuramazda, Darius legitimises his reign. Darius has been supported by the protector of *aša* with skills that make him a good king. Perhaps surprisingly, Darius also presents himself as a judge of *aša* and *druj* in the passage, 'I am a friend of the right, of the wrong I am not a friend'.<sup>[5]</sup> This idea is also present in the Bisitun inscription, indicating it as an important aspect of his kingship and how he legitimised himself.<sup>[6]</sup> Therefore, in the inscription Darius aligns himself with Ahuramazda with a subtle hint at his own divinity. However, this is counterbalanced by Darius also presenting himself as a human, subject to *aša* and *druj* respectively, 'I am firmly ruling over my own impulses'.<sup>[7]</sup> He is clearly below Ahuramazda here, as the *Gāthās* state 'look upon the two sides, between which each man must choose for himself.'<sup>[1]</sup> Darius clearly is subject to the trials of 'each man' demonstrated by his 'impulses'. This illustrates the caution that Darius had to take when dealing with religion as on one hand it was a useful tool for legitimising his reign, whilst on the other it was vital to simultaneously remain humble and pious. The religious aspect of the inscription is replicated by Xerxes at Persepolis indicating that the way Darius deals with religion in the passage was deemed contemporarily successful.<sup>[8]</sup> So, the inscription presents us with a useful opportunity to examine how religion was utilised successfully to legitimise the early Achaemenid king's reigns.

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