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STUDIES IN ANCIENT ORIENTAL CIVILIZATION

A NEW INSCRIPTION OF XERXES
FROM PERSEPOLIS

By
ERNST E. HERZFELD



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Edited by

JAMES HENRY BREASTED

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THOMAS GEORGE ALLEN

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**A NEW INSCRIPTION OF XERXES
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FOREWORD

The discovery and publication of this important royal record of the Persian kings mark the entrance of the Oriental Institute upon a new field of investigation. The place of the Persian Highlands in the development of civilization is a very important one. The Highland civilization, to a certain extent a coherent whole, is now known to have extended throughout the length of the Highland Zone from the Aegean eastward to the Iranian Plateau. In the *western* half of the Highland Zone the Oriental Institute has already been carrying on field researches in Anatolia for some seven years. It was very necessary that it should also be able to carry on similar researches at the *eastern* end of the Highland Zone.

In undertaking this campaign in Persia, made possible by the generosity of an anonymous donor, the Institute has been very fortunate in securing the experienced co-operation of Professor Ernst E. Herzfeld as field director of the expedition. The foundation document which he discovered last year, and which is herewith presented in text and translation, belongs to the great creative age of Persian civilization, which represented the sunset splendor of oriental civilization. Behind this culmination of early oriental culture obviously must lie many ages of gradual evolutionary development from the most primitive beginnings. It is the hope of the Institute to devote a great deal of attention also to the earlier stages of civilization in the Persian Highlands. The discoveries which Professor Herzfeld has thus far made demonstrate quite clearly that the evidence for the successive stages of the earlier development is still plentifully preserved in Persia and that an adequate body of such evidence will soon be in our hands for the reconstruction of pre-Persian history in this region. We shall then be in a better position to comprehend how remote are the beginnings to which we must trace back the noble civilization so splendidly represented at Persepolis. The clearance of the palace terrace at Persepolis is yielding an important harvest of new historical documents, among which the latest is a foundation record of Artaxerxes I. It is the hope of the Institute to instal all this newly salvaged evidence

in the royal apartment occupying the front of the harem palace of Darius and Xerxes, which is being restored by the Institute to serve as a museum of the rescued monuments of Persepolis. This magnificent royal residence of ancient Persia may thus, in a very real sense, become a national sanctuary in which the citizens of modern Persia may find enshrined in honor the surviving memorials of their greatest ancestors.

JAMES HENRY BREASTED

THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE
CHICAGO, U.S.A.
July 28, 1932

A NEW INSCRIPTION OF XERXES FROM PERSEPOLIS

Since the spring of 1931 the Persian Expedition of the Oriental Institute has been busy in reconstructing the so-called "southeast palace" of Persepolis, which various archeological observations now prove to have been the harem of Darius and of Xerxes.

When rebuilding the southwest corner of that palace, Mr. Krefter, the architect of the expedition, thought it necessary not to use the remains of the ancient wall but to renew the corner from its foundation. Hence the old sun-dried bricks, preserved to a height of about 1 meter, were taken away. Below appeared the usual deposit of small stones and rubble with which the Achaemenian architects leveled the uneven surface of the rock terrace. And directly under the lowest course of bricks, among those small stones, there was lying, on a bedding of small pieces of crystalline sulphur and remains probably of some fragrant wood, a block of calcareous stone measuring about 52×58 cm. and from 6 to 11 cm. thick, shaped like a Babylonian clay tablet and wholly inscribed with 48 lines of Old Persian cuneiform.

For the significance of the bedding of sulphur I can only refer to the Assyrian custom of putting foundation documents on a layer of beads, ornaments, and similar small offerings and to the Iranian custom of drinking sulphur-water with the ceremony of taking an oath: apparently the bedding in sulphur had some magic meaning. The inscription, then, was found *in situ*, untouched, exactly as it had been laid down some 2,500 years ago. The text is reproduced in Figures 1 and 2; transliteration, translation, and commentary follow.

TRANSLITERATION

§ 1. ¹ba²ya. vazrka. a^huramazdá. hya. imá²m. búmim. adá. hya. avam. ásm³ánam. adá. hya. martiyam. adá. ⁴hya. šyátim. adá. martiyahy⁵á. hya. χšayáršám. χšáyadyam⁶. akunauš. aivam. parúnám. χš⁷áyadyam. aivam. parúnám. fram⁸átáram.

§ 2. adam. χšayáršá. χšá⁹yadya. vazrka. χšáyadya. χšá¹⁰yadyánám.

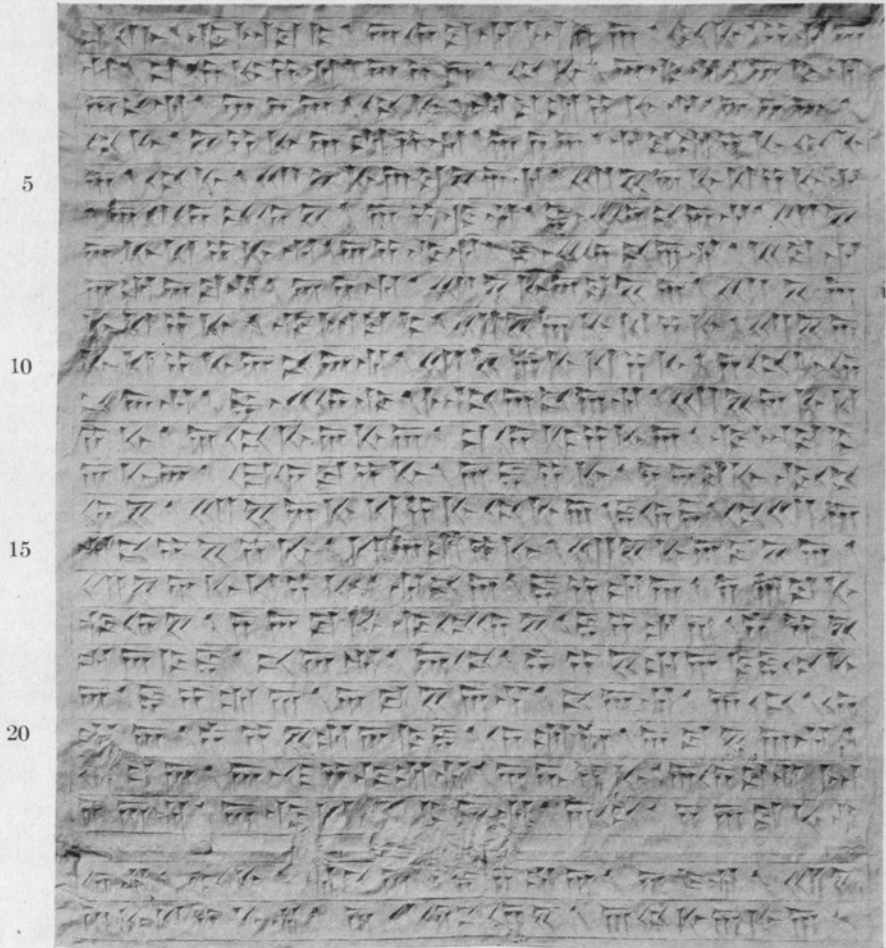


FIG. 1.—THE INSCRIPTION, LINES 1-24 (FROM A SQUEEZE)

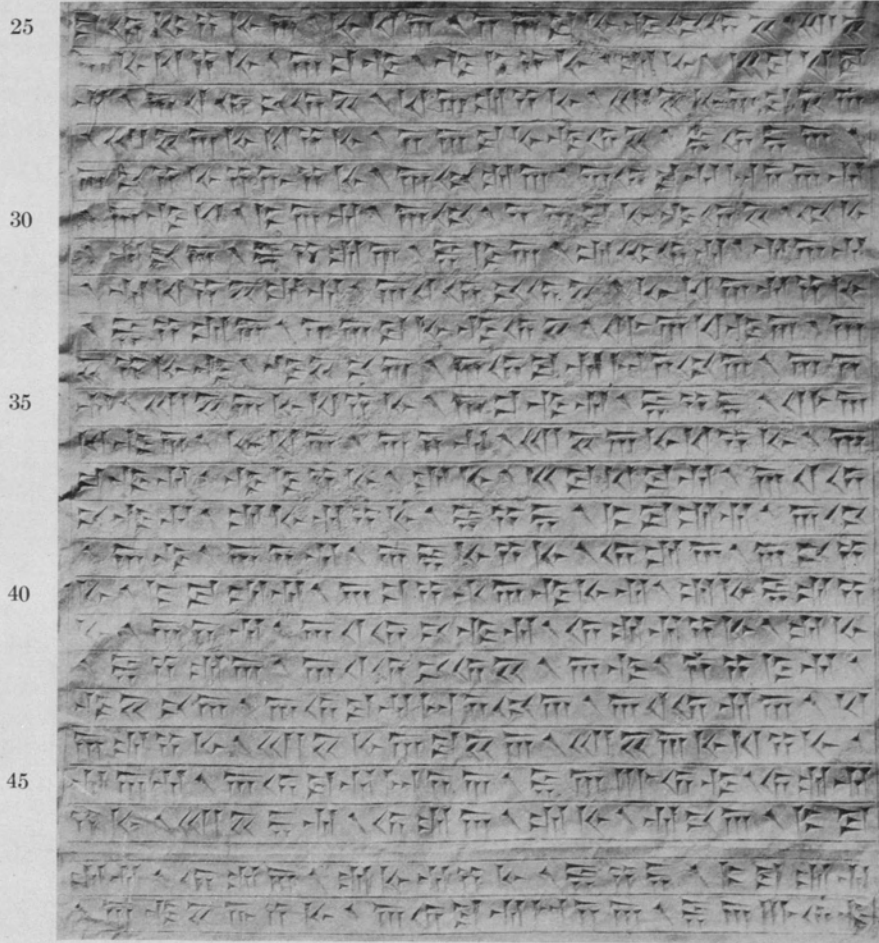


FIG. 2.—THE INSCRIPTION, LINES 25-48 (FROM A SQUEEZE)

χśáyavθya. dahyú¹¹nám. parú^v. zanánám. χśáyavθ¹²ya. ahyáyá. búmyá. vazrk¹³áyá. dārai^y. api^y. dārayavaha¹⁴uš. χśáyavθyahyá. puθ^ra. haχá¹⁵manišiya.

§ 3. θaⁿati^y. χśayâršá. ¹⁶χśáyavθya. maná. pitá. dāraya¹⁷va^huš. dārayavahauš. pitá. viš¹⁸táspa. náma. áha. vištáspahy¹⁹á. pitá. ršáma. náma. áha. ú²⁰tá. vištáspa. utá. ršáma. ²¹ubá. aźīvatam. ačči^y. a^huramaz²²dám. avaðá. káma. áha. dārayava²³um. hya. maná. pitá. avam. χśá²⁴yavθyam. akunauš. ahyáyá. ²⁵búmyá. yavθá. dārayavahauš. χś²⁶ayavθya. abava. vasai^y. tya. fraθra²⁷m. akunauš.

§ 4. θaⁿati^y. χśayâršá²⁸. χśáyavθya. dārayavahauš. puθ^rá. ²⁹aniyaiči^y. áhaⁿtá. a^huramazdám³⁰. avaða. káma. áha. dārayava^huš. hya³¹. maná. pitá. passá. tanum. má^m³². madištam. akunauš. yavθmai³³. pitá. dārayava^huš. gāθavā. a³⁴šyava. vašná. a^huramazdahá. ada³⁵m. χśáyavθya. abavam. piθ^ra. gá³⁶θavá. yavθá. adam. χśáyavθya. a³⁷bavam. vasai^y. tya. fraθram. aku³⁸navam. tyamai^y. piθ^ra. krtam. áha³⁹. ava. adam. apyi^y. utá. ani⁴⁰ya. krtam. abižāvayam. tyapati⁴¹y. adam. akunavam. utamai^y. tya⁴². pitá. akunauš. ava. visam. ⁴³vašná. a^huramazdahá. akumá.

§ 5. θaⁿati^y. χśayâršá. χśáyavθya. ⁴⁵mám. a^huramazdá. pátú^v. utama⁴⁶i^y. χsad^ram. utá. tya. maná. kr⁴⁷tam. utá. tyamai^y. piθ^ra. krtam⁴⁸. avašči^y. a^huramazdá. pátú^v.

TRANSLATION

§ 1. A great god (is) Ahuramazdâ, who created this earth, who created yonder heaven, who created man, who created peace for man, who made Xerxes king, one (as) king of many, one (as) lord of many.

§ 2. I, Xerxes the great king, king of kings, king of the lands with many kinds of people, king on this earth far and wide, son of Darius the king, the Achaemenid (had this made).

§ 3. Says Xerxes the king: My father (is) Darius, Darius' father was one named Vištâspa, Vištâspa's father was one named Ršâma. Vištâspa as well as Ršâma, both were alive when Ahuramazdâ, as was his will, made Darius my father¹ king over this earth. After Darius became king, he did many *fraθram*.

§ 4. Says Xerxes the king: Darius had also other sons; (but) as was the will of Ahuramazdâ, Darius my father made me the greatest

¹ After "father" the text inserts a resumptive "him" which is unusable in English.

after himself. When my father Darius went (away from) the throne, I by the grace of Ahuramazdâ became king on my father's throne. After I became king, I did many *fradram*. What had been done by my father, that I also (did), and other works I added. And what I did and what my father did, all that have we done by Ahuramazdâ's grace.

§ 5. Says Xerxes the king: Let Ahuramazdâ protect me and my empire; and what has been done by myself and what has been done by my father, that too let Ahuramazdâ protect.

COMMENTARY

Sections 1, 2, and 5 are found in the same form in all the longer inscriptions of Xerxes. Section 1 praises Ahuramazdâ as creator of the world, as the god who chooses¹ kings. This prayer is found at every place where Darius or Xerxes has left inscriptions, but not in the inscriptions of other kings. It is the typical prayer of these two kings, a kind of confession to Ahuramazdâ the Creator, a signification given to the primordial god of the Aryans by Zarathustra, whereas, e.g., Yasht XIX 52 still knows the older conception of the god Âpâmnâpat (the Iranian Neptune) as creator of men.

Section 2 contains the protocol of the king, preceded by the pronoun "I" and implying "ordered this to be made" or "have had this made in my name." That is the regular formula for building-inscriptions, using the first person. Inscriptions on sculptures, on the contrary, are construed in the third person, with the formula "(This is) N.²" Similarly, inscriptions marking the ownership of an object consist simply of the owner's name or, a little more explicitly, name the object, adding: "made for the palace of N."

The character of our inscription as a foundation document, therefore, is proved both by the circumstances of its discovery and by its literary form; yet the inscription does not mention the name of the building. Nor does any other building-inscription do so, with the single exception of the great foundation inscription of Susa, which speaks vaguely of "this palace that I have built at Susa." Only the

¹ Old Persian *avnavatâ*; cf. *Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* III (1931) 43.

² We use this symbol for the name, whatever it may be, often followed, as here, by titles or epithets.

formulas "After Darius (var., 'I') became king, he (var., 'I') did many *fraðram*"¹ and "What has been done by myself and what has been done by my father, that too let Ahuramazdâ protect" hint at building operations.

The main contents of the inscription are sections 3 and 4, and for an official document these contents are so amazing and enigmatical that they require interpretation. In section 3 Xerxes insists upon the fact that at the accession of Darius the father and grandfather of that great king were still alive, that is, that the succession was in contradiction of old custom and usage. It was sanctified only by a special expression of Ahuramazdâ's will (*kâma*). Section 4 establishes the fact that Xerxes, although not the eldest son, had been designated as heir to the throne by his father. This constituted a second violation of common views and conceptions; for, in the story of Demaratus, Artabazanes, Darius' eldest son by a daughter of Gobryas, asserts his title with the words, "that he was the eldest of all the offspring, and that it was considered proper by all mankind for the eldest to have the sovereignty."² A third irregularity is that, by the grace of Ahuramazdâ, Xerxes ascended the throne at the abdication of his father, while the latter was still alive. There is nothing further.

Now such inscriptions were drawn up in the royal offices and were presumably approved by the king himself. Hence these statements are not to be explained by a bad conscience, nor are they boastings of an extraordinary destiny, nor do they represent a joke. There was nothing to force the king to save from oblivion the three offenses in his succession. There must be some underlying meaning, unexpressed, but taken for granted by his contemporaries.

Of the three facts, the first was already known from the foundation inscription of Susa. From the Greeks we knew that Darius became king when he was in his thirties. And from Ctesias' story of his parents' visiting his tomb, it followed that Vištâspa was still living long afterward. In the same way, Herodotus' story of Demaratus confirms the fact that Darius had sons older than Xerxes. By Darius' first wife, a daughter of Gobryas, there were three sons, the eldest of whom was Artabazanes; another, Ariabignes, is mentioned in Herodotus vii. 97. Xerxes' designation was surely due to the high birth and

¹ A new and obscure word.

² Herodotus vii. 2.

the influence of his mother Atossa, Cyrus' daughter. She was first married to her half-brother Cambyses, then to his successor the magus Gaumâta, and lastly to Darius, over whom she enjoyed "unlimited power."¹ According to Herodotus the decision would have been made during the preparations for the suppression of the Egyptian rebellion in 486 B.C., when Xerxes, born after Darius' accession, hence after 521, was only about thirty years of age.

The third fact is new. The Greeks say only that Darius died in the thirty-sixth year of his reign, when preparing the expedition against Egypt, and that he did not live to see its accomplishment by Xerxes nor the attempt at repairing the defeat of Marathon; but they do not mention his abdication. Nor do the dates on Babylonian business documents reveal such a step. The last date under Darius is the 22. VI. of his thirty-sixth year. The first document dated under Xerxes is from the 7. X. of his accession year, viz., the remainder of Darius' last year.² There is a gap of only a little more than three months. In spite of that, and although the expression in the inscription is quite ungrammatical and hence not clear, I consider any other interpretation than "abdication" as artificial. Literally the text says, "when my father Darius on the throne (loc.) moved (or went)." As the effect is that Xerxes "became king on his father's throne," the movement must have been "down," "away from." At any rate, therefore, the locative is a mistake for the ablative; according to the usage of the Darius inscriptions the text should read *hačâ gâđva*, "from the throne," instead of *gâđavâ*, "on the throne." In itself *gâđu* might be understood in a broader sense as "rank," "dignity," "class." Its still broader meaning, "place," does not occur in Old Persian inscriptions. Or the expression might be a euphemism for "to die," as sometimes in New Persian, e.g., in Firdausî. But that would imply the same wider signification for the apodosis, where any other interpretation than "throne" would be unnatural. Besides, there is a perfectly clear antithesis between the passages "My father (is) Darius"³ and "Darius' father was . . . Vištâspa. . . ."

¹ *Ibid.* vii. 3.

² See Weissbach in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* LV (1901) 206 f.

³ The copulative verb remains unexpressed in the 3d per. sing. present, whereas all the other forms are expressed.

8 A NEW INSCRIPTION OF XERXES FROM PERSEPOLIS

The peculiar tenor of Xerxes' inscriptions at Persepolis, most of which do not distinguish between his own activity and that of his father, and the relation, just as peculiar, of their buildings, which it is impossible to allocate to either Darius or Xerxes individually, have always implied a kind of coregency of Xerxes. Moreover, two sculptures at Persepolis illustrate that relation:

1. On each post of the door leading from the open portico of the *tačara* to the main hall the king is represented, with all the insignia and paraphernalia of his rank, leaving the hall under a parasol carried by a servant. Each of the two sculptures is like a mirrored reflection of the other. On the right-hand one a fold of the garment bore the inscription Dar. Pers. a (now chiseled off and preserved in the National Library of Paris): "(This is) Darius the great king, the son of Vištâspa, the Achaemenid." On the left-hand one (Fig. 3) are the remains of an inscription hitherto unnoticed: "(This is) Xerxes, the son of King Darius, [the Achaemenid]."¹ In the counterpart of this inscription, that on the folds of the garment of Xerxes in the doorway of the *hadiš* or palace (Fig. 4), is written: "(This is) Xerxes, the great king, king of kings, son of King Darius, the Achaemenid." Hence the *tačara* inscription shows us the official title of the heir to the throne. In the same way, during the Sasanian epoch, the successor to the crown is addressed as "*vâspuhr*, most glorious of kings," the use of *vâspuhr*, though it meant literally the son of a family of the high nobility, being restricted in this case to the royal house. In the same way, during the first Moslem period the sons of the caliphs, when designated as successors, appear with their caliphate names but with the simple title "son," e.g., at Samarra "al-Mu'tazz billâh, son of the Prince of the Believers."

2. On both posts of the outer door of the tetrapylon at Persepolis (Fig. 5) Darius is represented, wearing all the royal attributes, enthroned on a high couch-platform supported by representatives of the various nations of his empire. Behind him in the relief, that is, in reality at his right, stands Xerxes with the same royal attributes, his left hand resting on the high back of the throne. That is a gesture

¹ Incidentally, Old Persian "portraits" are often mentioned. But the fact that sculptures as alike as those just described bear different names shows that to call them "portraits" is a mistake.

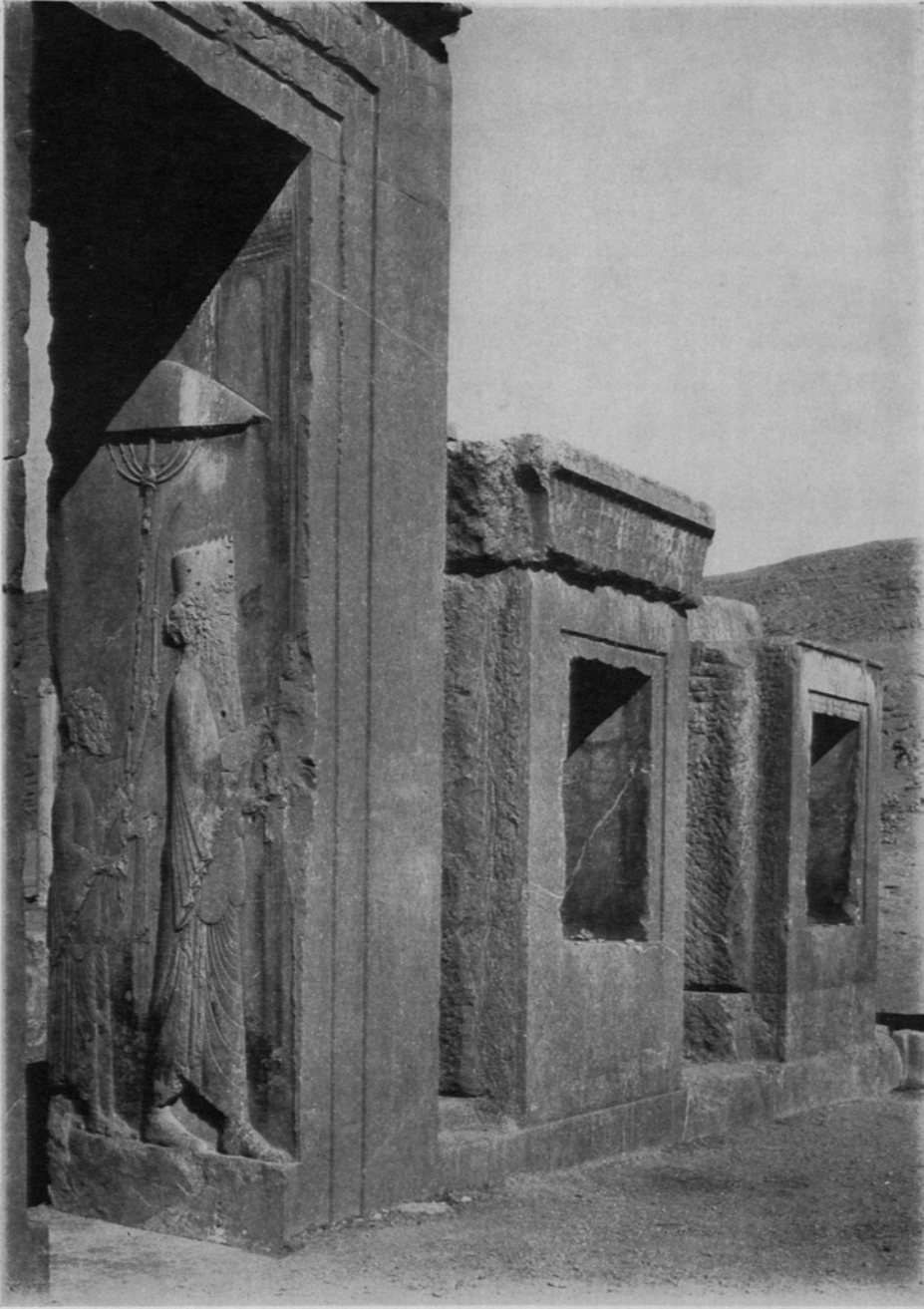


FIG. 3.—XERXES, AS HEIR TO THE THRONE, LEAVING THE PALACE
Relief in middle doorway of main hall of the *tačara*.

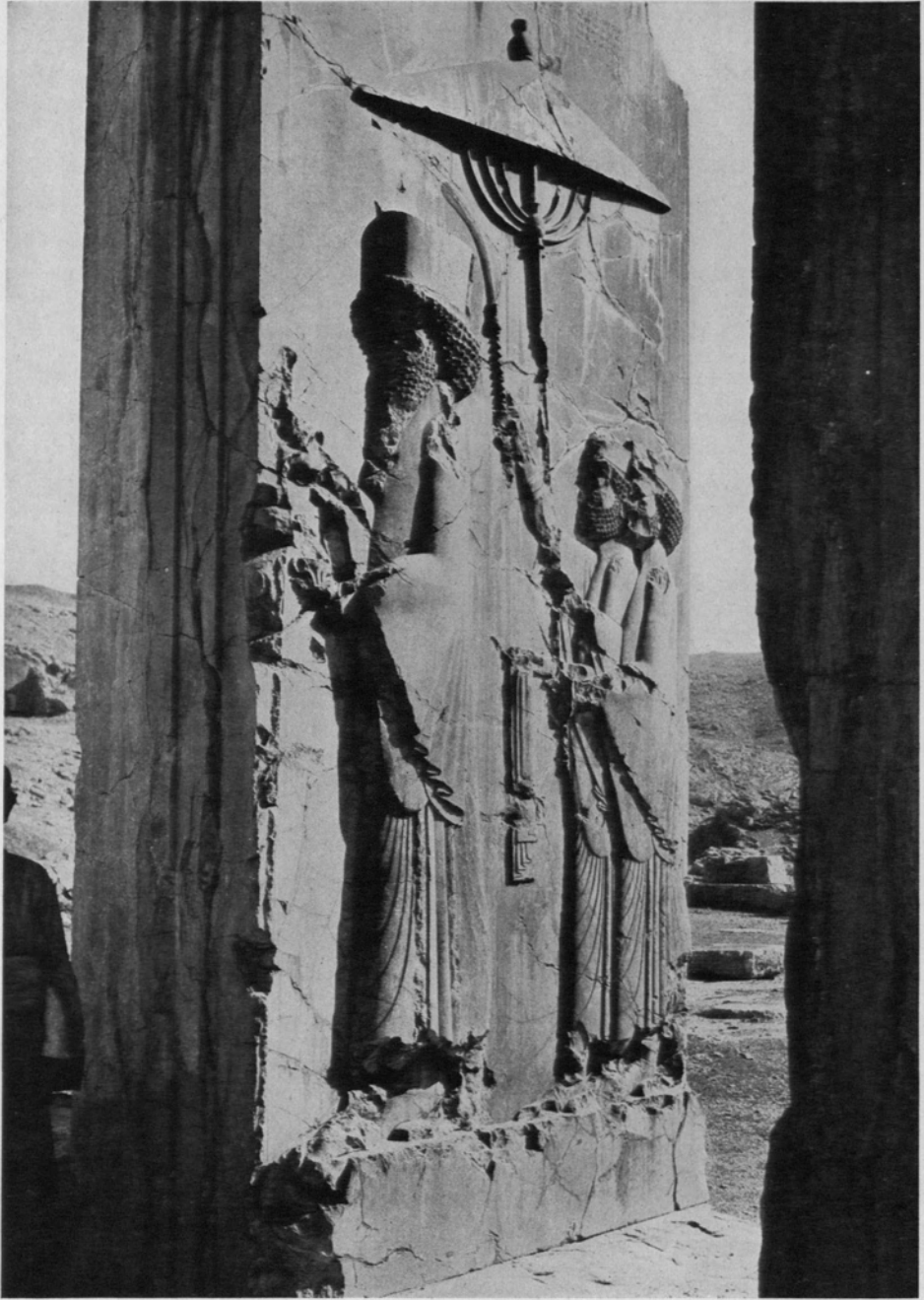


FIG. 4.—XERXES, AS GREAT KING, LEAVING THE PALACE
Relief in doorway from main hall to open portico of the *hadiš*.

that speaks clearly of more than mere successorship; it means coregency.

The inscription of Xerxes on the Alwand Mountain near Hamadân and the two fragments Scheil Nos. 24 and 25¹ from Susa do not concern our problems. Apart from them and the two inscriptions on the folds of the garments, then, seven inscriptions of Xerxes are at present known. In them a formula found at the beginnings of many sections occurs in two different wordings. One, "Says Xerxes the king," corresponds to the wording used without exception by Darius. The other, "Says Xerxes the great king," is new. Upon classifying the inscriptions on this basis, we find the simpler wording used in three cases:

1. Xerx. Susa (=Scheil 23). A mere statement that "this palace was built by Darius my father." Weissbach² translates, "who (was) my father," which is very natural, but inexact, for in the preterite the copulative verb ought to be expressed by *âha*. The words mean simply "my father" or "who (is) my father." In this inscription Xerxes is not "great king" but simply "king."³

2. Xerx. Van. After the protocol of the great king (§ 2), the reader is informed (in § 3) that "Darius the king my father (not 'who was my father') commanded to cut away this rock. . . . I commanded to execute this inscription."

3. Xerx. Pers. a, on the main gateway of Persepolis, which was called *visadahyu*, "All Lands." It contains the protocol of the great king and mentions together the activities of his father and of himself.

The new wording is used in

1. Xerx. Pers. c, on the huge pillars and on the terrace wall of the *taçara* at Persepolis, on the door lintels and window sills of which stand various inscriptions of Darius. After the protocol of the great king we read: "This palace Darius the king my father (not 'who was my father') built." In the prayer at the end, the building activities of father and son are treated as a unit.

2. Xerx. Pers. d, various inscriptions on the *hadiš* of Xerxes at

¹ In his *Inscriptions des Achéménides à Suse* ("Mémoires de la Mission archéologique de Perse," T. XXI [Paris, 1929]).

² *Die Keilinschriften der Achämeniden* (Leipzig, 1911) p. 115.

³ "King" alone is not a sovereign title, but the attribute of every prince of the royal house and of every satrap also.

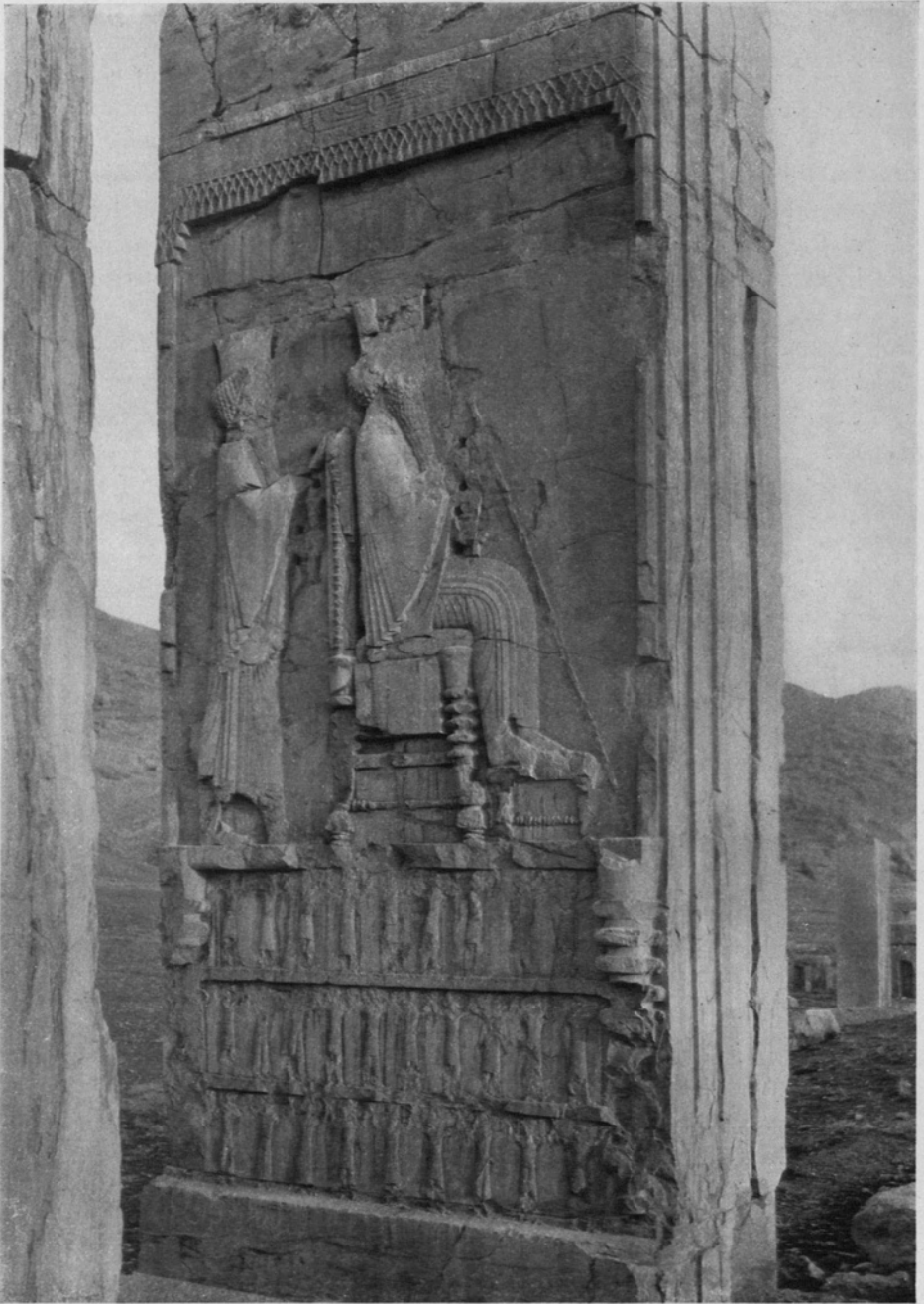


FIG. 5.—DARIUS ENTHRONED AS GREAT KING, XERXES AS COREGENT STANDING BESIDE HIM
Relief in outer doorway of the tetrapylon.

Persepolis (cf. Fig. 4) with protocol of the great king. Work of Xerxes alone is mentioned.

3. Xerx. Pers. b, on the tribute procession in front of the great audience hall at Persepolis. It is similar to the foregoing inscription.

This arrangement reveals a clear picture of the sequence and the chronology of the inscriptions. The inscription on the garment in the *tačara* and the inscription from Susa (Scheil 23) were composed when Xerxes was still heir to the crown. The Van and Pers. a (*visadahyu*) inscriptions, containing the great-king protocol and the older wording of the formula and combining the activities of Darius and Xerxes, belong to the period of Xerxes' coregency. Pers. c (*tačara*), with the same protocol and the later style of formula, but speaking of Darius' activity, dates from the time after Darius' abdication but still during his lifetime. Only Xerx. Pers. d (*hadiš*) and b (tribute procession) were written after Darius' death.

Our new foundation document, with its older style of formula and with the words, "My father (is) Darius," stands between Pers. a (*visadahyu*) and Pers. c (*tačara*). It was the first inscription to be composed after Darius' abdication. When it was composed, Darius was still alive. Its latest date, then, is the year 486/5 B.C., possibly a few years earlier, but certainly not earlier than the battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.

With Darius' abdication we may connect the following observation. The great Iranian epic has lost entirely the legend of Darius, of which traces are preserved by Herodotus in the story of Oebares (iii. 88) and the story of the murder of the false Smerdis. The reason is that that legend had not been written down as had the older ones,¹ which ended with the legend of Kavi Haosravah-Cyrus. But, in the epic, Kavi Haosravah retires at the height of his glory from the throne. Obviously a historic fact the moral of which had left a deep impression upon the imaginative minds of the people—the lord of the world resigning of his own free will—has been transferred from the lost legend of Darius into the legend of Cyrus and thus been preserved.

The main contents of our official document, then, are the three irregularities in the succession of Xerxes, every single one an expression of the will of Ahuramazdâ. This god, whom the king glorifies

¹ Cf. *Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* I (1929-30) 125 ff.

in the opening paragraph, makes the grandson king instead of the grandfather, the younger son instead of the elder, and the son king within the lifetime of his father. He does not care for custom and tradition; he is revolutionary. Behind that the unexpressed secret of this strange inscription must be concealed. That creator of the world and chooser of kings is in name the ancient god of the Aryans, but in essence a new god into whom Zarathustra has instilled a new meaning. He does not care for old customs, for he chooses his closest adherents.

The insistence with which the irregularities of the succession are emphasized as the only contents of the inscription signifies that by the will of this new Ahuramazdá the real Zoroastrianism as a new religion triumphs over the older Magian religion. That was known and understood by the contemporaries of Xerxes, to whom the great historical facts of their time were known, whereas we must by historical criticism infer those same facts from faint hints.

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