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978-1-107-00960-8 - Ancient Persia: A Concise History of the Achaemenid Empire, 550–330 BCE

Matt Waters

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ANCIENT PERSIA

The Achaemenid Persian Empire, at its greatest territorial extent under Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE), held sway over territory stretching from the Indus River Valley to southeastern Europe and from the western edge of the Himalayas to northeast Africa. In this book, Matt Waters gives a detailed historical overview of the Achaemenid period while considering the manifold interpretive problems historians face in constructing and understanding its history. This book offers a Persian perspective even when relying on Greek textual sources and archaeological evidence. Waters situates the story of the Achaemenid Persians in the context of their predecessors in the mid-first millennium BCE and through their successors after the Macedonian conquest, constructing a compelling narrative of how the Empire retained its vitality for more than two hundred years (c. 550–330 BCE) and left a massive imprint on Middle Eastern as well as Greek and European history.

Matt Waters is Professor of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire. He is the author of *A Survey of Neo-Elamite History* (2000), and his work has appeared in numerous journals, including *Iran*, *Revue d'Assyriologie*, and the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Waters is the recipient of fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies, Harvard University's Center for Hellenic Studies, the Loeb Classical Library Foundation, and the University of Wisconsin–Madison's Institute for Research in the Humanities. He was awarded the Jonas C. Greenfield Prize from the American Oriental Society in 2006 for the best published article in ancient Near Eastern studies in a three-year period by a scholar under the age of forty.

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Matt Waters

University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire



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32 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10013-2473, USA

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521253697

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First published 2014

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Waters, Matthew W. (Matthew William)

Ancient Persia : A concise history of the Achaemenid Empire, 550–330 BCE /

Matt Waters, University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-00960-8 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-25369-7 (pbk.)

1. Achaemenid dynasty, 559–330 B.C.E. 2. Iran – History – To 640. I. Title.

DS281.W38 2013

935'.05–dc23 2013027356

ISBN 978-1-107-00960-8 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-25369-7 Paperback

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To Michelle, Alex, and Ellie

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Achaemenid Royal Inscriptions and Classical Sources

Information on the most frequently cited sources is contained in the following overview, by author and citation format. A. Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period*, 2007, contains translations of almost all textual material referenced herein; it is an indispensable tool for study of the Achaemenid Persian Empire. On a smaller scale, M. Brosius, *The Persian Empire from Cyrus II to Artaxerxes I*, 2000, has translations of several texts, and the Internet site Livius.org (<http://www.livius.org/aa-ac/achaemenians/inscriptions.html>) has translations of many of the royal inscriptions and other resources.

ACHAEMENID ROYAL INSCRIPTIONS

Inscriptions cited refer to the Old Persian versions of the text, unless otherwise noted. They are cited by standard abbreviations: king's first initial, superscripted number (if applicable), and location. Lowercase letters differentiate separate inscriptions from the same site. For example, A²Sd §2 stands for Artaxerxes II, Susa, inscription d, paragraph (or section) 2.

Elamite and Akkadian translations are found mainly in specialized literature. The classic treatment of all versions of most trilingual inscriptions is F. H. Weissbach, *Die Keilinschriften der Achämeniden*, 1911. The most accessible English translation of the Old Persian versions of the royal inscriptions is R. G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Text, Lexicon*, 1953. Also notable is R. Schmitt, *Naqsh-e Rostam and Persepolis*, 2000.

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CLASSICAL SOURCES

Accessible text editions with translation for major authors, including most of those listed below, are published in the Loeb Classical Library series. The Perseus Project (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>) has translations available under its Greek and Roman Materials tab. Citations of major works follow convention by book, chapter (or paragraph), and section number. For example, Hdt. 1.125 refers to Herodotus, Book I, chapter/paragraph 125. An additional number indicates section, for example Diodorus 12.4.4–5 refers to Diodorus Siculus, Book 12, chapter 4, sections 4–5. Authors' biographical information in the following is adapted from *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, Third Edition Revised, 2003.

Aelian, c. 156/170–230/235 CE, from Italy. The author of a number of works, including *On the Nature of Animals* and *Varia Historia*.

Aeschylus, c. 525?–455 BCE, from Athens. Preeminent Athenian playwright, his play *The Persians* dramatizes Xerxes' failed invasion of Greece.

Arrian, c. 86–160 CE, from Bithynia in northern Anatolia. Author of a number of works, references herein are to his *Anabasis of Alexander*.

Berosus, late fourth to early third centuries BCE, a Babylonian who wrote a history in Greek for Antiochus I, cited by fragment number and letter. An English translation of the main fragments is available in G. Verbrugge and J. Wickersham, *Berosos and Manetho*, 1996.

Ctesias, late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE, Greek physician from Cnidus in southwestern Anatolia, who served at the court of Artaxerxes II. Author of a number of works, citations herein are to his *Persica* in twenty-three books, only fragments of which remain. Cited by fragment number and letter and, for longer fragments, paragraph (§) number. An English translation, with Greek text, is available in J. Stronk, *Ctesias' Persian History, Part I. Introduction, Text, Translation*, 2010.

Diodorus Siculus (abbreviated DS), first century BCE, of Sicily, author of what is generally titled the *Universal History* (*Bibliotheka*), of which fifteen books survive.

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Herodotus (abbreviated Hdt.), mid-to-late fifth century BCE, from Halicarnassus in southwestern Anatolia. Herodotus is the most important Greek source for Achaemenid Persian history.

Justin, dated variously between the second and fourth centuries CE, author of a Latin epitome of Pompeius Trogus' *Philippic Histories*.

Manetho, early third century BCE, an Egyptian priest from Heliopolis who wrote a history of Egypt from its origins to 342 BCE.

Plutarch (abbreviated Plut.), first to early second centuries CE, Greek priest from Chaeronea in central Greece. Author of a number of works, references herein are to his various Lives, cited by individual life and paragraph/chapter number (§).

Quintus Curtius Rufus (often just Quintus Curtius), first century CE, wrote a history of Alexander the Great in ten volumes.

Strabo, c. 64 BCE–20s CE, from Pontus in northern Anatolia, author of the *Geographica* in seventeen books.

Thucydides (abbreviated Thuc.), c. 460–400 BCE of Athens, a general who wrote an incomplete history of the Peloponnesian War into the year 411.

Xenophon (abbreviated Xen.), c. 430–350s BCE of Athens. Author of numerous works, several of which serve as sources for Achaemenid Persian history: the *Hellenika*, a continuation of Thucydides' history into the fourth century; the *Cyropaedia* ("the Education of Cyrus"), a novelistic account of Cyrus the Great's life; and the *Anabasis*, the account of Cyrus the Younger's failed expedition against Artaxerxes II and the homeward march of his Greek mercenary forces, of which Xenophon was one of the commanders. The *Anabasis* is variously titled in English translation as "The Expedition of Cyrus," "The March Up Country," or "The March of the Ten Thousand."

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Acknowledgments

Cyrus the Great and his successors ruled much of the known earth for more than 200 years, and the empire they forged represented something new in its scope and in its durative power. This book's aim is to provide a detailed historical overview of the Achaemenid Persian Empire (circa 550–330 BCE), presented in conjunction with the manifold interpretive problems that historians face in understanding it. In doing so, I have endeavored to consider Achaemenid history in its Near Eastern context, supplying, as much as possible, a Persian perspective even when relying mainly on Greek and other non-Persian sources.

Writing this book has often proven an exercise in regrettable exclusion even more than considered inclusion – and some topics are only scratched on the surface. As a book geared toward English-speaking, novice readers, the citations and further readings (Appendix D) are primarily in English. Translations of ancient texts are my own unless cited otherwise. I have given priority to readability of translation but with every attempt to adhere to the original text's sense. My work of course owes much to the numerous scholars cited throughout, but in particular I would highlight the works of Pierre Briant and Amélie Kuhrt. Their literally voluminous publications have revolutionized the field. Briant's *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (translated from the original 1996 French version by P. Daniels) and Kuhrt's *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period* represent culminations of their seminal, and notably ongoing, works. Rather than cite them on almost every page, I will acknowledge my deep debt to their work here, as frequent sources of information and inspiration in this writing.

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I would like to acknowledge the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire for support of this project. Many friends and colleagues deserve thanks for their help during its course. Pat and Jill Pink have been unstinting with friendship and hospitality on numerous trips to Chicago for research, including many enjoyable discussions on what constitutes quality writing. Javier Álvarez-Mon, Rémy Boucharlat, Beth Dusinberre, Grant Frame, Mark Garrison, Mike Kozuh, Dan Potts, Tessa Rickards, Chessie Rochberg, Margaret Root, David Stronach, and Mónica Vélez graciously and generously assisted with mixtures of advice, illustrations, in-progress work, and moral support. Special thanks to Clyde Smith and Jeff Vahlbusch who, reminding me that I was not writing a book for specialists, provided many useful comments on an early draft. Two anonymous Cambridge University Press referees provided insightful commentary and saved me from several mistakes, at the same time reminding me that specialists may indeed use or consult this book. Beatrice Rehl and Asya Graf, along with a number of other Cambridge University Press staff, were helpful and patient in guiding me through the maze of the publication process. My gratitude to all of them is immense.

Finally, and especially on the subject of patience, I acknowledge the support of my family, to whom I dedicate this work. To note that they put up with a lot is an understatement.

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Map 1.1 Achaemenid Persian Empire, with Major Routes. After *Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. 4, Second Edition, 1988, map 1.



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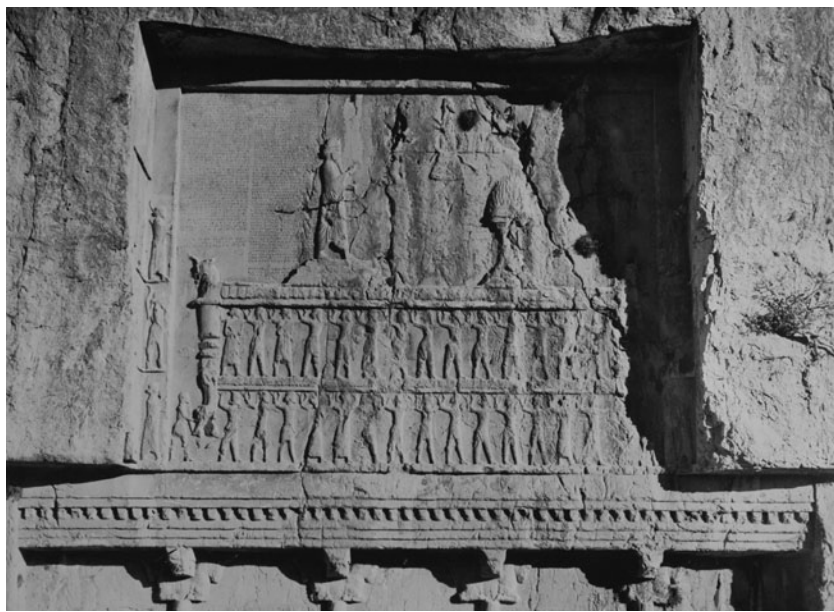


Figure 1.1 Tomb of Darius I, top register, Naqsh-i Rostam. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.