

All Achaemenian Kings after Cyrus were Zoroastrians

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Darius I the most powerful kings of his line, and a strong devotee of Ahura Mazda. The first mention of Ahura Mazda in a royal inscription dates to the reign of Darius I, and the primary god he mentions is Ahura Mazda. Other gods are mentioned, but only in secondary usage. That Darius viewed Ahura Mazda as the premiere and the greatest god is clear from his inscriptions. One of the most famous of these is the Behistun Inscription, in which he describes the strength of his empire and of his reign. There is throughout his inscriptions a great ideological element including his divine kingship and insisting especially on the privileged protection of Ahura Mazda." For example he claims that "By the grace of Ahuramazda I am king; Ahuramazda brought the kingdom to me." Here we can clearly see that Darius I portrays his kingship as a divine gift from the god Ahura Mazda.

There are evidences from classical sources for Darius's adherence to Zoroastrianism, which includes a recognition of ritual purity and the impurity found from dead bodies. Herodotus records a story, and although he gives his standard anti-Persian spin on it, it is easy to see contained within it the idea of ritual purity. A certain Babylonian queen insisted, upon her death, on being entombed over a gate into the city of Babylon. It is recorded that Darius was squeamish about passing under the gate for reasons not given by Herodotus. We can assume that it was part of his religious devotions that made him squeamish, as it is unlikely a warrior king was overly upset over the mere presence of a corpse.

For Darius I, Ahura Mazda was the supreme god, the highest and holiest of beings, the God worshiped in his inscriptions with a singular fervor, similar to that found by the Hebrew prophets in the Hebrew Bible. He praises Ahura Mazda saying, "A great God is Ahuramazda who created this earth, who created yonder heaven, who created man, who created peace for man, who made Darius king." 19 There seems to be a logical progression from one thought to the next. Thus first, Ahura Mazda creates heaven and earth, then he creates man, and then he creates peace for man. How is it that he creates peace for man. He makes Darius I king. an interesting statement of Darius's fervent belief in his appointment by Ahura Mazda and his willingness to serve Him.

It has been argued that one of the purposes of the Achaemenid kings in the spreading of their Persian Empire was to establish Zoroastrianism as the state religion and to spread it abroad throughout the Near East.

Xerxes, the son of Darius I, while following his fathers faith in Ahura Mazda as the great God, His policy seems to have been one of putting in place the worship of Ahura Mazda, where previously other gods had been worshiped, referred to as daevas, the word in the Avesta for false god. He talks about how Ahura Mazda created the

earth and created peace, in a passage that parallels his father's nicely, but then goes on to report, "By the favor of Ahura Mazda I smote that land and put it into its place . . . within these lands where formerly the daevas were worshipped. Afterward, by the favor of Ahura Mazda, I destroyed the community of the daevas and proclaimed: The daevas you shall not worship. Where formerly the daevas were worshipped, there I worshipped Ahura Mazda and the holy Arta." 22

There are a number of very important facts to be learned from this inscription. First, it clearly illustrates the less tolerant attitude of Xerxes, as compared to his forebears. Second, it shows how the religion of the Achaemenid kings was moving progressively toward something closer to modern Zoroastrian religious dogma, with the inclusion of a mention of the worship of Arta (a name that can be roughly translated as "righteousness"), who is one of the angelic Holy Immortal associated with Ahura Mazda. As previously mentioned, the only god named by Darius 1 in any of his inscriptions is Ahura Mazda, his premiere and primary god.

Another example of the evolving nature of the belief of the Achaemenid kings, and their relationship to Zoroastrianism that they had adopted comes from later in the previously quoted inscription, where Xerxes says, "The man who has respect for that law which Ahuramazda has established, and worships Ahuramazda and Arta reverently, he becomes both happy while living, and becomes blessed when dead." This quotation is from Vendidad This is more than just the standard Near Eastern statement of "I am king because my god is best." This is a real positive statement of a religious doctrine in an official royal inscription. By now, Zoroastrianism was definitely the state religion.