

## Persia and the East: Relationship between Central Asia and the Achaemenid Empire



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During the last decade, the focus of scholarship on the Achaemenid Empire (ca. 550-330 B.C.) has gradually shifted from a study of the overall structure of the empire on the basis of material from the imperial heartland in western Iran to an examination of the empire's mechanism through its local manifestation. A number of recently published books exemplify this new trend of scholarship. These publications concentrate almost exclusively on the empire's western provinces, including Anatolia, Egypt, the Black Sea area, and the Levant. What is missing is a proper description—especially from the perspective of material culture—of the roles that the vast territory of the east played in the political and economic arena of this first and heretofore largest world empire. . My research, which draws on textual, archaeological, and art historical material addresses the complex, dynamic, and intimate yet conflicting relations between the Achaemenid ruling power centered around the imperial heartland, and the people of the eastern provinces and the various nomadic groups that resided in Central Asia and the Indo-Iranian borderland.

With a focus on the socio-political, economic, and cultural process of the regional development in Central Asia during the Achaemenid period, my research investigates the various channels through which the people of the eastern provinces engaged with the large imperial enterprise and interacted with their foreign overlords. An examination of this relationship, combined with a comparison of the relationship between the Persian imperial authority and the regions controlled by the empire in the west, helps to clarify the internal organization and mechanisms of the empire, and create a more balanced image of it. The goal of my research is a monograph with seven chapters which should fill a gap in our knowledge regarding this important region of Central Asia at its crucial moment of social and societal transformation. The purpose of the monograph is to enhance our understanding of the Achaemenid Empire and to provide a broader framework of the study of empires in general.

During my four-and-half-month tenure at the Albright Institute, I finished writing the draft of three of the five main chapters of the monograph. Chapter Two illustrates, on the basis of Achaemenid royal inscriptions and official art, the Persian geographic concept

and Achaemenid perspectives on the imperial structure and relations within the context of its ideological system. The chapter places the people of the east on an equal standing with those of the west. Chapter Three, following a general historic outline drawn on classical texts and Achaemenid royal inscriptions, provides a discussion of the political dynamics between the Achaemenid ruling class and people living in Central Asia. It suggests, based on a comprehensive study of warfare images in Achaemenid art, that the people of the east, especially those who lived in the empire's northeastern corners, i.e., the Bactrians/Parthians, Sogdians/Choresmian, and Saka nomads, must have posed serious challenges to the Achaemenid central authority. In different forms, the threats to the Achaemenid dominating power imposed by the people from the east perhaps exceeded those of the Greeks and Egyptians from the west. Chapter Four focuses on the administrative system of the Achaemenid Empire, using administrative and economic texts from Egypt and especially the travel texts (Q texts) from the Persepolis Fortification Archive at Persepolis. The chapter evaluates the position of Central Asia and the other eastern provinces within the Achaemenid imperial administrative system through a comparative approach.

In addition, I edited and submitted an article to *Iranica Antiqua's* 2014 volume. Entitled "'O Young Man ... Make Known of What Kind You Are': Warfare, History, and Ideology of the Achaemenid Empire," the article draws attention to Achaemenid history from a Persian perspective rather than employing the traditional Classics-oriented approach. It presents a theoretical and methodological framework for utilizing visual material, especially glyptic evidence that is often neglected in the study of political history, to reconstruct the history and ideology of the Achaemenid Persian empire.

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