

Linguistics

The Languages of the Multicultural Achaemenid Empire

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ABSTRACT. The article contains a review of languages of the Achaemenid Empire, with a special emphasis on their role and social functions in the Multicultural Empire. © 2007 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

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Between 550 and 539 B.C. the Persian King Cyrus II (559–530 B.C.) succeeded in liberating his country from the yoke of the Medes' sovereignty, conquering the Lydian Empire of Croesus and assuming power also in the Neo-Babylonian Empire of Nabonidus. By this the impressive rise of a really universal empire, the first in the history of mankind, took place that included all the previous countries of the Ancient Near East with an advanced civilization. Under Cyrus' successors the frontiers of that new Persian Empire were pushed still further forward, since Cambyses II (530–522 B.C.) subjugated Egypt and the neighbouring countries to the south and west, and Darius I (522–486 B.C.) from another branch of the ruling dynasty could extend the borders also towards the east, north and west. During the reign of that king, in the time of its greatest extension, that empire encompassed, as we can read in two of his inscriptions¹ (DPH 5–8, DHa 4–6), the countries “from the Scythians who (are) beyond Sogdiana, from there as far as Nubia, from the Indus province, from there as far as Lydia”. The large number of the peoples who were united in that empire – on the one hand Persians, Medes, Parthians, Sogdians, Bactrians and other Iranian-speaking tribes, on the other

hand Elamites, Babylonians, Assyrians, Arabs, Egyptians, Lydians, Armenians and the rest of them – is plainly reflected in the various surveys of the Empire's countries and peoples preserved in the form of lists of names (with fairly varying numbers though) as well as of figurative representations. As regards those depictions there are well-known the tribute-bearers portrayed in the reliefs of the audience hall (the so-called *apadāna*) at Persepolis, the throne-bearers on the façades of the royal tombs at Naqsh-i Rostam and – in Egyptian style, but showing a fusion of Egyptian and Achaemenid ideas – the figures depicted on the base of the large (larger than life-size) statue of Darius I found at Susa, which seemingly are supporting the ground on which the king stood². But though all those peoples were dominated by the Persians, the Persian language of that period, which in linguistics is called Old Persian and which was the mother tongue of the kings themselves, never spread all over that vast empire³. This perhaps surprising fact means nothing else than that the language of the rulers never became the language of the Empire itself.

Old Persian is the language (or at least one of the dialects) spoken in Persis, the region around Shiraz

¹ References to the Old Persian texts follow a system initiated by Kent 1953, but developed further by the present author for the sake of unambiguity and greater systematization. The English translation of the text quoted here is taken over from Schmitt 2000, p. 64.

² The most comprehensive study of the base of that statue is still found in Roaf 1974.

³ The linguistic situation of the Persian Empire and the use of the various languages are dealt with, e.g., by Schmitt 1993 and 1998; Stolper 2005 and Stolper and Tavernier 2007, pp. 18–25; moreover, cf. Briant 2000 for multilingual texts and Briant 2001 for the situation in Asia Minor.

(where Pasargadae and Persepolis are situated) and the modern province of Fârs. It belongs to the family of the Iranian languages and according to the dialectological classification is part of the south-west group of that language family⁴. But the form of Old Persian as it is attested in the official and partly programmatic royal inscriptions never was spoken, since it is an artificial form of language with a lot of stylistic figures, with archaic forms and words and with several borrowings from another Iranian language which only in a few particular cases can be determined as of Median origin⁵. Colloquial Old Persian as spoken at the time of Darius or his son Xerxes (486–465 B.C.) was much more advanced anyway in its linguistic development (e.g., by the monophthongization of older diphthongs) as one can see in Old Persian words and names reflected in foreign languages (its so-called collateral tradition)⁶.

In the sphere of its use Old Persian is entirely restricted to the Great Kings, in practice it is the language of Achaemenid kingship and serves together with the cuneiform writing system elaborated specially for it⁷ only the kings' prestige and representation purposes. Such purely representative use of the Old Persian script and language for decorative purposes as it were can be seen already from the fact that several of those inscriptions were not at all meant for reading for the simple reason that they had been engraved at a dizzy height on inaccessible rock faces or had been set into the foundations of the royal palaces. But it is of little importance that texts such as the great inscription DB next to Darius' relief at Mount Bîsutûn (which is the most famous example of that kind) could not be read, since Darius himself expressly stated (DB IV 91f.)⁸ that for making known his message he sent that text everywhere in the countries of his Empire, to be precise, sent away copies of it in the various languages of the subject peoples. We see this information confirmed by the fragments of a Babylonian version of DB that have been excavated in Babylon and by scraps of papyrus with a younger copy of the Aramaic translation of the Bîsutûn text that came to light in Upper Egypt. Such Aramaic versions of the royal texts, written on papyrus or parchment, easily could be spread over the empire, but as they were written down on rather transient material, only meagre remains have survived.

The Old Persian language is inseparably combined with Old Persian cuneiform writing which was of no sig-

nificance in everyday life, but was used only "for show", as becomes evident also from the aesthetic criteria followed at its creation. We see this assertion reinforced by the fact that inscriptions are found without exception on solid objects, mostly on rocks and stone or metallic tablets, some also on other stone objects (vessels, weights) and more rarely on clay tablets – only quite recently one single Old Persian text, though unfortunately scarcely understood, has been detected by Matthew Stolper even among the many thousands of Elamite administrative texts from the Persepolis Archive⁹ –, but obviously Old Persian was never written on parchment, papyrus or similar stuff, for which other writing materials than hammer and chisel were used and on which one did scribble in a more running handwriting. The major part of the royal inscriptions comes from the Empire's core, chiefly from the royal capitals in Persis (Pasargadae and, since Darius I, Persepolis with nearby Naqsh-e Rostam, the cliff with the royal tombs), Elam (Susa) and Media (Ecbatana = modern Hamadan). Among the most important texts from the other countries are Darius' inscriptions from his Suez Canal (since a prestigious enterprise like that structure required appropriate representative appreciation), the inscription on the large statue of Darius I, that was excavated at Susa, but as we learn from the text itself, had been manufactured in Egypt, and also a rock-inscription of Xerxes from Lake Van obviously ordered on the occasion of a visit of the King in Armenia.

Already these remarks make one thing perfectly clear: Old Persian was never used for the administration of the Achaemenid Empire. The official language of the Empire's strictly organized administration on the contrary was the Aramaic language, as it was already in the centuries before. For in the period of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, when the small states of the Aramaeans in Syria and Upper Mesopotamia came under the influence of that Empire and when on the other hand more and more Aramaeans had come to Mesopotamia, that the Semitic language had widely spread and thus had become, especially under King Sargon II (721–705 B.C.), a lingua franca in the Ancient Near East and the language of international diplomacy. This development was combined with a change in the script used, since the Aramaeans brought with them their own writing system, which had been developed from the Phoenician script and was superior to the age-old cuneiform script, since one

⁴ A comprehensive handbook of the Iranian languages is Schmitt (ed.) 1989; there are both a survey of the Old Iranian languages in general (pp. 25–31) and a sketch of Old Persian (pp. 56–85), each authored by the editor.

⁵ The problems concerning the evidence available for the language of the Medes are dealt with in great detail by Schmitt 2003.

⁶ A clear example is found in the name of King Xerxes himself, if one compares two-syllable Gk. *Xérxēs* and Elam. *Ik-še-ir-ša* with four-syllable OPers. *Xšaya-ršā*.

⁷ The history of the monument at Mount Bîsutûn makes it absolutely clear that originally there were planned only Elamite captions to the figures of the relief and an Elamite inscription; and even the first extension (with the Babylonian versions) did not yet present Old Persian letterings.

⁸ A new edition and an English translation of the Old Persian texts of the Bîsutûn inscriptions may be found in Schmitt 1991.

⁹ This sensational find of an Old Persian administrative record has been edited, very well documented and sensibly commented upon by Stolper and Tavernier 2007.

needed not even two dozens of different signs for spelling out the single sounds of the words. Thus the Aramaic language and script became the leading means of communication in the Persian Empire as regards the regional administration of the Empire's single countries and the interregional correspondence from the centre to the various countries as well as between them. The use of that language made it possible to surmount the many language boundaries within the Empire and therefore made the contact between the many different peoples much easier, without impairing their own languages in one way or other. For we see that in the different regions of the Empire at the same time also locally or regionally spread languages were used aside from the Aramaic language at least in a restricted extent, especially where Aramaic had not yet gained acceptance in pre-Achaemenid times. Such languages with only local or regional significance were, e.g., Elamite in Elam, Babylonian in Southern Mesopotamia, Egyptian in Egypt, and after all in Asia Minor Greek as well as Lydian or Lycian, which all in multilingual texts are brought together with Aramaic.

From the very beginning, i.e. from the first occurrence of the Old Persian cuneiform writing in Darius' Bisutūn inscription of 521/20 B.C., the proclamations of the Persian Great Kings mostly were written in three languages; and where a certain order of precedence or hierarchy can be made out among the three versions, that is not in accordance with the chronological order of their origin (as it is the case with the Bisutūn texts), they always are in the fixed sequence Old Persian – Elamite – Babylonian. The Old Persian language as the kings' mother tongue has priority. Elamite is entitled the second place since it is the very old language of that civilized people, which was the first victim of the Persians' expansion. That also the Babylonian language was included in that triple canon, notwithstanding the fact that at that time in practice it was without any significance outside of Babylonia, can be interpreted only as meaning that the Achaemenids regarded themselves the legitimate successors of the Assyrian and Babylonian kings even after Cyrus II, who had emphasized this attitude quite clearly in his most important inscription on the famous Cyrus Cylinder¹⁰, which like many other royal inscriptions has something of a propagandistic nature. But it must be underlined here that the Babylonian versions of the trilingual texts owing to strong influence of Old Persian and/or Elamite stand out for a great deal of striking loan-translations (calques), so that the old language tradition, which is still perfectly evident in the Cyrus Cylinder, seems deliberately cut off by Darius and his successors.

With this policy of information (as we call it nowadays) the Persian Kings intended to take up ancient

Mesopotamian traditions of epigraphy. In all, it becomes perfectly clear, that that trilingualism of the royal inscriptions is politically motivated. In several cases further versions in one of the regional languages are added to the three cuneiform inscriptions (and to the Aramaic text made known all over the Empire), though the fortuitousness of tradition and preservation often leaves the matter in suspense. Good examples are the inscribed stelae of the Suez Canal and the inscriptions on the statue of Darius, in all of which a fourth text is added to the three cuneiform versions, written in Egyptian hieroglyphs and as regards its length in exact agreement with the total volume of the three cuneiform inscriptions. The text's two halves of equal size may either be written on two sides (front and reverse) of one and the same stone (as it is the case with one of the Suez stelae, viz. that of Kabrīt) or be arranged side by side in a symmetrical manner, whether on two parallel stones or on one and the same. The one alternative is attested on the two stelae of Tell el-Maskhūta (at the Suez Canal), the other on the statue of Darius whose ankle-length robe shows on the left (as seen from the observer) four folds with ten lines of cuneiform and on the right four folds with hieroglyphs.

In the short trilingual cuneiform text of the Suez stela we read only a concise account of Darius' work, whereas the additional part of the Egyptian text consists of a complete listing of all the Empire's countries and peoples as well as a much more detailed description of the canal-building, in which its importance is particularly stressed. The hieroglyphic text of the statue is characterized on the other hand by formulations that follow the tradition of Egyptian monumental inscriptions. In part we have to do even with something like a hymn of praise of the pharaoh in classical Egyptian language, to which only at the end has been added a vernacular passage in Demotic language with the actual titles of Darius in literal translation. The preceding main part of the text, on the contrary, features a long series of often rather metaphorical titles as they were typical of the Egyptian pharaohs: "King of Upper and Lower Egypt", "personification of Rē", "son of Atum", and similar. In all, these are titles which the Achaemenid Kings (of the 27th Egyptian dynasty) as the legitimate successors of the pharaohs were entitled to.

The same distribution of a longer fourth text added to the three cuneiform versions we must assume in my opinion also for the two inscribed stelae¹¹ that according to the information given by Herodotus (4,87,1–2) Darius had ordered to be put up on the occasion of crossing the Bosphorus. Since those two stelae, the one inscribed with cuneiform characters (or *Assýria grámmata* as the Greeks usually called them¹²) and the other one

¹⁰ The most recent treatment of that text is in Schaudig 2001, pp. 550–556.

¹¹ I have treated this topic in some detail already in Schmitt 1988, pp. 32–34.

¹² For a discussion of the Greek expression *Assýria grámmata* and of the question what the Greeks did know about cuneiform writing see Schmitt 1992.

with a text in Greek letters, are no more extant, we can say (or guess) hardly anything about their content. But we scarcely make a mistake if we imagine the situation to be comparable with the Suez stelae, particularly since Herodotus says also something about an enumeration of the Empire's peoples, which we have to insert then into the more detailed Greek text. Above all we must conclude from such evidence, however, that royal inscriptions that originated outside the core area of the Persian Empire and are destined only for some special region, usually were written not only in the three common (cuneiform) versions, but as well in an additional fourth text drawn up in the regional language concerned (Egyptian, Greek or whatever).

It is a matter of course, however, that the question arises, how those additional versions apart from the trilingual cuneiform inscriptions came into being and from what language they have been translated. In order to judge this problem we are given a decisive hint by another Greek inscription the authenticity of which is not undisputed, although the formulation and phraseology found in it must have a real background and cannot be dismissed just as a pure invention. It concerns an inscribed stone from the vicinity of Magnesia on the Meander with a late copy (dated to the reign of Emperor Hadrian) of the Greek version of a letter King Darius I sent to a certain Gadatas, about whom nothing else is known, surely a local official or deputy, but hardly (as some scholars had suggested) the satrap of that province. In the Greek text of that so-called letter of Gadatas the phrase *péran Euphrátou* "beyond the Euphrates" is attested for denoting the area between the River Euphrates and the Mediterranean Sea, i.e. roughly Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine. The Eastern perspective of that expression (and I mean not only the East–West orientation of it) becomes evident from the simple reason that in the Greek language something of that kind is entirely unusual; a similar formulation we find only in the translation of the Old Testament book Ezra (4,10) where the Septuagint version's expression *péran toû potamoû* "beyond the river [scil. Euphrates]" is easily explained, however, as the exact rendering of the Aramaic original. For the phrase in question is known from both Babylonian (*eber nāri*) and Aramaic (*'abar naharā*). In any case that expression therefore comes from the East, and since it is absolutely foreign to the Achaemenid Persian geographical terminology, in the end it is evidently an Aramaic pattern on which it is based.

With this, our discussion has come back again to Aramaic, that remained the official written and administrative language as long as the Achaemenid Empire existed and obviously well over its decline. The Aramaic language made it possible to get over the many language boundaries within the Empire and thus proved to be a

suitable means of communication – the only alternative would have been to make use of a non-verbal medium, e.g. visual arts and their pictorial "language" – and a comfortable tool for easier contacts between the Empire's numerous peoples. Therefore this special form of the Aramaic language usually and not by accident is called Imperial Aramaic (in German "Reichsaramäisch"), with a term that was introduced by Josef Markwart, but in the end is based on an idea developed half a century before by the French Semitist Charles Clermont-Ganneau. That scholar had smoothed the way for understanding the linguistic situation within the Persian Empire in general when interpreting the fragments of a papyrus preserved in the Egyptian Museum of Turin (A5.3¹³) as belonging to a letter which the Egyptian Pakhim (*phym*) had written to the Iranian (perhaps Persian) Mithravahisht (*mtrwhšt*), whose ethnic origin becomes clear from their names. Now if an Egyptian at that time wrote to a Persian neither in the Egyptian nor the Persian language, but made use of a third language, in this case Aramaic, then this proves that in the 5th century B.C. the Aramaic language had taken the function of an administrative language of the Empire in its entirety, that means: also in those regions where it did not yet have it in pre-Achaemenid times.

This conclusion that all the activities of scribes, clerks, archivists etc. were in the hands of Aramaeans as the Persians had found them in the Assyro-Babylonian tradition, could be strengthened by further observations in hundreds of Aramaic texts: letters, contracts, official accounts, graffiti, tomb and other inscriptions, particularly by observations concerning the form of address or dates after Persian Kings. An especially informative and presumably the most striking evidence of that kind is the collection of the so-called letters of Arshama (A6.1–16). Most of them are letters written by the then Persian satrap of Egypt, the Persian Arshama (*ršm*), and several of them are addressed to other Persians; nevertheless those letters are written not in Persian, but in the Aramaic language. One should qualify that statement, however, by the reservation that not all Aramaic texts from Achaemenid times have been written in Imperial Aramaic; on the contrary we find other Aramaic dialects as well used chiefly in private letters and non-official documents, the language of which clearly differs from the administrative language in that the Persian influence on syntax and lexicon is much less marked there.

Aramaic documents and inscriptions are known for the period of the Achaemenid Empire from its whole territory from Upper Egypt and the Aegean coast in the West up to Central Asia and North West India in the East and with a certain concentration in Persepolis. Most of the Persepolis material, however, has not yet been edited, but one has to distinguish here between seal impressions on a good deal of the Elamite clay tablets, marginal epigraphs on such tablets, graffiti on the re-

¹³ This is the symbol for the text in question in the now authoritative edition by Porten and Yardeni 1986.

mains of buildings, inscriptions written in ink on stone mortars, pestles and plates from Arachosia (modern South Afghanistan), and finally more than 500 texts on clay tablets that were excavated together with the much more numerous Elamite tablets in the fortification wall of the terrace. A text full of problems is on the other hand the 25-line inscription in Aramaic characters on the façade of the tomb of Darius at Naqsh-e Rostam, which seems to have been written, however, only in post-Achaemenid (Seleucid?) times; but one has to be rather cautious with such a date since the former reading of a group of signs as the name of Seleucus (*slwk*) recently has been doubted. Be this as it may, the more or less uniform use of Aramaic script and language in the Empire's administration in the end led to the use of an own Aramaic-based writing system in later times not only by Persians and Parthians, but also by Sogdians and Chorasmians (and surely by other Iranian tribes for which we cannot prove it). Moreover, it was obviously a stimulation from Achaemenid Iran that caused the creation of the sinistroverse Kharoshthi script in the oldest Indian inscriptions after an Aramaic model.

The communication between the various administrative organs of the Empire may have taken place in that way that the orders and announcements of the King or the (mostly Persian) top officials were enacted in Old Persian, then were translated into Aramaic, were written down and in this form were sent to the destination, let us say, the seat of a satrap. For all such communication seemingly proceeded by letters that have been carried by messengers on those famous major roads right across the Empire, of which the well-known "Royal Road" from Susa to Sardis with its 111 post-stations had exceedingly impressed the Greeks (see Herodotus 5,52–54); in any case only traffic routes of that kind made such a regular and reliable courier-service possible. In the appropriate office of the local or regional administration at the destination, e.g. at a satrap's residence, the letters or other texts received according to what circumstances required then were either translated or orally interpreted from Aramaic into the local or regional administrative or vernacular language.

One has always to be aware of this chain of dictation, recording in Aramaic and oral interpretation into the particular language needed. Only if one brings to his mind that in Achaemenid times official documents were written down in Aramaic script, but read out in different specific languages – linguists are used now to call that phenomenon "alloglottography"¹⁴ – one is able to comprehend the entire meaning of an interesting passage of the book of Ezra (4,7). There we read about the letter the Jews had written to King Artaxerxes concerning the res-

toration of the temple in Jerusalem and may first be startled by a formulation that seems to be redundant when it says that the letter "was written in Aramaic and has been interpreted [i.e. read] in Aramaic" (*katūb 'aramīt um² turgām 'aramīt*). What to the lay reader seems redundant here, in reality was not a matter of course, but well needed clarification.

That permanent translating to and fro between Old Persian and Aramaic (as in addition also the translating from Aramaic into other languages) led to numerous phenomena of interference, so that in Imperial Aramaic texts the Iranian influence is quite plainly recognizable (e.g. as regards the borrowing of particular terms, loan-translations and, of course, onomastics). And the role of Aramaic as the mediator to a third language has become particularly clear in the case of Egypt, since already Kurt Sethe¹⁵ had shown on the basis of unambiguous examples that the Iranian words and names attested in Egyptian (hieroglyphic or demotic) writing went through an Aramaic intermediate stage.

After all we know about Imperial Aramaic, it is not in accordance with the historical facts at any rate, that the Persian King had written "to each people in its own language", as we read in the book of Esther (1,22), in which it is being said also in quite exaggerated form that the Empire had 127 provinces from the Indus River to the Nile and that each of them had used its own script and language (8,9). But since in that book of Hellenistic times any close familiarity with the period of the Achaemenid Empire is lacking, we have to interpret that linguistic information merely as an idealizing literary topos.

Among the countless Imperial Aramaic texts the multilingual specimens are of particular interest. Here may be cited only some impressive examples: There is a bilingual Lydian–Aramaic tomb inscription from Sardis, a pseudo-bilingual Aramaic–Greek text of the same kind from Lycian Limyra, where the Greek text, however, only has been added by the deceased's great-grandson. In the case of the trilingual Greek–Lycian–Aramaic inscription from the Letoon at Xanthus dealing with the institution of some cults, differences are to be recognized not only in the language, but also in the content of the text and in the attitude to it. Thus it becomes clear that the Lycian language and text are related to the inhabitants of Xanthus, the Aramaic to the Persian Empire as a whole and the Greek to the dynasts ruling at that time over Lycia, i.e. the Carian Hecatomnids. For Lycia it could be ascertained, too, from the many sepulchral inscriptions, which mention the municipal committee responsible for building and protecting the grave monuments, that the use of the Lycian language was obligatory in the municipal administration¹⁶; and the coins with Lycian legends

¹⁴ A cross-cultural discussion of alloglottography in the Ancient Near East (not only in Achaemenid times) may be found now in Rubio 2006.

¹⁵ See Sethe 1916.

¹⁶ The use of the various languages (Lycian, Greek, Aramaic) in Achaemenid Lycia was studied on the basis of the sepulchral inscriptions by Le Roy 1989.

minted by the Lycian cities confirm this in the best way. But one has to bear in mind as well that to a certain extent a cultural shift towards Greek, which strengthened the position of that language as one of major cultural prestige enormously, took place at the time in question (5th/4th centuries B.C.).

Aside from Aramaic also other languages have been used in “official” texts, with a regional limitation each, as it seems, and mainly in those areas where the Aramaic language had not yet taken root before Cyrus II and Darius I. To this extent we are quite right to speak of a pragmatic language policy pursued by the Persian kings. Such languages of only regional importance are, for instance, in Asia Minor Lydian, Lycian and Greek. But apart from those languages also other indigenous idioms remained in use there as non-official, though written languages and/or everyday vernaculars. Not rarely we know them only by some onomastic material or just by name. The Greek language was of crucial importance as well, above all in the many Greek cities, as a language of culture, if we think only of the poetic texts found here and there in form of epitaphs.

As relatively rich evidence shows, Phoenician could hold its position in Phoenicia also under Persian rule, and it is attested elsewhere, too, in the great centres of trade and along the “international” trade routes to the Red Sea or even to Arabia. It is little wonder that in part it got under pressure by the closer related Aramaic language, as we see it also from the situation in Palestine for the Hebrew language, which survived, however, to a certain extent as literary language and was outside the greater cities also fairly unchallenged as the colloquial idiom used in everyday life.

Insofar as the supremacy of the Persians had not been touched, all the peoples of the Empire had well the benefit of a certain autonomy, so that each of them could keep its traditional customs, its religion and language. Only this is the explanation for the exceptionally rich evidence of Babylonian texts in Babylonia: on the one hand in the archives of temples and on the other in the private archives of the great business-firms with their enormous amount of juridical and economic documents, since in both of these fields ancient Babylonian traditions remained as before.

For most of the peoples of the Persian Empire east of the Tigris River written records are lacking, even for the Medes, who were close relatives of the Persians, and this despite their privileged position. As far as textual evidence is available, all the other languages spoken in the provinces of the Persian Empire are put in the shade of Elamite as regards the number of inscriptions. As already men-

tioned above, that language is attested by inscriptions not only from Elam proper (especially from the Elamite capital Susa), but also, and above all, from Persepolis. As many thousands of clay tablets show, it was there the administrative language of the Achaemenid court until the reign of Artaxerxes I (465–425/24 B.C.) and it was written by scribes who spoke Persian at least as a second language. Only in the course of a fundamental administrative reorganization changing over to other kinds of writing and to the Aramaic language, the Elamite script and language were displaced more or less completely and for ever. But aside from the Elamite tablets (and those in Aramaic; see above)¹⁷ the Persepolis archives exhibit even isolated pieces in other languages, one each in Babylonian, Phrygian, Greek and Old Persian (for which see above). There is nothing surprising in this, however, since the transfers of (mostly) food rations listed in those tablets very often are referring to the employees working there. On that occasion one should mention as well the graffiti from the quarries above the Persepolis platform, in which Greek stonemasons have left their marks.

Unfortunately the linguistic situation in that multinational state owing to the lack of evidence is known rather inadequately, the more so since for a reasonable judgement not only the official texts written for administrative or representative purposes are of relevance. Questions like “Who used what language at what place in what communicative situation for what purpose?” we are unable to answer, because we know nearly nothing about what sociolinguists call non-standard idioms. Therefore we are able to judge only in relatively few cases with certainty, whether we have to do with an official written or spoken language, a literary or religious dialect, a language of interregional trade and traffic, the vernacular of private life or the like¹⁸.

From the linguist’s view large parts of the Achaemenid Empire are unknown territories. Notwithstanding, its character as a multinational or, better, multiethnic state is beyond any doubt. That characteristic is clearly reflected also in two royal titles used by the Persian Kings, at least as they are attested for Darius I and Xerxes I: “King of the countries containing all races” (OPers. *xšāyaθiya dahyūnām vispazanānām*) and “King of the countries containing many races” (OPers. *xšāyaθiya dahyūnām paruzanānām*) respectively. Realizing that language is one of the expressions of ethnicity, the authors of the Babylonian versions of those inscriptions did render both of these variants as “King of the countries of the entirety of all tongues” (*šar mātāti ša naphar lišānu gabbi*) and thus took well into account that multiethnic state was above all a multilingual state.

¹⁷ For those special items see now the treatment by Stolper and Tavernier 2007, pp. 3–5.

¹⁸ For sociolinguistics of the Achaemenid Empire and especially the cultural-historical implications of the use of script and language see Rossi 1981 and 1986. An interesting model which perhaps may be adapted to the situation of the Persian Empire was drawn up for pre-Islamic Central Asia by Frye 1991.

ენათმეცნიერება

აქემენიდთა მულტიკულტურული იმპერიის ენები

რიუდიგერ შმიტი*

* საარბრუკენის უნივერსიტეტი

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიკოს თ. გამყრელიძის მიერ)

სტატია მიმოიხილავს აქემენიდთა იმპერიაში გავრცელებულ ენებს და განსაზღვრავს მათ დანიშნულებასა და სოციალურ ფუნქციებს მულტიკულტურულ სახელმწიფოში.

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