

IRAN SCENES

Ganjnameh



Picture: Jeremy Thomas

Carved into the base of a mountain just outside Hamadan (Ecbatana/Achmetha), these two inscriptions were once thought to indicate the location of a secret treasury: Ganjnameh means 'treasure epistle'. They are in fact monuments to the Biblical kings Darius (left) and Xerxes (Ahasuerus; right), praising their god for their greatness.

We are left in no doubt how the monarchs of Persia regarded themselves: "The mighty lord Ahura Mazda, the god of gods, who created this land, the sky (cf. Gen. 1:1) . . . appointed Xerxes as king, the unique king of kings, the unique ruler of the rulers. I am Xerxes, the great king, king of kings . . .".

The monuments are beside the ancient Royal Road that ran from Ecbatana to Susa (Shushan), then on to Babylon and westward as far as Sardis, enabling irrevocable royal edicts (Dan. 6:8,12) to travel great distances extremely quickly. Biblical examples of this are found in the book of Esther, it being along this very road, amongst others, that the decrees of the king went, first for the Jews to be destroyed at the instigation of Haman, and then for the Jews to defend themselves after Haman's ignominious downfall: "And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces . . . being hastened by the king's commandment . . . So the posts that rode upon mules and camels went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment" (3:13,15; 8:14). The Royal Road was no public highway, however, for only the king's officials were permitted to use it. Punishment was severe for anyone found here without the king's authority.

As the photograph shows, the Ganjnameh inscriptions are in three columns of cuneiform text, each one being a different language (old Persian, Elamite and neo-Babylonian). Some of these languages evidently lasted for many centuries, for at Pentecost, amongst those hearing the gospel message "every man in (their) own tongue, wherein (they) were born", were Elamites (Acts 2:8,9).—*Jeremy Thomas*