

# IRAN SCENES

## Tomb of Ahasuerus, Naqsh-e Rostam



Picture: Jeremy Thomas

Ahasuerus, also known to history as Xerxes I, was the wealthiest of the kings of Persia, and during the twenty-one years of his reign the Medo-Persian Empire reached its greatest extent. Some of the splendours of his rule are described in the book of Esther, “when he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days” (1:4) to the nobles and great men who had assembled within the royal citadel at Shushan (Susa). Multi-coloured marble lined the palace walls, hung with rich furnishings and furnished with couches of precious metal (v. 6). We can only guess, therefore, at the riches which in 465 B.C. accompanied Ahasuerus to his tomb, no doubt surpassing even burials like that of the pharaoh Tutankhamen in Egypt, and which were looted by the Greeks when Ahasuerus’ kingdom—in fulfilment of Bible prophecy, and like all human kingdoms—came to an end.

Strictly speaking, it was not the body of Ahasuerus that was laid to rest in the stone sarcophagus beyond the entrance to the tomb, but his bones, for according to Zoroastrian tradition his corpse was first left exposed for the vultures to pick clean! The four ‘elements’ of earth, air, fire and water are sacred to Zoroastrianism (a religion which still exists), and this procedure avoided desecrating the earth with the dead body. Such traditions were continued in Iran until as recently as the 1960s. A closer view of the carvings above the king’s tomb would show him standing in worship before a Zoroastrian fire altar, with the outstretched wings of his god hovering protectively above. We are blessed indeed that the light of the true gospel has rescued us from pagan darkness like this. If like the Lord Jesus we put our trust in the true God, then, in the words of the psalmist, it may be said to us too: “He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust” (Ps. 91:4).—*Jeremy Thomas*