

The Influence of Irtashduna's Power on the Royal Court of Achaemenid Persia

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The broad scope of Ancient Persian history remains entrenched in the actions of great kings and men: from Cyrus the Great's initial campaigns to define the empire as a global power, to Darius I's coup and suppression of various revolting satrapies, and to finally, Xerxes' ineffective Greek campaign. These Achaemenid leaders undoubtedly altered the course of ancient history, ensuring the rise and dominant reign of Persian leaders for centuries after the empire's original founding. While ancient Persian society retained a myriad of qualities typical of a patriarchal system and praised the actions of the warrior class, women undeniably played a major role in shaping Persian royal affairs through exerting influence economically, socially and politically. One of the most important examples of such an occasion remains the life of Queen Irtashduna. Known in Herodotus' histories as Artystone, Irtashduna stands out as a significant Persian queen from the reign of Darius I. Darius, upon ascending to the throne, married the princess into order to solidify a claim to the throne, as Irtashduna's father Cyrus the Great founded the empire only a few decades prior.¹ The queen did not sit idle when placed in a position of great power, and instead utilized access to large fortunes and land to influence the royal court.

Irtashduna's forceful presence clearly appears throughout the Persepolis Fortification Tablets, the foremost archive for Achaemenid Persian history. Queen Irtashduna emerges on several occasions within the documents, commanding large retinues of servants, organizing significant amounts of land and demanding large quantities of food and drink for feasts. Persian queens benefitted from positions of prominence, and exercised power characteristically associated with the role. Despite clear indications of the leader's power and influence in the

¹ Aubrey De Sélincourt, trans. 1972 (1954), Herodotus, *The Histories*, London, New York: Penguin Books, [Herodotus: 88].

Persepolis Fortification Tablets, Irtashduna appears less frequently in the archive compared to prominent queens Atossa and Iradabama. Both Atossa and Iradabama factor into more archival documents, and as a result, materialize in greater quantities in the academic historiography. By analyzing Irtashduna, the scholarly community may begin to consider the impact of the lesser known queen upon the court of Darius the Great. Additionally, scholars may choose to focus research on Irtashduna, as there remains a gap in scholarly research on the queen. While the scope of the queen's power does not appear as particularly unique compared to Atossa and Iradabama, highlighting the significance of the royal leader illuminates key insights from the reign of Darius I. In the midst of a crowded field of queens, Irtashduna nevertheless accumulated power and influence, and maintained a strong power base throughout the leader's tenure as queen. Queen Irtashduna clearly employed the trappings of royalty to gain a significant power base, and in turn, influenced Darius I's sovereignty over the substantial Persian empire, effectively demonstrating the power which noble women held during the Achaemenid period.

Herodotus only gives cursory details regarding the lineage one of the most significant Persian queens during Darius I's era in the *Histories*, but provided scholars a platform from which to construct a framework for reconstructing a chronology of Irtashduna's life through later research: "The first women who Darius married were Cyrus' two daughters Atossa and Artystone; the former had previously been the wife of her brother Cambyses and also of the Magus; the latter a virgin."² By marrying Artystone and Atossa, the recently crowned Darius cemented a legitimate claim to the throne of the Persian empire, where previously the warrior's ascension to the throne stemmed from a violent seizure of power through the assassination of the

² Hdt. 3.88.

false Bardiya, Gautama.³ Through tying a direct connection to the founder of the empire, Darius I demonstrated that the grace of Ahuramazda and a powerful bloodline legitimized a violent coup d'état. While Atossa previously wed Cambyses and Gautama, Irtashduna appears unmarried at the time of the princesses' union with Darius.⁴ This demonstrates Irtashduna's preeminence as Darius wed the leader to indisputably solidify a claim to the Achaemenid throne. Marriage to Atossa appears expected for Achaemenid rulers of the era, whereas union with Irtashduna stands out as unique and strategic. While this description of the Persian queen solely focuses on Artystone's relationship to Darius, another Herodotus anecdote provides context for the power which the daughters of Cyrus held at court.

In the midst of describing Xerxes' invasion force poised to take Greece, Herodotus casually mentions a detail regarding the commander Arsames: "the son of Darius- his mother was Cyrus' daughter Artystone, the favorite wife of Darius, who had a statue made of her in beaten gold."⁵ In the seemingly trivial line about Arsames, Herodotus highlights the significance of the relationship between Darius and Irtashduna. The Greek author clearly defines the queen as the king's preferred companion, thus entitled to special treatment. The fact that Irtashduna received a golden statue in the queen's likeness demonstrates the immense influence attributed to the member of the Persian court. Darius surely recognized and appreciated the power, authority and contributions of the queen, so much so to spend valuable time, funds and resources to create the exorbitantly luxurious gift. Even from Herodotus' passing remarks about the Achaemenid queen, a definite picture of meaningful authority evidently appears. However, Irtashduna's son

³ Hdt. 3.78.

⁴ Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Achaemenid Empire*, Warsaw, IN: Eisenbruans, 2002, 132.

⁵ Hdt. 7.69

Arsames failed to ascend to the throne upon Darius' death, as Atossa's son Xerxes seized the throne. While this fact discourages the scope of the queen's influence, Irtashduna still significantly impacted the Persepolis area through social and economic means. Irtashduna's role among Darius' various wives suggests a degree of influence which made the queen a key player among the many members of the royal court. Herodotus notes Irtashduna as a factor in the Persian court, but later scholarship would fully uncover more details regarding the queen's background and biography.

Maria Brosius' impactful research and contributions to the field greatly help illuminate and uncover many details surrounding the favored queen. In Brosius' landmark work, *Women in Ancient Persia*, the author argues that Greek sources often simplify the lives of Persian women to fit certain narrative and pedological arguments, which often inaccurately portray prominent queens and court figures. Greek sources frequently only describe only the most sensational accounts of Achaemenid women; highlighting cases of extreme brutality, manipulation and hubris. Brosius notes this directly impacted scholarly examinations of well-known women of the time, as scholars relied on accounts steeped in cultural prejudice.⁶ The author argues that Darius utilized the marriage with Irtashduna as an alliance meant to discourage the queen's children from challenging the throne in subsequent decades. Darius bolstered a successful claim to the throne through this alliance, which additionally solidified loyalties with dominant nobles Otanes and Gorbyas.⁷ Brosius' work sets the standard for analysis of noble Achaemenid women, as the scholar's broad sweeping work accounts for long-held biases which plague the field. While the author's argument largely covers the life of Atossa, Irtashduna's more prominent sister, the

⁶ Maria Brosius, *Women in Ancient Persia, 559-331 B.C.*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1998, 1-3.

⁷ Brosius, *Women in Ancient Persia*, 61-62.

scholar supports the notion of the importance of the political marriage. Brosius dispels common issues with the field and backs the concept of powerful Persian women in the court of Darius I.

In an article published in *The World of Achaemenid Persia*, edited by Curtis and Simpson, Brosius continues to dive deeper into depictions of women at court during the era and the implications for those queens. The prominent scholar writes that Persian women frequently appeared “on a variety of media...precious metals, ivory, tapestry and stone, on seals and on finger rings.”⁸ However, the most significant depictions of royal women stem from seals held at the Louvre. A seal held at France’s preeminent cultural institution shows a female figure holding a lotus flower, resting on a throne with feet above the ground; as ancient Persian royalty’s feet could not touch the ground. Lotus flowers in the Achaemenid period also denoted special status. Additionally, the female figure wears a crown usually attributed to depictions of royals in the ancient Near East.⁹ Brosius notes a second example of a seal, as another artifact from the Louvre which depicts a woman “with bobbed hair seated on a throne...holding an object (a bowl or stylized flower)”. This image provides evidence for a claim that royal Persian women appeared in depictions surrounded by elements associated with the Achaemenid court. Brosius concludes that with the seals, Persians “recognized...royal and high-ranking women”, a concept which stands out as “considerabl(y) historically significant.”¹⁰ This work by Brosius supports the idea that women in Achaemenid Persia, specifically high-ranking court players, maintained considerable sway over royal proceedings. By including royals in seals and art, the typically patriarchal Persian society recognized the contributions which noble women added to the court

⁸ Maria Brosius, “The Royal Audience Scene Reconsidered” in *The World of Achaemenid Persia: History, Art, and Society in Iran and the Ancient Near East*, edited by John Curtis and St. John Simpson, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010, 141.

⁹ Brosius, “The Royal Audience Scene Reconsidered”, 144-145.

¹⁰ Brosius, “The Royal Audience Scene Reconsidered”, 148-150.

scene. While no explicit evidence demonstrates Irtashduna factored into major works of art, the queen undoubtedly impacted the internal culture of royal affairs in the court of Darius I. Artifacts explicitly featuring the queen failed to survive the millennia, but evidence shows women of similar stature often appeared into the material culture of the Achaemenid court. The favored queen of Darius I fails to materialize in art from the era, but by following the precedent set by other powerful women, Irtashduna's reputation certainly warranted representation in Persian expression.

Another scholar from the modern era, Pierre Briant, greatly contributed to the clarification of Irtashduna as a historical figure from the Achaemenid period. In Briant's extensive study of the Persians entitled *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Achaemenid Empire*, the author delves into analysis of the queen. The scholar argues against the concept of reclusive and passive women in the court, and states, "girls received a physical education something like boys', during which they studied traditional martial arts....it is tempting to conclude that aristocratic women were not prepared for reclusive life at all."¹¹ Ctesias of Cnidus describes an Achaemenid princess as "very beautiful and highly skilled with the bow and javelin." The primary sources also dictate that royal women travelled long distances often, moving between courts.¹² This information corroborates the concept of powerful women within the court of Darius I. Briant's theory that royal women obtained education, both intellectually and in combat, suggests that these nobles received training to fit in as productive members of the court. While a conclusion of equal standing between royal men and women remains unlikely at best, evidence suggests royal women gained knowledge and skills conducive

¹¹ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 285.

¹² Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 285.

to effectively influencing the affairs of Persian courts. Irtasduna's power certainly extended throughout Darius' followers, as the queen utilized the renowned theme of the Royal Hero as a seal.¹³ Briant states that the Royal Hero theme remains "one of the most frequent themes" in Achaemenid seal art and depicts a hero, usually in the middle of a seal, "fighting real or monstrous animals." This theme portrays the King or Queen as a bastion of order against the evil creatures of chaos.¹⁴ Through the application of this well-known design on documents, Irtashduna tapped into an image of Achaemenid royal power usually associated with men. The favored queen of Darius certainly applied the education Briant argues for in pursuit of a significant power base within the royal court and Persepolis region. Briant's scholarship implies an image of a well-rounded Achaemenid royal woman, which fits the narrative of Irtashduna's authority within the court of Darius I.

Irtashduna, while non-existent in the large-scale art of Darius I's reign, prominently factors into the Persepolis Fortification Tablets; exhibiting a considerable amount of influence on the court of the king. Multiple documents from the archive depict the queen requesting sizable amounts of grain, flour, figs and wine for personal reasons. One such document details a massive request: "710 bar of grain has been deposited as *kem* to (the account of) Irtena (at) Matanna, for (the woman) Irtashduna."¹⁵ Such a significant allocation of food resources demonstrates the female leader certainly retained a status which commanded high payment. All members of Achaemenid Persian society under Darius I received daily rations, but also could obtain payment for job performance in the form of consumable goods. A transaction of such a level for Irtashduna indicates two possible reasons for the large movement of consumables: the queen's

¹³ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 285.

¹⁴ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 225.

¹⁵ PF 166.

actions in court justified such a transaction or the royal woman planned to host a lavish feast. Darius favored the queen according to Herodotus,¹⁶ and may have expressed that esteem through an expression of wealth. Darius ruled the expanse of the Persian Empire and called on resources as need arose. The second conclusion retains higher plausibility however, as Irtashduna exercised sweeping power as queen to entertain guests. Irtashduna's ability to call upon sizable quantities of resources to accommodate guests from the extensive court system, and possibly from around the empire, demonstrates a level of power and influence which impacted the dominion of Darius I. With the strong capacity as a political player in court, the queen certainly forged alliances and repelled adversaries through diplomacy via extravagant banquets. Irtashduna certainly entertained guests from within Persia proper, as well as foreign dignitaries; employing the privileges and benefits of membership in Darius' family to effectively influence political proceedings. The Persepolis Fortification Tablets exhibit the power of the Achaemenid queen, as the leader sought to project royal power dramatically in a manner different than Darius' traditional patriarchal manner.

In addition to hosting extravagant feasts, the PFT reveals more methods in which Queen Irtashduna projected personal power throughout the Achaemenid royal court. Throughout the tablets, the queen requests varying amounts of consumable resources to utilize for payment purposes and the like. Each order, carried out by requisition officers and middlemen, shows the scope of the resources the leader retained access to. More fascinating however, remains the fact that not just one requisition officer carried out such orders. In the Fortification tablets which feature Irtashduna, eleven middlemen (or women) carry out the queen's order for commodities:

¹⁶ Hdt. 7.69

Muska, Irtana, Bakumarnus, Minda, Turmisduna, Zamasha, Bakamada, Kama, and Karkis.¹⁷ The amount of connecting bureaucrats which provided the leader with necessary supplies suggests Irtashduna retained a wide network of loyal officials; who provided vital services at a moment's notice. If the Tablets contained notes that suggested the queen employed only a handful of administrators, arguing for a larger extent of Irtashduna's dominion would prove as difficult. However, in the multiple documents demanding supplies, the leader contacts a myriad of intermediary officials to carry out the acquisition of goods. Irtashduna clearly retained a great deal of power within the royal court, as the names of over ten bureaucrats appear in the archive. Additionally, the queen requested such goods, not Darius I, which suggests a level of independence and autonomy separate from the king. The primary sources from the archive show that Darius did not request the grain, wine, flour, and figs for the queen, but Irtashduna requested the food items with full self-sufficiency. This demonstrates the queen's ability to hold court, retain followers, and even influence royals potentially; despite the overall attitude toward women in the Achaemenid period. Irtashduna's bureaucratic network contributes to the overall power structure which the queen built during the Achaemenid period, and suggests meaningful autonomy separate from Darius I's reach.

While Irtashduna's ability to host royals and employ a wide variety of administrators certainly emphasizes the impact the leader had on the Achaemenid court; consideration of the economic power which the queen wielded stands out as a worthy endeavor in fully considering the empress' authority. Two tablets from the Persepolis Fortification archive point to the queen's prowess as an estate holder during the reign of Darius I. In tablet 168, the author of the document notes that "57 bar of figs has been deposited (as) *kem* to (the account of) Minda (at)

¹⁷ PF 164-168, 730-734, 1236.

Matannan.”¹⁸ This sentence states that Irtashduna frequented or owned property at Matannan, as the figs required transport to the location. More interestingly however, tablet 732 produces insight into the economic and property-related influence the queen exhibited. Tablet 732 states, “17 *marris* of wine...Bakadada took, coming (to the place) Puradana”¹⁹ which directly contrasts with tablet 168. In tablet 168, servants of the queen took the figs to Matannan; while in tablet 732 wine goes to Puradana, an entirely separate location. The inclusion of these two distinct locations suggests that Queen Irtashduna owned or frequented two areas within the administrative domain of the Persepolis Fortification tablets. The leader required consumable resources at two locations, rather than a singular place, which implies that Irtashduna exercised power in multiple areas. Through the request, the possibility of the queen holding court or feasts at Puradana and Matannan becomes realistic. This remains significant, as stereotypically queens only applied power in one region or locale; but Irtashduna casts off such a trend.

In in a recent work by Woulter Henkelman, the scholar provides evidence that Irtashduna’s sphere of influence included to an area greater than just the Persepolis region. Henkelman’s work covers recently translated tablets, which show that the queen held table at Ecbatana in Media; hundreds of miles away from Persepolis. One tablet demonstrates this succinctly: “he was coming to Ecbatana, it was consumed at Irtashduna’s court.”²⁰ The queen of Darius certainly exerted an influence at Ecbatana like that which appears in the PFT. Henkelman draws the correlation, noting, “It is hardly over-audacious to postulate that Irtashduna’s staff did the same in Ecbatana: linking up to the local institution, drawing commodities from the regional economy, issuing Elamite receipts sealed with the queen’s seal, which were then processed by

¹⁸ PF 168.

¹⁹ PF 732.

²⁰ PF-NN 2502.

the local administration, producing the ‘Ecbatana Fortification archive.’”²¹ The evidence alludes to significant economic power, as the queen appeared multiple locations hundreds of miles apart, requesting commodities which in turn might have influenced the local economies mentioned in the archive. The Queen clearly held court at both prominent locations within the Persian empire and travelled between the two locales; bringing along a retinue of servants, scribes, followers, and court members along with the leader. This in turn influenced the local economy and impacted Darius’ power in Media. The evidence suggests both leaders held court in Ecbatana, which could have solidified claims to the region; as the queen and king could have exerted power and leadership on different groups of elites, forging lasting political connections. Irtashduna’s requests at two locations exhibits the remarkable sphere of influence the Persian queen retained during Darius I’s era, as ruler maintained important control while under the umbrella of the king.

Henkelman also emphasizes the significance of the royal queens during Darius I’s era, citing the individuals’ preeminence in economic and court-based matters. In Henkelman’s article entitled “Consumed before the King”, the author argues that the phrase “consumed before the king” or “poured before the king” appears 82 times throughout the translated Persepolis Fortification Tablets. Among those 82 appearances, on 19 occasions the word relates to Persian queens, including Irtashduna.²² While the scholar remains skeptical that Irtashduna hosted lavish feasts, Henkelman notes the high quantities of commodities present in some of the tablets: “1,224 head of sheep / goats (PF0696), 126,100 qts. of flour (PF 0701), 1,044 head of poultry (PF 2034), 5,000 quarts. of *karukur* fruit (NN 0923), and 12,350 quarts. of wine (PF 0728).”

²¹Woulter Henkelman, “Administration in the Achaemenid Empire – Tracing the Imperial Signature”, *Classica et Orientalia* (2017): 134-135.

²² Woulter Henkelman, “Consumed before the King: The Table of Darius, that of Irdabama and Irtaštuna, and that of his Satrap, Karkiš”, *The Achaemenid Court* (2010): 676-677.

Henkelman also theorizes that the timing of the allotments of resources coincide with the beginning of the Persian new year, “calendrical(ly) and administrative(ly) and would be used during that year within the queen’s personal domain.”²³ The scholar’s argument supports the idea that Persian queens during Darius I’s reign demanded significant logistical quotas to account for personal need like rewarding followers, engaging in royal affairs, and displaying the lavish trappings of court life as a symbol of dominance. Irtashduna, along with other Achaemenid queens, sought to demonstrate power through conspicuous consumption, showing off wealth through decadent feasts. This ritual created the phrase “consumed before the king” (or queen) which appears throughout the Fortification Tablets. Irtashduna’s displays of royal prosperity, demonstrates a Persian willingness to influence constituents through dramatic means; one not limited to the king’s immediate court.

Scholarly analysis also demonstrates Irtashduna’s taste as a royal, as the queen included varying art forms in seals. The scholar M.B. Garrison examines the stylistic differences between various seals, and notes change over time. In the article "Seals and the Elite at Persepolis: Some Observations on Early Achaemenid Persian Art", Garrison delineates a shift between Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian art styles. The scholar notes that “modeled style” of the Achaemenid era diverges from prior examples of Neo-Assyrian art in that Persian featured less definite human figures and a decreased emphasis on detailing. However, during Irtashduna’s tenure as queen of Darius, a distinct royal seal style existed; as artisans distanced works from the Neo-Assyrian tradition. Irtashduna’s seal remarkably continued the tradition of the Neo-Assyrians, as the queen “chose a figural style with archaicizing allusions to Assyrian art.” Garrison notes that this tendency appears common among elite officials who appear in the PFT,

²³ Henkelman, “Consumed before the King”, 679.

as chief administrator Parnaka utilized a seal with commonalities relating to Assyrian royal seals. The scholar notes royals and royal officials in Darius I's court retained certain preferences for art and used resources to find artists to accommodate for such tastes. Additionally, Garrison states "individuals (men and women) ... wield power, travel widely, give orders, and patronize artistic styles suited to their own taste, even when those tastes differ radically from that emanating...from the king"²⁴ as evidence of personal royal autonomy. The queen utilized the means associated with the Persian royalty to successfully claim an identity separate from that of Darius and other prominent officials during the era. Through applying a unique seal to documents and other notes, Irtashduna marked personal independence and power in an era defined by male dominance. The Achaemenid queen's distinct artistic preferences exemplifies the power royal women wielded in the court of Darius the Great, as the leader claimed power unattached to that of the king.

Another scholarly work also details the power and influence Queen Irtashduna exercised over the king. In *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume Two* scholar J.M. Cook emphasizes the considerable power the queen retained. In the work, Cook states "Artystone bore Darius two sons who appear as army commanders in 480 B.C.E....The Persepolis tablets show that she owned a village estate with a tapestry factory and also a palace (at Kuganaka) in Persis; and no doubt she had a detachment of troops assigned to her."²⁵ These facts portray Irtashduna as retaining significant power and influence over Darius the Great. Through the connection to King's sons, Irtashduna certainly may have affected, encouraged and guided the actions of these important

²⁴ M. B. Garrison, "Seals and the Elite at Persepolis: Some Observations on Early Achaemenid Persian Art," *Ars Orientalis* 21 (1991): 8-9.

²⁵ J.M. Cook, "The Rise of the Achaemenids and the Establishment of Their Empire" in *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 2*, edited by William Bayne Fisher, I. Gershevitch, John Andrew Boyle, Ehsan Yarshater, Richard Nelson Frye, Cambridge University Press, 1985, 226.

men. The leader could have swayed and persuaded the two young commanders to initiate certain international military directives, while proceeding with the accumulation of domestic power within Darius' court. Cook's details about Irtashduna's economic holdings also specify the queen's commercial clout in the Persepolis industry. The aforementioned tapestry factory provided a direct means of income for the queen, showing Irtashduna's ability to remain economically viable without funding from the king. Additionally, the palace at Kuganaka adds to the concept of Irtashduna's royal power: independent and forceful; allied with the king, but not necessarily subservient. Cook's mention of the queen retaining an exclusive retinue of soldiers also demonstrates a level of military power within the Persian court. This group most likely focused on maintaining Irtashduna's security, but the mention of an armed contingent surrounding the leader highlights the elevated status royal Persian women retained. The scholar also states in a footnote, "In 498 B.C.E. she entertained Darius at Pesis (as the seal shows, at his expense)."²⁶ This short line actually provides great insight into the power dynamic between Darius the Great and Queen Irtashduna. By charging the king for the expense of a feast, the figure demonstrates an ability to influence Darius' sovereignty; thus, creating a worthy seat alongside Ahuramazda's chosen one. Darius certainly recognized the authority Irtashduna exerted in the royal court and the surrounding Persepolis region, and capitalized on the marriage between the two crowned heads of state. The Achaemenid queen maintained a considerable amount of power in the court of Darius the Great and utilized this influence to rise to the position as a worthy partner to the king.

Queen Irtashduna clearly exhibited a significant amount of sway over the royals of Achaemenid Persia, as well as the king. The leader influenced the economic, political, artistic,

²⁶ Cook, "The Rise of the Achaemenids, 226.

and even militaristic sectors of the Persepolis region impactfully; and possibly impacted another sector of Persian society: the ideology of the royals. Darius the Great's ideology stands out as well documented, as the Naqsh-e Rostam inscription in modern day Iran codifies the values and themes common in Persian dogma during the king's reign. Achaemenid rulers often emphasized dominion over the natural world, as the king brought Ahuramazda's light and order to the globe. Portions of the inscription exemplify that notion: "Ahuramazda, when he saw this earth in commotion, thereafter bestowed it upon me, made me king. By the favor of Ahuramazda I put it in its proper place; what I said to them, that they did, as was my desire."²⁷ Restoring order to a chaotic world stands out as one of the hallmarks of Achaemenid ideology, as royals sought to bring the light and truth of Ahuramazda to the world to end the Lie (the Achaemenid concept of evil). Taming the natural world featured prominently into the philosophy of the Persians, as Cyrus the Great created Pasargadae as oasis²⁸ and Xerxes constructed the pontoon bridge to cross the Hellespont.²⁹

While the focus of the period rests on the kings which implemented massive projects within the Ancient Near East, Queen Irtashduna certainly exhibited a need to control nature on a much smaller scale. Christopher Tuplin notes that the leader requested a muster of male peacocks, records of which materialize in 40 documents.³⁰ Peacocks often symbolize decadence, wealth and royalty and Irtashduna purchased the animals for the court. However, this acquisition may mark an effort by the queen to project royal control over a specific aspect of nature: beauty. By incorporating these animals into the court scene, Irtashduna sought to demonstrate that the

²⁷ DNa 4.

²⁸ Josef Wiesehofer, *Ancient Persia from 550 B.C. to 650 A.D.*, New York: I.B. Taurus, 2007, 26.

²⁹ Wiesehofer, *Ancient Persia*, 46.

³⁰ Christopher Tuplin, *Achaemenid Studies*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996, 108.

court's ability to bring order to the world encapsulated all aspects of the environment. While the king waged war to bring order to the political sphere of the Achaemenid world, the queen pursued order and a projection of power within the royals. Through demonstrating authority over the riches of nature, Irtashduna underscored a potent ability to command the wide-ranging material resources of the Persian court. Queen Irtashduna's purchase of a group of peacocks exemplifies the leader's ability to convey the ideals and ideology of the Achaemenid ruling dynasty, expanding credibility within the court and with husband Darius I.

Queen Irtashduna dramatically impacted the royal court of Darius I and the region which constituted the Persepolis Fortification tablets. Herodotus' *Histories* provide vital insight into the esteem with which Darius held the queen, as the sovereign constructed a golden statue to honor the leader. While the ancient author provides cursory information about the ruler, scholars such as Brosius and Briant examined Irtashduna in detail, revealing that the queen actively sought to utilize the alliance with the king for meaningful political gain. Briant's scholarship reveals that Persian royal women received educations both in combat and in knowledge, similar to that of royal men. Irtashduna undoubtedly took advantage of such an opportunity to ascend the power structure of the royal court. In the process of the climb, the queen left behind material evidence which suggests widespread influence. The leader owned considerable amounts of land, employed vital bureaucrats to document economic activities, and expressed a distinct sophistication in the selection of artwork for personal seals. Irtashduna's impressive command of monetary resources allowed the queen to host feasts, with the purpose of attracting attention and building connections. These banquets brought even the king to the queen's court, as the sovereign funded one such endeavor. Additionally, the queen's power extended to the military realm of the government, as the royal controlled a contingent of soldiers. While Irtashduna struggled to

ascend amidst the jockeying between Darius I's queens (Atossa's son Xerxes assumed the throne), the queen nevertheless played an important function in the Achaemenid court and influenced the elites and economy which surrounded the king. In conclusion, Queen Irtashduna effectively utilized the resources, connections and education which arose from the position of royalty and as a result; dramatically influenced the Achaemenid court and the reign of Darius the Great.

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Achaemenid court ceremonies maintained and reinforced hierarchy within the elite and delineated power relations between courtiers, the royal family, and the monarch himself. Persian monarchs relied upon formalized etiquette and court ceremony to create a special aura around the throne. A deliberate separation and distancing of the king from the gaze of his subjects, even from much of his court, meant that elaborate rituals were enacted through which courtiers and visitors might get limited access to the royal personage during a tightly controlled and stage-managed audience ceremony (Esther 1. Ancient Persia. Cyrus the Great and the Achaemenid Empire. The Rise of Persia. This is the currently selected item. Zoroastrianism. Practice: The Achaemenid Empire. Practice: State-building: The Persian Empire. Practice: Ancient Persia. Next lesson. Classical Greece. The Achaemenid Empire, also called the First Persian Empire, was an ancient Iranian empire based in Western Asia founded by Cyrus the Great. Ranging at its greatest extent from the Balkans and Eastern Europe proper in the west to the Indus Valley in the east, it was larger than any previous empire in history, spanning 5.5 million square kilometers (2.1 million square miles). It is notable for its successful model of a centralised, bureaucratic administration (through satraps under the King of Kings) The Achaemenid Persian Empire (550–330 BCE) was a vast and complex sociopolitical structure that encompassed much of modern-day Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan and included two dozen distinct peoples who spoke different languages, worshipped different deities, lived in different environments and had widely differing social customs. This book offers a radical new approach to understanding the Achaemenid Persian Empire and imperialism more generally.Â fifth century B.C., chiefly due to the influence of Athens, whose citizens formulated a new Athenoconcentric conception of "Greekness." View. Show abstract. This book explores the representation of Persian monarchy and the court of the Achaemenid Great Kings from the point of view of the ancient Iranians themselves and through the sometimes distorted prism of Classical authors. eISBN: 978-0-7486-7710-8. Subjects: History.Â It is a fitting place start to this short work on the Achaemenid court, because in spite of recent sophisticated scholarly advances in the study of ancient courts (Spawforth 2007b; Strootman 2007; Jacobs and Rollinger 2010; Save. Cite this Item.Â This chapter explores the role of royal women at the Achaemenid court and examines the evidence relating to queens (kings' wives and mothers), princesses, and concubines within the rigid hierarchical system of the Great King's household.