

**Riéra**

Réseau international  
d'études et de recherches  
achéménides  
*International Network  
of Achaemenid Studies  
and Researches*

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*call for collaboration*

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# Area and timespan

**“Achaemenid studies and research”** signifies the research carried out in the countries of the Middle East and Central Asia, which formed, more or less continuously, an integral part of the Achaemenid Persian empire, i.e.: east to west, from the Indus Valley to the Aegean, and north to south, from the Republics of Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan etc.) as far as the First Nile Cataract. This area corresponds to the empire as defined by Darius I in one of his inscriptions: “This is the kingdom which I hold: from the Saka beyond Sogdiana as far as the land of Kush; from the Indus as far as Sardis” (DPh). Also included are the countries which were lost fairly soon after being conquered, such as parts of the Balkans, in particular Macedon and adjacent regions, from where Alexandre and his army set out in 334 to conquer Darius III’s empire. Chronologically, Achaemenid history spans more than two centuries: from around 550 (when the Persian conquests begin with Cyrus) down to 330 (death of Darius III); but, this chronological range needs to be extended both backwards and forwards.

Back, because it is generally thought that Iranian people arrived in the land that came to be known as Persia around 1000 BC – the period during which this entity came into being (c. 1000-550) still raises many problems and demands research. Further, in order to understand how, beginning with Cyrus and Cambyses, the Persian empire was formed, it is essential to be familiar with the situation in the Near East c. 560, i.e. the Neo-Babylonian empire, the Saite dynasty in Egypt, Media, Lydia and Central Asia.

Forward, because the brief period of Alexander is properly a part of Achaemenid history, although it brought with it the seeds of change. The whole period of Alexander’s successors also needs to be included, for three reasons: first, several sources of this period are also relevant to Achaemenid history, as they illustrate continuities; secondly, trying to understand the emergence of the first world empire leads automatically to a consideration of the veritable explosion of coherent structures in the two decades following Alexander’s death; finally, analysis of the installation of Graeco-Macedonian rule provides crucial material for the study of longterm cultural interaction.

## The current state of Achaemenid studies

**Although the trilingual inscription** of Behistun has always been accorded great importance because of its role in the process of decipherment (Rawlinson 1846), studies of the Achaemenid empire have generally been restricted to excavation of the royal residences located in the centre:

Susa, Persepolis, Pasargadae. The results have been extremely important, even spectacular, although some of the most important finds are still only partly published (the Persepolis Tablets in the Oriental Institute, Chicago). Assyriologists, for a long time, were uninterested in Babylonian tablets dating to the “late” period, because they regarded 539 (the date of the fall of Babylon to Cyrus) as creating a caesura, beyond which Babylonian history became the task of classicists given the wealth of Greek narrative sources. A similar lack of interest in the “Late Periods” exists in Egypt. There is also the more fundamental problem that neither archaeologists nor epigraphists paid much attention to historical analysis. Since the survey by Olmstead (1948), only one globalising synthesis has appeared (Briant 1996). Yet research on the countries of the empire and imperial structures has been multiplying. The “Achaemenid Workshops” started by Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg (Groningen, now Utrecht) and Amélie Kuhrt (University College, London) have certainly played a role of prime importance in this: between 1983 and 1990, eight workshops were held in Groningen, London and Ann Arbor, the proceedings of which were published in Leiden (Netherlands Institute for the Near East, 1987-1994) in the Achaemenid History Series created for that purpose. At these meetings, nearly 60 scholars from various countries exchanged ideas:

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Communications</b>
Deutschland	5	18
Belgium	3	2
Canada	1	2
Denmark	1	1
U.S.A.	13	18
France	7	18
Great-Britain	14	30
Israel	1	1
Italy	2	2
The Netherlands	9	16
Switzerland	1	1
ex-USSR	1	1

Both subsequently and in parallel, other colloquia were held elsewhere on Achaemenid themes – Belgium: Persian religion (Kellens 1991); France: tribute (Briant-Herrenschmidt 1989), the Near East viewed by a Greek (Briant 1995), Asia Minor (Descat 1985), coins and coinage (Descat 1989), the Transeuphrates region (Elayi-Sapin 1990, 1993-4, 1996-7); Turkey: Hellespontine Phrygia and Asia Minor (Bakir 1998), the coinage of Asia Minor (Casabonne 1998). The statistics are as follows:

Countries	Participants	Communications
Deutschland	7	12
Belgium	6	8
Denmark	2	4
U.S.A.	9	9
France	34	54
Great-Britain	14	14
Greece	2	4
Israel	8	8
Italy	12	12
Switzerland	4	5
Turkey	8	10

These figures do not present a totally reliable guide to the distribution of researchers by country. The fact that quite a number of colloquia were in the Netherlands (8) and France (7) accounts for the number of scholars invited from those two countries; similarly, the fact that two colloquia were held in Turkey explains the rather high proportion of Turkish scholars. Further, we should not be misled by the relatively large number of participants in Achaemenid colloquia: the focus of some meetings provided a platform suitable for large numbers of classicists, on one hand, of Israeli archaeologists, on the other, whose work on the Achaemenid period plays a markedly secondary role in their research. Conversely, the fact that there have been no colloquia specifically concerned with Persia (Fars), Egypt or even the archaeology of Asia Minor explains why representatives of these fields are so poorly represented. Nevertheless, overall the tables imply the existence of three characteristic traits, borne out by further considerations:

■ **The field of research** of a majority of the contributors appearing in the above tables coincides only partially and incidentally with the Achaemenid period and territory. Those researchers, fully engaged with the history of the Achaemenid world are sparse: they amount to little more than around fifteen.

■ **This tiny number of specialists** is scattered over a number of countries, with different languages and cultures, even though in this case, as in others, English is de facto the preferred language. Given this situation, these specialists work in a relatively isolated manner, particularly since the end of the “Achaemenid Workshops” (1983-1990) and of the specialised Newsletters (Pirradazish, Chicago; Data, Utrecht), which existed only briefly; the only survival is the series Achaemenid History which is now devoted to publishing monographs and collected essays – its continued existence depends on the world-wide development of

Achaemenid studies. No journal is specifically devoted to this field of study. Finally – and perhaps most startling – nowhere, at this moment, is there a specialised research team.

■ **This very lack of cohesion and concentration** mirrors the Achaemenid empire to perfection. From the Indus to the Mediterranean it embraced a variety of countries and peoples, most of which used his/their own script (s) and spoke their own language. The field is, as a result, divided in accordance with linguistic categories and specialists in particular conventions of writing: Old Persian, Elamite, Babylonian, Hebrew, Phoenician, demotic and hieroglyphic Egyptian, Aramaic, Greek, Lycian, Carian, Lydian, Phrygian, etc. – all these languages and scripts were used to write documents dating to the Achaemenid period. Such studies in themselves belong to larger disciplines (Assyriology, Egyptology, Semitic studies etc.), within which the Achaemenid period, albeit important (for example, so called Imperial Aramaic), does not encourage any particularly strong interest (e.g. the hieroglyphic inscriptions of this period). Conversely, in some instances the field is quite well studied either because texts in a certain script develop in the Achaemenid period (Egyptian demotic is one example), or because the period is now attracting more attention (as in the case of Achaemenid and hellenistic period Babylonian texts). But what is clear in all instances is that there is a vast spectrum of specialised linguistic studies – there is no single specialist who can master the corpus of fifteen or so languages. And, obviously, this fragmentation of research goes hand in hand with the geographical scatter of scholars.

■ **To conclude**, the current situation of Achaemenid research is paradoxical:

■ **The exceptional fragmentation** in the field of history and the widely dispersed researchers must be stressed. This is particularly striking as the field has only crystallised in this form recently in relation to the focus of Near East conquered by Alexander and organised by his successors. These drawbacks and gaps explain the absence of any national or international structure for Achaemenid research. At the same time, the lack of a permanent structure for facilitating meetings and exchanges of views accentuates and helps to perpetuate the depressingly isolated and sporadic nature of individual efforts or meetings organised purely on the basis of regional and/or linguistic convenience; on the epistemological level, these can never, in themselves, meet essential research demands. Further, even if we can now say that several Egyptian and Near Eastern specialists no longer totally disregard the late periods, it is still the case that Achaemenid history is completely ignored in university teaching, which continues to be dominated by the history of Greece and Rome, only somewhat tempered by the glamour of Egypt and the early Near East. In recent years, only one French university (Toulouse-II) has regularly offered an optional course in Achaemenid history within the context of the normal Licence d'Histoire, and the situation elsewhere in Europe and the world is no different.

In those countries where there is an Iranological tradition, virtually all research is in archaeological or linguistic fields.

■ **Nevertheless**, there has been an explosion of research and publication in recent years. I reviewed this in my 1996 book, where I gathered the relevant publications from c. 1970-1985 (Briant 1996: 1056-1056; commentary to pp. 782-788). This was my assessment: "... The rate of discoveries and publications of evidence grew markedly in the course of the eighties, and the harvest of the nineties already promises to be excellent. As we know how and to what degree excavation strategies and the eyes of archaeologists and museum keepers are determined (sometimes overdetermined) by broad research trends, the hope is not unreasonable that such progress will continue in the short as well as the long term" (p. 785).

In late 1997 I drew up a new survey of material in a "Bulletin d'Histoire Achéménide I (BH Ach I)", with the idea that it appear periodically: it contained about 450 titles from 1995-1997 and showed the astonishing vitality of publications of new material in those countries of the empire where political circumstances allow established excavations to continue and even investigation of new sites.

## An International Network: **achemenet.com**

**Given this situation**, French and international initiatives need co-ordinating. It should be stressed that the intention is not to set up a system expensive in terms of human and material resources: the point is not to bring all existing research together, but to co-ordinate it and stimulate further work. This is the driving idea behind the International Network of Achaemenid Studies and Research, which, under the name **achemenet.com**, will be organised as a series of interconnected nodes; it will, first and foremost, use the new means now at our disposal for exchanging information, which promise to become ever more effective in the coming decade.

### Site and sites

**The achemenet.com** site itself will result from the collaboration of a co-operative project whose ideas they broadly accept, will contribute either by creating a link between their specialist and the **achemenet.com** site, or by transmitting their information directly to the central site in Paris for being included.

At the moment, the draft project has been submitted to about twenty colleagues in various countries. Reactions have been very positive. One subgroup ("cell") is already

being formed by F. Joannès; this site will eventually contain several hundred Babylonian tablets (roughly from Nabonidus to Seleucus) in transliteration and with a French translation. Other scholars have already expressed their willingness to collaborate on this. Further cells can be organised in this way. Let me cite some examples:

■ **archaeological cell:** on the screen, a colour map showing all archaeological sites of relevance (even if only partly so) to Achaemenid history (e.g. Turkey: Daskyleion, Sardis, Gordion, Kerkenes Dağ, Xanthos, Limyra etc.; Egypt: Memphis, ‘Ayn Manawir; Iran: Susa, Persepolis, Pasargadae, Hamadan etc.). Clicking on each toponym, researchers will gain access to whatever information the archaeological team has loaded, either through the central site, or through the link established with a particular website.

■ **“Persepolis texts” cell:** for this, there will be access to a site now being organised by our colleagues at the Oriental Institute in Chicago. (There is already a site devoted to the royal inscriptions and to photographs of Persepolis taken by the American team: easy access via Abzu.)

■ **“iconography” cell:** a gathering of Achaemenid images, both central and provincial. This will be an enormous project to organise, as it will include relief sculpture, seals, coins, statuary etc.

■ **“coin” cell:** the preceding project suggests that a site pulling all the evidence on coinage in the empire together should be set up (Koray Konük).

■ **“museum” cell:** each museum with a collection of Achaemenid objects (in the broadest sense) could take over a specific site within such a cell.

■ **“aramaic texts” cell:** the Aramaic texts from Asia Minor are being treated first.

■ **“egyptian texts” cell.**

■ **“inscriptions from Asia Minor” cell:** this will primarily be Greek epigraphy (Pierre Briant), but the Greek texts cannot be presented in a separate category, as several are multilingual. Further, Asia Minor contains a wealth of inscriptions in local languages (a specialist in charge of each corpus is needed). It should be structured on the pattern of the “Aramaic texts” cell above.

■ **regional cell:** another possibility would be cells organised in regional terms (Lycia, Bactria etc.). A site “Xanthos” is in the process of being constructed.

■ **“classical sources” cell:** to be worked out...

There are suggestions only. The ultimate goal is to have available on the web a full databank on the history of the Near East from Nabonidus to Seleucus. This is ambitious; but, in contrast to a conventional paper project, it is achievable, provided an extensive decentralised, international collaboration can be set up.

## Organisation of the “central” site [achemenet.com](http://www.achemenet.com)

**The programm is both decentralised and decentralising.** Nevertheless, it requires the provision of a central platform, from which the specialised sites can be accessed via a link and index. I propose that the communication crossroads be established at the Collège de France, centred on the chair Histoire et civilisation du monde achéménide et de l’empire d’Alexandre [<http://www.college-de-france.fr/>]. The central platform would provide shared pages, such as:

■ **a directory of scholars** whose work focusses, either entirely or partly, on the Achaemenid period (and the early hellenistic period). To achieve this, a registration slip will be sent (by post and/or e-mail) to all those who have signalled their willingness to collaborate. A link will be established between this Directory and the Chicago Abzu site. Links must also be set up with the directories of classicists in various countries (e.g. Sophau, France). Links will, of course, also be set up with any existing personal sites and research teams.

■ **a directory of young scholars and theses in preparation.** To gather this information, colleagues in all the relevant countries will be contacted as soon as it is feasible. This will provide an interesting global picture of the future of Achaemenid studies.

■ **bibliographies.** The Bulletin d’Histoire Achéménide (BHACH) prepared by Pierre Briant will be made available to scholars on the site thanks to the courtesy of the Editorial Board of *Topoi* (Lyon). New publications could, for example, be attached to this. There is also the possibility of putting together more specialised bibliographies on particular themes.

■ **discussion forum, journal?** As, by definition, the site is a meeting place, it would be possible to set up a discussion forum, its form to be decided. The site could also be used to publish a draft of work in progress, provided the author is willing. In the long term, the creation of a journal specifically dedicated to the field of Riera needs to be considered – to be published either only on line or also in print.

■ **announcements.** The site could also be used for making announcements – new publications or ones about to appear, colloquia, university or research centre vacancies.

**In order to achieve this, we ask you to fill in the attached slip and return it to us directly by e-mail.**

## Finance and staff

The project has already been met with a favourable reception at the ministère de l’Éducation nationale in Paris. The direction de la Recherche of the ministry, within the framework of “actions spécifiques”, has agreed to finance the establishment of the project in 2000. The



allocated budget will make it possible to finance the assignment, organise initial meetings and set up the web-site on a professional basis. A web-site designer in Paris has already agreed to work on it [olivier.cabon@thotm.com or <http://www.thotm.com>].

A second tranche of money will be requested under the four-year plan 2000-2004. Specially earmarked funds will make it possible to acquire essential resources from November-December 1999.

Very important is the possible funding of research groups who do not have sufficient resources on their own. Funds might be made available for work on the setting up of a particular site. At the appropriate time, such needs will have to be calculated in order to cost the specific needs of a group.

<sup>1</sup> Temporary position offered to a student preparing his/her thesis.

A request will be put in for an Ater post <sup>1</sup> (for two years: 2000-2001) to get the site off the ground and manage mail and other communications. A technical aide will also spend part of this time on the project.

## Call for collaboration

At the moment we are looking for:

- **any information** on existing sites, which would like to be linked to the site [achement.com](http://achement.com)
- **any suggestions** for sites that could join up with the worldwide network [achemenet.com](http://achemenet.com).

To encourage plans, we can organise special meetings to help with the setting up of a cell. We can also, in a manner yet to be specified, supply material and logistic advice to any groups in need.

## Steering Committee

After the forms and proposals being analyzed, the results will be published on the site. An International Steering Committee will be in charge of the development of the site. Its first meeting will take place at the Collège de France, before the end of year 2000.

Thank you and best wishes! **Pierre Briant,**

*thanks to send every mail concerning*

*the web site [achemenet.com](http://achemenet.com)*

*to [achemenet@college-de-france.fr](mailto:achemenet@college-de-france.fr)*

name \_\_\_\_\_

first name \_\_\_\_\_

**framework of the researches**

institution (university, museum...) \_\_\_\_\_

address \_\_\_\_\_

free-lance researcher \_\_\_\_\_

student title of the PhD \_\_\_\_\_

research director \_\_\_\_\_

university \_\_\_\_\_

department \_\_\_\_\_

**address...**

home-address \_\_\_\_\_

phone  home \_\_\_\_\_

office \_\_\_\_\_

fax  home \_\_\_\_\_

office \_\_\_\_\_

personal web-page \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**fiel of research**

period (saïte, achemenid, diadoques...) \_\_\_\_\_

field of research (Lycie, Central Asia...) \_\_\_\_\_

favorite topics \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

publications: you can join a list of your ten more recent publications \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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**proposal for a web site linked to achemenet. com**

- existing site
- site under construction
- planed site

can you tell us more about you project?

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- I accept that my plan would circulate through achemenet. com

**wishes**

if you have no plan, which would be your wishes in this respect?

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- are you in favour of the organisation of a forum on achemenet. com?

on which basis?

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- do you think it would be useful to found a new journal  
which would be specially devoted to Achaemenid Studies?

no

yes

on line

paper

- do you think it would be useful to organize conferences around the field  
relating to achemenet. com?

on which topics?

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**thanks**  
to send us back this form

**either, after having printed an filled it,  
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