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# DNf: A New Inscription Emerges from the Shadow

**Abstract**

DNf is a recently-discovered trilingual inscription on the tomb of Darius I at Naqsh-e Rostam. This article presents images, a first edition of the texts, observations on why the inscription was not recognized earlier, and comments on the relationship between the inscription and the sculptured figures below it.[1]

**Keywords**

Naqsh-e Rostam, Darius, Achaemenid, Royal Inscriptions, Achaemenid Tombs.

## Introduction

About 6 km northwest of Persepolis Terrace, on the southern side of *Hossein Kuh*, four Achaemenid royal tombs (Tombs I-IV) are cut out in the cliff wall. Only Tomb I has cuneiform epigraphs that unambiguously identify it as the tomb of Darius I.

DNa and DNb are two long trilingual inscriptions cut on the left side of the top register (DNa) and in the middle register on two sides of the entrance (DNb). On the left side of the top register a vertical array of three relief images represent figures bearing weapons. Above the upper and middle figure (Gobryas[2] and Aspathines[3]) are trilingual inscriptions or captions (DNc-d) which identify the figures with their names. There are also thirty "throne-bearers" all of which have brief trilingual inscriptions, subsumed under the siglum DNe.[4]

Research has focused on the left and central parts of the upper register of the tomb, notably on the well-preserved images of weapon-bearers and throne-bearers with their trilingual captions. Exactly opposite to the vertical array of armed figures on the left side of the tomb, however, on the right side of the top register, there is another vertical array depicting unarmed figures that have received less attention. They have suffered from erosion, they were partially covered by a deposit (perhaps of dirt washing down from the top of the cliff), and they are in a corner of the relief that rarely receives direct sunlight and are therefore often obscured by shadow.

When Mojtaba Doroodi visited Naqsh-e Rostam with professional photographer Mohammad Ali Mosallanezhad on the 23rd of October 2018, he noticed a damaged inscription on the right side of the top register above the uppermost figure. Being in the right place at the right time, when the shadow of the right corner was at its shortest (about 14:00 o'clock), they took pictures of the inscription. Doroodi sent photographs of the inscription, along with images of the previously known inscriptions, to Soheil Delshad who confirmed that it is a new inscription.

The inscription is laid out in four lines immediately above the top figure on the right side of the top register (Figs. 1-3). The Old Persian version, in two lines, is uppermost, followed by the Elamite and Babylonian versions, each in one line. The left side of the inscription has broken off and several other signs are severely damaged. Because it is clear that the three versions begin with a personal name and an ethnonym, (below) it is possible to estimate that a third of the original length of the inscription is lost. There is a fracture in the middle of the remaining part of the inscription. It starts from the first line (where the Old Persian sign "a" was engraved)

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[2]     OP. *Gau̯b(a)ruva*

[3]     OP. *Aspacan*ā

[4]     For the history of studies on Naqsh-e Rostam until 1911 see Weissbach (1911, pp. 3-13), for the archaeological studies as well as a short history of researches on Darius' tomb see Schmidt (1970, pp. 80-90) and recently Schmitt (2000, pp. 23-24).
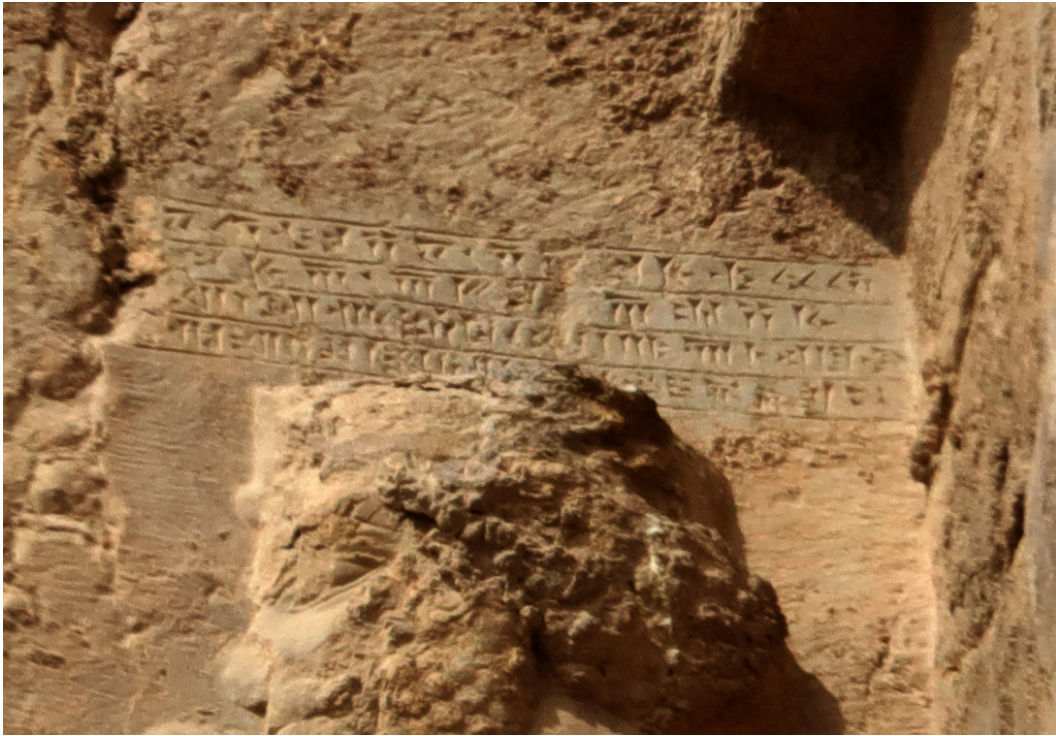
**Fig. 1.** *DNf at the time of discovery on 23ʳᵈ of October 2018 (taken by M. A. Mosallanezhad).*



**Fig. 2.** *Top and middle figures of unarmed Persians in a single frame (taken at the time of discovery on 23ʳᵈ of October 2018 by M. A. Mosallanezhad).*

**Fig. 3.** *Top unarmed figures and the upper part of the middle figures (taken on 4ᵗʰ of January 2019 by M. A. Mosallanezhad).*



**Fig. 4.** *Remains of blue color in the cuneiform signs after cleaning the surface of DNf in 2001 (© Parse-Pasargadae Research Foundation).*

and continues to the second line (right in the middle of the verb) and to the Elamite version (sign "*iš*") and Babylonian version (sign "*muš*"). It is not clear whether the fracture was already on the surface of the rock face when the stone-cutters started to engrave DNf. In photographs taken at the time of cleaning the surface of DNf (in

2001), it is clear that the cuneiform signs were inlaid or incrusted with blue pigment (Fig. 4) like other inscriptions at the site, both long (DNa and DNb) and short (DNc-d-e). According to Nagel (2013, p. 608), the blue pigment is "Egyptian blue."[5] A close examination by the authors on the 27th of January 2019 revealed that there are still a few remaining traces of blue pigment in the cuneiform signs.

Like the other caption inscriptions (DNc-d-e), DNf relates to and describes the figure below it. Unlike DNc-d-e, DNf includes a verb, describing what the figure does.[6] Put differently, the form and meaning of the verbs attested in all three versions appear to be connected with the figure. The name of the figure is lost in all versions, but his description with the ethnonym *\*pātišuvariš*, "Patischorian," can be confidently reconstructed by comparison to DNc.

Despite uncertainties of interpretation, the inscription evidently characterizes the figure below as performing a ceremonial task or gesture in front of the Great King.

## Texts

### Old Persian

#### Transliteration:

1- [ x-x-x-x(-x) : p-a-t-i]-š-u-v-r-i-š : d-˹aˋ-r-y-v-h-u-

2- [ š : x-š-a-y-ϑ-i-y]-h-y-a : a-f-r-[?]-a-t-i-y

#### Comments:

1- The name of the figure is completely lost. It might have four to five signs.

The reconstruction of "[p-a-t-i]-š-u-v-r-i-š" is based on DNc (1). For the etymology of "*pātišuvariš*" see Schmitt (2014, p. 232f.).

2- "*Dārayavahauš*" is the gen./dat. sg. of "*Dārayava.u-*,". Therefore, the sign "š" must be the first sign of the second line. Considering "[x-š-a-y-ϑ-i-y]-h-y-a" as the following word, one may assume nine cuneiform signs (including word separator) in the damaged part of the second line.

a-f-r-[?]-a-t-i-y :

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[5]    For the use of colors on the royal tomb of Darius I see also Nagel 2010, pp. 140-154.

[6]    Note that the Akkadian verb (which has the most secure interpretation) is a present-future (= imperfect) form which means the Old Persian and Elamite verbs appear to represent the same "present-future" tense.

Given the possible interpretations of the Elamite and Babylonian versions (especially Babylonian), an Old Persian verb with the meaning "to greet, to bless" (etc.) seems to be called for.[7] However, one should consider that all of the textual elements (especially the verbs) of such a trilingual inscription are not necessarily exact renderings of each other. As a result, the Old Persian verb may not necessarily have the same meaning as the Babylonian (and perhaps Elamite) verb does.

The initial impression, from the picture taken from ground level on the 23rd of October 2018 (Fig. 1) led the authors to identify the sign "y" between "r" and "a," hence "a-f-r-[y]-a-t-i-y (*ā-fra-yāti)" perhaps "he comes forward to." Because of the difficulties in proper analysis of such a verb,[8] one may consider another possibility, i.e., "a-f-r-[ϑ]-a-t-i-y" (ā-fra-θāti), "he speaks forth to." A dative would seem possible after such a compound verb of speaking, and the simple verb θā- is followed by a dative/genitive at DB IV.55 and elsewhere. There is a great number of Vedic and Avestan verbs of speaking which can be prefixed with either ā- or fra-; but it is difficult to find examples of both these preverbs prefixed to the same verb of speaking.

## Elamite

### Transliteration:

1- [ᴰᴵˢx-x-x(-x) ᴰᴵˢba-ut-ti-iš-mar-ri]-iš ᴰᴵˢda-ri-ia-ma-u-ˈišˈ ᴰᴵˢEŠŠANA(-)ir(-)me(-)na-ma-ak

### Comments:

3- The Elamite personal name is lost. Expected is the personal determinative (used in inscriptions) "ᴰᴵˢ" followed by about three cuneiform signs.

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[7] One could therefore think of a Old Persian cognate of Avestan "frāy-" (Bartholomae, 1904, cols. 1016-1017) and read "a-f-r-[i-n]-a-t-i-y (*ā-frînāti)." From the point of view of Old Iranian historical verb morphology and sentence syntax, and also given *ikarrabi* in the Babylonian version, this would be the most plausible restoration of the verb. Epigraphically, however, this solution is not attractive: the fracture is simply too narrow to contain "-i-n-."

[8] The root "yā-" is not attested in the Old Persian corpus and it would be hard to expect it while there is already "ay-." On the other hand, in Avestan and Vedic texts it is attested with the meaning "to go, to drive" (Bartholomae, 1904, col. 1282; Mayrhofer, 1996, pp. 407-408). "frayāi" is attested in the Avesta with the meaning "to go ahead, to proceed" (Bartholomae, 1904, col. 989). Another problem is the order of the preverbs ā-fra- before root yā-. It is true that such an order has one parallel in the Rig Veda (RV 7.24.1) ā- …. pra yāhi "Drive forth to (it)," but this could be poetic word order, as it is never found in Vedic prose. A more serious objection is syntactic as we would expect the goal of the movement expressed by this compound verb to be in the accusative, as it is at RV 7.24.1, not in the dative.

**Fig. 5.** *A closer look at the inscription*
*(© Parse-Pasargadae Research Foundation and Gilan Survey http://www.gilan-survey.com/).*
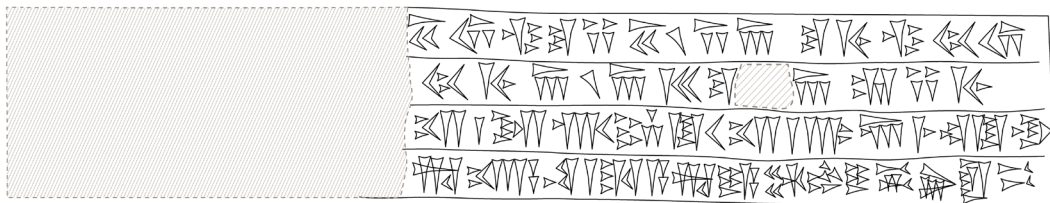


**Fig. 6.** *Drawing of DNf by M. S. Pezeshk.*

[$^{DIŠ}$*ba-ut-ti-iš-mar-ri*]-*iš*:

Reconstruction of the Elamite ethnonym is according to DNc (3). In PFA, there are two distinct forms, the gentilic *Battišmarriš* (with determinative $^{HAL}$ in PF-NN 1581; but also without determinative, describing cattle, in Fort. 1748-101:57 and Fort. 1889-101:17'); and the place-name *Battišmarran* (with determinative $^{AŠ}$, PF-NN 2654:04'', Fort. 1298-101:12', 22, 27', Fort. 2001-101:09f. (twice), 11f. (twice), 13f. (twice), 21, 23f.; Fort. 2168-101:15', 18', 29', 37', 38' (KI+MIN), 39' (KI+MIN), Fort. 2170-101:17'). Also of interest is $^{AŠ}$*bat-ti-iš-mar-rak$_0$-kaš* Fort. 0553-103:08f. (comparable to such paired place-names as *Hadaraš/Hadarakkaš, Matezziš/Matezikaš, Memaš/Memakaš*).[9]

EŠŠANA *ir me-na-ma-ak:*

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[9]   Patischorians and other tribes in PFA will be discussed more by W. F. M. Henkelman (forthcoming).

The most attractive solution would be "*ir me-na-ma-ak*", i.e., resumptive pronoun + Conj. IIm sg. of a verb *\*mena-*. Admittedly, the verb *mena-* has not been attested in Achaemenid Elamite so far, but there is a range of Elamite theophoric names that end in *-mena* (*Humban-nu-mena, Umman-mena-nu, Attamena, Nannimena,* etc). In those names, Hinz & Koch (1987, p. 914) and Zadok (1984, p. 28) suggest the meaning "magnificence, power" for *mena-* (taken as a noun), which is a possible but unsubstantiated solution. In other words, interpretation of *mena-* in DNf essentially depends on the Old Persian and Babylonian versions. One could speculate on a meaning "invocation" (in theophoric names), "invoke, address" (in DNf), or something in that range. The resumptive pronoun *ir* may refer to "Darius the King" as the patient of the intransitive-passive Elamite verb form, consistent with the marking of the king as the indirect object of the OP and Akk. verbs.[10]

## Babylonian

### Transliteration:

1- [ᵐx-x-x(-x) ᴸᵁ*pa-id-di-iš-ḫu*]-*ri-iš* ⌈*a*⌉-⌈*na*⌉ ᵐ*da-a-ri-ia-*⌈*muš*⌉ LUGAL *i-GA-ir-ra-bi*

### Comments:

4- Even though the name in Babylonian version is lost, it certainly preceded by a single vertical sign as determinative for male persons, i.e. "ᵐ." The calculation of space suggests that the name might have had three cuneiform signs.

[ᴸᵁ*pa-id-di-iš-ḫu*]-*ri-iš*: Reconstruction of the ethnonym is due to DNc (5).

*i-GA-ir-ra-bi*:

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10  There are of course other ways of splitting ᴰᴵˢEŠŠANA *ir*(-)*me*(-)*na-ma-ak*. One would be to read "*-ir-me*" and compare it with, e.g., DB II.24-5, ᴰᴵˢ*da-tur-ši-iš ir-ma ši-in-nu-ip*, "they came against Daturšiš" (cf. Reiner, 1969, p. 79; Hinz & Koch, 1987, p.776). Representation of postposition *-ma* as *-me* in a royal inscription (as opposed to the PFA) would be odd, however. As to the rest of the phrase in case of reading *-ir-me*: *-na* could be connected to *-ir-me* as a calque on the genitive/dative construction in the Old Persian version. Such an interpretation can also be supported by the Babylonian version, i.e., "*ana šarri*." Then, *ma-ak* is perhaps a 3rd. Sg. Conj II. of a separate verb *ma-*. This verbal root is ambiguous. There is a semi-auxiliary verb *ma-* (see Malbran-Labat, 1986 and Grillot & Vallat, 1975), but it is not easy to explain the current inscription from this perspective. One could argue that *ma-ak* is to be connected to *-ir-me-na* as a makeshift verbalisation of *ir-me* (+ calqued 'genitival' *-na*), hence "PN the Patischorian who is 'againsting'/approaching Darius the King"), but this is clearly not the most attractive solution. Finally, one might read *na-ma-ak*, Conj IIm. of na-, "to speak, to say", hence "PN the Patischorian who is speaking against/in the direction of Darius the King" (i.e., "addresses Darius the King"?). A Conj.II form of na- (usually Conj.III) is not easy to explain, however.

The interpretation of the verb is quite problematic. First of all, there are three orthographic problems in the verb: a. how to read the sign GA; b. the broken writing of the second syllable, i.e., -GA-*ir*- instead of the usual -*ar*-;[11] and the "überhängender Vokal" on -*bi*.[12]

The most important problem in this verb is how to read the sign GA. In Naqsh-e Rostam inscriptions, GA usually represents *ga*,[13] while *ka* is written with KA[14] and *qa* is written with QA.[15] However, in the Babylonian versions of other Achaemenid royal inscriptions, GA can also represent *qá*.[16]

If one considers that GA represents *ga* as in other inscriptions in Naqsh-e Rostam, the reading *i-ga-ir-ra-bi* yields a form of a non-existent verb \**garābu.* Reading GA as *qá*, thus *i-qá-ir-ra-bi*, yields an erroneous form of *qerēbu* "to approach" (for expected *iqarrib/iqerreb*).

There is another possibility to read GA as *kà*. *Kà* has not been attested in the Achaemenid royal inscriptions so far. The value *kà* for GA is attested in "peripheral" Akkadian (Akkadian texts from El-Amarna, Boghazkoy and so forth) as well as in Elamite texts, (Steve, 1992, p. 94; Labat, 1994, p. 320). Interchangeable use of the signs GA and KA in Elamite texts (e.g., *šu-šu-un-ka* and *šu-šu-un-ga* in König, 1965, p. 178, footnote 5) may be a key element here. An overall study in the Elamite corpus especially in Neo- and Achaemenid Elamite would bring useful results regarding the possible Elamite origin of this value.

Reading GA as *kà* however, offers a grammatically acceptable form of an appropriate verb, *karābu* "to bless" (CAD K, pp. 192-198). CAD (p. 197) cites a usage of *karābu* with the nuance "to make the gesture of adoration or greeting – a) in descriptions of figural representations" which would be especially suitable here. If *karābu* is the verb which was intended by the engraver, using the sign GA instead of KA may have been due to the lack of adequate space.

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[11] One can also observe such a broken writing in DNc and perhaps in DNf, where *pa*- follows by -*id*-, i.e., ᴸᵁ*pa-id-di-iš-ḫu-ri-iš.*

[12] "Überhängender Vokale" are frequent in Neo- and Late-Babylonian texts. See *GAG*, § 10 g, §18 e, and § 82 e.

[13] *a-ga-a* passim, ᴷᵁᴿ*za-ra-an-ga* (DNa 13)*,* ᵐ*ú-mu-ur-ga-'* (DNa 14), *ga-áš-ra-ak* (DNb 22, 25).

[14] *ak-ka-'-i-ki* (DNa 25), ᴷᵁᴿ*ka-at-pa-tuk-ka* (DNa 16), *ṣe-ba-a-ka* (DNa 24, DNb 6, 12, 17), *im-min₄-da-ak-ka* (DNa 27, 29), *ḫa-da-(a)-ka* (DNb 16, 18).

[15] ᴷᵁᴿ*qa-du-ú* (DNa 19), *a-qa-pa* (DNb 14).

[16] *i-qá-ab-bi* (XPc^{1-2} 8, XPc³15), and *i-qá-bi* (XPm).

**Translation (based on the Babylonian version):**

[Personal Name, Pati]schorian, invokes blessing upon Darius the King.

## Encrusted and Covered with Shadow: Why has DNf not been seen until today?

Herzfeld and Sarre are the only researchers who suggested the existence of more captions accompanying other figures than the weapon bearers on the left side and the throne bearers ("Vielleicht sind auch noch andere Beischriften vorhanden," 1910, p. 16). Photographic documentation has not favoured study of the right side of the top register of the tomb of Darius I; the campaign of the Oriental Institute at Naqsh-e Rostam produced no clear image of it.[17] Photographs taken by Grunewald on behalf of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in 1975 and 1976, show almost no trace of the inscription but do indicate dirt deposits and lichens in the area of DNf (Figs. 7-10). It appears that the inscription only became visible as the Parse-Pasargadae Research Foundation started cleaning the surface of the royal tomb in 2001 (Figs. 11-12), but the cleaning staff did not report the new inscription, perhaps because they assumed that it was already known.

## Unarmed Persians: Mourning or Royal Audience?

The "unarmed Persians" on the right side of the tomb are shown raising their left hands to their mouths, palms toward their faces. A comparison between the figures on the left frame with those unarmed figures on the right frame shows that there are some differences in their attire, headgear, hairdressing, and beard.[18] While the figure of Aspathines has a long beard, other attendants on the right and left frames appear to have the same short-cropped beard. The figures most similar to each other are the figure of Gobryas and that of Patischorian below DNf. Both of them appear to have the same garment, headgear (referred to by Schmidt (1970, p. 86) as the "low fillet-like cap"), hairdressing and beard. More discussions on those differences in detail are not possible because of the erosion of the right figure.[19] While other labels

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[17] For the photographs of the Royal Tomb No. I published by the Oriental Institute see Schmidt (1970, Pl. 18-39).

[18] For a detail discussion on the appearance of Aspathines, Gobryas and other attendants see Garrison (2017, p. 406).

[19] One may find more detailed discussions regarding bringing the dynamics of the scene at Naqsh-e Rostam in line with that of the dynamics of the Apadana in Garrison (ibid, p. 410).

*Fig. 7.* DAI photograph depicting the dirt deposits on the right side of the top register in the 1970s.



*Fig. 8.* A closer look at DAI Photograph depicting two top unarmed Persians covered with dirt deposits in the 1970s.

**Fig. 9.** *Top figures, dirt deposits and lichens around them from left view (©DAI).*



**Fig. 10.** *Middle figures, showing the damage to the figure, the dirt deposits, and the lichens from left view (©DAI).*

*Fig. 11. Removing dirt deposits, and the lichens from DNf by Hassan Rahsaz in 2001*
*(© Parse-Pasargadae Research Foundation).*



*Fig. 12. The situation of DNf after removing dirt deposits and lichens in 2001*
*(© Parse-Pasargadae Research Foundation).*

of the attendants such as DNc and DNd have some differences with DNf, this new inscription shares some features with them such as the name of the individual (which is lost), his tribal/clan identifier (Patischorian), and his linkage to the king (the verb attested in DNf and the titles of weapon bearers at the left frame). One is thus inclined to consider that Patischorian on the right frame may have had a similar rank/status to that of Gobryas and Aspathines. Like them, he may have held a high office at the royal court (i.e., not that of a priest, but an exceptionally important Persian noble).[20] There are several interpretations of the gesture of the attendants on the right frame. It seems that in the absence of DNf, every interpretation is faced with some difficulties. Erich Schmidt (1970, p. 87a) was the first to interpret the gesture as "an attitude of mourning,"[21] later commentators offered other intepretations.[22]

More recently, M. B. Garrison (2017, pp. 406-408) discussed that gesture in connection with Persepolitan glyptic evidence. According to him, there are "two distinct contexts in which the gesture is made at the time of Darius:
In the direct presence of the king (tomb façade, central panel reliefs from Apadana, and doorjamb reliefs in the Throne Hall);
In ceremonial procession toward paired stepped and tower structures (Persepolis glyptic)."

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[20] The authors offer repeated thanks to M. B. Garrison for his valuable comments on these matters. It is necessary to indicate that the comments of the authors in this part are preliminary.

[21] Schmidt (1970, footnote 61) also noted the "attitude of respect is illustrated in the audience reliefs of Persepolis. It seems that, for him, the particular nuance of "mourning" arises not from the gesture of the relief but from the tomb.

[22] For example, Hinz (1969, p. 63, footnote 4) interpreted it as a prophylactic act (*"das heilige Feuer auf dem Altar nicht zu verunreinigen"*). Root (1979, p. 179) rejected the idea that these figures are meant to be shown mourning. She dated "the planning and execution" of Darius' tomb and its inscriptions to "the first half of Darius' reign" (ibid, p. 75). For her, the gesture of the unarmed Persians seems rather to be the same gesture of "bowing officials" in front of the king that is depicted on reliefs at Persepolis, i.e., "treasury reliefs" and "the north door reliefs of the Throne Hall" (ibid, p. 179). P. Briant (2002, p. 211) also concludes that those figures might have represented an act of mourning. Because of the lack of epigraphical evidence which could support one of these interpretations or even propose an alternative in this regard, von Gall (2009) concludes that both interpretations seem problematic. For discussions regarding the reliefs of the royal tombs see also Calmeyer (1975a-b).

He argues that such a gesture may "predate the tomb of Darius" (ibid, p. 408).[23] Based on the Persepolitan glyptic evidence, he suggests that "the attendants on the tomb façade are not standing before the king but moving toward him in a ritual procession that, based upon Persepolitan glyptic, would have instantly signified a religious setting" (ibid, p. 410).

The discovery of DNf above the top unarmed figure and the act of the figure described in the text could help researchers discuss such a gesture with more appropriate information. It seems that the broader suggestion of Root (1979, p. 179) regarding "the act of respect" rather than "mourning" is a good place to start in this regard. She suggested that they are "looking toward the face of the king." That is why they raise their left hands.

The verbal analysis in DNf (based mostly on the Babylonian verb *karābu*) would suggest that the figure invokes blessing upon the King. Such an interpretation of the verbs may imply a religious setting for this gesture and may encourage the following idea of Garrison (2017, p. 408):

"We may venture a proposition that, based upon the glyptic evidence from the Fortification archive, the king and his planners have deliberately transposed a gesture, the hand held over/near the mouth, from a ritualized context that is primarily a religious one (sacrifice on a stepped structure before a tower structure) to ritualized settings that are both openly religious and socio-political..."

With the possible semantic range of the verbs in DNf the debate on a numinous reading of the scene at Naqsh-e Rostam, as proposed in Garrison's 2011 paper, receives a new impulse.

## DNg: Another lost inscription?

If we consider that symmetry plays a significant role in Achaemenid art -especially in the case of the figures on the Achaemenid royal tombs- we might very well expect there to be another matching inscription, i.e., "DNg" above the second unarmed figure. Severe damage to the surface of the rock at that particular spot makes it almost impossible to find any trace of such an inscription above this figure, at least from the photographs (Figs. 13-14). However, this does not prevent us from suggesting the existence of a "DNg"

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[23] For Pre-Achaemenid evidence see also Stronach (2002) who compares the audience scenes of Til Barsip's wall paintings (Neo-Assyrian period) and Persepolis (especially Apadana reliefs). For discussions regarding the Assyrian paintings especially in Til Barsip see Albenda (2005).

**Fig. 13.** *Upper part of the middle figure (taken on 4ᵗʰ of January 2019 by M. A. Mosallanezhad).*



**Fig. 14.** *A closer look at the upper part of the middle figure (© Parse-Pasargadae Research Foundation and Gilan Survey http://www.gilan-survey.com/).*

which could contain the name and title (or ethnonym) of the middle unarmed figure and describe him with a ceremonial task or his title/ethnonym or duty at the royal court like DNc-d. Further investigations, with suitable equipment, on the surface of the tomb, might reveal whether there was another inscription below DNf.

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