

**Old Persian**  
**intensive summer 2024**  
**Yale University NELC S384**

ONLINE VIA ZOOM

Summer Session A      June 1 to August 2

MWF 9:00–11:15am

Instructor: Prof. Kevin van Bladel

Contact: kevin.vanbladel@yale.edu

Office Hours: by appointment or at the end of any class session—just stay on Zoom to chat.

This intensive course covers the ancient Iranian language called Old Persian in its historical and material context in the Achaemenian Empire. The course consists of philological investigation of the inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings. Students will learn to read the language in the original cuneiform script and cover almost the entire corpus of texts. They will also study the place of Old Persian in Indo-European linguistics and within the Iranian languages as a family. The course will culminate in an examination in which students translate inscriptions from photographs and carry out historical-linguistic analyses.

The Achaemenid dynasty conquered all of Western Asia and ruled, from Greece and Egypt to India, from 550 BCE until the Macedonian invasion under Alexander in the 330s BCE. For these two hundred years Old Persian was a major language of the court personnel and the ruling elite. The language is attested in a series of inscriptions, some of them quite long, stating clearly the ideology of imperial power as expressed by the Achaemenids, outlining the extent of their empire and the imperial deeds that they themselves considered noteworthy. These inscriptions are the earliest physical documents in any Iranian language and are part of ongoing debates about the origins of Zoroastrianism and the fidelity of Greek historians of the Persians such as Herodotus. They are among the most important sources for historians in telling the history of this first “world empire” against which the ancient Greeks defined themselves.

Substantial class time will be spent on the language and reading of Old Persian in its original, cuneiform script, and royal texts issued by these kings.

**Course Books:**

- ❖ P. Oktor Skjærvø, *An Introduction to Old Persian*, 2016 edition. (pdf provided)
- ❖ Matt Waters, *Ancient Persia: A Concise History of the Achaemenid Empire, 550–330 BCE*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Yale Bookstore)

All other required readings will be distributed by the instructor.

**Grading and Assignments** A = 93–100, A- = 90–92, B+ = 87–89, B = 83–86, B- = 80–82, C+ = 77–79, C = 73–76, C- = 70–72, D+ = 67–69, D = 63–66, D- = 60–62, E = 0–59

Active participation in the discussion of course materials is a basic requirement and is assumed.

- 3 quizzes (vocabulary, 5 pts. per quiz) (15%) **Sessions 3, 6 & 12.**
- Midterm exam (20%) **Session 8, during session** (June 23)
- Final exam (30%) **Session 15, during session** (July 9)
- Daily in-class readings of Old Persian cuneiform (35%).

*Note: Regardless of your point total, you must pass the final to pass the class!*

## **Learning Objectives**

Students finishing this course will be able to read Old Persian inscriptions in the original cuneiform, and will have read most of the extant corpus of texts. They will understand the history of ancient Persian and its place and relationship to other Indo-European languages. They will know enough of the history of the Achaemenid dynasty and its empire to conduct further research on the topic.

## **Statement on Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is a core institutional value at Yale. It means, among other things, truth in presentation, diligence and precision in citing works and ideas we have used, and acknowledging our collaborations with others. In view of our commitment to maintaining the highest standards of academic integrity, the Graduate School Code of Conduct specifically prohibits the following forms of behavior: cheating on examinations, problem sets and all other forms of assessment; falsification and/or fabrication of data; plagiarism, that is, the failure in a dissertation, essay or other written exercise to acknowledge ideas, research, or language taken from others; and multiple submission of the same work without obtaining explicit written permission from both instructors before the material is submitted. Students found guilty of violations of academic integrity are subject to one or more of the following penalties: written reprimand, probation, suspension (noted on a student's transcript) or dismissal (noted on a student's transcript).

These policies apply in this course to undergraduates as well as graduate students. For more on this topic, see <http://ctl.yale.edu/writing/wr-instructor-resources/addressing-academic-integrity-and-plagiarism/preempting-plagiarism>.

## **SCHEDULE**

### **WEEK 1**

**Session 1. June 7.** Introduction to the Achaemenids. Historical Geography. Old Persian Script.

- Lessons 1–2.

### **Session 2. June 9.**

- Lessons 3–4.
- Pierre Briant, “The History of the Persian Empire 550–330 BC,” in *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia*, ed. J. Curtis and N. Tallis, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 12–17
- Matthew Stolper, “Achaemenid Languages and Inscriptions,” in *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia*, ed. J. Curtis and N. Tallis, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 18–24.
- Jan Tavernier, “Old Persian,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran*, ed. Daniel Potts, 2013, pp. 638–657.

### **Session 3. June 11.**

- Lesson 5–6 + **Quiz 1.**
- Waters, *Ancient Persia*, pp. 5–34

## **WEEK 2**

### **Session 4. June 14.**

- Lessons 7–8.
- Waters, *Ancient Persia*, pp. 35–72.
- On the Cyrus Cylinder:
  - <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/cyrus-cylinder/>
  - <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/cyrus-cylinder/cyrus-cylinder-translation/>

### **Session 5. June 16.**

- Lessons 9–10.
- D.T. Potts, “Cyrus the Great and the Kingdom of Anshan,” in *Birth of the Persian Empire*, ed. Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Sarah Stewart, London: I.B. Tauris, 2005, 7–28.
- Wouter Henkelman, “Cyrus the Persian and Darius the Elamite: A Case of Mistaken Identity,” in *Herodot und das Persische Weltreich / Herodotus and the Persian Empire: Akten des 3. Internationalen Kolloquiums zum Thema “Vorderasien im Spannungsfeld klassischer und altorientalischer Überlieferungen” Innsbruck, 24.-28. November 2008*, ed. Robert Rollinger, Brigitte Truschneegg, and Reinhold Bichtler, 2011, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, pp. 577–634.

### **Session 6. June 18.**

- Lessons 11–12 + **Quiz 2.**
- Waters, *Ancient Persia*, pp. 73–91.

## **WEEK 3**

### **Session 7. June 21.**

- Lessons 12–13.
- Waters, *Ancient Persia*, pp. 92–113.

### **Session 8. June 23.** Lesson 14–15

- Lessons 14–15.
- **MIDTERM EXAM**

### **Session 9. June 25.**

- Lesson 16.
- Josef Wiesehöfer, “The Achaemenid Empire,” in *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires: State Power from Assyria to Byzantium*, ed. Ian Morris and Walter Scheidel, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 66–98.

## **WEEK 4**

### **Session 10. June 28.**

- Lesson 17.
- Waters, *Ancient Persia*, pp. 114–133.

### **Session 11. June 30.**

- Lesson 18.
- Waters, *Ancient Persia*, pp. 145–156.

### **Session 12. July 2.**

- Lesson 19 + **Quiz 3.**
- Waters, *Ancient Persia*, pp. 157–175.

## **WEEK 5**

### **Session 13. July 5.**

- Lesson 20.
- Waters, *Ancient Persia*, pp. 176–196.

**Session 14. July 7.** Reading Bisitun inscription extensively.

**Session 15. July 9.** Reading Bisitun inscription. **FINAL EXAM.**

Old Persian Flashcards

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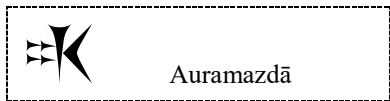
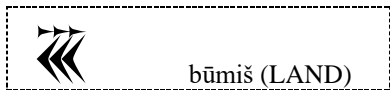
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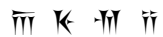
𐌚𐌚 xšāyathiya (KING)



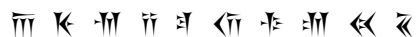
### Tips based on sign frequency

You should learn the most frequently occurring signs first. The following figures are based on the Bisitun inscription.

These four signs account for 45% of the instances.



These ten signs account for about two thirds of the instances.



These fourteen signs account for about four fifths of the instances.

