

NAQSH-E RUSTAM

Naqsh-e Rostam (Persian: Naq̄še Rostam Persian pronunciation: [næyʃeros'tæm]) is an ancient necropolis located about 12 km northwest of Persepolis, in Fars Province, Iran, with the best group of ancient rock reliefs cut into the cliff, from both the Achaemenid and Sassanid periods. It lies a few hundred meters from Naqsh-e Rostam, with a further group of Sassanid reliefs.

The oldest relief at Naqsh-e Rostam dates to c. 1000 BC. Though it is severely damaged, it depicts a faint image of a man with unusual headgear and is thought to be Elamite in origin. The depiction is part of a larger mural, most of which was removed at the command of Bahram II. The man with the unusual cap gave the site its name, Naqsh-e Rostam, "Rostam Inscription" because the relief was locally believed to be a depiction of the mythical hero Rostam.

Four tombs belonging to Achaemenid kings are carved out of the rock face at a considerable height above the ground.

The tombs are known locally as the 'Persian crosses', after the shape of the facades of the tombs. The entrance to each tomb is at the center of each cross, which opens onto a small chamber, where the king lay in a sarcophagus.

The horizontal beam of each of the tomb's facades is believed to be a replica of the entrance of the palace at Persepolis. The order of the tombs in Naqsh-e Rostam, from left to right is: Darius II, Artaxerxes I, Darius I, Xerxes I

One of the tombs is explicitly identified by an accompanying inscription as the tomb of Darius I the Great (c. 522-486 BC). The other three tombs are believed to be those of Xerxes I (c. 486-465 BC), Artaxerxes I (c. 465-424 BC), and Darius II (c. 423-404 BC) respectively. A fifth unfinished one might be that of Artaxerxes III, who reigned at the longest two years, but is more likely that of Darius III (c. 336-330 BC), last of the Achaemenid dynasts.

The tombs were looted following the conquest of the Achaemenid Empire by Alexander the Great.

Seven over-life-sized rock reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam depict monarchs of the Sassanid period.

The founder of the Sassanid Empire is seen being handed the ring of kingship by Ahura Mazda. In the inscription, which also bears the oldest attested use of the term 'Iran' (see "etymology of 'Iran'" for details), Ardashir admits to betraying his pledge to Artabanus IV (the Persians having been a vassal state of the Arsacid Parthians), but legitimizes his action on the grounds that Ahura Mazda had wanted him to do so.

This is the most famous of the Sassanid rock reliefs and depicts Shapur's victory over two Roman emperors, Valerian and Philip the Arab. The more elaborate version of this rock relief is at Bishapur.

On each side of the king, who is depicted with an oversized sword, figures face the king. On the left stand five figures, perhaps members of the king's family (three having diadems, suggesting they were royalty). On the right stand three courtiers, one of which may be Kartir. This relief is to the immediate right of the investiture inscription of Ardashir (see above), and partially replaces the much older relief that gives Naqsh-e Rostam its name.

The first equestrian relief, located immediately below the fourth tomb (perhaps that of Darius II), depicts the king battling a mounted Roman soldier.

The second equestrian relief, located immediately below the tomb of Darius I, is divided into two registers, an upper and a lower one. In the upper register, the king appears to be forcing a Roman enemy from his horse. In the lower register, the king is again battling a mounted Roman soldier.

Both reliefs depict a dead enemy under the hooves of the king's horse.

In this relief, the king is depicted as receiving the ring of kingship from a female figure that is frequently assumed to be the divinity Aredvi Sura Anahita. However, the king is not depicted in a pose that would be expected in the presence of a divinity, and it is hence likely that the woman is a relative, perhaps Queen Shapur dokhtak.

This relief is below tomb 3 (perhaps that of Artaxerxes I) and depicts Hormizd forcing an enemy (perhaps Papak of Armenia) from his horse. Immediately above the relief and below the tomb is a badly damaged relief of what appears to be Shapur II (c. 309-379) accompanied by courtiers.

In 1923, the German archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld made casts of the inscriptions on the tomb of Darius I. Since 1946, these casts have been held in the archives of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, DC.

Naqsh-e Rostam was excavated for several seasons between 1936 and 1939 by a team from the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, led by Erich Schmidt.



