

RICHARD FRYE'S VIEWS ABOUT DARIUS AND GAUMATA ON THE BAHISTUN INSCRIPTION

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It will be interesting to see what Richard Frye as an expert on Achaemenian history has to say. In one of his comments on the reliability of Darius' claim in his Behistun inscription expressed in a brief article *Atash-e Dorun, the Fire Within*, Volume II (edited by C. G. Cereti and F. Vajifdar, (2003, pp. 171-175), Frye seems to doubt Darius' story since the Babylonian documents mention the rule of Bardiya only for a short time and not for the entire period Cambysis was campaigning in Egypt and so Bardiya may have found it convenient after he could establish himself well to revolt against his brother and usurp the throne. However, as Bardiya became a popular ruler according to the Babylonian documents and Herodotus (111.67), Darius could not possibly admit killing a son of Cyrus and had to create a story. He blamed the Median Magian Gaumata for the murder of Bardiya, leading to Magophonia or execution of the Magis in the realm. Frye adds: Herodotus (111.72) embellishes the story of the overthrow of Gaumata, but he also says that Darius generally approved of lying to secure one's goal" that seemed to me to be so hard to swallow because of his multiple admonitions for following the truth, but truth is hard to gauge. Frye also wonders: "Does his addition to his story imply that Herodotus himself seems to have had doubts about Darius' story. Frye, however, suggests that his explanation "best accounts for all the data and fits with what we know about the place and time of Darius' accession." But he wonders where are the temples Darius claims to have destroyed and "was there a religious division between Medes and Persians, not only in this regard but also in support of the teachings of Zarathushtra as opposed to the old Iranian faith," an issue I have also raised here. However, in a style so characteristic of him, Frye regards his response as a rather "simplistic explanation" and states; "reality may have been much different, such as conflicts between followers of Zarathushtra and those of the old Iranian deities," a possibility he refers to once again and it is around this issue that I believe any answer to Darius' veracity and motives lies.

Bryant also seems to doubt Darius' story but on different but highly convincing grounds as reviewed here succinctly.