

Persian language

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OLD PERSIAN is the name applied to the Persian language used in the cuneiform inscriptions of the Achaemenian dynasty; it can be localized as the language of southwestern Persia, or Persis in the narrower sense, and was the vernacular speech of the Achaemenian rulers. The OLD PERSIAN inscriptions are commonly accompanied also by translations into Elamite and Accadian, engraved in other types of cuneiform writing, and sometimes by an Aramaic version or an Egyptian hieroglyphic version. Linguistically, OLD PERSIAN belongs to the Iranian branch of Indo-Iranian or Aryan, which is one of the main divisions of the Indo-European family of languages.

THE IRANIAN LANGUAGES' are, like many other sets of languages, divisible on a chronological basis into three periods: Old Iranian, Middle Iranian, and New Iranian. They were spread in ancient times over the territory bounded by the Persian Gulf on the south, by Mesopotamia and Armenia on the west, and by the Caucasus Mountains; to the east of the Caspian Sea they extended considerably to the north of the present boundary of Iran and Afghanistan, into the Pamir plateau of Turkestan, and thence approximately along the course of the Indus River to the Gulf of Oman. This is even today approximately the area of Iranian-speaking peoples, although at all periods there have been islands of non-Iranian speech within it, and islands of Iranian speech outside it.