



DĀTA

DĀTA, Old Iranian term for “law” (originally the neuter verbal adjective *dāta-* from the root *dā-* “to put, place,” thus “(the law) set/laid down”; cf. Ger. *Gesetz* and Eng. *law* respectively), attested both in Avestan texts (Old and Younger Av. *dāta-*) and in Achaemenid royal inscriptions (Old Pers. *dāta-*; Kent, *Old Persian*, p. 189). The Old Persian term was incorporated into the languages of several neighboring peoples during the Achaemenid and subsequent periods (e.g., El. *da-ad-da-um*, *da-at-tam*⁶, *da-tam*⁵, *da-ad-da(-ma)* [cf. Hinz and Koch, pp. 246-47, 256, 298], Late Babylonian *da-a-ta/ti/tu*, Hebrew *dt-*, biblical Aram. *d't*, *dāt*, inscriptional Aram. [Xanthos] *dt-h*, Syr. *dt-*, Arm. *dat* (cf. Mid. Pers., NPers. *dād*, etc.).

In the Achaemenid royal inscriptions Old Persian *dāta-* is used in a dual sense. In texts of **Darius I** (522-486 B.C.E.) all the references are to the king’s law, by which order was established and guaranteed in his empire (DB I.23: “these countries obeyed my law”; DNa 21-22=DSe 20-21=XPh 18-19: “my law—that held them (firm)”; DSe 37-39 “my law—of that they are afraid”). In two instances in Xerxes’ so-called “*daiva* inscription,” however, the law of **Ahura Mazdā** is mentioned (“obey that law which Auramazdā has established”; the man who obeys “both becomes happy while living and blessed when dead”; XPh 49-56; Kent, *Old Persian*, pp. 151-52). Divine law thus apparently applied not only to order on earth but also to welfare in the life to come.

Both these meanings, “king’s law” and “divine law,” recurred elsewhere. In the royal decree of Artaxerxes I (465-25 B.C.E.) quoted in chapter 7 of the Book of Ezra “the law (*dātā*) of your God (i.e., Yahweh)” and “the law of the king” (*dātā*



dī malkā) are mentioned side by side. Other evidence in the Old Testament confirms this dual meaning; it suffices to mention only the famous immutable “law of the Medes and the Persians” (Daniel 6:9, 6:13, 6:16; Esther 1:19).

It is not surprising that the expression “the king’s law/decreed (*dātu ša šarri*)” is also attested from Babylonia, but only from the reign of Darius I and later. The phrase occurs in several texts but in obviously different senses (*Assyrian Dictionary*, pp. 122-23). On one hand, the delivery of barley and other produce and the payment due are the subject, whereas in other instances (e.g., a deed recording a slave sale) there are references to trials before a judge whose behavior and decision were to be guided by a law. It is thus evident that this law had been newly imposed in Babylonia by the Achaemenids, most probably by Darius.

It was owing to Darius’ legal reforms or, stated more prudently, to his introduction of a special Persian form of law that so many peoples of the empire borrowed the Old Persian term *dāta-*, in semantic contexts obviously extending beyond the native Jewish, Mesopotamian, and other conceptions of “law.” Furthermore, there is no doubt that these new developments in the legal and juridical systems were based on royal decrees, which had the force of law. T. Cuyler Young, Jr., correctly noted (p. 95) the passage from DB 1.23-24 in which Darius seems to have equated his law with his command: “By the favor of Auramazdā these countries obeyed my law; as has been said to them by me, thus they used to act.” In one document from his twelfth year there is mention of a high official *ša muḥḥi dātu* “in charge of the law,” and the title *dātabara* is also attested.

The only independent (untranslated) attestation of Old Persian *dātam* in the Elamite texts is in a Persepolis tablet (PF 1980.31; Hallock, pp. 583-84) in which the term “a former law” occurs, probably referring to a kind of decreed tariff and surely not to a law.

The use of the Avestan term *dāta-* (*AirWb.*, col. 726) corresponds to some extent to the Achaemenid dual usage. On one hand, there are the divine “laws of Ahura Mazdā” (e.g., *Y.* 46.15, 21.1); the religious “law of Zoroaster” (*dāta-zaraθuštri-*), which is more often than not combined with the “law code abjuring the *daēuuas*” (*dāta- vīdaēuua-*, i.e., the *Vidēvdād*); and apparently a deified “law” (*dāta-*; *Yt.* 10.139). On the other hand, profane and trivial occurrences of *dāta-* are not infrequent, including that in *Yašt* 10.84, where there is reference to the pauper who “is deprived of his rights (*dātāiš*).”



See also **DĀD**, **JUDICIAL SYSTEM**.

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