



## Woman in Culture and Arts

### The Economic Activities of Atossa Based on the Persepolis Tablets

Hedieh Eskandari<sup>1</sup> | Hossein Badamchi<sup>2</sup>

1. M.A. of Ancient Iranian History, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: [hedieh.eskandari@ut.ac.ir](mailto:hedieh.eskandari@ut.ac.ir)

2. Corresponding Author, Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: [hbadamchi@ut.ac.ir](mailto:hbadamchi@ut.ac.ir)

Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article type:</b> Research Article</p> <p><b>Article history:</b> Received: 3 May 2025 Received in revised form: 10 August 2025 Accepted: 25 January 2026 Published online: 30 March 2026</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Achaemenid Women, Atossa, Darius the Great, Persepolis Tablet, Xerxes I.</i></p>	<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>The primary goal of this investigation is to compare the depiction of Atossa in Greek sources with the economic activities of Atossa as documented in the Persepolis Tablets. The objective of this research is to reassemble Atossa's authentic character by comparing Iranian sources from the Persepolis archives with Greek accounts. These Greek accounts have been inaccurately perpetuated by scholars both domestically and internationally due to a lack of primary evidence. This article aims to provide a fresh perspective on Atossa's social and economic status by utilizing the recently published Persepolis tablets from 2018 by Dr. Matthew Stolper. It will construct a documented picture of Atossa's position from the perspective of Iranian sources and critically evaluate the prevailing and frequently distorted portrayal of her in Greek historical texts.</p> <p>The study posits that Atossa, like other prominent Achaemenid women, such as Irtašduna and Irdabama, possessed substantial wealth and was not, as frequently depicted in Greek sources, a conspiratorial figure or solely motivated by ambitions to position her son, Xerxes I, on the throne. Rather, she is depicted as having maintained a fair approach in her economic interactions, which includes her interactions with employees. Evidence indicates that Atossa held extensive land holdings and employed numerous agents, such as Šatarma, who received their stipends and rations under her direct command. The tablets from 500 to 504 BCE, which refer to Atossa's economic and social activities, underscore her substantial involvement in managing her private estates, overseeing agents, and administering human and financial resources through figures like Kinnadadda and Ramatiš.</p> <p>This study, which is being presented in Persian for the first time, explores the function of Atossa as it is depicted in the Persepolis Tablets, in comparison to Greek historiographical sources. It includes firsthand sources such as Hallock's <i>The Persepolis Tablets</i> (1969), Matthew Stolper's article "Atossa Returns: Another Daughter of Cyrus in the Persepolis Texts" (2018), and Herodotus' <i>Histories</i>, Aeschylus' <i>Persians</i>. Furthermore, the comparative analysis is underpinned by the critical scholarship of Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1993), Pierre Briant (1996), Maria Brosius (1996), Wouter Henkelman (2010), and Yazdan Safaee (2016), which examines the depiction of Achaemenid women in Greek sources. These scholarly works illustrate that much of the negative perception of Eastern women, particularly Atossa, in Greek historiography is grounded in incorrect assumptions. Additionally, recent research, particularly that of Matthew Stolper (2018), has uncovered previously disregarded political and social roles of Achaemenid women, including Atossa, that were wholly disregarded in classical Greek narratives, as a result of new information from the Persepolis Tablets.</p> <p><b>Research Questions</b></p> <p>a) What is the new and realistic image of Atossa that the Persepolis tablets provide, and how do these sources contribute to clarifying her actual position within the political and economic structures of the Achaemenid Empire?</p> <p>b) In what ways does the portrayal of Atossa in the Persepolis tablets differ from that of Greek historical narratives, and how did these differences develop?</p>

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**Methodology**

This investigation employs comparative analysis, descriptive-analytical methodologies, and library research. Initially, the literary and ideological underpinnings of the dominant Greek narratives and perspectives on Atossa are meticulously scrutinized and critically analyzed. Then, historical and social analyses are conducted to reconstruct a more realistic understanding of Atossa's status and function, relying on the Persepolis clay tablets as primary and well-documented sources. The reliability and contradictions between Greek accounts and archaeological evidence can be assessed through this comparative approach, which ultimately contributes to a more thorough reconstruction of Atossa's historical character.

**Findings**

Three distinct hypotheses regarding Atossa's character are presented in Greek sources, each of which illustrates a specific aspect of her influence and authority within the court. The initial hypothesis portrays Atossa as a divine and unparalleled mother whose solitary objective was to safeguard her son, Xerxes I, and guarantee his ascension to the throne. She is depicted as the protector of the royal family and the destiny of the Achaemenid dynasty in this narrative. The second hypothesis depicts her as a symbol of unmitigated power within the court, positing that her illustrious lineage from Cyrus the Great enabled her to secure the kingship of Xerxes I. In this perspective, Atossa's influence was so significant that Darius, despite his royal status, was effectively depicted as lacking genuine authority. The third hypothesis presents Atossa as a scheming and war-hungry figure, suggesting that she used deceit to advance her personal ambitions, including her involvement in pushing Darius into unwanted wars with Greek forces.

However, the traditional depictions are being challenged by recent evidence from the Persepolis Tablets. It demonstrates that Atossa was not a conspiratorial figure, but rather a figure who actively and influentially influenced the economic and social structure of the Achaemenid court. She was heavily involved in the distribution of rations, financial management, and the fair allocation of resources. Atossa's independence in managing her finances and her executive powers are evident in the records, which demonstrate her oversight of resource allocation to workers, particularly in regions such as the village of Antarantiš. Additionally, she distributed specialized provisions to women and mothers who had recently given birth, indicating a systematic distribution of resources and an acknowledgment of the social significance of childbearing. Furthermore, the role of ceremonial and celebratory events in reinforcing diplomatic and social connections is underscored by her management of resources. Atossa's effective administration not only solidified her political position but also significantly impacted the cultural and social structure of the Achaemenid Empire.

**Conclusion**

The examination of the administrative tablets from Persepolis, particularly those pertaining to the Antarantiš region, demonstrates that Queen Atossa was a responsible, precise, and active member of the Achaemenid bureaucratic system. Under Atossa's direct supervision, the allocation of resources such as grain and wine, the documentation of annual consumption and surplus, and the targeted support of workers, postpartum women, and state officials were all executed, frequently in conjunction with officials such as Kinadada and Ramatiš. This level of administrative responsibility is in striking contrast to the representations found in Greek historical narratives. It is crucial to note that none of the administrative or economic tablets that are currently in existence offer evidence of Atossa's direct involvement in political affairs or in the succession of Xerxes I. In contrast to the accounts in later Greek sources, which place her in a prominent political role, particularly in relation to the regal succession, no Elamite document attributes her with such influence. This implies that Atossa's primary function was established within the context of economic, executive, and administrative responsibilities, rather than in the realm of high-level political decision-making.

In fact, Atossa's portrayal in Greek and Elamite sources is fundamentally contradictory. She is depicted as an ambitious schemer, a meddling mother, or an emotive influence behind

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Darius's wars and Xerxes's defeat in texts such as *The Persians* by Aeschylus and *Histories* by Herodotus. Conversely, the Elamite documents depict her as a just and efficient administrator who occupied a critical yet organized position within the empire's bureaucratic system.

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