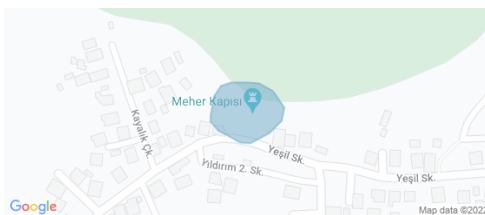


Meher Kapısı inscription (Urartian text)

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Entry tags: Urartian Religions, Inscription, Ritual text, Text, Deity list, Assyrian Religions, Anatolian Religions, Hurrian Religions, Religious Group, Mesopotamian Religions

The Meher Kapısı is a monumental rock carved niche located four kilometres north east of Van Kalesi, the site of the Urartian capital of Tušpa. Inside the niche a cuneiform text was carved, which defines the Urartian pantheon and sets ritual instructions. The text contains a long list of deities, starting with 𐎶𐎠𐎷𐎫𐎺 (Haldi). The head of the Urartian pantheon is followed by Teišeba, the weather god, and Šiuini, a solar deity. After the triad of the most important gods worshipped across the Urartian state, the text contains a long list of names, many of which are otherwise unknown deities. For each listed god there are instructions regarding the type and number of animals to be sacrificed during a yearly ritual. The text also mentions the gods of certain cities, without giving their names, and the gods of the lake and of the valley. Urartu developed from a series of small chiefdoms spread out on the Armenian Plateau, and had its capital established by Sarduri I on the eastern shores of Lake Van during the mid 9th century BCE. From what today is the modern city of Van, the royal dynasty created by Sarduri ruled until the first half of the 6th century BCE. At one point the main antagonist of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, Urartian territories stretched from Lake Sevan to the southern shore of Lake Urmia, and as far West as the sources of the Euphrates. Mostly known for their metalwork and their fortifications, Urartians had a well established religion with 𐎶𐎠𐎷𐎫𐎺 at the head of the pantheon. Although most Urartian temples and inscriptions are dedicated to him, the Meher Kapısı inscription shows a more complex picture, with dozens of gods being worshipped across the territories of the ancient state.



Date Range: 820 BCE - 580 BCE

Region: Ancient Tušpa (Urartian capital)

Region tags: Turkey

Armenian highlands, eastern shore of Lake Van

Status of Readership:

✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists

Sources and Corpora

Print Sources

Print sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Salvini, M. (2008) *Corpus dei testi urartei: Le iscrizioni su pietra e roccia*, vol. 1, CNR/Istituto di studi sulle civiltà dell'Egeo e del Vicino Oriente, Rome, pp. 125-129.
- Source 2: Salvini, M. (1994) The Historical Background of the Urartian Monument of Meher Kapısı, in A. Çilingiroğlu & D.H. French (eds), *Anatolian Iron Ages 3: The Proceedings of the Third Anatolian Iron Ages Colloquium held at Van, 6-12 August 1990*, British Institute at Ankara, Ankara, pp. 205-210.

Online Sources

Online sources used for understanding this subject:

– Source 1 URL: N/A

Online Corpora

Relevant online Primary Textual Corpora (original languages and/or translations)

– Source 1 URL: <http://oracc.org/ecut/Q006886>

– Source 1 Description: Original text and English translation of the Meher Kapısı text (A03-01), provided by the open-access electronic Corpus of Urartian Texts (eCUT) Project, a sub-project of the Munich Open-access Cuneiform Corpus Initiative (MOCCI). A03-01 is the inscription code assigned to this text by Mirjo Salvini in his "Corpus dei testi urartei" (see print sources).

General Variables

Materiality

Methods of Composition

– Incised or Inscribed



Method of inscription

– Chisel

Medium upon which the text is written/incised

– Stone

Was the material modified before the writing or incising process?

– Physical preparation

Notes: The rock face was shaped and smoothed.

Location

Is the text stored in a specific location?

[Note at which point in time, for reference, if known; select all that apply]

– Yes

Notes: There is only one known copy of this text, inscribed inside the Meher Kapısı niche. This monument was part of a open air sanctuary which also included a terrace carved into the bedrock, at a lower elevation.



Tomb

– No

↳ Cemetery

– No

↳ Temple

– No

↳ Shrine

– Yes

↳ Altar

– No

↳ Devotional marker

– Yes

↳ Cenotaph

– No

↳ Church

– No

↳ Mosque

– No

↳ Synagogue

– No

↳ Triumphal Arch

– No

↳ Monument

– Yes

↳ Mass Gathering Point

– Yes

Notes: It is impossible to know how many people gathered for ritual practices in front and below of the monument, however the presence of a rock carved terrace suggests an audience.

The base of the rock outcrop could have also accommodated larger numbers of worshipers.

↳ Cave(s)

– No

↳ Hilltops

– Yes

↳ Other natural sanctuaries

– No

↳ Boundary markers or lines

– No

↳ Domestic contexts

– No

↳ Library/archive

– No

↳ Specify

– Specify: N/A

Is the location where the text stored accompanied by iconography or images?

– No

Is the area where the text is stored accompanied by an-iconic images?

– No

Production & Intended Audience

Production

Is the production of the text funded by the polity?

– Yes

Notes: The Urartian rock carved inscriptions are a royal prerogative. Therefore it is safe to assume the creation of the Meher Kapsi monument, including the text, was funded by the polity.

- ↳ Are the authors/copyists/engravers paid by the polity?
– Field doesn't know
- ↳ Does the polity provide financial support to religious infrastructure involved with textual production?
– Field doesn't know
- ↳ Are the leaders of the polity and the religion the same figure?
– Field doesn't know
- ↳ Are political officials involved in the support of textual production?
– Yes
- ↳ Are political officials and religious officials otherwise overlapping institutional networks?
– Field doesn't know
Notes: We do not have any information on religious officials. However, it is possible the Urartian rulers had religious functions as well as political ones. The kings portray themselves as humble servants of Haldi and all their actions are done for the grace of the main Urartian deity and through his power at the same time.
- ↳ Does the polity enforce religious observance according to text or texts?
– Field doesn't know
Notes: The text includes instructions for sacrifices to be performed for different deities at specific times in the year. However, we do not know what parts of society were expected to perform these sacrifices and how their observance was enforced.
- ↳ Is the polity legal code derived from religious text(s) in question?
– No
Notes: The Meher Kapısı text does not include any instructions which could relate to a legal code.
- ↳ Is preferential economic treatment (e.g. tax exemption) present in the polity to support the text(s)..
– Field doesn't know
- ↳ Are religious specialists present/in charge of the production of the text or copies of the text?
– Field doesn't know

Is the text considered official religious scripture?

– Field doesn't know

Written in distinctly religious/sacred language?

– No

Intended Audience

What is the estimated number of people considered to be the audience of the text

This should be the total number of people who would serve as the intended audience for the text.

– Field doesn't know

Does the Religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members?

– No

Are there clear reformist movements?

(Reformism, as in not proselytizing to potential new conservative, but "conversion" - or rather, reform - to the "correct interpretation"?)

– No

Is the text in question employed in ritual practice?

– Field doesn't know

Is there material significance to the text?

– Yes

↳ Is it visible?

– Yes

↳ Is it hidden?

– No

↳ Can it be touched?

– Yes

↳ Does touching the text during ritual have a specific function?

– Field doesn't know

- ↳ Does the material significance have an esoteric function?
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Does the text serve a protective function?
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Does the text serve a healing function?
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Does the text serve a cleansing function?
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Does the text serve as a form of expiation?
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Does the text serve as an incantation?
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Has the materiality of the text been altered?
 - No
- ↳ Are there debates about whether or not altering the materiality of the text is acceptable?
 - No
- ↳ Other important aspects of materiality with regard to the text?
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Are there material substance that commonly accompany the text?
 - Please specify the substances in the sub-questions
 - Field doesn't know

Context and Content of the Text (Beliefs and Practices)

Context

Is the text itself accompanied by art?

– No

Are there multiple versions of the text?

– No

Is the text part of a collection of texts?

– No

If the text is not explicitly scripture, is it part of another important literary tradition?

– Yes

↳ Cultural with religious implications?

– Yes

↳ Behavioral literature?

– No

↳ Other

– Other [specify]: Although the most comprehensive list of Urartian ritual practices, it uses the same formulas used in other Urartian texts carved into stone. The rituals described were established by the king, in the same way other royal projects were commemorated.

Content

Is the text - or does the text include - a ritual list, manual, bibliography, index, or vocabulary?
(Select all that apply)

– Ritual list

Are there lineages or a single lineage established by the text?

– Yes

↳ Does the lineage involve establish a chain of authority?

– No

↳ Is the lineage defined by concrete cycles or measures of time?

– No

↳ How is the lineage established?

– Blood or Marriage relations

Does the text express a formal legal code?

– No

Formulating a specifically religious calendar?

– No

Notes: The prescribed rituals are to be performed in the "month of the Sun-God", however the text does not describe the calendar used and we have no information on it from other sources.

Beliefs

Is a spirit-body distinction present in the text?

– No

Is belief in an afterlife indicated in the text?

– No

Is belief in reincarnation in this world specified in the text?

– No

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses dicated in the text?

– No

Does the text indicate if co-sacrifices should be present in burials?

– No

Does the text specify grave goods for burial?

– No

Are formal burials present in the text?

– No

Are there practices that have funerary associations presented in the text?

– No

Are supernatural beings present in the text?

– Yes

↳ A supreme high-god is present

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god is anthropomorphic or described in anthropomorphic terms

– No

↳ The supreme high god is a sky deity

– No

↳ The supreme high god is chthonic (of the underworld)

– No

↳ The supreme high god is fused with the monarch (king=high god)

– No

↳ The monarch is seen as a manifestation or emanation of the high god

– No

↳ The supreme high god is a kin relation to elites

– No

↳ The supreme high god has another type of loyalty-connection to elites

– Field doesn't know

↳ The supreme high god is unquestionably good

– No

↳ The supreme high god has knowledge of this world

– Yes

↳ Knowledge is restricted to a particular domain of human affairs

– No

- ↳ Knowledge is restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region
 - No
- ↳ Knowledge is unrestricted within the sample region
 - Yes
- ↳ Knowledge is unrestrict outside of sample region
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Can see you everywhere normally visible (in public)
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home)
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives)
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Knows basic character (personal essence)
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Knows what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight)
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Has other knowledge of this world
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Has deliberate causal efficacy in the world
 - Yes
 - ↳ Can reward
 - Yes
 - ↳ Can punish
 - Yes

- ↳ Indirect causal efficacy in the world
 - Yes
- ↳ Exhibits positive emotion
 - No
- ↳ Exhibits negative emotion
 - No
- ↳ Possesses Hunger?
 - No
- ↳ Can be hurt?
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Can be tricked?
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Can be imprisoned?
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Is it permissible to worship supernatural being other than the high god?
 - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god communicates with the living
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Does the text make communication with supreme high-god possible?
 - No

Previously human spirits are present

– No

Non-human supernatural beings are present

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings can be seen

– Yes

Notes: There are geographical features, mountains for example, which have god like status.

↳ Supernatural beings can be physically felt

– Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world

– Field doesn't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world

– Yes

Notes: Sacrifices are described for these beings, suggesting they have the power to influence the world, although we do not know in which way.

↳ Supernatural beings can reward

– Field doesn't know

↳ Supernatural beings can punish

– Field doesn't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings communicate with the living according to the text?

– No

↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world

– Field doesn't know

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit positive emotion

– Field doesn't know

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit negative emotion

– Field doesn't know

↳ These supernatural beings possess hunger

– Field doesn't know

Does the text attest to a pantheon of supernatural beings?

– Yes

↳ Organized by kinship based on a family model?

– No

↳ Organized hierarchically?

– Yes

↳ Power of beings is domain specific?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Other organization of pantheon?

– Specify: Geographical

Notes: Some deities are likely worshiped only in small geographical areas (certain valleys for example), with overlapping regional and transregional gods. The gods of certain cities are also worshipped, without being specifically named.

Are mixed human-divine beings present according to the text?

– Field doesn't know

Is there a supernatural being that is physically present in the/as a result of the text?

– No

Are other categories of beings present?

– Incomprehensible?

Notes: There are sacrifices prescribed "(17) for the gods of the tower temple (susī) of the god Ḫaldi", the meaning of which is unclear. There are also objects which have agency, suggested by the fact that sacrifices are performed for them. Some examples are the weapons of Ḫaldi and the "gates" of the gods.

Does the text guide divination practices?

– No

Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present in the text?

– No

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment in the text?

– No

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards in the text?

– No

Notes: There is a general blessing for long life for the ruler and his son, on behalf of the major deities, but nothing specific related to the sacrifices performed.

Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present in the text?

– No

Is an eschatology present in the text?

– No

Norms & Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the text?

– No

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious text?

– No

Are there centrally important virtues advocated by the text?

– No

Advocacy of Practices

Does the text require celibacy (full sexual abstinence)?

– No

Does the text require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence)?

– No

Does the text require castration?

– No

Does the text require fasting?

– No

Does the text require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods)?

– No

Does the text require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations?

– No

Does the text require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of adults?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of children?

– No

Does the text require self-sacrifice (suicide)?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of property/valuable items?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of time (e.g. attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.)?

– No

Does the text require physical risk taking?

– No

Does the text require accepting ethical precepts?

– No

Does the text require marginalization by out-group members?

– No

Does the text require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household)?

– No

Does the text require participation in large-scale rituals?

– No

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present as indicated in the text?

– No

Does the text employ fictive kinship terminology?

– No

Does the text include elements that are intended to be entertaining?

– No

Does the text specify sacrifices, offerings, and maintenance of a sacred space?

– Yes

↳ Are sacrifices specified by the text?

– Yes

↳ Animal sacrifice?

– Yes

↳ Human sacrifice?

– No

↳ Are there self-sacrifices specified by the text?

– No

↳ Are there material offerings present?

– No

↳ Is attendance to worship/sacrifice mandatory?

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The text does not specify it.

↳ Is the maintenance of the place regulated by the text?

– No

Institutions & Production Environment of Text

Society & Institutions

Society of religious group that produced the text is best characterized as:

– A state

Welfare

Does the text specify institutionalized famine relief?

– No

Does the text specify institutionalized poverty relief?

– No

Does the text specify institutionalized care for elderly & infirm?

– No

Other forms of welfare?

– No

Education

Are there formal educational institutions available for teaching the text?

– No

Are there formal educational institutions specified according to the text?

– No

Does the text make provisions for non-religious education?

– No

Does the text restrict education to religious professionals?

– No

Does the text restrict education among religious professionals?

– No

Is education gendered according to the text?

– No

Is education gendered with respect to this text and larger textual tradition?

– No

Does the text specify teaching relationships or ratios? (i.e.: 1:20; 1:1)

– No

Are there specific relationships to teachers that are advocated by the text?

– No

Are there worldly rewards/benefits to education according to the text specified by the text itself?

– No

Bureaucracy

Is bureaucracy regulated by this text?

– No

Public Works

Does the text detail interaction with public works?

– No

Taxation

Does the text specify forms of taxation?

– No

Warfare

Does the text mention warfare?

– No

Food Production

Does the text mentioned food production/disbursement?

– Yes

Notes: According to the text, the king and his son have planted a new vineyard and a new orchard. However, there is no indication of these projects or the produce having a ritual function.

↳ Does the text in question dictate how the religious group in question provide food for themselves?

– No

↳ Does the text celebrate/restrict food provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question?

– No