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Historiography and palaeography of Sasanian Middle Persian inscriptions

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The research developed in this doctoral dissertation investigates writing practices in early Sasanian Iran as reflected in the small corpus of Sasanian inscriptions by examining the rock-cut texts in their physical, historical and textual environment and by studying salient features of their palaeography. It contributes to Sasanian studies in particular, and to ancient Iranian studies more generally, in three main ways.

First, it offers a critical study of the history of research surrounding the decipherment of the Middle Persian script, to define the contribution of Sasanian epigraphy to the broader historiographical debates concerning the study of Late Antiquity.

Then, through the palaeographic analysis of the earliest pre-Sasanian and Sasanian Middle Persian written vestiges, it highlights the existence of a lively scribal tradition that was local to Persis in the Seleucid and Parthian periods.

Finally, it investigates a possible model for the study of Sasanian inscriptions which takes into account the references made in these monumental texts to (now lost) manuscript documents, as well as to key features of their natural and built environment; this helps bring into sharp focus the often overlooked legal, administrative and religious functions of Sasanian rock-cut texts.

Olivia K. C. Ramble's doctoral research was conducted in the framework of a cotutelle agreement between the Ecole pratique des hautes études/ Paris Sciences et Lettres and the University of Leiden, under the joint supervision of Prof. Philip Huyse (EPHE-PSL/CeRMI) and Prof. dr. Albert de Jong (Leiden University), as well as the co-supervision of Dr. Samra Azarnouche (EPHE-PSL/CeRMI).

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