Historiography and palaeography of Sasanian Middle Persian inscriptions

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Chapter 2

Rediscovering Persepolis and its inscriptions: early European travellers to Persia

I. When Čehelmenār becomes "Persepolis".

European diplomatic embassies, religious missions and travelling merchants in Persia.

In outlining the history of research concerning Middle Persian epigraphy, the first difficulty lies in choosing a starting point. The Buyid inscriptions of Persepolis show that Sasanian epigraphy attracted attention and attempts at interpretation soon after the fall of the Sasanian empire. Furthermore, although for many centuries they were not the subject of documentation and research as such, the epigraphic, sculptural and architectural vestiges of ancient Iran were given names, attributed with legends and even magical powers. These traditions not only form an integral part of the history of Achaemenid and Sasanian ruins and inscriptions but also influenced toponymy and inspired poetry, and continue to do so to this day: like natural features such as rivers and mountains, ruins and inscriptions and the stories attached to them shaped the living landscape of Iran.[124] Most importantly for the purposes of this study, local legends also had a direct impact on travellers' interpretation of the vestiges, influencing their reading of the inscriptions, including the versions in Greek, although this was an alphabet with which these adventurers – scholars in the case of many of them – were well acquainted. Nevertheless, in order to retrace the emergence of Middle Persian epigraphy as a discipline within the broader framework of ancient Iranian studies, this chapter will concentrate on the history of the first systematic recordings of Sasanian inscriptions by European travellers in the 17th and 18th centuries that began the long road to the decipherment of these epigraphic texts.[125]

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[124] See for instance toponyms such as *Ganjnāmeh*, *Naqš-e Rostam*, *Takht-e Jamšīd*, all directly derived from legends attributed to ancient Iranian vestiges.

[125] There exists an important literature on the more general history of European travellers' reports on Iran and its antiquities; some bibliographical references are given here, organized by theme. For a history of Early Modern European travellers' exploration of Persia, see Gabriel 1952; concerning the veritable fascination which the monuments of Persepolis in particular exercised on European travellers, photographers and archaeologists, see

A first aspect that this historiographical approach highlights is the central role played by the fascination of Western scholarship with the Achaemenid cuneiform inscriptions of Persepolis in the rediscovery of Middle Persian epigraphy: the recording of Sasanian inscriptions was, at first, only a by-product of excited travellers' drawings of the site's much more intriguing vestiges. Ironically, it was Silvestre de Sacy's decipherment of inscriptional Middle Persian that was to provide the key to the Old Persian script, in turn opening up the world of cuneiform writing to scholarship. In this respect, a fundamental turning point was the identification by early Spanish-Portuguese travellers of the sumptuous ruins of "Forty Columns" with the famous "Persepolis" of classical Greek historiography. This suggestion sparked the interest and imagination of Western scholarship. Čehelmenār was also a particularly attractive site for the purity of the nearby rivers and the bountiful orchards of the Marvdašt plain and was located just off a major axis between the port of Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf and the royal court of Esfahān via Shirāz. It soon became a favourite watering place for weary diplomatic embassies, religious missionaries and travelling merchants heading north from the port or south from the court and keen to see its legendary vestiges.

António de Gouveia (1575-1628), a friar of the Augustinian order and professor of Theology posted in the Portuguese colony of Goa, was chosen in 1601 by the king of Spain and Portugal Philip II to go to Persia, with a double mission: the first was the "spiritual conquest" of as many souls as possible and the second was to lead a diplomatic embassy to the Persian king Shah Abbas I (r. 1587-1629), with a view to signing a treaty of alliance against 'The Turk'.[126] His narrative illustrates the bitter rivalries between different Christian orders wanting to be picked for such a mission and more generally testifies to the fundamental role of religious bodies in international diplomatic relations: thus, apart from concluding a treaty, the embassy was to encourage the Safavid king not to make peace with the Ottomans, allowing the Portuguese to keep a privileged relationship with Persia, essential to furthering their commercial interests as well as their missionary ambitions in the East. It also highlights the strategic importance of the island of Hormuz: the Augustinians had a convent there, a definite

Vuurman 2015; for a study of the descriptions and drawings of the ruins of Persepolis by Early Modern and Modern European travellers, see Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1989 as well as Sancisi-Weerdenburg and Drijvers 1991; for the history of the rediscovery of the archaeological site of Persepolis in particular, see Mousavi 2012; for Early European travellers' perceptions of Zoroastrians in the 17th and 18th centuries, see Firby 1988 as well as Ramble (forthcoming, d) "The rediscovery of the ancient Persians and their world view".

[126] de Gouveia 1646, 12-13.

advantage that led to the choice of their order for the mission.[127] In his description of the site of Čehelmenār, the Augustinian father draws attention to the strange inscriptions covering the ruins, observing that the curious characters were neither Persian, nor Arabic, nor Armenian nor Hebrew.[128] After local legend, he describes part of the structure as a "tomb", the construction of which was variously attributed to either Cyrus or Artaxerxes, declaring that it dwarfed in both size and beauty even the lavish Mausoleum of Halikarnassos that Artemisia II of Caria commissioned for her husband (and brother). He adds that the local inhabitants bitterly complained about the amount of attention that the ruins attracted from passers-by and travellers, even resolving to destroy the vestiges: these were so hard however that they resisted both fire and iron. This anecdote incidentally shows that the interest for Čehelmenār was not a phenomenon propelled by Western orientalism but well-established already.

Pyramidal characters and Chaldean mementos: the inscriptions of Persepolis.

Gouveia's description of the site is mentioned rather dismissively by another diplomat of King Philip II, García de Silva y Figueroa (1550-1624), but it was evidently the Augustinian priest's identification of "Forty columns" with an important Achaemenid site that decided him to make a detour by the ruins. Figueroa was commissioned to travel to Persia in 1614 to establish a crucial treaty of alliance guaranteeing the joint kingdoms of Spain and Portugal monopoly of the island of Hormuz and an exclusive relationship with Persia for the silk trade. Like Gouveia, Figueroa first sailed to Goa, only reaching the port of Bandar Abbas in 1617. He began his journey up north to Esfahān, but Shah Abbas, who had evidently changed his mind about his promise to the king of Spain, asked the frustrated and anxious ambassador to wait a further few months in Shirāz. Figueroa describes his detour via Persepolis as a near-chance event but his proposed etymology for the name of Shirāz – a deformation of 'Cyropolis' – is already preparing the reader for an excursion into Persia's glorious Achaemenid past.[129] On the eve of his departure from Shirāz the camels meant to carry the one hundred and fifty loads of pepper that were part of the embassy's gift to the Shah were delayed by several days: in his impatience, Figueroa decided to set off north, with only a "dervish" to serve as his guide. He travelled four miles north-east off the main road to the "illustrious ruins" of Čehelmenār, marvelling at the

[127] For a study of the Catholic missions to the East in the 17th century, see Alonso 1967; on the missions to Persia of the Portuguese Augustinians in particular, see Flannery 2013.

[128] de Gouveia 1646, 81.

[129] Figueroa 1667, 118.

lush and well-watered plains of "Margastan" surrounding the site. He took with him Diodorus of Sicily's account of the palaces and tombs of Persepolis, later admitting that Gouveia's "confused" description of the site had intrigued him, encouraging him to study the passages in classical historiography dedicated to the Achaemenid foundation and to come to investigate the great remains. Comparing the course of the river called Bradamir with that of the Araxes described by the Greek historian, Figueroa argues that they must be one and the same stretch of water: the latter was famously crossed by Alexander when he marched from Susa to Persepolis, and the ambassador concludes triumphantly that the ruins of Čehelmenār must be the old Achaemenid site.[130]

He embarks on an impassioned description of the monumental remains: the entrance portico is held up by two winged horses "with the pride of lions in their eyes" and the stone in which the exquisite sculptures are carved is said to be of such high polish that one could catch one's reflection in it. Figueroa also dedicates a substantial passage to the site's different epigraphical vestiges.[131] He first reports that some of the porticoes are engraved with inscriptions in unknown characters, entirely different and certainly more ancient than the Hebrew, Chaldean (Syriac), Arabic, Latin and Greek scripts. Examining these carefully, Figueroa notes that they are composed of different types of "pyramidal" elements, arranged in deliberate configurations that create distinct units. The ambassador then describes several small inscriptions in "Arabic, Armenian, Indian and Chaldean". The fact that the short texts were written in more or less recognizable alphabets and that they are less deeply engraved prompted Figueroa to observe that they must have been added at different points in history many centuries after the erection of the structure, at a time when it had become a "miraculous" ruin and a site of pilgrimage: he compares them to the mementoes carved on the walls of caravanserais or mosques by travellers and merchants wishing to leave a trace of their passage. It is noteworthy that the ambassador, without being equipped to decipher either the Old Persian or the other inscriptions engraved at Persepolis – there are no Indian inscriptions and the "Chaldean" characters are in fact Parthian and Middle Persian – was immediately able to recognize the epigraphical texts that were part of the architectural program of the site, and those that were added subsequently ("secondary inscriptions"). It is therefore only the "original" cuneiform

[130] Figueroa 1667, 141-143. For a detailed overview of the different passages in both Classical historiography and Early Modern European travellers' accounts which describe the Kur and Pulvār rivers (with the various names, including Bradamir, given to these stretches of water), see Duva 2018.

[131] Figueroa 1667, 158.

inscriptions of which Figueroa chose to have a careful drawing made, producing what is thought to be the first – and now lost – copy of the Persepolis cuneiform inscriptions brought back to Europe.

It was with great pomp that Figueroa wrote home to announce his discovery. Describing the monumental vestiges as far exceeding any other of the "world's miracles", marvelling at the size and beauty of the columns and sculptures that "shone" as if new, he cites the passages of the classical authors describing the location of Persepolis, which led him "by the hand" to the site. He includes a description of the cuneiform characters, adding a sample drawing of a wedged sign in the margin, the caption of which reads "inscription of unknown letters in fashion of a delta". This letter, originally written in Latin, made a great impression back in Europe and was translated only a few years later into English and included in Samuel Purchas' monumental collection of travel stories, the *Pilgrimes*, in itself a testimony to the growing popularity of travel literature in Europe **[Fig. 2.1]**.[132]

Epic journeys to the East and their heroes: the rise of travel literature in Europe.

Better copies of cuneiform inscriptions as well as further support for the Čehelmenār-Persepolis association reached Europe in the letters of Pietro della Valle (1586-1652), an extraordinary and eccentric personality and a precious source of information concerning the Near East – and Goa – in the early 17th century. A Roman aristocrat with a solid education in Classics and a devout Christian, he initially decided to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, setting off in 1614. Falling in love in Baghdad with Ma'ni, the daughter of a Nestorian Catholic (Church of the East), he married her, postponed his return to Europe and, emboldened by Shah Abbas I's religious tolerance, made plans to establish a colony of Church of the East Christians in Esfahān. When Ma'ni died several years later, pregnant with their first child, he decided to have her embalmed; hiding her corpse at the bottom of a trunk, he sailed home back to Italy to bury her in the family sepulchre in 1626, almost twelve years after leaving for his epic journey. His *Viaggi* are recorded in 36 long letters, most of which were published posthumously by four of the fourteen sons born from his marriage with Mariuccia, a young Georgian girl whom he had adopted with his first wife and brought back with him to Italy from Persia.

[132] Figueroa 1625, 1533-1535.

The fifteenth letter, sent from Shiraz and dated to October 1621 describes the Persepolitan ruins and its cuneiform inscriptions.[133] Again, della Valle's main reference for all things Persian are the classical authors. Thus, he notes that the Persians are excellent horsemen and, just as Xenophon describes in his Cyropaedia, they attach the horses' hind legs when they are kept in the stables to stop the animals from fighting.[134] The identification of the site of Čehelmenār with Persepolis is introduced as a fact, the ruins are the "illustrious" vestiges of the "ancient and superb" Persepolis which he had been eager to see, indicating that by 1621 already this idea had already been accepted in intellectual circles. He also identifies Persepolis with the Elymaïs of the first Book of the Macabees, reminding his readers that the term "Persepolis" itself was never the original name of the foundation, but one forged by the Greeks and "usurped" by the Latins, introducing a welcome – and rare – distance from classical historiography.[135] Della Valle then applies his observational skills to the vestiges. He decides that the figures carved on the Apadana represent a sacrificial procession because of the animals depicted in it: he notes that while sheep and bulls are a sacrificial animal common to all nations, horses are also known to have been sacrificed in Persia, which is probably an oblique reference to Arrian's description of the magi's sacrifice to the tomb of Cyrus.[136] He concludes that the entire structure was a temple, adding as further evidence that there are no remains of a vault covering the structure: the Greek historians regularly describe the Persians as sacrificing to their deities in the open.[137] His interpretations are, however, also tinged with local lore. Being short-sighted, he relied on his guides for the description of certain bas-reliefs: thus, he is told that the hovering figure in the winged disk represents a demon, and della Valle concludes that the king standing in front of the altar must be Jamšīd, based on the myth of the latter's subjugation of the *devs*.[138] The traveller even offers a popular etymology for the sorcerer-king's name, said in the Arabo-Persian sources to be formed on the term *xoršīd* (sun).[139]

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[133] della Valle 1745, V, 280-344; see also Gurney 1994. For a recent edition (in Italian) of Pietro della Valle's *Viaggio* to Persia and Persepolis, see Invernizzi 2001.

[134] della Valle 1745, V, 295-296.

[135] della Valle 1745, V, 312.

[136] For this much-discussed passage in Arrian (VI, 29.7), see most recently Panaino 2005.

[137] For a discussion of this *locus classicus*, see de Jong 1997, 127-129.

[138] He attempts to rationalize this however, proposing that Jamšīd may have historically been the Assyrian king Nebuchadnezzar whose dominion extended all the way to Persia, della Valle 1745, V, 334-335.

[139] On the name of Jamšīd see Skjærvø 2012.

His observations concerning the cuneiform inscriptions are particularly astute. Carefully examining the figures, he notes like Figueroa that it is the combination of the pyramidal elements that distinguish the different characters. He also proposes that the script must be written from left to right, like Latin and Greek, rather than from right to left like the Semitic scripts:[140] based on the orientation of the pyramidal elements, he brilliantly deduces that the latter follow the direction of the script, and his meticulous drawings of five cuneiform characters far exceed Figueroa's schematic sketch.

None of della Valle's works were published before Sir Thomas Herbert (1606-1682), an English courtier and historian in the reign of Charles I (1600-1649), set off for Persia from Dover on Good Friday 1626, and yet, he alludes in his *Travels* to the Roman aristocrat's description of Tabriz, testifying to the rapid circulation of ideas in Europe at that time. Herbert also cites Figueroa's account of Čehelmenār that was published in Purchas' *Pilgrimes* two decades earlier. His description of the "ribs and ruines" of Persepolis heavily draws on the Spanish diplomat's letter, sometimes paraphrasing whole sentences:[141] his hesitation concerning the style of the architecture – "Corinthian, Ionic, Doric or mixed" – echoes Figueroa's own musings, illustrating the extent to which contemporary travellers' accounts were emulated. Herbert took advantage of an English embassy sent to Shah Abbas I headed by Sir Robert Shirley, the architect of the flourishing English-Persian relations, and Shirley's counterpart the Persian ambassador Nuqd Ali Beg, although the latter committed suicide aboard their ship bound for India "having desperately poisoned himself for four days eating only opium" in fear of the Shah's reprisals for his "base misbehaviour" in England. The Persian ambassador is buried in Surat, and it is there that the British traveller first encountered a Zoroastrian community. Evidently well introduced in the Parsi community settled there, Herbert records astonishing (albeit warped) information, such as the departure of their ancestors from Persia on the death of the Sasanian King Yazdegerd – which he dates to 635 CE – as well as the name and genealogies of legendary Persian kings. He also records a story of the life of Zoroaster, the name of their "law-book" – "Zand-Avesta", divided into 21 parts – and reports that their Pope is referred to as a "distoore" and their priests as "herbood"s.[142] Herbert's travelogue includes English-Arabic-Persian lexicons, and he attempts an etymology for the name of Shiraz, which he suggests may derive either from the Persian term for "milk"

[140] della Valle 1745, V, 319-321.

[141] Herbert 1638, II, 143-146.

[142] Herbert 1638, I, 48-54.

(*šīr*) or the name of a particularly delicious date "sheerab", departing from Figueroa who saw in it a deformation of "Cyrus".[143] Nevertheless, like his predecessors, Herbert's understanding of Persian history and geography is firmly rooted in the classics, and he offers a detailed history of the strategic island of Hormuz – the "umbelick of the Gulf" – according to Roman authors.[144] Leaving India, the crew arrived at the Port of Gamrūn (Bandar Abbas), where they were retained for several weeks by the local sultan who refused to let them go until the "die is right", that is, until a suitably auspicious day; whether this reflected genuine concern for their welfare or was a ploy to delay their progress northwards to the king "solacing" by the Caspian Sea is less clear.

The chapter dedicated to Čehelmenār is directly entitled "Persepolis", although Herbert also equates the site with the Elymaïs from the Books of the Maccabees (Maccabees 6:1), probably in an oblique reference to della Valle's account.[145] His dramatic description of the ruins mingles awe and admiration and although it certainly reflected genuine fascination, it was clearly aimed at entertaining an English audience: seeing Persepolis, the "only brave antique-monument" in the whole of the Orient, would have been worth his efforts even if it had been a thousand times further off the road. The columns are said to "groan with the tyranny of time", and the traveller introduces a touch of nostalgia, invoking the reader's imagination when he observes that they once "stood in luster and perfection". The Gate of all Nations is further said to support a "monstrous" elephant and rhinoceros: his accompanying engraving offers a strange depiction of two pillars on which are perched an elephant and a rhinoceros, in itself an illustration of the mind's power to warp perception **[Fig. 2.2]**.[146] We also find the story – familiar from all the early travelogues – of Alexander setting fire to the ruins, an act of barbarity so unworthy of the Macedonian conqueror that it is ascribed to the prostitute Thais, who sought revenge for the Persian invasion of Athens: in Herbert's account, Alexander is described as trying to quench the flames with his tears.[147]

[143] Herbert 1638, I, 133, see also 245-250.

[144] Herbert 1638, I, 113-119.

[145] Herbert 1638, II, 143.

[146] Herbert 1638, II, 145.

[147] On the archaeological testimonies for this literary *topos* of Classical historiography, see Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1993.

The "Antic Greek" inscriptions of Persepolis and Ardašīr as Alexander.

Coming to the inscriptions, Herbert describes a "mirror" of polished marble engraved with strange characters, "mystical" and "adverse to the intellect", conceding nevertheless that the figures are arranged with such symmetry and order that they could not "well be called barbarous": although these were "wrapped in the dim leaves of envious obscurity", there was no doubt that they concealed "some excellent matter".[148] Like della Valle and Figueroa before him, he could not ignore the deliberate character of the cuneiform shapes, immediately recognizing these to be a writing system rather than ornamental detail—a suggestion, tellingly, that would be made a century later by scholars examining the copies of these texts from the safety of their cabinets. Surprisingly, Herbert then adds that he thought some words resembled the "Antic Greek": although this could just be another trick of the mind, it may well be that the traveller saw the Greek legends of Naqš-e Rostam – which he proceeds to describe – and that the different inscriptions merged in his memory when he reworked his narrative.[149] Perhaps it is his glimpse of Greek inscriptions that prompted the English traveller to reject the local Persian tradition that associated the Sasanian bas-reliefs with the epic hero Rostam and to identify Alexander the Great instead in the monumental stone figures. Although he often dismisses their testimonies as fanciful, Herbert did make inquiries locally concerning the history of the ruins, recording that the "silly inhabitants" identify Jamšīd, Aaron, Samson and Solomon – "a wonder they leave out Rostam" – in the figure of the Achaemenid king engraved on the *tačara* and the *hadiš*, a structure which he suggests was a harem, a hypothesis that was to prevail well into the twentieth century.[150] Herbert's description closes with an explicit invitation to his readers to come and record the magnificent ruins: he deplores the damage done to the ruins by locals, who deface the stone and "cleave it asunder" to make tombstones and benches out of the carved blocks, estimating that a draft of "all the excellencies" offered by the ruins would take a "ready Lymmer" (a professional engraver) at least three months to execute.

Invitations au voyage: calling on professional draftsmen to record Persepolis.

A similar appeal to record the remains of Forty Columns is found in the travelogue of Johann Albrecht von Mandelslo (1616-1644). This German nobleman took advantage, very much like Herbert, of a diplomatic embassy sent in 1638 first to Moscow and then the Persian court by

[148] Herbert 1638, II, 146.

[149] Herbert 1638, II, 146.

[150] Herbert 1638, II, 146.

the Duke of Holstein-Gottorp; he was 22 years old. In the ambassadorial party was also the German geographer, mathematician and personal librarian of the Duke of Holstein, Adam Olearius (1616-1644), who published Mandelso's travels posthumously.[151] The party reached Esfahān coming down to Persia from the north through Tartary (Central Eurasia), following an entirely different route from the maritime one taken by Gouveia, della Valle and Herbert. Mandelslo decided to leave the Duke of Holstein's ambassadors after meeting a team of English merchants who, venting the wonders of India, excited his curiosity. He is described as "proudly" dismissing the generous allowance offered to him by the king of Persia for his journey, setting off on his horse "like a hero in a novel" with only a local Persian guide for companion, valiantly making his way down to the port of Hormozd despite a violent attack of dysentery and fever.[152] This dramatic prologue sets the tone for the rest of Mandelslo's travels, cast as an epic adventure – as those early travellers' journeys indeed were – contrasting starkly with de Gouveia's sober prose and cautious descriptions, and testifying to the emergence of the genre of travel literature: on his return trip to Europe his boat is caught in terrible storms and the young man escapes "miraculously"; again, he almost dies reaching the English coast. On his way down from Esfahān to the gulf, it would seem that Mandelslo took a slightly different route, and his account includes a description of Pasargadae, with a drawing of the tomb of "the mother of Solomon".[153] Passing through the Marvdašt plain, he explains feeling quite "obligated" to take a detour by the ruins, since "all those" who made the same journey have described them, and indeed in the passage dedicated to Persepolis we find many familiar motifs: the allusion to classical sources describing the site, the difficulty of determining whether the style of architecture is Doric, Ionic, Corinthian or mixed, the discussion concerning the identity of the figure above the tombs "adoring the sun" and fire, and the description of the "pyramidal" cuneiform characters resembling "neither Greek, nor Hebrew, nor Arabic" and yet not entirely "barbarous" in shape.[154] Mendelslo also remarks that the engraved characters are locally thought to have a "talismanic character" – echoing certain Arabo-Persian accounts that advocate the miraculous healing powers of the ruins, the stone of which, when ground to powder, is said to stop haemorrhages[155] – adding to the garb of mystery and fantasy that

[151] Mandelslo 1727.

[152] See the preface to the 1727 French edition of Mandelslo's travels by A. de Wicquefort.

[153] Mandelslo 1727, I, 8.

[154] Mandelslo 1727, I, 9-13.

[155] Mustawfī in Lestrange 1919, 119.

shrouded the ruins and their ancient writings. Like Herbert he expresses regret that the beauty of the plundered vestiges had not yet compelled an artist to come record them, estimating that the ruins would occupy a skilful painter at least six months. His concern for the conservation of the vestiges does not stop him from engraving his name on the site's stones however, beginning a long tradition of European travellers adding their name – sometimes with the date of their visit – next to that of their predecessors, evidently emulated by the trace of each other's presence, gradually transforming the site into an indelible visitor's book and contributing to its extraordinary epigraphic corpus.

Drafting Persepolis and its inscriptions: when the learned societies become involved.

The pointed *invitation au voyage* to come record the Persepolis ruins found in Herbert's and Mandelslo's accounts herald an important turning point in the history of the site and its inscriptions: European travellers began to travel to Persia to visit Čehelmenār specifically to draw the ruins and inscriptions of the site, against the backdrop of a race between European learned societies to be the first to publish complete engravings of the splendid vestiges. One such traveller was Samuel Flowers. This merchant and agent of the East India Company posted in Aleppo took it upon himself to go to Persia in November 1667, explicitly intending to etch Persepolis' "much-admired" ruins.[156] Significantly, Flower's decision was triggered by an "Enquiry for Persia" published in the *Philosophical Transactions* earlier that year. The periodical had been established in 1665 at the private initiative of the Royal Society's first secretary Henry Oldenburg, and most articles were "read before the Royal Society" before entering the printed volumes. It included a special section dedicated to "Enquiries" – presumably arising from meetings held at the Society – concerning a wide range of topics organised mainly according to geographic criteria **[Fig. 2.3]**. These took the form of more or less general questions about the geology, resources, and local practices of different peoples, evidently aimed both at furthering knowledge and gathering potentially lucrative information. Thus, that year, the editors printed such enquiries as "Whether it be true, that Diamonds and other Precious Stones, do grow again after three or four years, in the same places where they have been digged out?", clarifying that they had already received answers concerning India but

[156] See the second part of the article by see Wiesehöfer and Huyse (forthcoming), "Carsten Niebuhr and Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy: How a keen observer and a gifted young scholar unravelled the secrets of Sasanian Naqš-e Rostam", in which Philip Huyse records some of the correspondence between Flower and the Royal Society.

wanted to receive further confirmation.[157] Preceding the general enquiries about Virginia and the Bermudas was a section dedicated to Persia. The questions, clearly geared to collecting useful information about Persian science and economy, betray a certain admiration for the country's savoir-faire and trade, as well as an obvious financial interest:[158] "What are chiefly the present studies of the Persians and what kind of learning they now excel in?"; "How they make that plaster wherewith in those parts and in India they line their Tanks or Cisterns, and which, when dry, shines like marble?"; "What other trades or practices, besides silk- and tapestry-making, they are skilled in?" The third enquiry concerns the ruins of Persepolis **[Fig. 2.4]**: "Whether, there being good descriptions in *words* of the excellent pictures and basse reliefs, that are about Persepolis at Chimilnar, yet none very particular; some may not be found sufficiently skilled in those parts, that might be engaged to make a draught of the place, and the stories there pictured and carved."

II. The first publication of Sasanian inscriptions in Europe.

The "very good friend" of Mr. Flower.

It is not clear whether answers to these enquiries were financially rewarded, but travellers' accounts deemed worthy were read in front of the members of the Society and printed in the periodical, bringing considerable prestige to their authors.[159] That the society was not eager to provide funding for hopeful travellers setting out to distant lands to answer the periodical's enquiries is evident from the letter-excerpt that accompanied Samuel Flower's copies of the Sasanian inscriptions of Persepolis. His drafts were sent to the Royal Society by an individual who only describes himself as "Mr. F. A. Esq." in a letter addressed directly to the publisher of the journal **[Fig. 2.5]**.[160] The latter explains in his missive that Flower's papers were put into his hands by a "very good" friend of his – again an unnamed individual – who retrieved them

[157] *Philosophical Transactions* 1667, 420.

[158] *Philosophical Transactions* 1667, 420.

[159] It would appear that the Royal Society had originally offered to reimburse flower's expenses but then ordered him to stop his drawing work because of a lack of funding, see the second part of the article by see Wiesehöfer and Huyse (forthcoming), "Carsten Niebuhr and Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy: How a keen observer and a gifted young scholar unravelled the secrets of Sasanian Naqš-e Rostam".

[160] Aston 1693, 775-777. It is likely to be Francis Aston, who was elected Fellow of the Royal Society in 1678 and served as Secretary of the Royal Society from 1681-1685. He was probably not himself an agent of the East India Company: his reference to "Our East-India Company" is most likely to be a turn of phrase.

after Flower's sudden death. He takes the opportunity to observe acidly that the Royal Society's enquiry had been formulated so as to casually suggest that a "summary delineation which might be performed by a man qualified in a few days" would suffice, thereby sparing them the expenses – "which you know they are never able to bear" – necessary to fund a prolonged stay: the truth is that Flower had spent much time and money at the site. Upon his death soon after his visit to Persepolis, the young man's drawings and notes were scattered, falling into different hands: the copies of inscriptions included with the missive were only a small part of his papers, while the rest, continues the author pointedly, was sure to be recovered in due time providing that John Chardin's forthcoming exhaustive publication of the ruins did not "put a period to all further curiosity". This extraordinary and almost ominous sentence closes the letter-excerpt and is immediately followed by Flower's copy of six inscriptions, which contained the first drawings of Sasanian inscriptions to reach Europe.

Flower's epigraphic samples: cuneiform as the writing of the Gaures and Parthian/Middle Persian as ancient Hebrew/Syriac.

The six epigraphic samples carefully drawn by Flower are neatly organised to fit onto a single page **[Fig. 2.6]**. The first two as well as the fourth are explicitly said to be copies of the inscriptions engraved on the bas-reliefs of Naqš-e Rostam, on the chests of the two horses mounted respectively by "Alexander and Rostam". The very first sample is evidently an approximate copy of the Parthian version of the label inscription on Ardašīr's horse, while the second reproduces with more precision the Greek version of the same text: these are the two first versions – from top to bottom – of the trilingual inscription, while the third, Middle Persian, version was either lost or not copied by the traveller. Concerning the Parthian lines, Flower remarks that the characters bear some resemblance to the ancient Hebrew but that the Persians consider it to be their own, despite the fact that they are not able to decipher a single letter of it. The fourth sample is actually bilingual, reproducing the Parthian and the Greek versions of the trilingual inscription engraved on the figure to the right of the same bas-relief: Flower's inclusion of both versions in a single sample may suggest that he had intuitively understood the different lines to be translations of the same text. He notes that it was engraved on "Rustam's horse", which indicates that the more senior figure of Ahura Mazda, with his archaising, Achaemenid-styled crown, was spontaneously associated with the epic hero while Alexander was identified in the 'earthlier' figure of Ardašīr. The identification of Alexander in the bas-relief is however surprising, and it is difficult to decide whether this is an interpretation

offered by the traveller himself, after Herbert's suggestion perhaps, or a local legend. In this respect, the influence of Herbert's hypothesis on local tradition may not be completely disregarded.[161] The third epigraphic sample is a piece of calligraphy, which Samuel Flower locates on the Persepolis platform and describes as being in "Arabick Persian" script. Although his approximate copy makes it difficult to determine which inscription exactly it is rendering, it is likely to be one of the Arabo-Persian inscriptions engraved on the ruins of the *tačara*. The traveller himself recognises that it is "little different" from the script used in Persia in his day and adds that the piece probably did not date back to more than 500 years, a generous but realistic estimation. Flower's fifth epigraphic sample was the most accurate draft of cuneiform characters to reach Europe following della Valle's earlier drawings, and although the Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian characters are jumbled together, it is possible to read an Old Persian "a", "ra" and "sa" in the first three figures of his copy. The traveller describes this particular form of script as the being ancient writing of the "Gaures or Gabres", in other words the Zoroastrians, adding that it is only to be found at Persepolis and remains completely unintelligible to the local inhabitants. The attribution of the cuneiform script to Zoroastrians from times gone by is particularly noteworthy: whereas the otherworldly cuneiform writings are immediately linked to Persia's arcane Zoroastrian past, the Parthian and Middle Persian inscriptions are quickly dismissed as being "similar" to other already-known writing systems – or actually taken to be ancient Hebrew or ancient Syriac – and although local tradition firmly roots the Sasanian vestiges in Persian history, the special connection to Zoroastrianism is not emphasised. A short comment by the anonymous author of the cover letter follows. Possibly drawing on della Valle's careful analysis of the cuneiform script, he remarks that it is written from left to right and is composed of different pyramidal shapes. According to Herbert, he continues – thereby indicating that he was well acquainted with the most important accounts of the site's epigraphic vestiges – there were at least twenty lines of this script engraved on the ruins. He adds that Flower's papers included sheets with several lines of this type of writing, perhaps intimating that, should the Society be interested, he had more drawings to share with it. The last sample in Flower's copy reproduces an Arabic Kufic inscription and no doubt corresponds to one of the epigraphic texts commissioned by Buyid rulers at the *tačara*. Curiously, the traveller attributes it to the same period as the cuneiform inscriptions, perhaps

[161] Of course, Alexander certainly figures in the Persian national epic, and it is also possible that this tradition existed completely independently from the European travellers' interpretations, particularly as several of the bas-reliefs depict figures in foreign garb.

because of its angular style. We may also consider that the first Kufic inscription engraved on the doorjamb of the *tačara* is very deeply and symmetrically engraved, and its "official" aspect may have convinced Flower that it was commissioned at the time of the structure's erection. Nevertheless, the traveller also observes that the script bears "some affinity" with the Arabic and Syriac writing systems, thereby definitely setting it apart from the cuneiform writings. He also notes that "the padres pretend" to be able to read it: it may well be that to his informers at least the Kufic Buyid inscription was simply a difficultly legible Arabic text.

The curious manner in which Flower's copies reached the Royal Society, as well as the pointed allusion to Chardin's publication of the Persepolitan ruins in the letter, is linked to a contention concerning the authorship of the drafts. Indeed, Silvestre de Sacy, in his work on the Sasanian inscriptions of Naqš-e Rostam, highlights the exact conformity of the Greek and "oriental" inscriptions drawn by Flower and those later published in Chardin's travelogue – both samples present the exact same blanks and mistakes – and accuses Flower of copying the etchings commissioned by the French merchant.[162] The story of the first drafts of Sasanian inscriptions published in Europe is a remarkable and intricate one and several of its developments will be highlighted in the following pages.

Jean Chardin's first exhaustive publication of the ruins of Persepolis: contention over the authorship of Flower's epigraphic samples.

Jean Chardin (1643-1713) was from a wealthy Parisian Huguenot family who were jewellers by trade. He first set out for the East in 1664, at 22 years old, to conduct business in India on behalf of his father. On his return from India, he crossed Persia and remained there for six years, integrating the wealthy merchant community of Esfahān and even gaining access to the court, where he was officially named "Marchand du Roi de Perse" by Shah Abbas II. Returning to Paris in 1670, he soon became frustrated with his life in France, complaining that he was much restricted in his employments because of his religion, and he set off once again for the East a year later. Although the principal reasons he gives for travelling to Persia are his difficulties of conducting business freely in France – and his lucrative trading activities in the East – Chardin also expresses his intention to learn about all things Persian, professing to only record trustworthy information.[163] In his travelogue he often denounces the flaws and

[162] Silvestre de Sacy 1793, 18-19.

[163] Chardin 1811, I, xxxviii; see also Emerson 1991. The history of the many editions (1686, 1711, 1771, etc.) of Chardin's *Voyages* is complex and fragmented; for convenience's sake, because of its accessibility, better

inaccuracies of previous accounts, namely concerning the site of Persepolis: he complains that the "extravagant" drawings by Struys do not represent the ruins at all and criticises the "famous" Figueroa for his description of certain bas-reliefs.[164] He also makes a point of learning Persian, which he claims to understand and to speak better than any of his predecessors. Chardin never returned to live in France; coming back to Europe in 1680, he spent the rest of his life in England. Days after his arrival in England, king Charles II knighted him, for reasons not entirely clear. Shortly afterwards Chardin was elected as fellow of the Royal Society in London and it was also in London that he published the account of his second travel to Persia, accompanied by an English translation. The Frenchman even became an agent of the British East India Company, representing it for some time in the Netherlands.

In the passage dedicated to the Persepolis ruins, Chardin clarifies that this was the third time he had come to the site, the first being in 1666, adding offhandedly that he had not been satisfied with his first painter's etchings of the ruins, and returned to the site with another draftsman in the following years.[165] The date that Chardin gives for his first journey to Persepolis of course corresponds exactly to the period when Flower himself spent some time at the site drawing the inscriptions, and it is possible that this observation made in passing is intended as an oblique allusion to the contention around the authorship of the copies published in the *Philosophical transactions*, clarifying that he was responsible for the identical drafts that were reprinted in his Atlas.

The "Syriac" characters engraved at Naqš-e Rostam.

Chardin like his peers expresses his wonder at the splendour of the ruins, although this admiration in his case takes the form of a certain denigration of the classical Mediterranean world. Thus, he acidly remarks that although the Greeks boasted inventing most of the arts and sciences, it is an honour that he would not give them so easily anymore, after travelling in the East; he similarly denounces the Greeks' mistake in calling the site "Persepolis", known locally

readability, and the many useful (and historiographically interesting) annotations it contains by its editor Louis Langlès, I use the later 1811 edition here.

[164] Chardin 1811, VIII, 277. He namely points out that some of his predecessors – della Valle in particular – saw a "serpent" in the figure hovering above the fire altar and the king, whereas it represents a person in a winged disk. Remarkably, he tentatively suggests the relief may be a representation of the "soul", comparing it both to the way in which the hero's soul in Greek and Roman apotheosis is said to transported up into the sky by the smoke of the sacrifice, and to the metempsychosis of the Indians, Chardin 1811, VIII, 290-291.

[165] Chardin 1811, VIII, 242.

and by all only as Staxr.[166] Chardin is also particularly ready to record local legend as possible historical fact. He reports that some say the structure was built before the flood by the "giants" represented in the larger-than-life bas-reliefs on the ruins: he admits being surprised at the extraordinary scale of the ruins, considering that it is possible that some men may have been much larger in times past. He decides to investigate the problem scientifically however and has his servant – described as terrified – climb into the royal tombs of Naqš-e Rostam to measure the stone coffins: he is greatly relieved to see that these must have belonged to men that were not more than six feet tall.[167] Similarly, lured by the legends according to which the underground channels of the terrace hid extraordinary treasures, he resolves to explore these with his servants, leaving one man with a candle every fifty feet as they moved deeper into the labyrinth of passageways. According to Chardin, his servants eventually begin failing with fear and refuse to take a single step forward, despite his enticing promises of rich rewards – the traveller admits he is himself finally caught up by the horror of the place about which all manner of terrifying stories circulated and agrees to turn back, bitterly regretting not having gone as far into the channels as Pietro della Valle. Concerning the identity of the figures carved in the Sasanian bas-reliefs, which were variously said to represent the epic hero Rostam or Alexander the Great, Chardin proposes a new hypothesis, also no doubt derived from his Persian informants. Examining the bas-relief depicting Šābuhr's victory over the three Caesars, Chardin suggest the scene represents the victory of the Persians over the Indians: the Roman Caesars would be "humiliated Indians" at the mercy of the splendid Persian knight.[168] He adds that the relief is covered with characters that are entirely different from those engraved on the tomb façades, and resemble the Syriac script: this is the very first description of Kerdīr's great Middle Persian inscription on the relief.

The different alphabets of the Zoroastrians: comparing manuscripts and inscriptions.

Chardin is also the first to attempt a comparison between the "Zoroastrian" writings on the ruins and the manuscript "Zoroastrian alphabet" still in use by that community in 17th century Persia **[Fig. 2.7 and 2.8]**. The traveller notes that there are several different languages and

[166] Chardin 1811, VIII, 402.

[167] Chardin 1811, VIII, 351.

[168] This particular bas-relief attracted many interpretations. Jean Thévenot, a French traveller who visited the site only a decade earlier had proposed to see Rostam abducting a young woman, presumably in reference to the figure of Valerian depicting as being caught firmly by the arm by the Sasanian king, see Thévenot 1674, 287.

scripts to be seen on the ruins such as ancient Syriac, Greek and ancient Arabic.[169] These texts he suggests were commissioned by the various invaders of Persia: the ancient Syriac inscriptions he decides were carved by the Parthians and the Medes, the Greek texts by the Greeks and the ancient Arabic by the Arabs and the Tartars. The very idea that the Parthian and Middle Persian inscriptions, which he identifies like others before him as "ancient Syriac" probably based on the resemblance of Aramaic-derived scripts,[170] were commissioned by the Parthian rulers of Persia is remarkable.[171] This shrewd hypothesis may have played no small part in the Abbé Barthélémy's suggestion to date the Sasanian inscriptions to the Arsacid dynasty, later taken very seriously by Silvestre de Sacy in his work on deciphering these texts. By contrast, Chardin deems the cuneiform inscriptions to be the "original" writings of the structures: he argues like his predecessors that while the other later inscriptions are only etched and badly executed, the cuneiform characters are deeply engraved and present regular forms and proportions, testifying once again to the distinct aesthetic qualities of what we might call primary and secondary inscriptions.[172] He describes the cuneiform script as shaped by only two types of figures, one like a bracket and the other like a pyramid, drawn in different orientations – two for the first and six for the second – and combined in different ways: this, he warns, should not be an argument against considering the figures as being the characters of an alphabet, for our own letters he observes, are also based on two shapes only, the straight line and the curve; he further stresses that there is nothing confused or barbaric about this script. These observations suggest that objections to considering cuneiform as a writing system may have been in circulation in his time – they certainly were a century later – or that he was pre-empting criticism of his account. He further admits that it is impossible to understand whether this writing system contained vowels or not, a comment that suggests his familiarity with Semitic scripts.[173]

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[169] Chardin 1811, VIII, 319-320.

[170] Flower had proposed the characters were ancient Hebrew.

[171] Parthian history became widely explored and popularized in French theatre and music from the end of the 17th century onwards, in the works of playwrights such as Corneille and Racine for instance; this may partly explain that Chardin intuitively connected the unknown ancient writings to Parthian rather than Sasanian imperial history; I thank Albert de Jong for pointing this out to me.

[172] Chardin 1811, VIII, 320-324; on the articular of primary and secondary inscriptions in a given site, see Ramble (forthcoming, a), "Generations of writing: the secondary inscriptions of Persepolis".

[173] Remarkably, Chardin records noting some gilding in the grooves of the cuneiform characters, and as a professional jeweller is astonished to see how well the gold leaf survived, concluding that the quality of

Convinced that cuneiform was the script of the ancient Zoroastrians, Chardin is surprised that the Zoroastrians of his time, whom he considers as the "left-overs" of ancient Persia are unable to read the inscriptions. Even more astonishing he observes, is the fact that the characters used in the manuscripts of this community – an "old" alphabet belonging the "ancient Persians or Guèbres" – have nothing to do with those engraved on the Persepolitan ruins and resemble "our scripts" much more.[174] Chardin includes a copy of the alphabet in which the Zoroastrians' "Ritual" (texts) – which he records are called "Zend Pazend Avesta" – are redacted in, providing for each character the equivalent Persian-Arabic letter **[Fig. 2.7]**.[175] His table is overall a surprisingly accurate copy of the cursive Middle Persian alphabet, in terms of the letter-shapes as well as with respect to the New Persian correspondences given for each grapheme, and a testimony to Chardin's success in gathering indigenous material. If some of the characters belong to the Middle Persian alphabet rather than to the Avestan – the "š" and "f" for instance – Chardin's table includes letters specific to Avestan: the long "ā" spelled like a double *alef* is made to correspond to a Persian-Arabic *alef bā kolāh*, two different *mem* graphemes are provided (one with a cedilla) and the table includes an Avestan "e" drawn like a Greek epsilon described as equivalent to an *ain*. The traveller concludes that the cuneiform characters were either an ancient ceremonial script or were of unfathomable antiquity.

Magical inscriptions and royal treasures: large-scale tourism at Persepolis.

Noting like Mandelslo that local tradition attributed a talismanic quality to the ancient writings, he adds that according to "Persian scholars" the cuneiform inscription guarded the access to tombs in which countless treasures were kept: he records as proof that in the time of Shah Abbas, half a century earlier, there was a European traveller who could read the cuneiform inscriptions, and that after deciphering a few lines of the script in front of the local governor of Shirāz, the rocks were cleft apart, revealing a chamber full of gold and silver enough to load sixty camels.[176] This curious anecdote seems to combine old traditions about the awe-inspiring ruins, their hidden treasures and mysterious inscriptions, with the new European interest for

craftsmanship in the period when the structure was built must have been significantly higher than in his time, Chardin 1811, VIII, 322.

[174] Chardin 1811, VIII, 324-325.

[175] Chardin 1811, VIII, 324-325, Chardin 1811, Atlas, pl. LXIX and LXX/pl. S and T.

[176] Chardin 1811, VIII, 408-409. The belief that ancient inscriptions and bas-reliefs contain treasures still holds true today and is the cause of much damage and destruction to ancient inscriptions by looters.

the Persian sites and antiquities. Initial European curiosity certainly amounted to large-scale tourism by Chardin's time: the traveller records that the custom in Persia in his time was to pay for the expenses of the foreign envoys that had business with the court, and that because all the Europeans wanted to see Persepolis, the local vizier soon began to find that this international enthusiasm for the site was costing him too much. Receiving one year the accounts for his province and seeing that the expenses of Staxr amounted to one thousand two hundred guineas, he became furious. Berating the "*farangui*"[177] and their pilgrimage to Čehelmenār he commissioned sixty men to destroy the sculptures, but this, Chardin comments deviously, was done rather slowly, because of the immense profit which the town and its environs gained from the attention the site attracted; the king is later said to have forbidden any destruction of the ruins, precisely because they brought in visitors from all parts of the world.

The Greek inscriptions of Naqš-e Rostam: Alexander king of kings of all Asiatic nations.

Chardin's account is also the first one to provide a tentative translation for the Greek versions of the Naqš-e Rostam label inscriptions, identical copies of which had been published in the *Philosophical Transactions* under Flower's name some years earlier **[Fig. 2.9]**. The French merchant estimates that the Greek texts, based on their style, are "modern" and probably belong to the Late Roman Empire – in other words the 3rd to the 5th centuries – making once again an impressively accurate guess. He adds that certain "very learned men" claimed they deciphered the legends "this is the face of the divine Alexander, king of kings of all Asiatic nations, son of the divine Philip king" and "see the face of god the father/Jupiter god".[178] Chardin dismisses these readings, namely because he does not believe the figure to be a representation of Alexander, but it is important to highlight that the theories concerning the identity of the figures in the bas-relief heavily influenced the decipherment of the inscriptions: many scholars, well into the eighteenth century, were determined to read the name of the Macedonian conqueror into that of "Ardašīr", spurred on by the fact that the first letter of the Sasanian king's name encouraged their hypothesis. Beyond the name of the represented monarch however, the reading of the Greek inscriptions recorded by Chardin, instrumental to the decipherment of the Middle Persian versions, are surprisingly accurate.

[177] A common Persian word for foreigner/European.

[178] Chardin 1811, VIII, 328.

Ambrosio Bembo or when Chardin's draftsman finds a new master.

Figueroa, della Valle, Flower and Chardin, with their riveting accounts and awe-inspiring descriptions of monuments and strange peoples, paved the way for many young travellers eager to discover the wonders of the Near East and live adventures of their own. Many of these evoke as their sole reason for leaving an ardent wish to travel. All cite their predecessors, sometimes admiringly but often critically, intent on outdoing them in the precision of their accounts and in the beauty and accuracy of their etchings; when they did not record new inscriptions, they heavily improved the legibility of already drafted samples. Thus, the young Venetian aristocrat Ambrosio Bembo, who was to be the first to copy the Middle Persian inscriptions of the Sasanian site of Tāq-e Bostān mentions "the desire to know" as the sole justification for his epic four-year journey, describing the world as a "great book" waiting to be read.[179] Taking advantage of his uncle Marco Bembo's appointment as the Venetian Consul in Aleppo he set off in 1671, nineteen years old. Leaving his uncle in Aleppo he made his way to Persia and then India, conscientiously following the route of Pietro della Valle whose *Viaggi* had been published two decades earlier: Ambrosio Bembo systematically refers to his Italian predecessor's work, citing his comments concerning landmarks and other sites as he passed them and even arranging to meet his Armenian wife's sister in Shiraz. The young man's account is also closely intricated with that of Jean Chardin, whom he met in Esfahān on his return journey, right after visiting the ruins of Persepolis and Naqš-e Rostam. He is extremely critical of the French merchant, describing him as a shrewd and harsh businessman, who tried to cheat him on some merchandise; this and other squabbles eventually led to a rift between the two travellers, culminating in Bembo telling Chardin that his very presence "disgusted" him.[180] More importantly, Bembo noted that Chardin had a draftsman, G. Grélot, whom he had taken to Persepolis and who seemed very unhappy in the merchant's service: Chardin apparently refused to pay him for his drawings until their return to Europe, threatening to not pay him at all should he make a single etching for anybody else, a treatment which only illustrates the extreme jealousy with which European travellers guarded their discoveries. Grélot and Bembo took an immediate liking to each other, with Bembo seeing that this would be a fine opportunity to have etchings made to illustrate his account. They eventually decided that Grélot would leave Chardin and make drafts for Bembo instead. They immediately set to work, drawing the ruins of Persepolis from memory with the help of sketches that Grélot had made on site for

[179] Welch 2007, 33; for another recent edition of Bembo's *Viaggi* (in Italian), see Invernizzi 2005.

[180] Welch 2007, 346.

Chardin:[181] the young Venetian's account comprises 51 line-drawings made by Grélot, including several originally drawn for the French merchant.

Untangling the contention over the authorship of Flower's drafts.

Now, the twenty-first plate in Bembo's account, dedicated to the Persepolitan inscriptions, is particularly interesting for it merges epigraphic samples found in two separate publications. The three lines of cuneiform characters in this plate correspond exactly, character for character, to the sample of cuneiform writing given in plate S of Chardin's account, despite the slightly jumbled orientation of the third line **[Fig. 2.8 and 2.10]**.[182] This is not surprising since Grélot explicitly based himself on older drawings made while in the French merchant's service to produce illustrations for his new young patron. On the other hand, it is much more surprising to also find in Bembo's plate an identical copy of the Arabo-Persian inscriptions – Kufic and Nastaliq – included in Samuel Flower's drafts and sent to the Royal Society by his "very good friend"[183]. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that this specific sample is not found in any of Chardin's plates. Indeed, if Chardin also offers a drawing of Arabic Kufic writing and does not make Flower's mistake in attributing this script to the same period as the cuneiform inscriptions – he understands it as being "ancient Arabic" – his samples copy verses from the Qur'an rather than inscriptions engraved on the Persepolitan ruins.[184] The flawless rendering of the script in Plates LXXI and LXXII even suggests that Chardin had recourse to a professional calligrapher.

From this, it emerges that Grélot was the draftsman that Chardin himself reports firing right after his first trip to Persepolis – which he says he made in 1666, in other words one year before Flower's own – because he was displeased with the quality of his drawings. Bembo's account shows however that Grélot was still in Chardin's service in 1674, throwing some doubt onto the French merchant's chronology, as well as on his reasons for dismissing Grélot: this in reality seems to be closely linked to Chardin's dispute with Bembo, which resulted in the draftsman leaving the French merchant's service and entering Bembo's. In particular, Chardin's claim – later followed by de Sacy – that he had the copies of the Persepolis inscriptions re-done by

[181] Welch 2007, 361.

[182] Compare Welch 2007, 361 and Chardin, 1811, Atlas, Pl. LXIX.

[183] Probably Francis Aston, see above.

[184] These samples are correctly indicated as reproducing verses of the Qur'an in the legends of the plates, but in the passage of the travelogue which discusses these plates, the Kufic samples of Plate LXIX are described as copying an "inscription", adding further confusion to Chardin's drafts of the Persepolis inscriptions, Chardin 1811, VIII, 326.

another draftsman during a later trip is only half-true, since the cuneiform characters in his plate correspond exactly to Bembo's copy: the copies of the Qur'an in Chardin's publication suggest that the French merchant only hired someone else to replace the sample of Kufic writing because Grélot left with the papers on which this was drawn. These elements lend weight to the hint made by the author of the letter that accompanied the drafts published in the *Philosophical Transactions* that Chardin had Grélot "recycle" Flower's papers for his own publication when the Englishman's papers were dispersed after his death and made their way into the French merchant's hands. It would then seem that after leaving Chardin's service Grélot took part of Flower's papers with him, contributing what he took with him to Bembo's account and leaving the rest with Chardin. This scenario is also supported by the fact that Flower's much more muddled cuneiform inscriptions do not figure in either of Chardin or Bembo's accounts: it is likely that Grélot's only real contribution was drawing the longer and more precise lines of cuneiform published in their travelogues. It is also worth noting that Silvestre de Sacy, who lent a marked support for Chardin, is apparently not aware of Bembo's publication – in particular, he does not discuss the Middle Persian inscriptions of Tāq-e Bostān published by the Venetian traveller (see below) – and therefore did not see how Flower's drafts were 'split over' the two publications, making it very unlikely that the Englishman had copied Chardin's drawings. Be this as it may, the circulation and republication of these drafts of inscriptions indicate just how prised this new material – inscriptional in particular – was and illustrates once more the race for prestige which the early travellers embarked on, intent on winning the esteem and patronage of the learned societies of Europe.

Copying the "Coptic" inscriptions of Tāq-e Bostān.

If Grélot was likely not the author of the copies of Sasanian inscriptions included in Chardin's travelogue, he certainly was the first to draw the Middle Persian inscriptions of Tāq-e Bostān.[185] Bembo and Grélot passed through Hamadān, Bīsotūn and Tāq-e Bostān on their way back to Aleppo from Esfahān and the young Venetian remarks with surprise that his hero della Valle did not describe these sites, although he travelled along the same route, concluding that he must have passed them by night.[186] Concerning Bīsotūn, Bembo remarks that the style of the

[185] Although it was not the first to be published. For a detailed overview and study of the different European travellers' accounts and drawings of the monuments – including the Middle Persian inscriptions – of the site of Tāq-e Bostān, see Potts 2022.

[186] Welch 2007, 373.

sculptures was very similar to the Persepolis vestiges. He also records seeing Greek inscriptions engraved above the figures: thanks to Grélot's illustration of the mountain cliff, which illustrates the Bīsotūn relief as well as a lower relief closer towards ground level, it becomes clear that he is referring to the weathered Greek inscription of the Parthian King Mithridates; Grélot's drawings are the only evidence that remains of this inscription, for it was later destroyed by an Arabic inscription commissioned by a local Sheikh **[Fig. 2.11]**.[187] On the other hand, the cuneiform inscriptions go unmentioned. The party then halts four nights in a caravanserai close to the site of Tāq-e Bostān, giving Grélot ample time to sketch the Sasanian remains, to which he dedicates five plates. Finding no references concerning these magnificent vestiges in any of the literature at his disposal, he resorts to calling them the *Antiquities of Kermanshah*. Although he dismisses them as absurd, he does record popular legends concerning the sculptures however: thus, the knight on horseback is said to be the epic hero Rostam, while the figure of Anāhitā and the Sasanian king would respectively represent Khosrow and Shirin; a tradition already found in the Arabo-Persian chronicles and immortalised in Nezāmi's famous twelfth-century poem.[188] Noticing the inscriptions engraved on either side of the central grotto, Bembo goes to great pains to have them copied, sending to the town for a ladder and having the texts cleaned from the dust and cobwebs that covered them **[Fig. 2.12]**. Curiously, the young Venetian is convinced that the inscriptions are in Coptic and harbours great hope that Grélot's careful drawings will be enough to have them translated, elucidating the entire history behind the site and its vestiges.[189] It would seem that Bembo did encounter manuscript Middle Persian, since in his description of the cuneiform inscriptions of Persepolis he observes that the epigraphic texts on the ruins did not resemble in any way the ancient Persian writing of manuscripts – said to be "used in the time of Darius" – concluding, like Chardin had before him, that cuneiform must date from times immemorial. Bembo's determination like his predecessors to only consider cuneiform as a candidate for ancient Persian epigraphy illustrates once again just how hermetic the sphere of manuscript cursive and inscriptional Middle Persian were to remain.

[187] See Fowler 2005; on the Greek inscriptions of Bīsotūn, see further Huyse (forthcoming), "Epigraphic and archival sources for Arsacid history", 12, 15-16.

[188] On Nezāmi's *Khosrow o Shirin*, see Orsatti 2006.

[189] Welch 2007, 379-380.

Kaempfer and the iconic status of Flower's copies of Sasanian inscriptions.

The saga of Flower's copies of Sasanian inscriptions at Naqš-e Rostam meets another development with the account of the German traveller Engelbert Kaempfer.[190] Enrolled at the University of Uppsala as a teenager, he was appointed in 1683 as secretary of the delegation sent by Sweden to Russia and Persia, primarily to secure the country's commercial interests in these two countries by establishing a shorter land-route. The young man took with him Olearius' account of Mandelslo's travels which traced a similar route. Upon reaching Persia, he stays with the delegation in Esfahān for almost two years producing a detailed description of the town and the Safavid court. Choosing not to return to Europe with the Swedish delegation however, he continues his travels in Persia and Asia as an employee of the Dutch East Indies Company, eventually reaching Jakarta and then Japan. On his way down to Bandar Abbas, Kaempfer follows the familiar North-South route passing through Yazd, Naqš-e Rostam and Persepolis, Shirāz and Lār. He stays three full days at Čehelmenār, drafting the most detailed copies yet of cuneiform characters, filling an entire plate with these.[191] His etchings of the architectural remains of Persepolis, the Gate of All Nations, as well as the panoramic view of the site of Naqš-e Rostam are much more realistic than any of his predecessors' and display a keen eye for proportions and perspective.[192] He is also the first to attempt a copy of (a few characters of) Kerdīr's inscription, engraved behind the bas-relief of Šābuhr I's triumph **[Fig. 2.14]** and only mentioned in passing by Chardin: keen to underline the novelty of his account, he notes that Flower had not provided any drawing of this big *tabula rupi insculpta*.[193] His etchings have the advantage of showing the exact location of inscriptions: Kerdīr's text is depicted *in situ* behind the king's horse both on the panoramic view of the site and on the detail of the bas-relief. It is all the more surprising therefore that we find the copy of the Greek version of the Sasanian label inscriptions published by both Flower and Chardin-Grélot – identical to the character, complete with blanks and mistakes – carefully copied in the cartouche that dominates the panoramic view of Naqš-e Rostam, introducing his description of the site's

[190] Kaempfer, 1712, II.

[191] Kaempfer, 1712, II, 333.

[192] His copies of the Sasanian bas-reliefs are much perhaps less successful however, see for instance Kaempfer, 1712, V, 319-321.

[193] Kaempfer, 1712, II, 319.

vestiges.[194] Indeed, after his description of Kerdīr's inscription, Kaempfer assures his reader that there are no other epigraphic vestiges on the site of Naqš-e Rostam, apparently entirely missing both the Sasanian trilingual label inscriptions and the cuneiform characters on Darius' tomb. It would appear that he was confused about the location of Sasanian inscriptions published by Flower/Chardin-Grélot but absolutely determined to include them nevertheless and finally resorted to adding them as a decorative piece, copying them from the publications he had seen them in **[Fig. 2.13]**. The fact that the German traveller decided to prominently include the Greek inscriptions at all costs in the introductory plate before his description of the Persepolis ruins, points to the near iconic character that these copies had gained and the importance they played both in the traveller's narrative program and travel plan.

Drawing Persepolis.

In the wake of Chardin, Bembo and Kaempfer's publications, travellers began to give an increasingly prominent space to engravings – many soon becoming true works of art – moving away from the dramatic and sensational tone of the descriptions of their predecessors and favouring professionally executed etchings to document their accounts, a tendency particularly discernible in the descriptions of the ruins and inscriptions of Persepolis. One of the most richly illustrated travel accounts dedicated to the Near East and Persia was published by the Dutchman Cornelis de Bruijn (1652-1727).[195] An engraver and painter by profession, he produced a magnificent series of etchings of the archaeological site over a lengthy three-month stay *in situ*. De Bruijn reached Persia at the turn of the 18th century by following the land route taken by Mandelslo and Kaempfer through Russia. His expedition was funded by the burgomaster of Amsterdam, himself a great travel enthusiast and who had trading interests with Russia as well as contacts in the Dutch East Indies Company. De Bruijn himself however only ever evokes his desire to document his observations as truthfully as possible as the main motivation for his travels. His publication contains 320 engravings of which 51 are dedicated to Persepolis and Naqš-e Rostam. He explicitly gives himself a rule never to embellish his descriptions with fantastical details to add "lustre" to his work, drawing his subjects "de ma propre main et d'après nature" and personally vouching for everything his readers could admire

[194] Kaempfer, 1712, II, 307.

[195] de Bruijn, 1718, II. For a study of the descriptions and drawings of the ruins of Persepolis more generally by Early Modern and Modern European travellers, see Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1989.

in his travelogue.[196] This manifesto is an explicit criticism of his predecessors' highly literary accounts, and de Bruijn includes a lengthy addendum dedicated to Chardin and Kaempfer's descriptions of the Persepolis ruins in which he corrects their errors – proceeding etching by etching in order of their appearance in the travelogues – commenting each problematic figure and any lack of proportion.[197] This marked wish to produce a solidly documented account rather than an enticing narrative may explain why de Bruijn mentions nothing concerning the Sasanian inscriptions of Naqš-e Rostam: as we saw, Kaempfer himself seems to have had difficulty in locating these, transforming them into an ornament instead. Similarly, de Bruijn only includes the Arabo-Persian inscriptions which he was able to have read for him and includes on the plate the translation for each underneath the corresponding samples. He accordingly expresses some doubt concerning the Kufic texts included by Chardin in his plates, which are as we saw copies of a manuscript Arabic text rather than inscriptions.[198] De Bruijn's etchings of the ruins are no doubt a real improvement on what had been published in Europe in his time. His magnificent drawing of the Gate of All Nations, beyond its increased realism and better proportions is also the first to indicate the location of the trilingual cuneiform inscriptions engraved on them **[Fig. 2.15]**. In his careful copies of the cuneiform characters, de Bruijn is cautious to keep the distinction between the different versions of a single inscription, presented in neatly delineated cartouches, although nothing indicates that he recognises that they are composed of different type of characters. De Bruijn follows his predecessors in assuming that the cuneiform inscriptions were specifically Zoroastrian ancient writings: he explains copying the inscriptions with the utmost care – and does not shy away from hacking out a piece of cuneiform writing from a window-pane – in the vain hope of finding a Zoroastrian priest that could decipher them. He incidentally remarks that the members of the Zoroastrian community use a specific script different from that of the Arabs in a long section dedicated to his "conversation with a Zoroastrian priest"[199] but does not engage in the comparison of the cuneiform inscriptions with what he is shown in the manuscripts.

[196] de Bruijn, 1718, II, [preface p. 2].

[197] de Bruijn, 1718, II, 437-452.

[198] de Bruijn, 1718, II, 443.

[199] de Bruijn, 1718, II, 387.

Carsten Niebuhr and the epigraphic corpus of Naqš-e Rostam – Persepolis.

The travelogue that was decisive in the decipherment of the Old Persian and Middle Persian inscriptional alphabets however was that by Carsten Niebuhr (1733-1815).[200] Niebuhr was invited, while he was still a student at the University of Göttingen, to join an expedition to Arabia and the Near East funded by the King of Denmark Frederick V (r. 1746-1766). The mission was to record the various "curiosities" of the East, but especially those of Egypt and Arabia with an eye to collecting material concerning the Old Testament. The party was composed of five Danish scholars, picked especially for the mission, including a linguist specialised in Oriental languages, a natural historian, a doctor and an artist; Niebuhr, who received training in cartography and navigational astronomy for this appointment, was put in charge of geography, authoring some of the most extensive and accurate maps of the Near East and Asia of his time. Niebuhr was to be the sole survivor of the expedition, all four of his companions succumbing to disease during the journey:[201] he reached Persepolis only in 1765, on his way back from India, and alone, his last travelling companion having died in Surat. Taking a ship from Bombay to Muscat and then Bushehr, the young man makes his way up north inland to Shirāz and then Persepolis only as a detour, specifically to see the famous ruins, returning to the Persian Gulf to sail from Basra along the Euphrates to reach Bagdad. In his preface, Niebuhr assures his reader that although there are already many descriptions of Persepolis – he namely cites those of Chardin and de Bruijn – he will find new inscriptions never copied before as well as better copies of already known ones.[202] His detailed account of the ruins is accompanied by two double folio drafts of cuneiform inscriptions carefully separated into different sections to distinguish the three different cuneiform alphabets. This time, his keen eye was able to differentiate the Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian versions, offering his reader coherent lines of three sets of characters:[203] it was based on his meticulous drafts that Münter was half a century later able to identify the single diagonal wedge as a word divider and recognize the title "King of kings", leading the way to Grotefend's decipherment of Old Persian cuneiform. Like his predecessors, Niebuhr also copied several Arabo-Persian

[200] For a study of Carsten Niebuhr's work, see Wiesehöfer and Conermann 2002; on the importance of Niebuhr's travel account for ancient Iranian studies more generally and Silvestre de Sacy's work on Middle Persian specifically, see Wiesehöfer and Huyse (forthcoming), "Carsten Niebuhr and Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy: How a keen observer and a gifted young scholar unravelled the secrets of Sasanian Naqš-e Rostam".

[201] Niebuhr 1780, II, v.

[202] Niebuhr 1780, II, vi.

[203] Niebuhr 1780, II, 129-130.

inscriptions, but his account again outdoes those of earlier travellers in that he conscientiously has each of his epigraphic samples fully translated by the French Persian-born agent in Basra, Jean François Rousseau.[204] On the same plate (pl. XXVII) **[Fig. 2.16]**, Niebuhr also includes a much better example of the trilingual Sasanian inscriptions of Naqš-e Rostam, including an often-ignored Hebrew inscription engraved on Ardašīr I's triumph relief, as well as a much-improved draft of Kerdīr's inscription on Šābuhr I's bas-relief, despite its lacunary state; he also copies the Sasanian trilingual inscriptions of Naqš-e Rajab. Niebuhr finishes his passage on the inscriptions of Persepolis by marvelling at the sheer quantity and variety of epigraphic texts engraved on the ruins, declaring that there must be no other place in the world that brought together so many different types of characters, beginning with the cuneiform texts and ranging all the way to the modern graffiti left on the ruins by his fellow travellers:[205] in this sense, Niebuhr is the very first scholar to put forward a reflexion of the inscriptions of Persepolis as an epigraphic whole. Like his predecessors, Niebuhr observes that the cuneiform inscriptions must be original to the buildings because a space has been made in the architectural and iconographic program of the site to receive them. Next in antiquity he places Kerdīr's inscription engraved behind Šābuhr I's triumph. Interestingly, despite his sharp sense of observation, Niebuhr does not recognise its characters to be the same as those in the Middle Persian version of the Sasanian label inscriptions; these make up the next strata of inscriptions in Niebuhr's all-encompassing study. Then come the Parthian legends, making him the first to differentiate the Parthian versions from their Middle Persian counterparts. After the writings of the ancient Persians he continues, the Greeks also recorded their passage on the site with some inscriptions, although he is very critical of their poor draftsman ship. After them he places the Kufic, Arabic and Persian texts engraved in a more recent past, as well as the Hebrew inscriptions. The last stratum in his epigraphic overview are the names of the travellers and he notes – perhaps with a note of disapproval – that the name of Cornelis de Bruijn is drawn in red chalk in several locations. Niebuhr is somewhat uncomfortable with his global description of the inscriptions of Persepolis, conceding that the lightly etched Hebrew words and the names of his contemporaries should probably not be ranked among the other inscriptions of the site:[206] his hesitation illustrates the characteristic difficulty of reconciling an instinctive distinction between 'official' as well as more ornamental epigraphic commissions and private mementos,

[204] Niebuhr 1780, II, 113.

[205] Niebuhr 1780, II, 129-130.

[206] Niebuhr 1780, II, 130.

with an appreciation for the fact that the texts, despite their very different nature, were articulated around one another to form a more or less coherent whole.[207]

The two alphabets of the Parsi priests according to Carsten Niebuhr.

Like his predecessors, Niebuhr spontaneously compares the cursive Middle Persian and Avestan scripts he obtained from members of the Zoroastrian community during his travels with the cuneiform characters he observes at Persepolis, expressing his surprise at not finding any of these ancient Persian letters engraved on the ruins.[208] During his stay in Surat, Niebuhr had obtained a copy of two ancient alphabets used by the Parsis from a Capuchin monk who was a close friend of Anquetil Duperron; the characters had been drawn for the latter by one of the Zoroastrian priests who helped him with his study of the Avesta (see below). Niebuhr respectively calls these two alphabets the Pehlevi, said to be used for the Zoroastrian sacred texts, and the "Dsjan-chân", perhaps a deformation of the term "Zend" and much more vaguely recorded as being used "for other books".[209] From his table, the two scripts roughly correspond to the Middle Persian cursive alphabet – augmented with some diacritics and a few Avestan letters – and the Avestan script; the Danish traveller also provides the phonetic value of each character in Latin letters. In this respect, Niebuhr's table is a significant improvement on Chardin's own, clearly distinguishing for the first time – after Anquetil Duperron's pioneering work – the use of two alphabets by the Zoroastrian community.

Documenting Middle Persian glyptic and numismatics.

Niebuhr's examination of the ruins also stands because he has the idea of comparing the ruins with other ancient near eastern artefacts: seals. In his description of the great entrance gate on the Persepolis platform and the fantastical composite creatures carved on the two monumental antae – which Niebuhr calls Persian sphinxes – he observes that a very similar creature is depicted in one of the two agate sealing stones given to him during his stay in Aleppo and Basra.[210] The first seal indeed portrays a similar composite creature, winged, with an animal – equine? – body but with a crowned human head; it does not bear an inscription. The second seal however depicts a feline creature and includes an inscription engraved along the edge,

[207] See Ramble (forthcoming, a), "Generations of writing: the secondary inscriptions of Persepolis".

[208] Niebuhr 1780, II, 130.

[209] Niebuhr 1780, II, 40.

[210] Niebuhr, 1780, II, 102, pl. XX.

encircling the image in the centre. It is difficult to determine from Niebuhr's sketch exactly what language the inscription is engraved in but he certainly seems confident that the characters are identical to that engraved on the series of coins published in his *Description of Arabia*:[211] now, the five coins illustrated in plate XI (figures 17 to 21) of this volume are Sasanian coins with legends in Middle Persian engraved all around the central image of a Sasanian king, immediately recognisable by his korymbos-surmounted crown; the obverse of the coins depicts the familiar motif of two figures standing on either side of a fire altar. Although Niebuhr describes them as bearing ancient Persian or Parthian writings – the terms Persian and Parthian are also used interchangeably in Late Antique historiography[212] – he does not seem to draw a link between the characters engraved on the Sasanian bas-reliefs and those in his numismatic and glyptic samples: the association between Sasanian coins and Sasanian monumental inscriptions had to await Silvestre de Sacy's work a few decades later.

III. Bringing back the first Middle Persian manuscripts to Europe.

Anquetil Duperron and the Parsi manuscripts of Surat.

Niebuhr's reference to Anquetil Duperron's study of the Avesta with the Parsi priests of Surat is particularly noteworthy. This not the only allusion by the Danish traveller to Anquetil Duperron's work, indicating that the latter was already considered to be a reference for all those exploring the antiquities of Iran.[213] Anquetil Duperron's return from India with 18 Zoroastrian manuscripts obtained in Surat and which he deposited at the Bibliothèque du Roi in 1762, as well as his pioneering work on cursive Middle Persian and Avestan, suddenly brought the study of Zoroastrianism into sharp focus for European scholars and excited academic interest for pre-Islamic Iran and its languages. Although Anquetil Duperron exclusively dedicated himself to manuscript Middle Persian (and Avestan), the lexicon of Middle Persian terms he derived from his translations of the Zoroastrian texts were instrumental to Silvestre de Sacy's decipherment of inscriptional Middle Persian. As we shall see in the following chapter, manuscript and inscriptional Middle Persian were not immediately recognised as being the same language rendered by two variant alphabets and in many ways the close friendship between Anquetil Duperron and Silvestre de Sacy – the latter was even made "légataire universel" by Anquetil

[211] Niebuhr, 1774.

[212] In Ammianus Marcellinus's *Res Gestae* for example.

[213] Niebuhr, 1780, II, 33-34, 40.

Duperron, inheriting all his travel notes and papers at his death – can be seen as embodying the articulation between the decipherment and study of manuscript and inscriptional Middle Persian in the second half of the 18th century. Although Anquetil Duperron's motivations for going to India were academic and focused on translating the Zoroastrian manuscript texts, he was also a traveller and adventurer in his own right and in this respect his audacious journey has its place in this chapter.

Anquetil Duperron (1731-1805) was the son of a spice merchant and his interest for the East seems to have begun very early on, for he chose as a young student to learn oriental languages – namely Arabic but also Hebrew – while studying with the Jansenists in Holland, at the Amersfoot seminary. In the introduction to his travelogue, Anquetil Duperron repeatedly mentions his desire to learn about the antiquity of the East from eastern sources directly: he is exasperated by the "assoupissement général" concerning the study of ancient oriental languages and strongly critical towards scholars – namely Hyde – who expect to be enlightened on all matters eastern by reading Latin and Greek texts "in vain".[214] When in 1754 he is shown in Paris the copy of an Avestan manuscript brought back from India and kept at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, he decides to go learn "ancient Persian" in "either Gujarat or Kirman".[215] He sets sail barely a year later for Surat with the explicit intention of bringing back a copy of the sacred scriptures of the Zoroastrians from the Parsi community established there and, even more importantly, intent on succeeding where the British had failed, which is to say to convince Parsi priests to teach him the "Zend" language. Indeed, although in the *discours préliminaire* to his travelogue Anquetil Duperron sums up rather dismissingly British scholars' knowledge of Zoroastrianism and its scriptures, he is forced to recognise that they were pioneers both in the study of this ancient religion and in the collection of Avestan manuscripts.[216] The British East India Company was firmly implanted in India in the 18th century and through its exceptional relationship with the Parsi community, British agents and travellers encountered and bought Zoroastrian manuscripts. The first specimen, a copy of the *Vendidad Sāde*, to be sent back to Europe was procured by George Bourchier and brought from Bombay to England by the Reverend Richard Cobbe and placed in the Bodleian Library Oxford in 1723. An impressive collection of Zoroastrian as well as Sanskrit and Persian manuscripts were then bought by James Fraser (1713-1754), a member of the Royal Society and a servant of the East

[214] Anquetil Duperron 1771, I, vi.

[215] Anquetil Duperron 1771, I, vi.

[216] Anquetil Duperron 1771, I, v.

India Company posted at the British council in Surat in the early 1740s; the list of the hundreds of oriental manuscripts his collection comprised is included at the end of the latter's account of the life of Nadir Shah (1742).[217] His premature death put a sudden stop to his work on the Zoroastrian manuscripts he had obtained however, leaving the field open for Anquetil Duperron.

In France, Anquetil Duperron's project was backed by eminent members of the *Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* such as the Comte de Caylus and the Abbé Barthélémy who promised to obtain funding for him, with the implication that, should his brazen enterprise succeed, it would be crowned with a fellowship at the Academy. Seeing that the funding was taking time to materialise, and also keen not to have to owe anyone anything should his ambitious undertaking fail, the young and bold Anquetil Duperron decided to leave by his own means, enrolling in the army of the Compagnie des Indes as a foot soldier, taking with him only two shirts, two handkerchiefs and a pair of tights.[218] Upon his arrival at the port of Lorient however, he is told by the Compagnie bureau that the king had awarded him a pension of 500 pounds towards his mission in India: this had been obtained for him by his contacts at the Académie along with free crossing aboard a ship of the Compagnie des Indes bound for Pondicherry. Reaching India, his different letters of recommendation introduced him to the French society established there, and namely M. de Leyrit, Governor general of French establishments in India. Anquetil Duperron was able to obtain from the latter a rudimentary salary of 75 rupees a month to sustain him while he learned Persian and made contact with the Parsi community, although the young man pointedly refused an official job as interpreter for the Compagnie, judging that the "mercenary and instrumental role" of interpreters was ill-adapted to his independent character.[219] Anquetil Duperron was highly critical of the expatriate community in Pondicherry. The young man's arrival and the object of his mission raised many eyebrows, and he describes himself as standing out sharply from the rest of his compatriots: he viewed their attraction for India as motivated only by greed, the need to make up the family fortunes which they had squandered or to exile themselves while the scandals they had caused back in France died down. Similarly, the preface to his travelogue, jointly addressed to the French and British people, is an unambiguous plea to cease plundering India for its material riches and begin instead to nurture interest for the staggering wealth of its ancient culture, to

[217] Fraser 1742, A Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts in the Persic, Arabic and Sanskerrit languages, 1-40.

[218] Anquetil Duperron 1771, I, vii.

[219] Anquetil Duperron 1771, I, xxv.

enrich Europe with goods that "do not cost tears" and "do not expel" from their homes those from whom they are received.

The terms of Anquetil Duperron's departure for and stay in India once again highlight the instrumental role both of European learned societies as well as national trading companies in enabling both financially and logistically the endeavours of early travellers—the young man's spirited account also shows that this support was strongly self-interested. Thus, his sudden departure hastens the Académie des Inscriptions' decision to find him funding and safe crossing to India; although it was not to be immediate, Anquetil Duperron is also rewarded upon his return with an official role as "interpreter of oriental languages" at the Bibliothèque du Roi and a membership at the Académie. Furthermore, the rivalry of the different European powers concerning trading interests in the East, which periodically translated into violent military confrontations,[220] was mirrored by a rivalry between European learned societies and the race for – in the case of the nascent field of Zoroastrian studies – the collection and decipherment of Zoroastrian manuscripts. It would seem that the Zoroastrian priests were quick to pick up on this competition, pointedly remarking in front of their French student on the great sums of money that Fraser had been willing to pay for manuscripts as well as on the great recompense that was offered back in England to who would translate the sacred books of the Zoroastrians.[221] Anquetil Duperron himself exploited the differences between Parsi religious leaders to obtain manuscripts, however.[222] Collecting documents from different religious experts, the young man also for the first time experiences the existence of variant manuscripts and is evidently unsettled by – and very suspicious of – the often-substantial divergences between the texts he is given, not recognising that these were not the result of the dishonesty of the Parsi priests.[223]

The French hold on Pondicherry was finally lost in 1761 and the Compagnie des Indes went bankrupt, forcing Anquetil Duperron to return to Europe on a British ship as a prisoner of war. He is detained in Portsmouth on parole for three months, although the young man was clearly much more anxious about the fate of his manuscripts, kept in a humid outlet at customs than of his own.[224] When he is finally released from prison in England he refuses to go back to

[220] Thus, Anquetil Duperron has to wait three years in Pondicherry before reaching Surat because of the war between England and France for the control of trading posts.

[221] Anquetil Duperron 1771, I, cccxiv. This unflattering portrayal of the Parsi religious leaders was criticised by J. J. Modi, see Deloche, Filliozat and Filliozat 1997, 24-26.

[222] Anquetil Duperron 1771, I, cccxv-cccxviii.

[223] See Deloche, Filliozat and Filliozat 1997, 25-26.

[224] Anquetil Duperron 1771, cccclii-ccccliv.

France insisting that since he had been brought to this country against his will he would at least go visit Oxford first. Obtaining a three-day passport for Oxford, he is invited to examine the copy of the *Vendidad Sāde* deposited there, and is able to confirm that the manuscript, the trigger for his entire enterprise in India, indeed corresponded to the most beautiful of the manuscripts that he had obtained in Surat. He is also shown Fraser's impressive collection of manuscripts, noting with some satisfaction that it does not contain any Middle Persian texts. Anquetil Duperron finally made his way back to Paris, arriving on the stormy night of the 14th of March 1762, suffering from a terrible attack of gout; the very next day he presented himself at the Bibliothèque du Roi to deposit the precious manuscripts he had brought back from India; he was not thirty years old.[225]

Work on cursive Middle Persian begins.

Anquetil Duperron published a series of dissertations on the "Ancient languages of Persia" in the journal of the *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* which for the first time clearly distinguished between the Avestan and Middle Persian languages and scripts.[226] Anquetil Duperron also offered concrete examples of the way in which the Avestan, Middle Persian and Persian strata of text and commentary were articulated in a given manuscript, providing a Latin and French translation of the Avestan and a French one of the Middle Persian to illustrate his demonstration. A few years later in 1771 the account of his travels and his translation of the Avesta were printed, propelling Zoroastrian studies forward. With Anquetil Duperron's first extensive work on the Middle Persian language and script also came the first serious challenges that this writing system posed to scholarship. Thus, we find for the first time the notion that Middle Persian was riddled with Arabic and Syriac loanwords as a result of its prolonged contact with Arabic-speaking populations: if Anquetil Duperron does record the term "azvaresch/huzvaresh", he considers it to be a mere synonym for "Middle Persian".[227] Similarly, although they are correctly translated, all the arameographic forms of words are rendered phonetically. No link is yet established either between the languages of the Zoroastrian scriptures and that engraved on the ruins of Persepolis, and Anquetil Duperron dismisses as fabrications the drafts recorded by early European travellers, although he does introduce an important temporal landmark when he argues that Middle Persian was probably

[225] Anquetil Duperron 1771, cccclxxvii-cccclxxviii.

[226] Anquetil Duperron 1768.

[227] Anquetil Duperron 1768, 408-409.

spoken up to the Sasanian period.[228] As work on Middle Persian epigraphy moved away from the field and its adventures and into the carpeted cabinets of library orientalists, many of whom had never left their country let alone Europe, these issues became the tropes of scholarly debate – taking until the nineteenth century to untangle – and will be the focus of the following chapter.

[228] Anquetil Duperron 1768, 416.