Historiography and palaeography of Sasanian Middle Persian inscriptions

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Chapter 4

Towards a biography of writing: Šābuhr's inscription at Hājjiābād

I. Early studies of the Hājjiābād texts: contentions over the "nature" of Middle Persian.

The first copies of Šābuhr's bilingual inscription at Hājjiābād.

The rediscovery of the Middle Persian and Parthian bilingual inscription of the Hājjiābād grotto in Fārs is usually attributed to Sir Robert Ker Porter (1777-1842),[353] but another British traveller ought to be credited – if not for discovering the inscription, since it was local inhabitants who led him to it – for venturing beyond the well-known sites of Persepolis and Naqš-e Rostam in search of undocumented antiquities. Sir James Justinian Morier (1782-1849), a British diplomat and writer, was famous in his time for his popular novel *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*, a satirical portrayal of Persian society packed with orientalist motifs that follows the adventures of the mischievous Hajji Baba.[354] Morier undertook his *Second Journey* to Persia between 1810 and 1816, joining the embassy headed by Sir Gore Ouseley in charge of accompanying the Persian ambassador Mirzā Abu'l-Hasan – "feasted and exhibited in London for nine months" – back to the Qajar court.[355] On their journey north to Isfahān from the gulf, the party are detained in Shiraz and Morier visits the ruins of Persepolis. He compares De Bruijn, Chardin and Niebuhr's drawings of the inscriptions and reliefs with what he sees *in situ* and follows della Valle and Chardin in exploring the underground channels of the terrace, conscientiously repeating motifs – such as his servants' growing fear as they progressed deeper into the dark passageways and his own disappointment at not being able to advance any further than his predecessors – developed in the French traveller's account.[356] Morier, however, was especially intent on finding "some object that had never yet been described by other travellers" and paid local men to excavate the

[353] See for instance Thomas 1868, 70 and Gignoux 1972, 9.

[354] For an overview of the different editions of this work, first published in 1824, see Amanat 2003.

[355] Morier 1818, 1-2.

[356] Morier 1818, 77-78.

terrace, until an order from the governor put an end to his activities.[357] His enquiries eventually led him to a cavern "still unexplored by Europeans" known as the "Zendan Jemsheed" – yet another instance of the association of monuments and ominous locales with this mythical Persian king. Following the river Pulvār from Naqš-e Rostam, the party reached the village of Hājjiābād in the vicinity of which lay the rocky recess engraved with the inscription. Morier set to work to copy the inscription, but his guides were reluctant to linger after nightfall for the region was "infested with Bakhtiarees" and urged him to rush his drawings; his account contains only a small sketch of the cave and an approximate copy of a few lines of Parthian, which Morier knew at least enough about to describe as "Pehlavi" **[Fig. 4.1]**.[358]

Morier put Hājjiābād on the map for future travellers and both the Middle Persian and Parthian versions were copied a year later in 1817 by Ker Porter, a Scottish diplomat and artist appointed as historical painter to the court of Tsar Alexander I (1777-1825), where he married a Russian princess, Mary von Scherbatoff, who was a cousin of Alexei Olenin, the Imperial Secretary of State and the President of the Russian Academy of Fine Arts in Saint Petersburg. Ker Porter travelogue is dedicated to George IV of England, but in his preface, he publishes a letter addressed to him by Olenin, encouraging him to make accurate drawings of the ruins of ancient sites in Persia, "nothing suppose, nothing repair", suggesting that his journey was made with the support of the Academy.[359] More particularly, Olenin asks his "cousin" to record "the precise form of the Pahlevi and Zend characters", indicating that the recent discoveries in Europe were animating the Russian intellectual circles also. Ker Porter left Saint Petersburg in 1817 for Odessa, from where he intended to cross the Black Sea to Constantinople; however, because of an outbreak of plague there, he was forced to change his route and finally reached Persia by land through Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.[360] He then made his way down through Qazvīn, Tehrān, and Isfahān to the province of Fārs. On his way from Pasargadae to Persepolis Ker Porter and his suite followed the bends of the river Kūr (Pulvār) into the dell of Hājjiābād. He describes an idyllic landscape, with ripening plentiful harvests, well-watered plains and tortoises crawling in the abundant vegetation; crystalline springs flowed from a series of grottos and gushed out from high up in the cliff, falling into the valley in cascades.[361]

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[357] Morier 1818, 76-77.

[358] Morier 1818, 79-81.

[359] Ker Porter 1821, I, vi-viii.

[360] Ker Porter 1821, I, 6-7.

[361] Ker Porter 1821, I, 509-511.

He notes that some caves, held to be holy by local inhabitants, were strewn with innumerable lamps. The party halted in the village of Hājjiābād, where the author was told about a 'piece of antiquity' and brought to the cave engraved with the inscription of Šābuhr I.[362] The natural recess had been widened and its walls made smoother by manual labour, and four deep frames had been cut into the rock, two engraved with a version each of the bilingual text while the other two were left empty. Ker Porter took a careful copy of the inscription, recognising the script to be "Pehlevi", although he extends this identification to both versions **[Fig. 4.2]**. He expresses his hope that his copies will be brought to the attention of Monsieur de Sacey (*sic*), but Silvestre de Sacy never published a study of these.

A few years after Morier and Ker Porter's visits to the site, the Irish-born Major-General Sir Ephraim Gerrish Stannus, Resident of the East India Company in Bushehr, undertook excavations at Persepolis in search of new antiquities; his name is engraved twice on the ruins of the terrace. He unearthed several bas-reliefs and column capitals – which were, however, promptly reburied by locals: according to the British traveller Alexander, an especially destructive flight of locusts was blamed on the excavations of the ancient vestiges – and embarked on the confection of a series of plaster casts of the sculptures and inscriptions.[363] Evidently well-informed about Morier and Ker Porter's recent discoveries, Stannus also went to Hājjiābād to make casts of the engraved texts. These were shipped to England from Bushehr in 1826;[364] a set was displayed at the British Museum and another given to the Royal Asiatic Society. The original casts were donated to the Royal Dublin Society and were first published in this Society's *Transactions* in 1835. It was after these that Edwin Norris, secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society produced the first pentagraph copies of the Hājjiābād inscription.[365]

Following the siege of Herat in 1838, diplomatic relations between England and Persia collapsed and the French crown promptly sent an embassy to the Qajar court a year later to take advantage of the rift. The French military painter Eugène Flandin and architect Pascal Coste were especially appointed by the Institut de France to join the embassy and to produce illustrations for their account of the mission (see Chapter 3).[366] In step with their British

[362] Ker Porter 1821, I, 512-515, pl. 15.

[363] Alexander 1827, 137. On Stannus' plaster casts of the sculptures and inscriptions of Persepolis and the great impact these made when they were displayed at the British Museum for the first time (placed between Egyptian and Classical antiquities), see Simpson 2000.

[364] Curzon 1892, II, 116; Simpson 2007, 349-351.

[365] Thomas 1868, 70-71.

[366] Flandin and Coste 1851, I, 3-7.

predecessors, Flandin and Coste made the detour that took them to the Hājjiābād cave during their 10-day stay at Naqš-e Rostam and Naqš-e Rajab spent copying the bas-reliefs and inscriptions. They were taken to the grotto by the son of the district Hakim and recorded two names for the cave, Zendān-e Jamšīd, and Šeykh ʻAlī, after a legend according to which ʻAlī came to meditate in the caves around Hājjiābād.[367] Flandin and Coste produced two plates of the site: a panoramic view of the valley as seen from the cave **[Fig. 4.3]** and a detail of the bilingual inscription **[Fig. 4.4]**.[368] The first decipherment of the Hājjiābād texts was based on the comparison of Norris' pentagraphs and Flandin and Coste's drawings.

Scholars debate the relationship between manuscript Middle Persian and the language of the Sasanian inscriptions.

In an annex to his 1851 edition of the *Bundahišn*, Niels Ludvig Westergaard published Norris' pentagraphs, but without commenting on them. That Westergaard did work on them however becomes apparent from his discussion of the relationship between inscriptional and manuscript Middle Persian in the preface to his *Zendavesta*.[369] After giving an overview of the different manuscripts that compose the Zoroastrian corpus, Westergaard concluded – following the Zoroastrian tradition – that the texts were assembled and put into writing in the Sasanian period: the Sasanian kings, who piously describe themselves as *mazda-worshipping*, ordered the *mowbed*s to 'restore' the ancient religion that was in decline after five centuries of Hellenistic rule. According to Westergaard, the script used to put the Zoroastrian corpus into writing was a "species of the Semitic alphabet" used under the Sasanian dynasty which gradually evolved into the Avestan script known from the extant manuscripts.[370] To add "new lustre" to Zoroastrianism and to facilitate the understanding of the older texts, additional ones – namely, "Pehlevi" translations and commentaries – were then added to the scriptures.

Now, *Pehlevi*, warns Westergaard, carries "two distinct significations" and designates two idioms belonging to different language families: "The official language of the Sassanian kings was called Pehlevi and this is not any Iranian tongue, but […] a Semitic one in two

[367] Flandin and Coste 1851, II, 138-140.

[368] Flandin and Coste 1851, *Planches*, IV, pl. 193 and 193 *bis*.

[369] Westergaard 1852-1854, 19-21.

[370] Westergaard 1852-1854, 19. The relationship between this "proto-Avestan" script and either inscriptional or manuscript Middle Persian alphabet is, however, not explained.

closely related dialects[371] with some intermixture of Persian words."[372] Remarkably, "Sassanian-Pehlevi", the language of the Sasanian royal inscriptions and coins, is thus considered to be a Semitic idiom. He continues: "This Semitic language differs essentially from what Neriosangh calls *Pehlevi* (*Pahlavi-bháṣá*) which has indeed the same written character, but is by nature Iranian and particularly Persian. This is the proper Zand- or commentary-language."[373] Westergaard thus considered the language of Zoroastrian manuscripts to be a separate, Iranian idiom, unrelated to the (Semitic) one used in the inscriptions and coins. It is worth noting that although the languages of the manuscripts and inscriptions are said to be entirely unrelated, the cursive Middle Persian *script* is understood as deriving directly from inscriptional Middle Persian.

Westergaard also notes that the medieval Parsi scholar Neriosangh, on whose Sanskrit translation he based his study of the Avestan corpus, describes the language of the Zoroastrian commentaries as "intricate": this intricacy is, Westergaard suggests, due to the "arbitrary signs", or "ideographs" used for key parts of speech such as pronouns and prepositions.[374] These only "have the appearance of real words" – perhaps this description may imply that they were not read phonetically – although they can "be made readable" by a special transcription in Avestan, Persian or even Gujarati characters, which is what is referred to as *pāzand*: *pāzand* is thus clearly defined as a transcription process rather than a specific writing system or language. For Westergaard, the Zoroastrian priests deliberately hid Middle Persian under an "artificial and unnatural garb" to make learning it difficult for laymen as well as for the Arab invaders. He further records that in addition to – and separately from – these ideographic signs, Middle Persian *also* has Semitic loanwords: these are marked by the strange use of specific graphemes, and "pertain to the writing system and do not enter the language", a peculiar observation that suggests here again that the Semitic forms were not read phonetically. Westergaard considered these Semitic loanwords to have been inherited from "Sassanian-Pehlevi" (the "Semitic" language of Sasanian inscriptions), when new commentaries in "Zand-Pehlevi" (the Iranian language of Zoroastrian manuscripts) were prepared, based on the older ones, towards the end of the Sasanian period. He gives an example of one such loanword:

[371] The two "closely related dialects" is a reference to Parthian and Middle Persian, known both form the trilingual Sasanian legends and the Hājjiābād text.

[372] Westergaard 1852-1854, 19.

[373] Westergaard 1852-1854, 19.

[374] Westergaard 1852-1854, 20.

"BARBITA".[375] This aramaeogram, which represents the Middle Persian term *wispuhrān* "princes" – BRBYT'n – occurs in both the (Parthian and Middle Persian) versions of the Hājjiābād inscription, indicating that Westergaard had partly deciphered this rock-cut text, but without publishing his results. Evidently, he had derived his understanding of "Sassanian-Pehlevi" – the 'official' "Semitic" language of the Sasanian kings – from his work on the Hājjiābād inscription. Westergaard's example of the heterogram BRBYTA as a "Semitic loanword" passed from the language of the inscriptions into the "Zand-Pehlevi" of the Zoroastrian scriptures, also reveals that he regarded the former ("Sassanian-Pehlevi") to be Semitic because of the frequent recourse to aramaeograms in Middle Persian inscriptions. Westergaard, who so astutely explained the "intricate" terms mentioned by Neriosangh as functioning like ideograms, thus curiously had difficulty extending this understanding to the Semitic-looking terms of Middle Persian: his persistence in viewing them as loanwords is precisely what led him to the erroneous distinction of the language of the Sasanian inscriptions and that of the Zoroastrian manuscript into two separate (and respectively Semitic and Iranian) idioms.

Middle Persian: Semitic, "Aryan" or a "mixed" language?

The very same year, Martin Haug, a German orientalist who dedicated his habilitation dissertation in Bonn to the "Teachings of Zoroaster based on the ancient songs of the Zendavesta", published his own study of the *Bundahišn* headed by an essay on Middle Persian. Haug essentially uses *Pehlewi* and *Huzûresch* synonymously, as had Anquetil Duperron, although to differentiate inscriptional Middle Persian from its manuscript counterpart, he seems to prefer *Pehlewi* for the former and *Huzûresch* for the latter. Disagreeing with Westergaard, he argues that Sasanian inscriptions and the Zoroastrian commentaries showed, on the whole, the same 'basic character' (*Grundcharakter*), consisting of a mixture of Semitic and Iranian components.[376] The main difference pertained to the prevalence of one or the other component: the inscriptions showed a predominance of Semitic linguistic features, with the Parthian version of the Hājjiābād text – called inscription B – being the more Semitic of the two "dialects".[377] Still, although inscriptional and manuscript Middle Persian are considered 'closely related'

[375] Westergaard 1852-1854, 21, n. 1

[376] Haug 1852-1854, 6.

[377] Haug 1852-1854, 23.

(*nahe verwandt*),[378] Haug does not identify them exactly as the same language, therefore agreeing with Silvestre de Sacy's initial sentiment. He also concludes that, in view of the numerous Semitic terms and syntactical elements featured in both the inscriptions and the manuscripts, the "original component" (*der ursprüngliche Bestandtheil*) of all three languages – the two dialects illustrated in the Hājjiābād inscriptions and the language of the manuscripts – was a Semitic idiom to which Iranian words were progressively added.[379] Remarkably, like Westergaard, Haug thus considered the official "Reichs- und Landessprache"[380] of the Sasanians to be essentially Semitic.

Two years later, Friedrich Spiegel published his *Grammatik der Huzvâresch-Sprache*. Spiegel, a German orientalist who first specialised in Pali, was introduced to the *Codices Hafnienses* in the early 1840s by the Orientalist Olshausen (see Chapter III) when working in Copenhagen on Pali manuscripts; he dedicated the remainder of his life to the study of Zoroastrian manuscripts and their languages. Spiegel begins his description of the Middle Persian language, which he calls "Huzvâresch", by painting the backdrop against which this extraordinary mixed language ("Mischprache"), presenting both Aryan and Semitic elements, was born. He tells the story of the invasion of the Near East and Europe by the mighty Iranian tribes from Central Asia, whose vigour the "effeminate empires" (*verweichlichten Reiche*) of Mesopotamian dynasties such as the Assyrians and Babylonians could not withstand.[381] The autochthonous Aramaeans, subjected to what Spiegel terms the Indo-Germanic peoples (*indogermanischen Völkerschaften*) of the Medes and Persians, were nevertheless 'spiritually victorious' over their invaders through the 'silent influence of their higher education': the Achaemenid kings adopted a type of writing system – cuneiform – after the Mesopotamian model.[382] The Semitic languages of Mesopotamia did not at first influence the language of the Persians, and Old Persian remained devoid of Aramaic loanwords. Now, an Aramaic-speaking tribe, the Nabateans, lived on the border of the 'Iranian ethnic area': the geographic proximity of an Aramaic people with the Iranian territory gave rise to Middle Persian.[383] Spiegel, like Anquetil Duperron, traces back the emergence of Middle Persian to a precise point in time and

[378] Haug 1852-1854, 6.

[379] Haug 1852-1854, 29-30.

[380] Haug 1852-1854, 6.

[381] Spiegel 1856, 4.

[382] Spiegel 1856, 4-5.

[383] Spiegel 1856, 24.

space: it is a dialect resulting from the close and repeated cultural contact between Semitic and Iranian peoples, in the period immediately following that of Alexander and the Seleucids.

The curious introduction of the Nabatean tribe as being key to the origin of Middle Persian was influenced by the important memoir that Étienne Quatremère had dedicated to the Nabateans in the *Journal Asiatique* a few years earlier.[384] Quatremère attempts to determine the relationship between Nabatean, Aramaic, Syriac and Chaldean, which he concludes represent different dialects or stages of the same language. He gives an exhaustive overview of the different classical historiographers and Arabo-Persian chroniclers who mention the Nabateans and their language. Because of the allusion to the presence of 'Nabatean words' in Middle Persian, Quatremère gives a full translation of the passage in the *Fihrist* of al-Nadīm describing the *huzwāreš* spelling used by the Persians (see Chapter I), discussing it for the first time – since the middle ages – in the context of a study of the linguistic landscape of Persia.[385] For Quatremère, *huzwāreš* is a form of 'cryptographic writing convention'; he compares it to the practice of writing Latin terms in French, which can be used even by those who are not acquainted with this idiom. Quatremère's somewhat awkward explanation is nevertheless a major step forward. Rather than viewing aramaeograms as Semitic *loanwords* adopted into the Persian language – which was the assumption of western scholars before him, including Anquetil Duperron, Silvestre de Sacy and Westergaard – Quatremère casts the practice of using *huzwāreš* (heterograms) as a '*writing convention*' – in other words, as a feature of the Middle Persian *script* not its language.

The importance of Quatremère's comment is not completely grasped by Spiegel, even though he repeatedly refers to the former's study. Spiegel persists in viewing the 'Semitic components' in Middle Persian as loanwords, and in his grammar, he separates his study of Iranian and Semitic terms into two distinct chapters.[386] Spiegel admits he is baffled by this extraordinary *Mischsprache*,[387] and by the way in which foreign linguistic material could both penetrate and yet not penetrate a language. He even considers the possibility that Middle Persian was never spoken: it would be a 'made-up' language or a special learned 'style' ("Stylart"), with scribes integrating Aramaic words they considered elegant.[388] Spiegel is

[384] Quatremère 1835.

[385] Quatremère 1835, 255-256.

[386] Spiegel 1856, respectively 40-58 and 58-62.

[387] Spiegel 1856, 164.

[388] Spiegel 1856, 165.

evidently wrestling with the idea that the Aramaic components of Middle Persian are a convention, but still has difficulty distinguishing language from writing system. Nevertheless, in contrast to Westergaard and Haug, this leads him to conclude that the essence ("das Wesen") of "Huzvâresch" (Middle Persian) belongs in the Iranian – or Indogermanic – "*Sprachstamm*".[389]

Spiegel's grammar is based on his study of Middle Persian manuscripts, but he does discuss the Sasanian inscriptions in an appendix.[390] He observes that scholars working on Sasanian inscriptions still heavily depended on there being Greek versions to support their conjectures: he mentions that Silvestre de Sacy himself had for that reason not been able to decipher the Hājjiābād inscription, although he was confident that it was written in the same script as the Sasanian trilingual inscriptions,[391] which is the only explanation we have for Silvestre de Sacy's silence concerning Hājjiābād. Nevertheless, Spiegel insists that the difficulty of deciphering the inscriptions is no reason to distinguish their language from that of the manuscripts: the manuscripts dealt for the most part with religious subjects, necessarily entailing a different vocabulary; even based on the short legends deciphered, the language could hardly be called different.[392] Thus, in stark contrast to Westergaard, as well as Haug, Spiegel regarded inscriptional Middle Persian as recording the same idiom as that in the Zoroastrian commentaries and distinguishes three main states of the "Huzvâresch" script: inscriptional, numismatic and manuscript.[393] Spiegel offers an impressively accurate transliteration of the royal titulature recorded in the Parthian version of Hājjiābād – in Hebrew characters, after the widespread convention of his time – remarking on the seeming freedom (*Freiheit*) in the use of 'Semitic' versus Iranian spellings: in the first and third lines the word 'god/lord' is spelled – with the aramaeogram – ALHA, while the fourth line presents the phonetic rendering *bag* (*bg*) as in the Middle Persian version. He comments that the language appeared to be only a minor variant (*nur wenig abweichend*) of its Middle Persian counterpart, a "*Dialekt(e)*".[394]

[389] Spiegel 1856, 159.

[390] Spiegel 1856, 166-185.

[391] Spiegel 1856, 174-175.

[392] Spiegel 1856, 168-169, 175.

[393] Spiegel 1856, 167.

[394] Spiegel 1856, 175.

Identifying the language of "Inscription B" at Hājjiābād.

The bilingual inscription of Hājjiābād offered more substantial Middle Persian-Parthian comparative material and significant progress on the Parthian alphabet was achieved by the English numismatist and collector Edward Thomas, a servant of the East India Company in Bengal and Treasurer of the Royal Numismatic Society. In a study dedicated to the Arab-Sasanian coins from the early Islamic period he put forth a table presenting the correspondences between the Hebrew, the Parthian – "Chaldaeo-Pehlevi" or "Persepolitan Pehlevi" because of the (erroneous) assumption that this type of writing was found only on monuments in the Persepolis region – Sasanian Lapidary, described as a "vulgar version" of the former, and the Sasanian "numismatic" alphabets;[395] it was on this table that Spiegel based his decipherment of the royal titulature in the Parthian version of Hājjiābād.

Scholars disagreed on what the language of inscription B at Hājjiābād ought to be called and debated its linguistic relationship to Middle Persian. The term "Parthian" to describe it was suggested by Rawlinson in his edition of the Bīsotūn inscription. He distinguished three variants of the script. In addition to the form attested in Hājjiābād, he mentions a Parthian numismatic alphabet;[396] he also takes the inscriptions from Šīmbār and 'Tang-e Soluk' (Tang-e Sarvak), later recognised by Henning to be Elymaean Aramaic, to present a very crude form of Parthian.[397]

Thomas' labelling of the script as "Persepolitan Pehlevi" was endorsed by the French scholar François Lenormant (1837-1883) in a 'mémoire' dedicated to Middle Persian palaeography. Lenormant was an archaeologist and numismatist, the son of Charles Lenormant – Curator of the Cabinet des Médailles and companion of Champollion during his 1828 mission to Egypt – and a controversial figure: he produced scientific publications in his teenage years but was accused of forging several inscriptions and including them with authentic material.[398] Lenormant attempts to determine the 'genealogical relationship'[399] between the Middle Persian alphabet and the Aramaic and Palmyrene scripts, one of the recurring topics of scholarly discussion since Hyde and the Abbé Barthélémy: his letter by letter comparison of the three alphabets along with Hebrew bring him to the conclusion that Middle Persian was a sister script

[395] Thomas 1850, 262-272, pl. 1.

[396] Rawlinson 1848, 44, n. 1.

[397] See Henning 1952; Shaked and Bivar 1964.

[398] Masson 1994.

[399] Lenormant 1865, 214.

of Palmyrene – but not derived from it – descended from Aramaic.[400] He distinguishes four palaeographic stages of Middle Persian in order of their 'degeneracy' from Aramaic:[401] the "Persepolitan Pehlevi" – he rejects Rawlinson's appellation "Parthian" arguing like Thomas that the main instances of this script were found in the Persepolis region – the "Sasanian Pehlevi" – corresponding to Middle Persian – the cursive script of the Zoroastrian manuscripts and a "proto-Pehlevi" script on Parthian coins. For Lenormant, Parthian is thus a 'stage' of Middle Persian.

Although this classification contains a strong element of chronology, Lenormant departs from his numismatist predecessors in that he allows for the possibility that a version of monumental and cursive Middle Persian co-existed.[402] To back this opinion, he cites the famous passage in the *Fihrist* which describes the multiplicity of alphabets used in pre-Islamic Persia. This leads him to consider the chronicler's addendum on the "*zawaresch*" spelling: Lenormant flatly describes the passage as obscure but concludes that the Semitic words used in Middle Persian were a form of 'mystic cryptography' comparable to the Jewish tradition of reading Adonai when encountering the tetragrammaton YHWH in the Bible.[403] He also makes an astute observation concerning the 'corrupted' spelling of the name 'Ohrmazd': following the example of the Jewish reading convention for YHWH, he suggests the word be read 'Ahuramazda' after the Avestan pronunciation, instead of Anquetil Duperron's phonetic "Ahnouman".

Parthian was also put forward as the "missing link" between the Aramaic-derived script engraved on Pali coins from Bactria – now known as the Kharoṣṭhī script – and the Sasanian numismatic alphabet. Horace Haymon Wilson, a numismatist and professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, published in 1841 his *Ariana Antiqua*, a work dedicated to coins and other antiquities found in Afghanistan by the British archaeologist Charles Masson (James Lewis) under the auspices of the East India Company. After classical historiography, Wilson defines "Ariana" as the geographic entity extending from the Indus to Carmania and from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea.[404] It is worth noting that whereas Silvestre de Sacy had tentatively read 'APIAN' in the Naqš-e Rostam inscriptions – and in fact translated ANAPIAN as 'Tūrān' – Wilson

[400] Lenormant 1865, 211. Lenormant ascribes to Silvestre de Sacy the hypothesis that Middle Persian derived from Palmyrene, but this is not clear from the *Diverses Antiquités de la Perse,* Silvestre de Sacy 1793, 122.

[401] Lenormant 1865, 216-219.

[402] Lenormant 1865, 197.

[403] Lenormant 1865, 200-201.

[404] Wilson 1841, 120-122.

confidently states that Ariana is "in fact, the same as IRAN, the proper appellation of Persia",[405] marking a striking evolution in Western historiography whereby the appellation "Persia" was beginning to be considered "wrong". Wilson notes that the script on the Pali coins presents some analogy with the inscriptional Middle Persian alphabet. Now, "the medium by which [the Kharoṣṭhī script] merged into the Pehlevi of the Sassanians" would be provided by the second (Parthian) version of the Hājjiābād inscription: this observation leads Wilson to conclude that the Kharoṣṭhī script was once used throughout Central Asia and Iran, in "the entire region from the Hindu Kush to the vicinity of Persepolis […] in the whole of which, it is to be inferred, both letters and language were once intelligible to the people".[406] The scholar evidently regarded the Kharoṣṭhī script as recording the original language common to all people living in the geographic entity of "Ariana"; he decides to name it the *Arianian* alphabet. Parthian is presented as being a stage in the "transmutation" of this original *Arianian* script, while Middle Persian would derive directly from Parthian.

Early translations of the Hājjiābād inscription, or how to be misled by aramaeograms: King Šābuhr I as supreme lord of the Jews.

Based on his careful comparative study of the two versions at Hājjiābād for his alphabet of "Persepolitan Pehlevi", Thomas first put forward a brave attempt at a reading of the Hājjiābād inscription. In 1867 he published an extensive article which brought together all the Sasanian inscriptions that were known to Western scholarship in his day; as such it was the first work to consider the Sasanian epigraphic corpus as a whole. It is headed by a study of the "career of the Phoenician-Babylonian script" stretching across nine centuries and culminating in the modern Arabic script.[407] Parthian and Middle Persian, which appeared at some mid-way point in this story, are considered "rival" scripts rather than descendants of one another as proposed by Wilson. With this study, Thomas is determined to bring to the fore what he considered a neglected writing system compared to others which excited the fascination of scholarship in his time, declaring from the outstart: "let Hieroglyphics and Cuneiform retain their ancient fame".[408] Thomas' overview of the Sasanian inscriptions shows that little progress had been made in his time beyond the decipherment of royal titulature. For instance, Kerdīr's inscription

[405] Wilson 1841, 120.

[406] Wilson 1841, 260-262.

[407] Thomas 1868, 5-22.

[408] Thomas 1868, 6.

at Naqš-e Rajab, copied by Flandin and Coste, is still attributed to Ardašīr because it is engraved next to this king's bas-relief; for the same reasons his inscription at Naqš-e Rostam is attributed to Šābuhr I. The numismatist does notice the recurrence of a term, *krtyr*, which we now know to be 'Kerdīr', the name of the high priest who authored both texts. He emends *krtyr* to *kytrum* however, identifying it as deriving from the Semitic root meaning 'crown'.[409]

Nevertheless, Thomas' publication did put forward original material. Although written by him, the article appeared as co-authored with Sir Henry Rawlinson for it published the latter's personal field notes concerning the Paikuli inscription, with a description of the site's geographical location and an account of the local lore concerning its history.[410] Thomas offers a transliteration – in the modern Parsi Middle Persian script for the Middle Persian version and in Hebrew for the Parthian – and a transcription in New Persian of the engraved blocks drawn by Rawlinson, but without offering a translation. He makes an explicit appeal to fellow scholars and chance travellers to help improve the existing copies of the Paikuli text by bringing back photographs, impressions, rubbings, or drawings of the blocks, providing to this effect the exact geographical coordinates of the site.[411]

Heading the article was also a photograph of Stannus' plaster casts of the Hājjiābād inscription, the other focus of Thomas' study. The scholar for the first time put forth a full, if approximate, transliteration and transcription – respectively in Hebrew and in New Persian – of the bilingual text and offered a tentative translation **[Fig. 4.5]**. Influenced by the well-known formulae of the Sasanian label inscriptions, Thomas identified the first word as *ptkr* (*pahikar*, 'image'), although the palaeography could not support this reading. Surprisingly he also misinterprets the second word, the demonstrative pronoun *ēn* spelled with the aramaeogram ZNE, well-known from the Sasanian legends, and reads "*zan*" (Middle and New Persian, 'woman'), translating it as the more neutral 'person'; Šābuhr I's titulature had already been deciphered by Spiegel. Thomas thus renders the first lines as a standard label formula, without the demonstrative: "representation of the person of Shapur king of kings".[412] Some aramaeograms are correctly identified by Thomas – such as BRBYTA, already explained by his predecessors – while phonetically spelled terms like *bērōn*, 'outside', are recognised thanks to comparison with New Persian. But for the greater part of the text, Thomas' work presents a

[409] Thomas 1868, 32.

[410] Thomas 1868, 56-80.

[411] Thomas 1868, 3-4.

[412] Thomas 1868, 73-76, 98.

series of misinterpretations leading to an extraordinary translation. Thus, the phrase AMT ZNE HTYA (*kā ēn tigr*, 'when the arrow'), is entirely misunderstood: ZNE is given as 'people' (see above), HTYA he links to New Persian *xodā*, 'god', and AMT to Arabic امة which he believes to mean 'many', giving "Lord of many races".[413] Similarly, the old mistake made by Silvestre de Sacy in reading the relative *kē*, MNW, as *mēnōg* – 'immaterial', but stretched by the French scholar to 'celestial' – persists, so that MNW YDE is translated as "the divine hand/aid". More problematic still for the general interpretation of the text is Thomas' misunderstanding of the aramaeogram 'to be' YHWWN as phonetically spelling the (Arabic) word for 'Jew', *yahud* — it appears with the personal ending 't' and 'd' in the Parthian version.[414] In the Middle Persian version where this verb is preceded by the adverb *ōwōn*, read *'rgwn* by Thomas and linked to the Greek ἄρχων, the resulting translation is extraordinary: Šābuhr would not only be describing himself as the 'Lord of many races' but more specifically "the supreme lord of the chosen Jews". Here the idea of 'chosen' is derived from the terms ADYN *bērōn* ('there beyond'), translated as "lawless [*a-dēn*] outside": "the separate sect declares itself outside… claiming a special pre-eminence as 'chosen'".[415]

Thomas himself admits not being very 'satisfied' with the resulting translation but nevertheless seriously entertains the idea that this inscription is a "unique manifesto" testifying to the "Western influences to which Sapor was subjected after his conquest of Valerian" and to the conversion of the Sasanian king – by Mani – to the "true faith".[416] The scholar concludes that Šābuhr probably remained a convert to Christianity for the rest of his life for had he reverted to the "newly defined creed of his father" he surely would not have "allowed this formal record of his adhesion to a more enlightened religion to have remained undisturbed till his death". It is worth noting that this remarkable interpretation was not wholly rejected from the outset: the British traveller George Curzon mentions, in his description of the Hājjiābād cave and its inscription, Thomas' theory concerning the conversion to Christianity of Šābuhr I, conceding nevertheless that there was no external evidence for it.[417]

It must be remembered that Thomas was a numismatist; his unfortunate readings of several heterograms may be explained to a greater extent as resulting from his lack of

[413] Thomas 1868, 73-77, 98.

[414] Thomas 1868, 85-88. "In like manner, I can hardly be mistaken in accepting the ايهوت and يهوت (in line 9) as the common designation of the Jewish nation at large", Thomas 1868, 85.

[415] Thomas 1868, 90.

[416] Thomas 1868, 100.

[417] Curzon 1892, II, 116.

knowledge of the Zoroastrian scriptures: Silvestre de Sacy's spectacular decipherment of inscriptional Middle Persian as we saw was largely enabled by his systematic comparison of key terms with possible counterparts from the manuscripts. As West would later observe, part of the problem was that Thomas – like many others – considered inscriptional and manuscript Middle Persian as quite separate languages.

II. Working with the Parsi scholars of Mumbai.

The Hājjiābād inscription intrigues the Parsi scholars of Mumbai.

Nevertheless, knowledge of manuscript Middle Persian could not alone provide the key to the decipherment of the Hājjiābād inscription. Indeed, the bilingual text intrigued experts of the Zoroastrian scriptures such as the Parsi scholar Dhanjibhai Framji but his translation of the inscription was rather unsuccessful. Framji served as the president of the Mulla Feroze Library – now part of the K. R. Cama Oriental institute – and of the Mulla Feroze Madressa, an institution founded in 1854 by the Kadmi Anjuman (the Parsi Zoroastrian reformist council)[418] and which provided free education in Avestan, Middle Persian and Persian to Parsis. He was also a member of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society – which had only just begun admitting Indians as members[419] – and the author of *A Grammar of the Huzvarash or Proper Pehlvi language* (1853, in Gujarati) as well as *On the Origin and Authenticity of the Arian Family of Languages, the Zand Avesta and the Huzvarash* (1861). On their respective title pages, the publication date of the works is given according to three eras: of Zoroaster, of the last Sasanian king Yazdegerd and of Christ. Bombay in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a dynamic center of modern Zoroastrian studies driven by eminent Parsi scholars such as Jivanji Jamshedji Modi (1854-1933), Tahmuras Dinshah Anklesaria (1842-1903) – themselves either Zoroastrian priests or born in priestly families – who collected, published and printed translations and editions of important Zoroastrian manuscripts and studies of Zoroastrian religion and traditions. It was also through the Parsi community of Bombay, several

[418] On the birth of the Zoroastrian Kadmi movement and the history behind the division of the Parsi community between the Kadmis and Šāhānšāhis, see Vitalone 1996, 9-16, and also Hinnells 1989 and Karanjia 2009. The Kadmi movement emerged in India (first Surat and then Bombay) in the early 18th century and vindicated the use of the Iranian Zoroastrian calendar, which presented some differences with that followed by the Parsis of India.

[419] Since 1841.

members of which were wealthy traders and industrialists, that funding for important publications in Iranian studies outside of India was secured, such as Herzfeld's *Paikuli* (see below): indeed, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the Parsi community had experienced a period of phenomenal economic success, favoured by the establishment of European commercial companies in India, for whom leading Parsi families acted as brokers, and the resulting intensification of trading activities and exchanges with Europe. Vitalone has suggested that this important economic development may have partly fueled the reinforcement of the Parsis' self-awareness of being a religious and cultural community which existed independently from their Zoroastrian coreligionists in Iran.[420] It is against this socio-historical background that the dispute over the calendar reform advocated by the Kadmi religious and scholarly movement – and opposed by the rest (an important majority) of the Parsi community, known as the Šāhānšāhis – must be understood: while the Kadmis proposed to solve the one-month discrepancy which existed between the Parsi and Irani calendars by 'correcting' the Parsi calendar and aligning it with the Irani one – and more generally argued for considering the Iranian Zoroastrian religious practices as 'superior' – the Šāhānšāhis strongly favoured maintaining the Parsi calendar unchanged. Controversies such as that over the calendar led to an intensification of the relations and scholarly exchanges between the Iranian Zoroastrians and the Parsis of Bombay throughout the eighteenth century: gradually however, the members of the Kadmi movement became the Irani Zoroastrians main interlocutors and ceased to be consulted by the rest of the Parsi community.[421] The Kadmis continued to actively support their coreligionists in Iran, with the collection of funding, and the foundation, for instance, of the Society for the Amelioration of the conditions of the Zoroastrians in Persia was established in 1854 and the Iran League of Bombay in 1922.

Although Qajar Iran was seeing its own revival of interest for its pre-Islamic past, it focused on the Achaemenid period, with the extensive use of Achaemenid motifs in Later Qajar art.[422] Imagery pertaining to the *ruins* of Persepolis in particular became popular: large houses and pavilions built in Shiraz in the second half of the nineteenth century were decorated with stone relief sculpture and plaster carvings displaying motifs of the Persepolis iconographic program and Judith Lerner describes a series of large carpets woven in the early twentieth

[420] Vitalone 1996, 9-10.

[421] Vitalone 1996, 10.

[422] On the subject of the revival of ancient Persian imagery in Modern Iran (and India), see most recently Grigor 2021.

century that reproduce nineteenth century drawings of Persepolis organised according to the terrace's actual plan.[423] Similarly, an inscription at the *tacara* commissioned by the Qajar king Naser al-Din Shah (1848-1896) in which he declares that he had picked up the monument's fallen blocks, wiped the earth from them and restored them to their upright position,[424] illustrates the integration of the Achaemenid ruins in political discourse. Lerner has proposed that the decipherment and translation of the cuneiform inscription of Darius at Bīsotūn by Rawlinson played a significant role in this revival: according to the British scholar, Muhammad Shah wanted to have his translation engraved under the cuneiform originals on the Bīsotūn mountain.[425] Still, it was not until the Pahlavi dynasty that the Parsis of India were ostentatiously welcomed 'home' to Iran – with Reza Shah declaring to Dinshah Jeejeebhoy Irani, founder of the Iran League in Bombay and leader of the Parsi delegation to Iran in 1932 that they were 'children of this soil'.[426] The Pahlavi crown backed important publications in ancient Iranian studies such as the *Corpus inscriptionum iranicarum* (see below).

The work of the Parsi scholars of Bombay focused on the study of Zoroastrian manuscripts and Dhanjibhai Framji had a very specific reason to tackle the decipherment of the Hājjiābād inscription. In the introduction to his work on the *Zand Avesta and Huzvarash*, he declares his intention to prove, through comparative philology, that the Zend language (Avestan) did not derive from Sanskrit but was a "primitive" language, "more perfect in its structure than the Vedic Sanskrit".[427] The Parsi scholar further declares that Avestan was the "hagiographical language and cuneiform the demotic language of the Primal Arian Nation".[428] These observations, like the title of his work promising to prove the authenticity of Avestan, are a direct response to the contention in Europe concerning the reliability of the Zoroastrian manuscripts and the 'genuineness' (see below) of the languages (Avestan and Middle Persian) in which the Zoroastrian scriptures are written in. There were different aspects to this contention. First, English scholars such as Sir William Jones and John Richardson who published together *A Grammar of the Persian Language* in 1771, deemed the scriptures brought back by Anquetil Duperron a fabrication by the Parsi priests of Surat. Jones, in a brutal letter written in French, directly addressed to Anquetil Duperron, and published in 1771 – the very

[423] Lerner 2017, 112-114.

[424] Mostafavi 1978, 228-229.

[425] Lerner 2017, 115-116.

[426] Coyajee 1948, vi; Hinnels 1989.

[427] Framji 1861, vi.

[428] Framji 1861, vii.

year that the latter published his *Zendavesta* – dismissed the content of the Zoroastrian lore as fables brought back from India and regarded Anquetil Duperron's work itself as a "tissu d'exclamations puériles";[429] while Richardson, a lexicographer of New Persian, argued in the dissertation which headed his *Dictionary* that the texts were spurious on account of the languages they were written in: the important number of Semitic words contained in Middle Persian and Avestan (*sic*) – this is clearly a confused allusion to aramaeograms in Middle Persian; Avestan does not present the use of heterograms – made these two languages highly suspicious, while neither presented a clear connection to New Persian; he decided that both idioms were 'invented' and judged the Zoroastrian scriptures of "uncommon stupidity".[430] As we saw, the notion that Middle Persian, because of its 'mixed' nature, was invented is an idea entertained by Spiegel also. Linked to this was the doubt expressed by other scholars concerning the nature of Avestan as an independent language: William Erskine, a Scottish orientalist and historian posted at the recorder's court in Bombay published a letter in the Transactions of the Bombay Literary Society in which he argued that Avestan was a dialect of Sanskrit introduced from India in the context of religious practice but never spoken as a live language.[431] The Danish scholar Rasmus Kristian Rask (1787-1832) strove to rehabilitate Avestan as an authentic, independent language, in his *On the Age and Genuineness of the Zend Language and Zendavesta* first published in 1826, as well as in a letter sent to the Royal Asiatic Society by its Bombay Branch and published in 1834 – the latter was a direct response to Erskine's essay.[432]

Dhanjibhai Framji aimed to prove that Avestan is linguistically independent and more ancient than Sanskrit[433] and that Middle Persian (*Huzvarash*) is not only independent from the Semitic linguistic branch but also 'superior' (possibly in the sense of 'older') to it.[434] Much of scholars' discussion had been confined to the study of the Zoroastrian manuscripts and had not concerned the Sasanian inscriptions. For Dhanjibhai Framji's demonstration, however, the bilingual inscription of Šābuhr at Hājjiābād was particularly important as it provided original evidence for the existence of Middle Persian in Iran in the early Sasanian period:[435] the Parsi

[429] Jones 1807, 432.

[430] Richardson 1806, v-vi; see also Haug 1862, 17-20.

[431] Erskine 1820, esp. 297-300, cited by Rask 1834, 527.

[432] Rask 1826; Rask 1834.

[433] Framji 1861, 57.

[434] Framji 1861, 74-76.

[435] Framji 1861, 72.

scholar is therefore eager to prove it to be Middle Persian – rather than a dialect of Middle Persian – and also considers Parthian to be nothing other than an 'older version' of Middle Persian,[436] identifying to this effect three variants of Middle Persian, the cursive, the lapidary and numismatic forms.[437]

Dhanjibhai Framji begins his study by giving a comparison between the copies of the Hājjiābād inscription in Ker Porter and Westergaard's respective publications. He then offers a transcription with a corresponding word-for-word translation, as well as two free translations based on each copy to show their slight divergences.[438] The Parsi scholar does not make Thomas' mistake in assuming that the first word reads *pahikar* and deciphers the letters *tglhy* correctly, reading "*tagrāhī*" (*tgl'hy*, *tigrāh*, 'bowshot', see below): however he explains it as being formed on Middle Persian *tagīg* ('swift, strong') and *rāh* ('way') translating it as 'zealous'.[439] Like Thomas, he surprisingly has difficulty with the second word, the demonstrative pronoun ZNE, which he transliterates alternatively as *zakī* and *vanī* and translates as 'just'.[440] Apart from a few words deciphered correctly – he identifies ALHA as being the counter part of *bag* – and some interpretations coming close – AMT as 'time' for example, rather than 'when' – Framji's readings are erroneous. HTYA, 'arrow', is explained as a verb – 'he is' – while the verbal form YHWWN, so seriously misunderstood by Thomas is not commented on. It is difficult to make any sense of the resulting translation: the Sasanian king Šābuhr is presented as describing his just and pious rule, receiving the blessings of Ohrmazd and in turn bestowing blessings upon the nobles of the kingdom, thus harming the "wicked Patīākī"— this last name is a misreading of *paydāg* 'visible'.[441] This unsuccessful decipherment of the Hājjiābād inscription by an expert of Zoroastrian scriptures shows just how far apart the worlds of Middle Persian inscriptions and manuscripts remained.

Still, the next significant step in the decipherment of the Hājjiābād inscription was taken by Martin Haug, and it will soon become apparent that his breakthrough rested on the glossary of aramaeograms – the *Frahang ī Pahlawīg* – which was brought to his attention by the Dastur

[436] Framji 1861, 93

[437] Framji 1861, 74.

[438] It is not clear why he describes the English translation based on Ker Porter's copy – which he judges 'very incorrect' – as being based on "Major Vans Kennedy's work on the origin of languages", Framji 1861, 80.

[439] Framji 1861, 88-90.

[440] Framji 1861, 83, 90. It is not clear what language Dhanjibhai Framji is referring to for the translation of *zakī* and *vanī* as 'just'.

[441] Framji 1861, 87.

Hoshangji Jamaspji, highpriest of the Parsis in Malwa, with whom he closely collaborated for its publication.

The importance of the Pahlavi-Pāzand Glossary for the understanding of the Middle Persian heterographic writing system.

Haug, who was appointed professor of Sanskrit in Pune and lived in India for several years, published the first edition of his *Essays on the Sacred Language, Writings and Religion of the Parsees* in Bombay in 1862. At this point, much of his understanding of Middle Persian corresponds to what he had already exposed in his preliminary work of 1854: Middle Persian is regarded as a basically Semitic language presenting a mixture of Iranian elements while the Parthian version of Hājjiābād recorded an even 'more Semitic' dialect of Middle Persian; the 'Semitic elements' of Middle Persian – and Parthian – are still described as being loanwords.[442] Nevertheless, during his work with Parsi priests, Haug was able to attend readings of Zoroastrian scriptures and he made a fundamental observation, which had entirely escaped Anquetil Duperron and could not be picked up on by European scholars confined to working from manuscripts. He noted that it is specifically the 'non-Iranian' elements of Middle Persian that are termed *huzwāreš* by the priests: the term is therefore not a synonym for 'Pehlevi' and the Semitic words had a special status in the written language. Crucially, he was able to observe that upon encountering such a Semitic word during their readings, the Parsi priests pronounced the equivalent Persian term rather than the 'foreign' one, although if asked, were also able to decipher it phonetically. Haug further records the use of phonetic complements, or 'Iranian terminations' added to the Semitic words to 'facilitate' their reading.[443] These observations, added in a footnote to his grammar, are illustrated by a few examples – the priests pronounce *xwāstan*, 'to wish' rather than *bunshunastan* – that much resemble the explanation of the Middle Persian writing-system by Ibn Muqaffa'. Haug does not make the link with this passage yet however, and openly mocks Westergaard's "strange opinion" that the Semitic elements function as ideograms. For Haug, this curious practice arose when Middle Persian became a dead language: Parsi priests began to "restore" the "pure" Iranian words where they read foreign ones, but, not daring to change the scriptures, substituted them in reading only.[444] The gradual "extermination" of foreign words and their replacement with Iranian ones eventually

[442] Haug 1862, 46-49.

[443] Haug 1862, 47.

[444] Haug 1862, 48.

gave rise to the form called *pāzand*, in which the less ambiguous Avestan characters were used to note the Iranian terms: like Westergaard, Haug thus recognises that *pāzand* is used specifically in the context of the scriptures, as an exegetical tool and is not a dialect.

Five years later, Haug published the *Zand-Pahlavi Glossary*, edited by Dastur Hoshangji Jamaspji. A version of this index of Avestan-Middle Persian terms, commonly known as the *Frahang-ī oīm* after the first Avestan-Middle Persian pair (the number one) which it records, had been published by Anquetil Duperron a century earlier, but the terms appeared in transcription and were rearranged alphabetically;[445] the *Glossary* was printed in Avestan and Middle Persian characters with the terms grouped in thematic sections after the manuscript tradition. In his introduction, the Dastur comments on the etymology of the term *huzwāreš*, corrected to "Huzvânesh", which he derives from "Huzwan-Ashar", "the language of Assyria", and boldly places the emergence of Middle Persian in pre-Achaemenid times.[446] His claim is fully supported in the preface by Haug, who argues that this would explain the Semitic forms in Middle Persian: *huzwāreš* terms must have been borrowed into the language at the time of the Assyrian rule over Iran and this very ancient and sacred nature of Middle Persian was the reason for Ardašīr's revival of it in the Sassanian period. For why else "did the Sasanian kings who were extremely zealous in preserving the national customs, manners and religion make an essentially Semitic idiom their official language?"[447] Haug proceeds to prove the identity of "huzvânasch" with the Low-Assyrian or 'Nabatean' dialect by identifying corresponding morphological features.[448]

Haug now declares himself "fully convinced of the complete identity" of inscriptional and manuscript Middle Persian as well as the "purely Semitic nature of both".[449] He proceeds to show that what had until then been taken as divergences were in fact similarities: the ending in manuscripts transcribed as 'man' for instance, corresponded to letter E in inscriptional Middle Persian. From his explanation of a number of terms of the Hājjiābād inscription and his identification of their equivalent cursive forms – in particular of several aramaeograms missed by his predecessors, such as LGLE 'foot' and the verb to shoot ŠDYTWN – it is evident that Haug had made a breakthrough with the decipherment of Hājjiābād.[450] The aramaeogram

[445] Anquetil Duperron 1771, II, 433-475.

[446] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1867, iii.

[447] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1867, xiv-xx.

[448] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1867, xxiv-xxx.

[449] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1867, xx-xxi.

[450] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1867, xxi-xxii.

MNW is still linked to *mēnōg* however and translated as "heavenly/divine"; it is ironically highlighted as one of the few Iranian elements to be found in the inscriptions.[451]

Now, when explaining several terms of the Hājjiābād inscription in his preface, Haug frequently refers to the *Pahlavi-Pāzand Glossary*. This second glossary was also edited by Dastur Hoshengji Jamaspji in 1867, who collated six different manuscripts for the preparation of the text. As the printing of the work began however, Haug's progress on the understanding of Middle Persian was such that he delayed the final publication: the glossary only appeared three years later in 1870 – and was printed, like the *Zand-Pahlavi Glossary*, at the expense of the Government of Bombay – augmented with an important introductory essay on the Middle Persian by Haug.[452] This lexicon of aramaeographic forms gives the Middle Persian readings spelled out phonetically in Avestan letters. It is worth noting that Anquetil Duperron, who had published a version of it – again, in transcription and arranged alphabetically[453] – as well as Silvestre de Sacy, who relied on it heavily for his readings, entirely missed the fact that the glossary was specifically geared towards explaining the 'Semitic' forms in Middle Persian. In his preface, the Dastur unambiguously states that the index was considered by the Parsi priests as the cornerstone of *huzwāreš* learning and was systematically memorised by students of the Zoroastrian scriptures.[454] It is in Haug's introductory essay that we find the first meaningful decipherment of the Hājjiābād inscription, marking a turning point in the understanding of the Middle Persian heterographic writing system **[Fig. 4.6]**.

Haug begins by restating the conundrums posed by the surprising admixture of Semitic and Iranian elements in Middle Persian as well as the seemingly bizarre choice by the Sasanian dynasts to use a Semitic language as their official idiom: scholarship had gravely misunderstood this language from the start. He denounces the separation between scholars working on inscriptions and manuscripts which stemmed from the misconception that the languages of these corpuses were different. For the first time, Haug considers the passage in the *Fihrist* containing the description of the seven Persian scripts and the *huzwāreš* spelling,

[451] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1867, xxiii.

[452] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1870, vi. The introductory essay which headed the *Pahlavi-Pāzand Glossary* was printed separately that same year and published in Stuttgart, while a shorter version of the same work appeared in German a year earlier under the title *Ueber den Charakter der Pehlewisprche mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Inschriften*: this title more specifically states how Haug's work on Sasanian inscriptions helped him determine the "basic character" of Middle Persian.

[453] Anquetil Duperron 1771, II, 475-525.

[454] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1870, ix.

recognising it to be "of the highest interest".[455] He argues that *huzwāreš* can neither be an alphabet – as Quatremère had suggested – nor a language, as supposed by Anquetil Duperron, Spiegel and Haug himself: rather, it must denote a special type of spelling or "Orthographie".[456] The scholar also notes that the lexicon of *huzwāreš* spellings containing 1000 words mentioned by Ibn Muqaffa', can refer to nothing else than the *Pahlavi-Pāzand* glossary which his very essay was introducing: it even still contained the two words ('meat' and 'bread') which the Persian chronicler had used as examples. Haug confirms the practice illustrated in the passage with what he had himself witnessed while working with Parsi priests and which he had described in previous works but without truly grasping its significance. He finally emends his previous support for the definition of *huzwāreš* as "the language of Syria" and connects it instead to Sanskrit *varṇa* which in some contexts can mean "a letter".[457]

Looking for possible analogous cases for this practice, Haug points out that Assyrian, which had obtained its writing system from another civilization, similarly featured 'foreign' words; Japanese also mixes in Chinese characters to which Japanese terminations can be added.[458] He concludes that Middle Persian could be considered fundamentally Semitic only in its *written* form: "Pahlavî is, therefore strictly speaking, no strangely mixed language, as it appears to be; but a purely Semitic language […] if we look only to the way in which it is written, or [a purely Iranian tongue], if we consider only the way in which it is read".[459] This is the first time that the Middle Persian language and writing system are clearly separated; Haug now describes the "Semitic" elements of Middle Persian as functioning like symbols, only a few years after rejecting Westergaard's description of them as ideographs.

The event described in the Hājjiābād inscription begins to emerge.

Based on these considerations, Haug offers correct transliterations and readings of an important number of aramaeograms in the Hājjiābād inscription, demonstrating that they all had counterparts in the manuscripts. He further notes that the final *yod* seemed to be a graphic convention of inscriptions.[460] Crucially, thanks to the *Pahlavi-Pāzand Glossary*, he identifies

[455] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1870, 37-43.

[456] Haug 1869, 20.

[457] According to Haug, see Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1870, 43.

[458] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1870, 121-124.

[459] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1870, 124-125.

[460] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1870, 48.

the key heterogram HTYA, 'arrow':[461] the event described in the inscription began to emerge as marking the shooting of an arrow by Šābuhr I from the cave on the wall of which the text was engraved, in front of his court. Haug is even able to decipher and tentatively translate the inscription's rather convoluted explanation concerning the issue with the place where the king's arrow fell: the spot was out of the party's eyesight, forcing the king to get a target set up in a different place that was visible from the cave, to better mark his bowshot. Indeed, if the dell of Hājjiābād is well visible from the cave to the left, to the right it is blocked by a rocky spur which stretches out into the valley: if Šābuhr shot his arrow in this direction, it would have fallen on the other side of the spur, out of the sight of the crowd gathered around the king in the recess. In the last part of his translation however, Haug is misled by a number of erroneous readings. The old reading of the relative MNW as *mēnōg*, 'immaterial' persists and just as Silvestre de Sacy had stretched its meaning to 'celestial', Haug broadens its semantic field to 'invisible'. The relative, placed adjacently to the terms HTYA and YDE (arrow, hand) is taken as an adjective qualifying these nouns: the text is understood as describing the erection of an "invisible target for the future", in the direction of which an "invisible arrow" was shot.[462] Similarly, an "invisible hand" wrote the inscription on the cavern wall. The notion of "writing" was suggested to Haug by the aramaeogram TB, 'strong, good': intent on finding a term linked to the act of writing to go with *dast* 'hand', the scholar restores the two letters TB to KTB, the Semitic root 'to write'. The scholar is bewildered by this translation but attempts nevertheless to explain it: the king's arrow not hitting the mark was regarded as "auguring evil" for his rule; the story of a "miracle" involving an "invisible" target, hand and arrow – "things which are quite in accordance with Zoroastrian ideas" – was invented.[463] Haug concludes that the bowshot was probably regarded as a symbolic act, with the king piercing "the enemy in a mystical way". Other (less problematic) misinterpretations include the very first word: the unusual form, based on the phonetic spelling of HTYA (*tigr*), *tgl'hy*, which was not to be elucidated for almost another century, is erroneously linked to the Semitic root 'to proclaim' and translated as "edict", "This is the edict of me, Šābuhr etc."[464]

Haug closes his introduction with a few remarks on the still undeciphered inscriptions of Kerdīr at Naqš-e Rajab and Naqš-e Rostam, for which the only documents available were

[461] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1870, 52.

[462] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1870, 61-64.

[463] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1870, 65.

[464] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1870, 48.

Flandin and Coste's approximate drawings. Without offering a translation of either, he does identify important aramaeograms, such as OZLWN, "to go" in KNRb 19 and KNRm 14 – although this same term is also erroneously read in the second line of KNRb – as well as key terms such as the pair *wahišt ud dušmen* ("paradise and hell") and *ruwān*, "the soul", known from the manuscripts but not yet deciphered in inscriptions. Haug also reads the names of several Sasanian kings which allows him to deduce that the inscriptions were necessarily engraved after that at Hājjiābād. Still, the name Kerdīr is read as "crown" and related to the "*cidaris*" of Persian kings after Thomas' initial suggestion.[465] As further evidence for this, Haug points to the bas-relief next to which the Naqš-e Rajab inscription is engraved and which depicts an investiture scene with Ardašīr receiving a diadem from Ohrmazd: this diadem would be the "crown" repeatedly mentioned in the texts.

Reflections on Middle Persian palaeography.

1870 was also the year that a friend from India and student of Haug, Edward William West (1824-1905), repeatedly mentioned in the introduction to the *Pahlavi-Pāzand Glossary* as an important collaborator in the preparation of the text, published an article entitled "Sassanian inscriptions explained by the Pahlavi of the Parsis". West's family owned cotton presses in India and as a young man he was sent to Bombay to superintend the estate, becoming Chief Engineer on the Great Indian Peninsula Railway Project in 1856. During his stay in India, West was in close contact with the Parsi community, members of which worked as managers in the cotton mills and in his home. It would appear that his interest for Middle Persian was first aroused by the Middle Persian inscriptions in the Buddhist caves of Kanheri, north of Mumbai, of which he published a first edition in 1880.[466] West continued his study of Middle Persian under Martin Haug, returning with him in 1866 to Munich, where he received an honorary degree of Doctor of Philosophy. West later collaborated with the Indologist Max Müller to publish the most extensive translation of Zoroastrian texts to this date in what was to become the fifty-volume series *The Sacred Books of the East*, which aimed at collecting translations of the religious canons belonging to the major world religions of Asia for scholarly study.[467]

[465] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1870, 65-66.

[466] Haug 1878, 50; West 1880.

[467] West 1880-1897; Cereti 2000; for a recent critical analysis of the ambitious editorial project behind *The Sacred Books of the East*, see Molendjik 2016.

The title of West's article explicitly states the role of manuscript Middle Persian in the decipherment of Sasanian inscriptions. After Haug, he proceeds to make a word for word analysis of all the Sasanian inscriptions known in his day to show that most terms could be found in the Zoroastrian commentaries:[468] the identity of both idioms could thus be considered established and the main difference between them was palaeographic.[469] West also notes that the 1000 year interval in the use of Middle Persian between the Sasanian inscriptions and the earliest known manuscripts could be bridged by the legends on Sasanian coins and medals, the drawings of Middle Persian letters in Arabo-Persian chronicles, as well as the Kanheri inscriptions: he observes that the script of this series of rock-cut texts, dated to the end of the tenth century and therefore over three centuries older than the oldest known Middle Persian manuscripts, present "no sensible difference in the form of the letters".[470] This overview of Middle Persian palaeography leads the scholar to reconsider the description in the *Fihrist* of the different alphabets used by the Persians. Lenormant had suggested that one of the alphabets mentioned by the Arabo-Persian chronicler would be the 'numismatic' Sasanian alphabet. West goes further and argues that the passage indicated that a cursive Middle Persian script was probably used contemporaneously with the monumental form illustrated in the early inscriptions, from the very beginning of the Sasanian period, lending further weight to the identification of the languages recorded in the inscriptional and manuscript corpuses.

In 1876 Martin Haug passed away leaving his ongoing work on the Zoroastrian scriptures and their languages unfinished and it was West who published, in London, a new edition of his *Essays* with an updated introduction. The work is dedicated to the "Parsis of Western India in Memory of the Old Times of Friendly Intercourse enjoyed both by the Author and by the Editor" and the introduction is supplemented with a chapter recording a brief history of Zoroastrian studies among the Parsis: it offers an overview of the important known copyists of Zoroastrian manuscripts as well as the Parsi scholars who contributed to the collection, preservation, study and translation of Zoroastrian manuscripts since the 18th century.[471] It ends with an unambiguous plea to the Dasturs and the Parsi community of India to consider their "duty to collect and multiply correct unimproved copies of all the oldest manuscripts extant"

[468] Predictably, West's explanation of the Hājjiābād inscription presents the same erroneous readings as Haug's, such as MNW as "spiritual, invisible" and TB as deriving from the root KTB "to write", West 1870, 368-376.

[469] West 1870, 370-372.

[470] West 1870, 386-391.

[471] Haug 1878, 54-62.

and learn all the languages necessary to study the manuscripts which their religion is based on. Haug's erroneous readings of the Hājjiābād inscription remain uncorrected however and the miraculous event described at the end of the inscription still involves an invisible arrow, target and hand.[472]

Reception of Haug and West's translation of Hājjiābād: the aramaeograms MNW and TB remain problematic.

As Haug and West's work progressively lifted the veil of mystery surrounding the Hājjiābād inscription, some scholars could not help but express some disappointment. In the very first overview dedicated to the history of Middle Persian epigraphy, published in 1898 in the recently inaugurated journal of Oriental studies *Le Muséon*, the French orientalist and numismatist Edme Drouin (1838-1904) commented, "On sait qu'il s'agit dans ces deux inscriptions d'une flèche qui fut lancée par Sapor I contre un but invisible […] Il est regrettable que ce double texte […] ait été gravé pour conserver la trace d'un fait aussi futile, au lieu d'un événement historique qui aurait eu pour nous bien plus d'intérêt".[473] Nevertheless, the French scholar is also the first to link Šābuhr's shooting to the legend of Āraš, a hero who features already in the Avesta but became particularly prominent in the Parthian period and was celebrated from his archery skills: during the mythical war between the Iranians and the Turanians, Āraš (Avestan Ǝrəxša) was asked to shoot an arrow to mark the boundary between the two empires; his arrow fell far, far away, extending the Iranian territory all the way to the remote regions of Khorasan. It appears that Drouin interpreted the description of Šābuhr's arrow falling 'out of sight' and hitting an 'invisible' target as narrative motifs referring to the Parthian hero's mighty bowshot.

Comments concerning Haug and West's decipherment were also put forward by Friedrich Müller, an Austrian linguist and professor of Sanskrit and comparative philology at the University of Vienna. In a dedicated article, Müller offers his own transcription of the bilingual text both in (manuscript) Middle Persian and Hebrew characters, with a new translation in German. He is convinced by West and Haug's conclusions concerning the identity of the language of the inscriptions and the manuscripts, but reverts to describing inscriptional Middle Persian as presenting a higher degree of "semitischen Mischmaschs"[474] and calls the

[472] Haug 1878, 87-90.

[473] Drouin 1898, 11.

[474] Müller 1892, 72.

Semitic elements as Aramaic "Lehnwörter"[475]: the functioning of the Middle Persian heterographic writing system would still take time to sink in.

Comparing Middle Persian *čītāg* to Balochi *čēdak*, Müller identifies the target in the inscription as being a 'stone pillar' "Steinpfeiler" and translates the term as "Schiesssäule".[476] The meaning of the word had until then only been guessed at from the context by Haug although he did link it to the Iranian root *čin-* 'to pile up, collect'.[477] Müller proceeds to compare the Hājjiābād inscription with the passage (23,852) in the Iliad describing the archery contest in the funeral games organised by Achilles for Patroclus. The target in this case is a ship's mast to which is tied a live dove: the archer who hits the dove gets the first prize, while the one who hits only the rope is placed second. Curiously, this leads Müller to understand the term *gyāg* ('place'), transliterated "*wajāk*" by Müller after Haug, to mean 'bird' by linking it to the Avestan *wi-* 'bird', a hypothesis first put forward by Haug but promptly abandoned.[478] In Müller's translation, the "bird" attached to the stone pillar is "absent" forcing the party to re-erect a target where the king's arrow fell. Müller also criticises Haug's translation for making too much allowance for "modern mysticism", because of the repeated translation of MNW as "invisible, immaterial": " (dass) sie uns zumuthet an Dinge zu glauben, die zwar mit dem modernen Mysticismus, aber nicht mit der mehr nüchternen Weltanschauung der Vorzeit sich vereinigen lassen".[479] Preferring the more 'sober' translation offered by Silvestre de Sacy, Müller renders MNW by 'himmlische' in the word for word translation as well as in the royal titulature, but, conveniently, leaves it out entirely in the free translation — unless the idea of "celestial" is suggested by the description of the target as "special" and "intended for his Majesty", making the notion of "celestial" almost synonymous to that of "royal". The last line is explained as a form of royal signature: "this the (king's) hand has written".[480]

[475] Müller 1892, 75.

[476] Müller 1892, 72.

[477] Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1870, 56.

[478] Müller 1892, 72; Haug and Hoshengji Jamaspji 1870, 58.

[479] Müller 1892, 71.

[480] Müller 1892, 72-74.

III. Archaeological campaigns in Iran and their contribution to the study of the Hājjiābād inscription(s).

New documents for the study of Sasanian inscriptions: photographs.

Haug and West had worked with the Parsis of India, but neither was able to go to Iran to visit Hājjiābād and the only documents available to them for the decipherment of the text were the tentative hand-drawings of Flandin and Coste and Stannus' incomplete casts. With Franz Stolze and Friedrich Carl Andreas's expedition to Persia, an entirely new type of document became available to scholars of Middle Persian epigraphy: photographs. In 1882 the German scholars published a monumental two-volume work collecting 150 photographs and plans of the most important archaeological sites of ancient Iran, including details of many Achaemenid and Sasanian inscriptions. Stolze, who was trained as a geographer and mathematician, travelled to Isfahan in 1874 at the behest of the Prussian ministry of Education and Medicine in the framework of an astronomic expedition sent to observe the passage of Venus; he was then commissioned to join the archaeological expedition in Persia directed by Andreas, professor of Western Asiatic philology at the University of Göttingen, in his capacity as photographer, astronomer and geographer.[481] Stolze participated in the excavation work carried out by Andreas' team at Bushehr, where they reported finding cuneiform-inscribed bricks; the two men then travelled together to document the sites of Kāzerūn and Bišāpūr. They were heavily affected by their many months' work in the scorching heat, and upon their return to Shiraz, Andreas remained there to recover; Stolze proceeded alone to Persepolis where he photographed the Achaemenid cuneiform inscriptions as well as the Middle Persian inscriptions of Naqš-e Rajab, Naqš-e Rostam and Hājjiābād **[Fig. 4.7]**,[482] setting up his laboratory of photography at the foot of the platform and protecting his plates as best he could from the blazing Persian sun. Stolze returned to Europe by land while his plates and materials were sent back to Europe by boat, a safer, smoother but longer route. Impressively, most of his plates reached Berlin intact although some sets did shatter. It was Stolze's photographs that Ernst Herzfeld included in his monumental *Paikuli* and from these that he put forth a new reading of the Hājjiābād inscription.[483]

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[481] Andreas and Stolze 1882, I, 1-2 (n. p.).

[482] Andreas and Stolze 1882, II, pl. 126.

[483] Herzfeld 1924, II, 209.

Herzfeld and the end of the "French-monopoly" over archaeological work in Persia.

Herzfeld was trained as an architect but also studied Assyriology in Berlin, joining an archaeological expedition at Assur for two years at the turn of the twentieth century, after which he travelled extensively through Iraq and Iran where he visited the sites of Persepolis, Ctesiphon and Pasargadae. These sites soon became central to his career: Herzfeld's 'Habilitationsschrift' was dedicated to Iranian rock reliefs and with Friedrich Sarre, director of the Islamic Museum of Berlin, he jointly published in 1910 a monumental study of the most important known archaeological sites of Fārs.[484] In 1911 and 1913 he visited the site of Paikuli and began piecing together its inscription, which had not been worked on since Rawlinson.[485] During the war, Herzfeld was sent at his own request to Iraq where he worked as a surveyor, enabling him to visit Paikuli for the third time. He was appointed full professor of Near Eastern Archaeology in Berlin once the war ended, but soon returned to Persia, and to Paikuli, where in 1923 he excavated 30 new blocks of the inscription – although these were not included in it, the following year saw the publication of his cornerstone work *Paikuli*.

During the next two decades Herzfeld headed a number of expeditions and excavations in Iraq and Iran. The German archaeologist largely contributed to ending the so-called "French monopoly" – which lasted since the late 19th century – over archaeological work in Persia when in 1931 he secured funding from the University of Chicago to excavate the Persepolis terrace: post-war Germany was engulfed in an economic crisis and Herzfeld turned to the better endowed trans-Atlantic Universities for support. The veritable sway which Herzfeld held over the most important archaeological sites of ancient Iran is illustrated by Robert Byron in *The Road to Oxiana*, a travel journal recounting his ten-month journey in the Middle East, undertaken in search of the origins of Islamic architecture. At the English club in Tehran in October 1933, Byron finds Friedrich Krefter, Herzfeld's architect, deep in conversation with the American First Secretary. As it turns out, Krefter had just unearthed Darius' gold and silver cuneiform inscribed foundation plaques of the Apadana terrace while Herzfeld was away in Europe: "Rather unwillingly he showed us photographs of them; archaeological jealousy and suspicion glanced from his eyes. Herzfeld, it seems, has turned Persepolis into his private domain, and forbids anyone to photograph there."[486] Byron later visits Herzfeld in Persepolis and is much entertained by the German archaeologist who gives him a full tour of the

[484] For an overview of Herzfeld's career, see Hauser 2003.

[485] Herzfeld 1924, I, xi.

[486] Byron 2007 [1937], 44.

excavation works in the company of Bul-bul, his pet sow, which was allowed to run loose among the ruins: the animal's "trotters slithered about stairways and pavements like Charlie Chaplin's feet, to an orchestra of growls and grunts [from Herzfeld's grumpy old Airedale] and roars from the Professor".[487] Invited for tea by the archaeologist, Byron remarks on the liberally endowed expedition, and alludes to the commercial plans entertained for the site's future. Concerning the diggers' 'house', he comments: "I say house; it is a palace, reconstructed of wood on the site and in the style, of its Achaemenid predecessor, whose stone door and window frames are incorporated in it. The money was supplied by Mrs. Moore and the University of Chicago, and the outcome is a luxurious cross between the King David Hotel in Jerusalem and the Pergamum Museum in Berlin. This is as it should be, for it will have to serve the purposes of both when the excavations are finished."[488] When he asks Herzfeld for permission to take pictures of the site, promising he would confine himself to the vestiges that had always been above ground, Byron is categorically turned down. Returning with letters from the Governor of Fārs and from Seyyed Mohammad Taqi Mostafavi, who was overseeing the excavations of Herzfeld's team on behalf of the Iranian government, Byron challenges Herzfeld to physically stop him from taking his pictures and the German archaeologist is finally forced to concede.

By the mid-1930s however, German-Persian relations had deteriorated and the Persian government demanded an American director to oversee the expedition at Persepolis. In parallel, with the second world war dawning, Herzfeld, who was of Jewish descent, was forced into retirement. The German archaeologist moved first to London and then to America where he continued his career in Boston, Princeton and then New York but abandoned his work on the Sasanian inscriptions.

Herzfeld's Paikuli (1924): further progress on Middle Persian aramaeograms and important corrections to the transcription and translation of Hājjiābād.

In the preface to his *Paikuli*, the German archaeologist describes his hopeless quest for funding towards the publication of the tremendously expensive two-volume book in post-war Europe. It was finally through the active and generous support of Sir Dorabji Tata as well as several other eminent members of the Parsi community of Bombay that funds were secured: in recognition of this support Herzfeld published it in English.[489] The title suggests the work is

[487] Byron 2007, 184.

[488] Byron 2007, 184.

[489] Herzfeld 1924, I, vi-vii, xiii.

exclusively dedicated to the reconstruction of the Paikuli monument and the decipherment of the extant blocks but in reality it contains much more and diverse material, including a history of the early Sasanian empire, an essay on the Pahlavi language and the publication of a number of engraved seals kept in different private and national collections. Based on improved photographs reissued from Stolze's original plates, Herzfeld was also able to put forward new drawings and transcriptions of the main Middle Persian inscriptions known at the time.

Herzfeld's laborious work on the Paikuli blocks revealed that the text was bilingual, in Parthian and Middle Persian – which he calls respectively Pārsīk and Pahlavīk – like at Hājjiābād. "I am not a philologist" Herzfeld bluntly declares in his preface: his task was a "purely epigraphical one, viz. to put in order the heap of hundred separate blocks, the relative positions of which were entirely unknown".[490] Still, his essay on "Pahlavi" marked fundamental progress in the understanding of the Middle Persian and Parthian heterographic writing systems, which Herzfeld considered "much neglected" by scholarship.[491] He puts forward a careful study the verbal aramaeograms and their phonetic complements in both Parthian and Middle Persian – referring to the Semitic forms as "ideograms", and terms the phonetic spellings *scriptio plena* – and tackles the problem of the pronunciation of heterograms in Parthian – for which there is no known glossary – putting forth a comparative table of verbs given in Parthian, inscriptional and cursive Middle Persian, along with their Aramaic roots and their phonetic pronunciation after the *pāzand* spelling.[492] This allows him to note the exceedingly rare instances in which Middle Persian aramaeograms depart from Parthian in employing a different, synonymous, Aramaic root. He also notes that some aramaeograms could be used for different Iranian words that sound alike but mean entirely different things and are etymologically unrelated, further indicating that the reading conventions attached to heterographic forms were in some instances more relevant to their use than the Aramaic root which they derived from: in other words that these heterograms had become syllabic units.[493]

Most crucially for the understanding of the Hājjiābād text, he makes a detailed study of the heterographic spellings of pronouns (personal, relative and demonstrative): the German archaeologist is the very first, since the decipherment of inscriptional Middle Persian by Silvestre de Sacy, to recognise that the aramaeogram MNW renders the relative and

[490] Herzfeld 1924, I, xii.

[491] Herzfeld 1924, I, 52.

[492] Herzfeld 1924, I, 58-59.

[493] Herzfeld 1924, I, 65.

interrogative pronoun *kē*, 'who'.[494] This solved the main difficulties that the Hājjiābād text still presented and corrected the long-erroneous transcriptions of Sasanian royal titulature. Herzfeld also correctly identifies the heterogram TB, *nēw*, 'good', so that the previous fanciful interpretation of the end of the text dissolved to reveal that the king was in fact challenging he who considered himself *strong-armed* to outdo his bowshot. Less happily, Herzfeld emends the first word of the inscription, drawing in an initial *mem*, to 'restore' the heterogram for *saxwan* ('speech'), MRYA, better corresponding to the notion of "edict". This emendation, apart from corresponding to Haug's own forced reading, is probably directly inspired by his (erroneous) reconstruction of the opening phrase of the Paikuli inscription: "this is the edict of the Mazda-worshipping Lord Narseh", although *saxwan* is there spelled phonetically.[495]

Herzfeld also offered a much-improved drawing and transcription of Kerdīr's inscriptions at Naqš-Rajab and Naqš-e Rostam. Apart from a number of correct decipherments and readings, Herzfeld namely rejects Thomas, Haug and West's interpretation of the term "Kerdīr" as a noun, for it was at odds with the sentence structure. The name also featured in the Paikuli inscription, in the long list of dignitaries which closes the text. Evidently uncomfortable with the idea of reading the term as a first name – what private individual could have commissioned inscriptions on these royal sites? – he settles for an intermediary reading of it as an official title: "And I, the Kartir".[496]

Samuel Nyberg and the bowshot of Šābuhr I.

Herzfeld's heavy emendation of the first word of Hājjiābād was corrected by Henrik Samuel Nyberg in a dedicated article two decades later.[497] The Swedish scholar and professor of Semitic studies at the University of Uppsala first became interested in the aramaeographic component of Middle Iranian languages, which he hoped might contribute to the study of Aramaic dialectology. Nyberg's posthumous publication of the *Frahang ī Pahlawīg* edited by his student Bo Utas, is a major contribution to the study of Middle Persian and remains the reference work for this text today.[498] Nyberg began to teach Middle Persian at Uppsala and

[494] Herzfeld 1924, I, 64.

[495] Herzfeld 1924, I, 94-95; for a recent and corrected edition of the Paikuli inscription, see Humbach and Skjærvø 1983.

[496] Herzfeld 1924, I, 89.

[497] Nyberg 1945.

[498] Utas 1988.

elaborated a Manual of Middle Persian, first entitled *Hilfsbuch des Pehlevi*; the first volume of an updated English version was published in 1964 while the second, reportedly found on Nyberg's desk at his death, was printed posthumously. The first volume consists in an anthology of Middle Persian texts painstakingly copied out by hand by the scholar. Nyberg also included several Middle Persian inscriptions and namely an improved hand-drawn edition of the Hājjiābād inscription.[499] The second volume is a glossary of Middle Persian terms and includes a special index of what Nyberg called, like Herzfeld, Middle Persian "ideograms".

Nyberg's article is the first to offer a full transliteration of both versions of the text with a phonemic transcription underneath. It inaugurates the convention used today of presenting the aramaeograms in transliteration in capital letters and the phonemic complements and words in *scriptio plena* in lowercase, with a transcription in lowercase. The focus of Nyberg's study is the first word of the Hājjiābād texts, the different erroneous interpretations of which had failed to identify the feat which the inscription celebrated. After denouncing Haug and Herzfeld's forced readings, Nyberg rejects the translation "edict" and, like Dhanjibhai Framji, deciphers the letters *tglh'y*, transcribing it "*tiγrāhē*".[500] The drawings of Flandin and Coste and the moulds of Stannus had not been able to reach the top right corner of the Parthian version, but Nyberg relies on Herzfeld's "personal communication" to him (see below), based on Stolze's photographs, for the reading *wt'wny* of the first word in the corresponding Parthian text.

For Nyberg, *tiγrāhē* is formed on the phonetically spelled term *tigr* 'arrow'– whereas is appears with the aramaeogram HTYA in the rest of the text – to which is added the Old Iranian verbal root **āsa*- "to reach, meet", giving "pilträff, skottlängd, skottvidd", "the bowshot range".[501] The Parthian counterpart provided by Herzfeld, *wt'wny* (transcribed as '*vitāvan*') – which occurs in the *Frahang ī Pahlawīg* (25,19) where it is glossed as *windag-witaw* without further information – is linked by Nyberg to Armenian *utawan*, which denotes a unit of measure describing the distance that can be reached with the shot of an arrow: a shot-range "skott-räckvidd, skottavstånd".[502] The Hājjiābād inscription thus appeared to be celebrating a feat of archery by the Sasanian king by marking the length of his bowshot "a monument to a master

[499] Nyberg 1964, 122-123.

[500] Nyberg 1945, 65-67.

[501] Nyberg 1945, 66. He later retracted this, preferring to identify the verbal root *Hap/f 'to reach, to attain'; on this root see Cheung 2007, 161-163.

[502] Nyberg 1945, 66.

shot of the Great King":[503] the inscription indicated the place where the king had shot his arrow from and described the target that the arrow had hit; the end of the text defied any passerby – or the members of his audience? – to outdo him.

Nyberg highlights the central importance of archery in the ancient Iranian world and offers a brief comparative overview of archer-heroes in the Indo-Iranian tradition.[504] Like Drouin he makes the parallel between Šābuhr's bowshot and the myth of Āraš, and observes that the symbolic demarcation between the Iranians and non-Iranians (Turanians) which Āraš's arrow effected, as well as the hero's self-sacrifice for his country – the strength of the bowshot rips Āraš apart – would have been particularly appealing for the Sasanian king. Nyberg suggests that Šābuhr may have shot the arrow in the context of a festival. The *tīragān* festival celebrated during the month Tīr in honour of the god Tištriya, who governs Sirius, was associated with the myth of Āraš and would be a likely candidate.[505] Nyberg also compares Šābuhr's inscription to the markers erected in celebration of the medieval Swedish king Stenkil's impressive bowshots and recorded in a chronicle appended to the Westrogothic law (Västgötalagen) — a comparison that was soon to turn out particularly astute.[506]

The Czech orientalist and philologist Otakar Klíma published some notes to Nyberg's study: he preferred for instance to see *tigrāh* as being formed on the verbal root *Hah^2 'to throw', 'to hurl', rather than to "reach".[507] Still, he translates *tigrāh* as "Pfeilwurf, Pfeilschuss" – with Parthian *wt'wny* as "Pfeilschussweite" – and regards the inscription as recording "eine Sportleistung des Sassaniden Shâhpuhr. Es handelt sich um einen Bogen-schuss":[508] Nyberg's final transliteration and translation of the inscription remains accepted today. However, if the

[503] Nyberg 1945, 71: "ett minnesmärke över ett mästerskott av storkonungen".

[504] Nyberg 1945, 71-74. He namely remarks that they occupied a different position in Greek mythology: although the bow and arrow are carried by gods and have an important role in contests, in warfare close combat has much more prestige. A comprehensive study of the "symbolic and ideological implications of archery" in royal ideology in the Achaemenid and Parthian periods was recently put forward by Panaino 2019: the author argues that the "ideological exaltation of royal archery" disappears with the Sasanians: the Hājjiābād inscription would be a "political and ideological *unicum* in Sasanian history" allowing Šābuhr to "enter a symbolic space previously covered by the Parthian dynasty", Panaino 2019, 47-49.

[505] On the relationship between the gods Tištrya and Tīr, the festival of the *tīragān* and the myth of Āraš see Panaino 1995, 52-53 and 61-85.

[506] Nyberg 1945, 72-73.

[507] Klíma 1968, 19-21. See also Klíma 1971. For the verbal root *Hah^2, see Cheung 2007, 152-153.

[508] Klíma 1971, 260.

Swedish scholar's work thus completed the decipherment of the much-studied Hājjiābād inscription, the remarkable, eventful story of this text does not stop here.

New Sasanian inscriptions are rediscovered and the Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum is created.

The twentieth century saw the rediscovery of a number of new Middle Persian inscriptions and the Sasanian epigraphic corpus grew steadily. At the tail end of the "French monopoly" on archaeological work in Iran were the excavations conducted at the site of Bīšāpūr by Roman Ghirshman, a French archaeologist of Ukrainian-Jewish descent appointed head of the Délégations archéologiques françaises in Persia in the 1931. The mission's finds at Bīšāpūr were plundered before they could be published, but Ghirshman produced a lavishly illustrated work dedicated to the series of bas-reliefs engraved in the gorge leading up to the city, which also included colour reproductions of the mosaics that decorated the floors of the Sasanian palace complex.[509] The excavations also revealed a Middle Persian-Parthian bilingual inscription engraved on a votive monument dedicated to Šābuhr I by his scribe in chief Apsāy: it records Apsāy's erection of the monument at his own personal expense, the king's great satisfaction with the statue – now lost, but which represented Šābuhr I – which was the centerpiece of the monument and lists the lavish gifts that were bestowed upon the scribe as reward.[510] This bilingual text appeared in a short compendium of ancient Iranian inscriptions – which included both Middle and Old Persian – put together by Jamshedji Maneckji Unvala, a Parsi scholar who obtained his doctorate from the University of Heidelberg, and printed at the expense of the Trustees of the Parsi Punchayet. The preface notes that the compendium was intended for the use of students at Bombay University: Apsāy's inscription at Bīšāpūr was the set text for the Master's entrance exam for the academic year 1951-1952 while the Hājjiābād inscription was prescribed for the year 1953-1954.[511] This detail shows that whereas the study of Zoroastrian manuscripts had a long history among the Parsi community, *inscriptional* Middle Persian – as well as Old Persian cuneiform – was now also considered as a core component for the study of ancient Iran in India.

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[509] Ghirshman 1956-1971. These extraordinary compositions represent motifs borrowed directly from the Greco-Roman world, including bacchic-like scenes, in a style reminiscent of mosaics from that period in Antioch, see von Gall 1971.

[510] Ghirshman 1936; see also Henning 1939.

[511] Unvala 1952.

Herzfeld himself, during his extensive surveying work throughout Iran, documented an inscription commissioned by another Sasanian high official Mihrnarseh which inaugurated a bridge in the vicinity of Fīrūzābād, as well as a third inscription by Kerdīr at Sar Mašhad, although as the specialist in (Classics and) Semitic languages Martin Sprengling bitterly observed, he did not publish it.[512] The German scholar's collaboration with the Chicago Oriental Institute inaugurated a new era of archaeological work in the Persepolis region. In 1936 the excavations headed by Erich Schmidt at Naqš-e Rostam revealed the longest inscription by Šābuhr I known to date engraved on the Achaemenid tower referred to as the Ka'ba of Zoroaster.[513] Three years later, the Greek and Parthian versions of this trilingual text were brought to light on the South and West facades of the tower as well as a practically intact inscription by Kerdīr engraved underneath the Middle Persian version of Šābuhr I's inscription. This key discovery propeled forward research on the elusive figure of Kerdīr – Sprengling was able to recognise Kerdīr as a name rather than a function and identify the different titles the high priest held – and enabled the decipherment and reconstruction of the rest of the high-priest's inscriptions as these present numerous repetitions and overlap.[514]

Scholars began to discuss the necessity to collect the known inscriptions of ancient Iran in a single volume series and in 1960 Nyberg inaugurated *The New Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum*.[515] The Swedish scholar had inherited from Herzfeld original documents including drawings and photographs obtained from Stolze's plates of most of the known Sasanian inscriptions, including Hājjiābād and Sar Mašhad: these enabled Gignoux to finally put forth an edition of the Sar Mašhad text and formed the core of the project's material at its inception.[516] Financial support for the creation of the *Corpus* did not come from the Parsi community of India this time, but from Iran itself, as well as the UNESCO. The scholar and statesman under the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties, Sayyed Hasan Taqizadeh, backed the project and funding was secured from Mohammad Reza Shah himself. This ostentatious support for ancient Iranian studies was emblematic of a new era in Iran under the Pahlavis who vindicated an unbroken continuity of rule between pre-Islamic and modern Iran – it culminated in

[512] Herzfeld 1926, 256–257; Sprengling 1940a, 202: "The beginning of SM [Sar Mašhad] is known to Professor Herzfeld and God, and, perhaps, Nyberg, but not to us ordinary mortals".

[513] Sprengling 1937; Sprengling, 1940b; Huyse 1999a.

[514] Sprengling 1940a; for a synoptic edition of the high priest's inscriptions, see Gignoux 1991.

[515] Nyberg 1960; see also Sims-Williams 1993.

[516] Gignoux 1968; Nyberg 1960, 42-44.

Mohammad Reza Shah's lavish celebrations in 1971 of the "2500 years" of the Persian Empire at the foot of the Persepolis platform.

Hājjiābād's twin inscription at Tang-e Boraq.

With the outbreak of World War II, Iranian archaeologists such as Ali Sāmi and Seyyed Mohammad Taqi Mostafavi who had supervised the excavations carried out by the Oriental Institute on behalf of the Iranian government took the lead in continuing archaeological surveys. A series of Middle Persian inscriptions were documented by Ali Sāmi and published in 1957: these inscriptions, for the most part private, were first printed in an Iranian journal and in Persian and did not make their way – and still have not – into the *Corpus inscriptionum iranicarum*, although Gignoux was able to add them to the bibliography of his *Glossaire des inscriptions pehlevies et parthes* which was published as a volume of the *Corpus* in 1972.[517] Drouin, who had been disappointed about the insignificance of the event recorded at Hājjiābād would have been taken aback by one of the inscriptions documented by Ali Sāmi. A very fragmentary bilingual inscription in Middle Persian and Parthian recording another bowshot by the same Sasanian king was found in the Tang-e Boraq cave, 100km away from Hājjiābād. A – very small – photograph of the inscription was published by Sāmi in his *Sassanian Civilisation* in 1963 but it was only when an edition of this inscription was put forward by the German scholar Gerd Gropp that the extent to which it reproduced the structure and wording of the Hājjiābād text became apparent.[518] Šābuhr's shooting at Hājjiābād was not an isolated, one-off event, but part of several feats of archery performed by the King of kings in front of his court, in different parts of the – newly-conquered – Sasanian territory, indeed very much reminiscent of King Stenkil's celebrated series of exploits; these feats were recorded according to a specific formulaic phraseology which identified the exact spot from which the king shot his arrow, "I put my foot in *this* recess", listed the witnesses present during the exploit and challenged the reader to outdo his bowshot. Gropp also notes the strong similarities between the two inscriptions' contexts: like the Hājjiābād cave, Tang-e Boraq is a rocky recess; it overlooks a gorge at the bottom of which flows a deep, crystal-clear river. From gaps in the rock above and below the cave water spurts forward into the gorge feeding the river below and a carpet of bright green moss covers the damp rock-cliff, a scene reminiscent of Ker Porter's description of the lush landscape and the waterfalls tumbling down the rockface at Hājjiābād,

[517] Sāmi 1957 and Gignoux 1972, 10.

[518] Sāmi 1963, 70; Gropp 1969, 229-237.

although these have now completely dried up. At Tang-e Boraq, the inscription's two versions are engraved one above the other, rather than next to another, on a smooth, prepared rock-surface. The first two words of the Middle Persian version are preserved according to Gropp's drawing – although it is very difficult to see this from his photographs – and if the rest of the first line is lost it appears to reproduce the formula which begins the Hājjiābād text. The shooting conditions at Tang-e Boraq were better than at Hājjiābād however, so that the main difference between the two inscriptions is that the section which describes the arrow falling beyond the target and out of the party's eyesight – which led to the re-erection of another target at Hājjiābād – is omitted at Tang-e Boraq. Gropp notes a tall and slender boulder in the valley below which he suggests may have served as a marker for the king's shot.

When text editions take a life of their own.

Further monumental examples of the Hājjiābād inscription have not – yet – been brought to light, but the text was found inscribed on a series of different artefacts which appeared on the antiques market in the 1960s and 1970s, marking a new twist in the remarkable trajectory of this text. David Neil Mackenzie, a British scholar of Middle and New Iranian languages who held the Chair of Oriental Philology in Göttingen and is the author of the only dictionary of Middle Persian available in English to this day, published in 1978 a curious Parthian inscription engraved on a silver plaque kept at the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities in the British Museum (BM 136772). The provenance for the object was loosely described as a "European private collection".[519] The first 14 lines closely reproduce the Parthian version of the Hājjiābād inscription albeit with the first word presenting some palaeographic differences, while lines 15 to 21 repeat this same inscription from the beginning with two learned variations: the phonemic spelling *be* is replaced by the corresponding aramaeogram BRE and the aramaeogram AYK is substituted for another, ANW. The erudition of these variations made MacKenzie dispel the possibility that the inscription might be a forgery: on the contrary, the Middle Persian spellings BRE and AYK pointed to the inadvertence of an "old non-Parthian scribe".[520] Nevertheless, the find baffled the scholar: a silver plaque could not possibly be a school exercise or even a miniature draft for the rock-cut text. He finally concluded that the object was meant as a master copy of the inscription for presentation to the king: at the sight of the sloppy attempt made by the first engraver, the chief secretary in charge of the Hājjiābād project would have asked a

[519] MacKenzie 1978, 499.

[520] MacKenzie 1978, 509.

second scribe to re-engrave the text; careful not to waste a precious piece of material, the latter decided to engrave his version below that of his predecessor. After painting as best he could this unlikely scenario, MacKenzie was forced to recognise that a year earlier Richard Nelson Frye, Aga Khan Professor of Iranian studies at Harvard university, had published an article in the Bulletin of the Asia Institute of the Pahlavi University of Shiraz – of which he was the Director – in which he mentioned that he was once shown a beautiful Sasanian silver plate engraved with a well-carved, but forged, inscription: upon closer examination he had identified it as being none other than the Middle Persian version of the Hājjiābād text.[521] This anecdote did not raise MacKenzie's suspicions however, and the scholar entertained the idea that the plate mentioned by Frye, because it was described as bearing the Middle Persian version of Hājjiābād, was the counterpart of the curious object in Parthian kept at the British Museum.

It was Shaul Shaked, Professor of Iranian studies at the Hebrew university of Jerusalem, who solved the enigma of the silver plaque a decade later in the *Papers in Honour of Richard Frye*.[522] He records not one but a whole series of objects kept in Museums and private collections alike bearing a version of the Hājjiābād inscription. These include a tomb-stone-like slab kept at the California Museum of Ancient Art engraved with the Middle Persian version of this inscription; a bronze plaque in a private collection with the same version **[Fig. 4.8]**; a bronze bowl with the Parthian version engraved on the outer rim; an earthenware bowl in the Yale Babylonian collection resembling a Babylonian incantation bowl, with the Parthian version inscribed in spiral lines running from the center outward and stopping mid-sentence when it reached the rim **[Fig. 4.9]**. This particular piece was strongly considered as potentially genuine by Prods Oktor Skjærvø, successor of Richard Frye as Aga Khan Professor of Iranian studies at Harvard, who argued that it presented a more cursive-like ductus of inscriptional Middle Persian.[523] This same cursive ductus was found among the spurious objects published by Shaked however, suggesting a common source for the forgery. Shaked remarked that the Hājjiābād text, which specifically points to its physical natural environment, would make little sense outside of its context and had no raison d'être on such objects. More specifically, he demonstrated that the engraved silver plaque first published by MacKenzie scrupulously copied not the Hājjiābād rock-cut inscription itself, but Herzfeld's *drawing* of the text, published in his *Paikuli* **[Fig. 4.10]**. Herzfeld gives a line-by-line draught of the inscription alternating

[521] MacKenzie 1978, 511; Frye 1977.

[522] Shaked 1990a.

[523] Skjærvø 1990, 292.

between the Middle Persian and Parthian versions. Because of lack of space, it is truncated at the bottom of page 87 and continued onto the next two pages:[524] this explained both the strange half-repeated inscription – after finishing his copy of the Parthian text, the forger went back to the beginning of the drawing and copied the six lines of the Middle Persian version on page 87 – and the sudden preference for aramaeograms used in Middle Persian in the second paragraph of silver plaque. Similarly, the bronze plaque engraved with the Middle Persian version of Hājjiābād slavishly reproduces the square brackets which Herzfeld had diligently added around the first letter in his drawing of the inscription to indicate that he was adding the initial *mem* in order to restore the term *saxwan* (MRYA, see above) **[Fig. 4.8]**: the forger was again evidently working from *Paikuli* and mistook these editorial marks for graphemes.[525]

Among the spurious objects published by Shaked is an Old Persian cuneiform inscription engraved on a silver plaque, with a small Achaemenid winged-symbol etched in the bottom left: the text, suspiciously justified to the right, was evidently written from right to left rather than left to right as Old Persian ought to be, strongly suggesting the inscription was forged.[526] We may consider that the extraordinary discovery of the gold and silver engraved foundation plaques found at the four corners of the Apadana building by Herzfeld's architect Krefter, which provoked immense international interest, inspired this counterfeit. Perhaps the Apadana foundation plaques were also the inspiration for the silver plaque at the British Museum engraved with the copy and a half of the Hājjiābād inscription. Shaked has argued that the spurious Old Persian inscription may be copying a genuine but now lost Achaemenid inscription; remarkably, in the case of the artefacts bearing copies of the Hājjiābād inscription, it was the very secondary literature dedicated to the original rock-cut inscription that produced a new series of engraved objects which made their way into museums and private collections and into the studies of eminent scholars.

[524] Herzfeld 1924, 87-89.

[525] Shaked 1990a, 270, Fig. 2.

[526] Shaked 1990a, 274-275.