Historiography and palaeography of Sasanian Middle Persian inscriptions

Ramble, O.K.C.

Chapter 8

Early Middle Persian inscriptions: Documenting the lost manuscript tradition of Sasanian Iran and exploring the different symbolic aspects of Sasanian epigraphic texts

I. The corpus of early Middle Persian Sasanian inscriptions within the Sasanian scribal tradition.

The lost manuscript tradition of Sasanian Iran and the political, symbolic, legal and religious aspects of Sasanian epigraphic texts.

The preceding chapter discussed the few manuscript remains that were securely datable to the Sasanian period. Monumental inscriptions constitute the bulk of the vestiges for this period, yet it is essential to appreciate that they were only a fraction of the written output of Sasanian Iran. When studied carefully, several monumental inscriptions betray a trace of the now lost Sasanian manuscript material: the rock-cut texts refer to administrative and legal manuscript documents and missives, and describe different aspects of scribal practice, such as the signing and sealing of contracts and the recording of legal evidence in specially dedicated archives; they also name key functions and offices that are directly linked to the act of manuscript writing and document a wealth of specialised terminology to refer to written texts, testifying to a rich and complex Sasanian administrative scribal tradition.[1044]

The aim of the following chapter is twofold. First, it will investigate the specialised vocabulary documented in several inscriptions to refer to manuscript material and scribal practice, as well as certain palaeographic features of the rock-cut texts that may betray manuscript models. This will highlight to what extent Sasanian inscriptions were embedded in a rich manuscript tradition which provided the administrative, legal and even religious backdrop against which the monumental texts must be studied and understood. Because of their three-dimensional nature however, inscriptions also present linguistic, textual-structural

[1044] It is worth noting that although, as the following chapter will demonstrate, the use of manuscript writing in the context of Sasanian administration is well attested, there is almost no trace of the use of writing in the realms of religion and literature in the early Sasanian period.

features and literary *topoi* that are unique to monumental, rock-cut, exposed[1045] texts. The second focus of this chapter will be to pay special attention to the different ways in which the inscriptions are embedded in their *physical* surroundings. Indeed, the choice of its location, such as a mountain, spring, private property or dynastic site, was an important part of an inscription's significance and its author's motivations for having it engraved; the writing surface – prepared and carved out, or not – also directly affected both the layout of the rock-cut text and its palaeography. Strikingly, authors of inscriptions systematically mobilise a number of linguistic tools to refer to key features of their inscriptions' natural and built environment, creating what linguists have termed a "deictic field" of reference:[1046] Sasanian monumental rock-cut texts are 'geo-localised' with respect to their environment and intrinsically belong to the space they were engraved in; they make little sense away from it.

The careful documentation of keywords relating to the act of writing and manuscript documents in monumental inscriptions on the one hand, and the description of the inscriptions' relationship with their natural and archaeological surroundings on the other, will help draw out the special status and significance of monumental rock-cut texts, and in particular their possible administrative, legal and religious qualities within the broader landscape of Sasanian written vestiges.

Studying the Sasanian inscriptional corpus: problems of typology and chronology.

When examining the monumental inscriptions of Sasanian Iran, one of the first difficulties is to decide on the best order in which to discuss them. A rigid categorisation of Sasanian monumental inscriptions into different types or classes – royal vs private;[1047] funerary vs commemorative etc. – can lead to the problematic compartmentalisation of the rock-cut texts.[1048] First, several examples belong in different categories – for instance, royal, funerary,

[1045] On the notion of "exposed writings", see Fraenkel 1994.

[1046] For the concept of an inscription's "deictic field of reference", which will be discussed below, see Chmielewska 2007, esp. 151-153 as well as Bühler 1990, 117-136.

[1047] For a recent edition with photographs of Middle Persian private (non-royal) and funerary Sasanian and post-Sasanian inscriptions, see Nasrollahzadeh 2019.

[1048] This was most recently put forward by Alexander Engeskaug who attempted a quantitative analysis of the Sasanian corpus of Middle Persian inscriptions. His approach has the advantage of taking into account often overlooked, minor private inscriptions, typically neglected in epigraphic studies in favour of longer, 'more important' royal texts. However, the numerical analysis of a corpus as limited as that of inscriptional Middle Persian (160 individual inscriptions), also runs the risk of overrepresenting certain categories as a result of chance

legal and commemorative. Then, some inscriptions may have had several 'lives': typically, in a case of *damnatio memoriae*, the rock-cut text or part of it has been destroyed and reengraved to fit another king's political program. The different stages of this inscription's engraving may belong not only to distinct categories but also different royal eras; rigid categorisations have difficulty accounting for such hybrid texts and are not helpful in defining their special status. Finally, dealing with the inscriptions by category does not do justice to the relationship between different types of texts: an example of this are the two Middle Persian inscriptions engraved on the ruins of Darius' *tačara* (discussed at the end of the chapter). These are directly adjacent to one another and present one of the most interesting cases of inter-textuality of the Sasanian inscriptional corpus. The second, more recent inscription was engraved to testify that the older text was in good condition and pays homage to its author; in other words, the very *raison d'être* of the second inscription is the first one. Yet, the project dedicated to Sasanian history and material culture, *Sasanika*,[1049] does not document, in its inventory of Sasanian inscriptions, the second one of the two inscriptions from this pair, presumably because it is not a 'royal' text.

The strict chronological organisation of inscriptions has its own problems. First, several texts are not dated with precision. Then, proceeding by date or even royal era makes the discussion of overarching themes relevant to different inscriptions belonging to various time periods particularly difficult or unmanageable. The reservations detailed above concerning the limits of the inscriptions' categorisations are also relevant to the strict chronological organisation of these texts, such as the problematic case of *damnatio memoriae*.

For the purposes of this study, the inscriptions of Sasanian Iran will be addressed by combining aspects of the texts' typology and chronology, with a view to discussing the main themes that are the focus of this chapter. As stated above, the present aim is to document lost manuscript material and Sasanian scribal practice as well as examine the monumental text's relationship with their environment, in search for clues concerning the inscriptions' special status within the corpus of Sasanian written material and their possible legal, administrative and religious value.

---

finds: for instance, Engeskaug tentatively concludes that writing stonemasons' marks belongs to Late Sasanian "praxis", because a series was discovered on the sixth century blocks of a wall in Darband (Engeskaug 2020, 179). This is unlikely: stonemason's marks are known from Achaemenid Iran, and certain non-alphabetical marks from the stone blocks of the early Sasanian site of Bīšāpūr are thought to be stonemasons' signatures. This observation further raises the difficult question of what constitutes an inscription and not – a signature remains a signature even if it is non-alphabetical.

[1049] Touraj Daryaee (ed.): https://sites.uci.edu/sasanika/inscriptions/.

II. Text and context (I): the relationship between Sasanian inscriptions and their natural and built environment.

Sasanian label inscriptions: the symbolic choice of language and script.

One of the very first uses which early Sasanian kings had for monumental rock-cut texts was the identification of protagonists – royal, but also divine – in monumental stone sculptures. The two main themes of Sasanian royal bas-reliefs can be described as depicting the king's military victory over enemies – either in the form of a battle or a royal triumph – and investiture scenes.[1050] In the latter, the Sasanian king is presented, typically on horseback, receiving a ribboned diadem from a divinity, generally Ohrmazd, the great god of the Zoroastrian pantheon. In such scenes, the king is identified with a trilingual – in the later Sasanian period a sole Middle Persian – inscription recording his full royal titulature; in rare cases, the divinity also is named. The only monumental texts attributed to the first Sasanian king Ardašīr known to this day are two such a 'label' inscriptions.[1051] The trilingual texts are engraved on the bas-relief at Naqš-e Rostam depicting his investiture by Ohrmazd,[1052] on the chests of the protagonists' respective horses.[1053] Ardašīr (left) and Ohrmazd (right) face each other with their right hands outstretched toward each other holding the ribboned ring between them **[Fig. 8.1]**; under Ardašīr's horse lies a corpse thought to be that of the last Arsacid king Artabanus V; under Ohrmazd's horse lies another corpse with serpentine hair, regarded to be a unique representation of his archnemesis Ahriman. Considering scribes in later Zoroastrian manuscripts systematically wrote Ahriman's name upside down – a form of scribal taboo – it is remarkable to have this god of darkness represented in a royal monumental stone relief in a sacred site.[1054]

[1050] Note, however, that James R. Russell holds Sasanian 'investiture' scenes to be strongly funerary in nature, Russell 2016, esp. 150-151. This hypothesis will not be followed here.

[1051] It should be mentioned that there is some debate as to whether the rock relief and the two label inscriptions were actually engraved during Ardašīr I's lifetime or were a posthumous commission by his son Šābuhr I, and whether the label inscriptions were engraved at the same time of the sculptures were carved, see Overlaet 2013.

[1052] In a provocative article, Bruno Overlaet rejected the identification of the god Ohrmazd in this bas-relief, see Overlaet 2013; this hypothesis will not be retained here.

[1053] In fact, exactly where two of the Middle Persian dipinti of the Dura synagogue were painted, see Frye 1968, pl. 4 and especially pl. 5.

[1054] For a discussion and short historiography of this relief, see Hinz 1969, 126-134, and 126, n. 23.

This first set of monumental inscriptions inaugurated the early Sasanian practice of inscribing trilingual texts, with a Middle Persian, Parthian and Greek version. While Middle Persian was the mother tongue of the nascent Sasanian dynasty, Parthian, as we saw in the previous chapter, was the other official language and script of Sasanian administration; it was also the mother tongue of the Sasanian king's predecessors, many members of which were important Sasanian dignitaries. The introduction of Greek, the language of the eastern Roman Empire, provided Sasanian official inscriptions and sculptured artworks with an international dimension.[1055] Perhaps it was meant to speak to foreign envoys and embassies. However, as Philip Huyse has observed concerning Šābuhr's trilingual inscription (see below), it is not necessary to postulate a target audience for the Greek version of Sasanian monumental texts: this language was used as a tool to 'universalise' the king's message in *lingua franca* of the (western world) at that time.[1056] Symbolically, the use of Greek placed Sasanian Iran on the map of international diplomacy. It was this Greek version which later convinced early European visitors to Iran that the sculptures represented the victories of Alexander the Great. The order in which the different versions of the texts were engraved has its significance. In the label inscription on Ardašīr's horse **[Fig. 8.2]**, the Parthian version (3 lines) is at the top, the Greek (4 lines) in the middle, and the Middle Persian one (3 lines) at the bottom. The space in which the three versions are engraved is delimited by Ardašīr's leg to the left and by the end of the horse's torso to the right; the inscriptions follow the smooth, curved line of the animal's chest muscles. The Parthian and Greek versions are engraved above each other in a neat paragraph that is justified both to the left and to the right; by contrast, the Middle Persian is indented to the right by several inches, as if it were a later addition. In the second label inscription, identifying Ohrmazd opposite, the order changes, with the Middle Persian one at the top, then the Parthian and finally the Greek **[Fig. 8.3]**. Each version is a single line, and all three are neatly justified to the left, although with the Middle Persian line running a little shorter than the other two. It is impossible to decide which of the two trilingual inscriptions was engraved first but it is tempting to suppose that the engravers' priority was to identify the king who had just toppled the Arsacids, and entrench the claim to power of the new dynasty's founder in the rocks of Persia's conquered territory. In this respect, it is worth noting that the

[1055] Note that as discussed in chapter 5, Greek was also an important administrative language, as well as a language and script of prestige, in the Parthian empire – in using Greek, the Sasanians were probably also continuing Parthian practice.

[1056] Huyse 1999a, II, 201.

very first version engraved was Parthian, the language of the defeated Arsacids, and the second one Greek, the language of the Persian king's Roman interlocutors: these two political entities were the most directly concerned by the foundation of the new Sasanian dynasty. Middle Persian did not have the same international importance – as mentioned above, perhaps the ostentatious indentation to the left indicates that it was, in fact, a later addition?

In the nearby dynastic site of Naqš-e Rajab, a trilingual label inscription similarly identifies the second Sasanian king Šābuhr I, represented on horseback with a throng of dignitaries standing behind him. Here again, the Parthian (4 lines) and Greek (6 lines) versions have evidently been given prominence. They are engraved in a neat paragraph one on top of the other directly on the torso of Šābuhr's horse, echoing the captions on Ardašīr's investiture scene described above; the justified lines are delimited by the end of the horse's anatomy to the right and the elements of its harness to the left. The Middle Persian version was not added beneath the two others as would be expected – there is little space left on the horse's breast and the line of writing would have run between the animal's forelegs **[Fig. 8.4]**. Instead, it is engraved on the unsculpted, flattened rock space to the right of the bas-relief, in a rectangular paragraph of four and a half lines. The asymmetric layout of this trilingual text implies that the Parthian and Greek versions were engraved first and the Middle Persian one added in afterwards – bringing further weight to the similar suggestion made above for Ardašīr's label inscription. The intended recipients of the news of Šābuhr's investiture were first and foremost the Parthian contingent of the Sasanian elite and the empire's western rival.

All three sets of label inscriptions are predictably written in a beautifully carved, monumental style. The graphemes are proportionate both to each other as well as to the Parthian and Greek letters, regularly spaced out and decidedly ornate. All examples of the letter *mem* for instance feature a dip in the grapheme's main loop, just below the left-ward cross, the right stem of which even ends in a curvy flourish. The *lamed* is Aramaic-style, with a straight main stem and bottom hook. The *pe* is an elegant hoop, both strands of which have been lengthened, making it look like a reverse cursive Latin 'p'. The main stem of the L-shaped *nun* is even given a slight wave. The main stem and large hook of the *taw* are fully detached from one another. The lower horizontal bar of the *bet* is lengthened at an angle and systematically 'underlines' the word following it.

The engraved captions follow an identical formula which systematically begins with the two words *pahikar ēn* (*ptkl*/*ptkly* ZNE; Parthian, *ptkr* ZNE): "this image/picture (sculpture)". The Iranian *pahikar* is rendered in Greek by ΠΡΟCΩΠΟΝ (*πρόσωπον*, face, visage, countenance). Follows the full titulature of the king – or name of the divinity, in the

case of Ohrmazd – represented.[1057] The close deictic *ēn* effects a direct relationship between the engraved text and the sculptured representation, dismissing any possible doubt concerning the identity of the represented monarch. Save for these first two first words, the caption follows the royal titulature-formula engraved on the respective kings' coins – *mazdēsn bay* [king's name] *kē čihr az yazdān* – to the very word, making the labelled bas-relief a monumental version of the portrait-with-legend combination minted on the issues of each monarch. In the rock-carvings, where there is more space, the name and title of the king's father (and grandfather, in the case of Šābuhr) is also added; the former king's full titulature is reproduced with exactitude, echoing the latter's own label inscriptions.

What's in a caption? The symbolic, political significance of Sasanian label inscriptions.

The political and symbolic significance of monumental label inscriptions is probably best illustrated by a striking case of *damnatio memoriae* in one of the royal bas-reliefs engraved on the gorge of Tang-e Čogān leading to the royal city of Bīšāpūr. Six monumental bas-reliefs are cut into the cliff sides on either side of the gorge; the lower part of their frames reaches the viewer standing in the gorge at about eye level. Three – the most lavish – celebrate the investiture and victory of Šābuhr I over Rome.[1058] To these was added an investiture scene by Wahrām I (r. 271-274 CE), son and successor (after Hormizd) of Šābuhr I.[1059] Wahrām I can be identified in this bas-relief thanks to the label inscription as well as his crown: a characteristic 'radiating' diadem – inspired by Mithra's headdress – topped by the balloon-like Sasanian coiffe known as the *korymbos* **[Fig. 8.5]**. Wahrām I's son, Wahrām II (r. 274-293 CE), had a bas-relief engraved next to that of his father's: he wears his distinctive winged crown with *korymbos* and is represented on horseback receiving an embassy of foreign envoys – thought to be representatives of Arab tribes – accompanied by their horses and camels.[1060] The sixth scene displays a starkly different style of engraving and is a later commission, thought to

[1057] The name of the god Ohrmazd is translated as Zeus in the Greek version. Some small changes in the royal titulatures of the Sasanian kings do occur: thus, Ardašīr presented himself as king of Ērān, whereas Šābuhr was king of Ērān and non-Ērān, a phrase which will be subsequently adopted by all his successors.

[1058] For an exhaustive photographic edition of these three reliefs attributed to Šābuhr I, see Herrmann, Howell and MacKenzie 1980-1983, I and III, 7-21, pl. 1-24c.

[1059] For this bas-relief, see Herrmann, Howell and MacKenzie 1980-1983, II, 11-19, pl. 16c-17b.

[1060] For an exhaustive description of this relief, see Herrmann, Howell and MacKenzie 1980-1983, II, 5-10, pl. 1-16b.

depict Šābuhr II:[1061] the king – represented fully frontally – is seated on his throne in the middle with a crowd of dignitaries (left) as well as soldiers and military officers (right) standing behind him; certain military officers brandish the severed heads of conquered enemies. The cliffs of the gorge of Tang-e Čogān thus portray a remarkable dynastic sequence of Sasanian kings, illustrating the monarchs and their distinctive attributes, not unlike the pages of the Sasanian royal "Book of Portraits" described by a number of Arabo-Persian chroniclers including Hamza al-Isfahani (see chapter 1).

Now, Wahrām I's relief was usurped by his brother Narseh – another son of Šābuhr I[1062] – who partly destroyed the label inscription identifying the former in his bas-relief **[Fig. 8.5]**.[1063] The inscription is engraved beside the king's head, to the right. Ernst Herzfeld was the first to note that the name 'Wahrām' in the caption was obliterated and that of 'Narseh' engraved over it.[1064] Because both kings were brothers, the rest of the titulature's sequence – namely the king's father's name and title – was identical and allowed to remain intact. However, scholars observed that Wahrām I was also identified by his radiating crown: it is this distinctive headdress that made him immediately recognisable to the onlooker, more so no doubt than the caption: the text is not easily legible from the ground, assuming the viewer could have read inscriptional Middle Persian at all.[1065] This makes Narseh's efforts to obliterate his brother's name in the short label inscription remarkable. In her careful study of this bas-relief, Georgina Herrmann suggested that Bahram's headdress may have been altered: the extremities of the crown's rays appear to be broken, and with the addition of (now lost) stucco mouldings, it could have been possible to recreate Narseh's personal headdress over that of Wahrām's.[1066] Be that as it may, Narseh's usurpation of Wahrām's caption is an example of the political and symbolic significance of the obliteration of a king's name from a monumental inscription and from a dynastic sequence. Indeed, changing the name of the king in the caption did not only modify

[1061] This is debated, however, see Herrmann, Howell and MacKenzie 1980-1983, II, 20-37 and esp. 32-33, pl. 18-32c.

[1062] After a long reign that lasted three decades, Šābuhr I died leaving four sons behind him – a bitter feud for the throne ensued, see Weber 2016; Cereti and Terribili 2012, 75-77; Dignas and Winter 2007, 17; Frye 1983, 126-128.

[1063] See the edition of this double inscription by MacKenzie, in Herrmann, Howell and MacKenzie 1980-1983, II, 14-19.

[1064] Herzfeld 1924, 120.

[1065] Ghirshman 1971, 97.

[1066] Herrmann, Howell and MacKenzie 1980-1983, II, 18-19, pl. 12-13.

the text: it attributed the entire monument to another monarch and destroyed the former's endeavours to be remembered by posterity. By rubbing out the name of his brother at Tang-e Čōgān, Narseh effectively removed Wahrām from the lineage of Sasanian kings as it was depicted on the cliffsides leading up to Bīšāpūr.

The Wahrām/Narseh inscription is engraved in monumental lettering and is the first royal caption to include a single Middle Persian version. This may indicate – now that the dynasty was well-established – that the message of royal legitimation was primarily intended for an internal audience rather than either foreign envoys or Parthian predecessors: the fight for the throne that took place between the sons of Šābuhr I certainly would support this. It certainly suggests the rise in importance of Middle Persian as embodying the political identity of the dynasty and increasingly becoming the main language of the Sasanian administration: as we saw above, the earlier Sasanian kings had given Middle Persian versions a secondary place in their bas-reliefs, only adding these at the end or towards the side. The label inscription of Wahrām/Narseh is justified to the right, delimited by the end of the bas-relief's frame, and the script is identical to that in the captions engraved under Šābuhr I and Ardašīr, with rounded, perfectly proportionate letters displaying all the familiar ornate characteristics of the monumental graphic register: a dip in the *mem*, a hooked *lamed*, a three-shaped *dalet* and *kaf* with cedilla. Only the *alef* is markedly squarer than its counterpart in earlier captions, where it is closer to the Parthian trident shape. The graphemes are also overall somewhat larger than in previous inscriptions: the omission of the Greek and Parthian versions no doubt allowed the engravers to dedicate more space to it.

The last two label inscriptions extant similarly display a single Middle Persian version; they are engraved to the left and right respectively of the high-relief statues of Šābuhr II (309-379 CE) and Šābuhr III (383-388 CE), in the upper register of the second cave (the smaller grotto) at the site of Tāq-e Bostān.[1067] This pair of inscriptions was first documented by Ambrosio Bembo who mistook them for Coptic texts; they were later instrumental to Silvestre de Sacy for the decipherment of Middle Persian (see chapter 2). Both inscriptions follow the semi-circular shape of the upper register, so that they are narrow at the top and wider at the bottom; the caption to the left is justified to the right and the one to the right justified to the

[1067] The most exhaustive study of the site of Tāq-e Bostān and its reliefs is a magnificent four-volume publication, *Takū-i Busutān*, by the Institute of Oriental Culture of the University of Tokyo, edited by Shinji Fukai and Kiyoharu Horiuchi. Volume 2 is entirely dedicated to the two grottos and their reliefs; for the Middle Persian inscriptions in the smaller cave, see Fukai and Horiuchi 1969-1984, II, pl. 72-73 and III, 163-166.

left. The titulatures follow the formula type inaugurated by both kings' early Sasanian predecessors, and the monumental script of the inscriptions is again near-identical to earlier examples, displaying a remarkable continuity in the graphic style – for this type of epigraphic text – over a century and a half **[Fig. 8.6]**. Nonetheless, some minor differences can be highlighted: the Tāq-e Bostān label inscriptions follow the Wahrām/Narseh example in using a square *alef*; the earlier, Parthian style, trident-shaped monumental *alef* appears to have been abandoned. Another feature of this later pair is the lengthening of the lower horizontal strokes of graphemes: the left foot of the *nun*, the cedilla of the *kaf*, the horizontal bar of the *waw* and *resh*, the left 'tail' of the *alef*, are all stretched out and, in the case of the *kaf* and *nun*, underline the preceding letter. The lower stroke of the *bet*, which in earlier label inscriptions was drawn at an angle – easier to carve on hard stone – is now perfectly horizontal and underlines the letters following this grapheme. The limited space provided by the semi-circular niche may have in part encouraged this: a perfectly horizontal lower stroke of the bet takes up less space than if it is drawn at an angle. Nevertheless, these features were characteristic of manuscript writing as illustrated by the Middle Persian inscribed parchments at Dura – and to some extent the dipinti at the synagogue – where lower horizontal strokes were almost systematically lengthened to effect the elegant underlining of graphemes or whole words.

Inscription and environment: Šābuhr's twin inscriptions at Hājjiābād and Tang-e Borāq.

Although they are not dated, the inscription of Šābuhr I in the cave at Hājjiābād, and its near-identical counterpart in the rocky recess of Tang-e Borāq, are probably the first monumental rock-cut texts commissioned by this king.[1068] As mentioned in chapter 4, they commemorate an exploit achieved by the king in those two locations: in both cases an exceptionally impressive feat of archery. By commemorating and describing this event, the inscriptions provide a lasting, material embodiment for Šābuhr's fleeting – albeit extraordinary – achievement allowing the king to mark and anchor his presence in the physical landscape of his empire's territory. As noted by several travellers (see chapter 4), the natural rocky recess of Hājjiābād was widened and smoothed, with four deep rectangular frames (about four inches deep each) cut into the bedrock to receive the different versions of the inscription. Only two of the frames are engraved however, each with a version of the bilingual Parthian and Middle

[1068] For an edition of the inscriptions, see MacKenzie 1978, as well as Daryaee, *Sasanika*, https://sites.uci.edu/sasanika/sapur-is-inscription-hajjiabad-sh/ and https://sites.uci.edu/sasanika/tang-e-Borāq/; for a full history of research of this text, see chapter 4.

Persian inscription. The Middle Persian occupies the rightmost frame; the Parthian is engraved in the frame in the center **[Fig. 8.7]**. The other two (leftmost) frames are left blank leading to some speculation as to their intended purpose: had the engravers planned a longer inscription initially, or was a Greek version also prepared that never made its way next to the Parthian and Middle Persian texts? Because Greek is written from left to right, one would indeed expect this version to occupy the leftmost frames, with the direction of writing 'looking towards' the other two right-to left texts. Perhaps the frames were meant to receive something other than an inscription however, such as a bas-relief of the king shooting the arrow. The rocky recess of Hājjiābād overlooks a grassy dell. Although the area is now extremely dry like the rest of the region, early travellers describe a well-watered valley with lush vegetation and an abundance of fauna (including tortoises and fish!); cascades of pristine water fell from the top of the cliff over the numerous caves in this area and, at least in the nineteenth century, these rocky recesses were evidently considered holy by inhabitants who placed small offerings of oil lamps inside them (see chapter 2).

Now, this quaint description resembles strongly what can still be observed at Tang-e Borāq, the location of Hājjiābād's 'twin' inscription. The bone-dry, sun-scorched, dusty valley suddenly gives into a shaded, miraculously cool, mossy-green recess from which little curtains of sparkling pure water cascade down into a deep, crystal-clear swimming pool of blue-green water; shepherds come to this small gorge with their flock and throw stones across the gorge into the cave to pass the time while their sheep drink and enjoy the shade **[Fig. 8.8]**. Whether or not they had a holy significance in the Sasanian period already, such rocky recesses were no doubt an appropriate setting for a royal party on the hunt to rest, water their horses and play games – and conduct archery contests, as Sasanian kings were fond of doing.

At Hājjiābād, the deep frames provide the outline for the Middle Persian and Parthian inscriptions, so that both texts are roughly justified to the left and right. The inscriptions' engraving is overall not as neat as that of the captions of Naqš-e Rostam, Bīšāpūr and Tāq-e Bostān. The lines of writing are not quite straight: in both texts, these go up to the left so that there is quite a lot of blank space left in the bottom lower left of both frames. The space between words is not regular either, sometimes practically non-existent; the letters are not quite proportionate to one another – the first line and beginning of lines are strikingly larger, a feature particularly exaggerated in the Parthian version – nor are they always aligned, resulting in an overall 'jumbled' effect; the engraver has often slightly miscalculated the space that was available to him so that the last letters of each line are smaller and squeezed together. The conditions at Hājjiābād were evidently much more difficult for the engraver. He probably did

not have all the tools and help that would have been available to him in a royal site like Naqš-e Rostam and certainly had less time to plan the inscription – as we will see, the text records the unforeseeable complications that followed the king's bowshot.

Traces of cursive models at Hājjiābād.

The graphemes belong to the immediately recognisable ornamental inscriptional script **[Fig. 8.7]**: the long, straight stems of the *lamed* are finished by a lower 'Aramaic' hook; the *mem* always presents a dip in the main loop under the juncture; the *kaf* is the familiar three-shape with cedilla. Nevertheless, the slightly rushed quality of the engraving is reflected in several instances of simplifications and the Middle Persian version even presents some examples of linked graphemes which betray the influence of a manuscript model. Thus, in several instances, the *kaf* has a much more 'zigzag' elongated shape than a clear '3'-shape with cedilla; similarly, the *nun* is a long vertical wave rather than a neat, dented vertical line with lower right foot. The two hooks of the *shin* are often simplified to small straight lines, making this grapheme look like an alef with a right tail (see a particularly striking case of this in line 6); similarly, the head of the *waw* and *resh* have in several examples lost much of their elegant curve. The lower stroke of the *bet* is horizontal rather than drawn at an angle like in the earlier label inscriptions; this grapheme is typically exaggeratedly lengthened to underline the entire word which it begins, which as we have seen is similarly a standard embellishment of manuscript. A striking case of 'ligature' occurs in line 10, in the verbal aramaeogram HWE (*hē*): the *ḥet* and *waw* are written very close to each other as a pair while a substantial gap separates these two graphemes from the final *he*; both the *ḥet* and *waw* are long and narrow, 'squeezed' next to each other and the lower right foot of the waw begins where the lower left curve of the het ends. The term 'ligature' here is put in inverted commas because the engraver, working on a hard surface, necessarily had to lift his tools to trace these two graphemes and could not have naturally found a true ligature more comfortable than detached letters: the linked pair therefore most probably reflects a feature of the manuscript model, in which the scribe had ligatured both graphemes together in a natural, single stroke of his writing instrument on the parchment/papyrus.

Another case of an embellishment that seems more at home in manuscript than in monumental rock carvings concerns the ductus of the aramaeogram ṬB, *nēw* 'brave, strong'. The word occurs twice in the inscription, once in the middle of line 12 and at the end of the last line. The *tet*, which is a grapheme that occurs rarely and only in aramaeograms – it did not correspond to a phonemic reality in Middle Persian and would eventually be replaced by the

taw, including in aramaeograms such as ṬB/TB – is made to be very large, about twice as high as the other letters in the inscription. It takes the unusual shape of a big S, although the lower hook is less pronounced and curves back to the right at the very tip. In the first occurrence of this aramaeogram, both letters are written very close; the lower hook of the *tet* appears to touch the beginning of the *bet*'s lower horizontal bar. In the last line, 'ṬB', the very last letters of the entire inscription, are spaced out and the lower horizontal stroke of the *bet* is exaggeratedly lengthened: as we saw, the elongation of graphemes to fill in the blank space left at the end of lines is a typical feature of manuscript and the Middle Persian inscription of Hājjiābād is the first rock-cut text discussed so far to display this type of embellishment.

The Tang-e Borāq inscription, which presents an extremely similar text save for some minor – but telling – modifications towards the end, was unfortunately heavily damaged. *In situ*, only one large, jagged block remains, fallen flat to the ground. It is therefore much more difficult to reconstruct the layout of the text. Still, from the surviving stone slab, it is possible to note that the Middle Persian and Parthian versions were written one above the other, rather than next to each other, with the Middle Persian at the top. Here again, the inscription was engraved in a carved out stone frame, using monumental, ornate style lettering. The overall quality of the engraving at Tang-e Borāq appears to be slightly superior, with straighter lines of writing and more proportionate letters.

Exploring the notion of an inscription's "deictic field" of reference.

The inscriptions of Hājjiābād and Tang-e Borāq were described above as providing a material, lasting form to Šābuhr's feat of archery. This is not a subjective interpretation: it is explicitly stated in the first words of both texts. The opening formula follows the model found in label inscriptions, with [object described] + the demonstrative ZNE (close deictic*; ēn* in Middle Persian, *im* in Parthian). Whereas in the captions on royal bas-reliefs the object described was *pahikar* ('image, sculpture'), in the Hājjiābād and Tang-e Borāq texts it is *tigrāh* (Middle Persian) and *widāwan* (Parthian). The opening sentence is usually translated (at least since Nyberg, see chapter 4) as "*this is the bowshot* of me, the Mazdaean Lord Šābuhr etc." The close deictic *ēn*/*im* 'this' is somewhat curiously used to point to an object that is immaterial and invisible to the reader save for its description in the inscription. The rest of the text is dedicated to giving a 'body' to this immaterial object by providing the reader visual markers to appreciate the impressive breadth of the feat of archery. Demonstrative pronouns, adverbs and prepositions of place and the description of the king's physical position with respect to salient

topographical features are the main linguistic tools used to achieve this. Šābuhr, the author of both the shot and of the text – in contrast to the captions, the Hājjiābād and Tang-e Borāq inscriptions are written in the first person – describes the exact position he was in when he shot *this* arrow (*ēn tigr*; *im tiγr*). Here again, the close deictic is somewhat surprising: either it is a way to refer to the bowshot as a material object, or the royal arrow was originally placed next to the inscription as a commemorative monument – perhaps to encourage any potential contender to outdo the king's feat (see below)? Šābuhr was in front of (*pēš*; *parwān*) the entire court (the lords, princes, grandees and nobles) when he shot it: with this wording, the Sasanian aristocracy is very much cast as a witness to his feat. Šābuhr then placed his foot ('*my* foot', *u-n pāy*) in *this* rocky recess (*ēn darrag; ēd wēm*) – in a direct allusion to the cave of Hājjiābād – and shot the arrow to *that* cairn (*ān čēdāg*; *hō čēd*), a now lost marker that indicated the place where the arrow fell. The phrasing of this passage is slightly different in the Tang-e Borāq inscription because the topographical conditions were not identical: the king shot his arrow from *this* cairn/stone (*az ēn čēdāg*; *až im ward*) to *that* cairn (*ō ān čēdāg*; *ō hō čēd*).

The Hājjiābād inscription includes a digression at this point, absent from its Tang-e Borāq counterpart: *that* place (*ōy gyāg, ānō gyāg*) where the arrow fell was not properly visible from where the king shot it; Šābuhr therefore ordered the cairn to be moved within sight of the cave (*ōrōndar*, 'towards this side'). As mentioned in chapter 4, when visiting the site of Hājjiābād, it is easy to appreciate the problems of visibility discussed in the inscription. The wide dell opens to the left of the cave, but right in front of the rocky recess is a hill that slopes down to the left: if the king shot his arrow a little too much to the right it would have fallen over to the other side of the low hill, making it invisible to anyone standing in the cave. The careful and lengthy explanation of the exact reasons for the displacement of the original cairn indicates just how seriously the king and his court took this feat of archery, and how cautious they were in recording the length of the bowshot with objective markers visible to all.

Now, this detailed information was probably intended for a potential contender and amounted to clear rules ensuring that the king's challenge was as fair to him as possible. Indeed, both inscriptions end with a challenge to the passer-by – or to an ambitious young noble – to outdo the king's extraordinary bowshot, while respecting the king's exact shooting conditions. At Hājjiābād the potential challenger is enjoined to place his foot in *this* rocky cleft (*ēn darrag; ēd wēm*) and shoot an arrow to *that* cairn (*ān čēdāg*; *hō čēd*), in a repetition of the formula used earlier to describe the king's feat; similarly, at Tang-e Borāq the rival must shoot an arrow from *this* cairn (*az ēn čēdāg*; *až im ward*) to *that* cairn (*ō ān čēdāg*; *ō hō čēd*). The inscriptions

conclude by stating that should the hopeful contender be able to shoot to *that* cairn (*ō ān čēdāg*; *ō hō čēd*), he could indeed be considered strong-armed (*dast-nēw*).

With demonstrative pronouns, adverbs of place and the description of topographical features and visual markers, the inscription is located geographically and spatially with great precision. In other words, the content of the inscription situates the physical text according to its material context. Linguists such as Karl Bühler and Ella Chmielewska who have worked towards defining and theorising the complex relationship of "topo-sensitive" writings – such as graffiti and other such 'exposed writings' – have put forward the useful notion of the text's "deictic field" of reference.[1069] Specific linguistic and visual tools – or "clues"; these include prepositions, adverbs, demonstrative pronouns, but also dates, script and layout – establish a deictic field of reference, enabling the text's situation in time and space and its articulation with its physical support (the surface of writing) and context. This, in turn, provides a materiality to the "here and now" of the text, its auto-referential quality: for Chmielewska, the text "calls attention to itself" through its indexation to its environment.[1070] Indeed, the establishment of a deictic field of reference is characteristic of texts the value of which (in fact, their *raison d'être*) depends on being indexed to a specific location that has been chosen for its importance or meaning (its fame, beauty, history, religious meaning etc.). The works of these scholars provide a theoretical framework to examine how texts like the Hājjiābād and Tang-e Borāq inscriptions both derive their significance from a specific locale and also transform this locale into a place of significance.

The rocky recesses of Hājjiābād and Tang-e Borāq were probably chosen for the towering view they offered over the nearby dells, the beauty of their geography and resources (namely, the water and shelter they provided); perhaps they once presented, as they did later, a numinous quality also. The inscriptions engraved in both grottos no doubt derived a special significance from this peculiar landscape. Mainly however, the importance of the rock-cut texts is to provide a material trace of an extraordinary feat of archery made by the Sasanian king of kings: the deictic field of reference defined in the inscriptions serves to mark the range of the royal bowshot, ensuring that the passer-by appreciate the exceptional strength and skill of Šābuhr, but also that a potential rival or contender be given a fair challenge. That this challenge was not only jest but quite serious – and perhaps presented a political dimension also – is suggested by the meticulous care with which the text explains the necessity to move the bull's

[1069] Chmielewska 2007, 151-153 and Bühler 1990, esp. 117-136.

[1070] Chmielewska 2007, 151.

eye for better visibility, as well as the long enumeration of the different contingents of the Sasanian aristocracy who witnessed the feat: feats of archery evidently followed a clear protocol with rules presented in a near-legal manner.

Inscriptions and arrows: the ritual demarcation of territory.

In this respect, it is worth noting that scholars such as Drouin, Nyberg and Gignoux have highlighted the central importance of archery – as well as its other closely related sport, hunting – in ancient Iranian royal and political ideology.[1071] More recently, in an article dedicated to the symbolic significance of archery in Achaemenid and Parthian kingships, Antonio Panaino also discussed the religious use of the bow in ancient Iran, for instance in the ritual, royal determination of sacred space.[1072] As mentioned in chapter 4, Drouin and Nyberg drew attention to the legendary bowshot of the hero Āraš as a possible symbolic backdrop for the Hājjiābād text.[1073] Āraš's extraordinary bowshot – the sheer force of which ripped the hero's body apart – crossed many lands and mountains, and the place where his arrow fell marked the boundary between Iran and non-Iran. Panaino argues that the legend of Āraš had particular significance for the Parthian dynasty: according to Arabo-Persian sources, Parthian nobles claimed direct descent from the hero; a convergence even appears to have been made between the names of the eponymous founder of the Parthian dynasty, Arsakes, and Āraš; the iconography of the royal archer is characteristic of Parthian coin reverses.[1074] For Panaino "Šābuhr I, in displaying his ability as a bowman consciously rehearsed a "Northern pattern", perhaps trying to recall the example of Ǝrəxša, implicitly entering a symbolic space previously covered by the Parthian dynasty."[1075] Indeed, thanks to the Paikuli inscription (discussed below), we know that Parthian nobles made up a significant part of the *wuzurgān*, the Sasanian aristocracy: these were the witnesses to the king's bowshot in the Hājjiābād and Tang-e Borāq texts. With his bilingual Parthian and Middle Persian inscription at these sites,[1076] Šābuhr was

[1071] Drouin 1898; Nyberg 1945; Gignoux 1983.

[1072] Panaino 2019, 27-28.

[1073] Drouin 1898, 11; Nyberg 1945, 71-74.

[1074] Panaino 2019, 28-39.

[1075] Panaino 2019, 47.

[1076] Again, this may show that the king's main intended audience was internal to Iran: the Parthian and Persian aristocracy. Curiously, in the other earlier (label) inscriptions of this king, the Parthian versions were given particular prominence and this is the first instance where Middle Persian is given the more eminent position: at

anchoring himself in his newly conquered territory using a Parthian politico-ritual motif. The challenge addressed to a contender considering himself 'strong-armed' may have indeed carried political undertones.

Writing on ruins: Šābuhr I's inscription at Naqš-e Rostam.

The 1936 archaeological campaign carried out by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago in Persepolis and its environs revealed an almost intact trilingual inscription by Šābuhr I engraved on the lower part of the monumental Achaemenid tower, the so-called Ka'ba of Zoroaster, which towers at 14 metres above ground level at the site of Naqš-e Rostam **[Fig. 6.6]**.[1077] The inscription presents a Middle Persian version, placed on the eastern façade, a Parthian version on the western one and a Greek version occupying to the south **[Fig. 8.9]**.[1078] The northern façade of the tower, which looks directly at the Achaemenid tombs cut into the living rock of the mountain opposite, is taken up by a high staircase which leads all the way up to a small *cella* in the upper part of the tower. As such, the location of Šābuhr's inscription at Naqš-e Rostam contrasts starkly with the secluded grottos, somewhat lost in the hills of Fārs, where the Hājjiābād and Tang-e Borāq texts were engraved. A few kilometres to the south of Naqš-e Rostam lay the monumental Achaemenid ruins of Persepolis; a few kilometres east was the Sasanian town of Staxr, thought to have hosted a temple to the goddess Anahita and a mint; visible from Naqš-e Rostam, on the way to Persepolis, was the other Sasanian dynastic site of Naqš-e Rajab, where kings and high officials had bas-reliefs and inscriptions engraved. Naqš-e Rostam itself was an ancient sacred site: an Elamite bas-relief identified as representing the god Napiriša and his consort Kiririša, probably dating to the second millennium BC, indicates that it had been invested by kings since pre-Achaemenid times.[1079] It was strategically located at the crossroads of two important axes of the Sasanian empire, used by caravans since times immemorial: to the north-east, passing through the valley of Staxr, the road led to the Achaemenid city of Pasargadae, and further north still to what became modern-day Esfahān; to the south-east, going through Persepolis, the road led to the province of Sīstān, and eventually Central Asia. Although it has now dried up, archaeologists have suggested that a

---

the top (in the case of Tang-e Borāq), and to the right, first when you come in, for Hājjiābād. Perhaps this marked a change in paradigm, with a new political importance of Middle Persian.

[1077] Sprengling 1937.

[1078] The reference edition for this trilingual inscription is Huyse 1999a.

[1079] Herzfeld 1935, 4-5; Schmidt 1970, III, 121; Vallat 1998.

small carved-out rocky recess that is still visible on the northern cliff side at Naqš-e Rostam may have been a water cistern:[1080] the presence of a spring and pool was probably at the origin of the site's popularity as a watering hole/caravanserai and perhaps also its religious significance.

While the Hājjiābād and Tang-e Borāq inscriptions allowed Šābuhr to visually – perhaps ritually also, as we saw – mark and take possession of his territory by creating 'new' Sasanian sites and locales of significance, he also anchored his rule by reinvesting what can be seen as ancient 'sites of memory'[1081] such as Naqš-e Rostam, the sacred significance of which was the result of millennia of religious and royal, but also popular and commercial frequentation. In a dedicated article, Matthew Canepa proposed to view the Sasanian bas-reliefs and inscriptions of Naqš-e Rostam as "technologies of memory" allowing the Sasanian dynasty to appropriate for itself the glory of past Iranian empires.[1082] By juxtaposing their monuments to the older Achaemenid ones and echoing details of Achaemenid iconography – Ohrmazd's crenelated crown follows an Achaemenid model, for instance – the Sasanians tapped into the sacred significance of the sumptuous ruins and the collective memory which had crystallised around them: by reinvesting this site of memory with new monuments, the Sasanian kings grafted their new dynasty onto the history of ancient Iran. Matthew Canepa's study was an answer to the hotly debated question of the Sasanian kings' 'memory' of the Achaemenids. In his inscription at Naqš-e Rostam (ŠKZ§30), Šābuhr presents himself as the legitimate heir of a territory that belonged to his (unnamed) ancestors: *amā ud pidar ud niyāgān ud ahēnagān* (Parthian, *hasēnagān*) *dastgird būd*. A number of scholars have taken this passage to mean that the Sasanians had kept a historical memory of the Achaemenids and considered themselves their legitimate heirs after a Hellenistic 'interlude'.[1083] Others have argued that based on their national history, Sasanians presented themselves as heirs of the mythical Kayanids, rather than the Achaemenids: it is likely that the extraordinary ruins of sites such as Persepolis, Naqš-e Rostam and Pasargadae had become associated with these legendary kings; furthermore, the name 'Achaemenid' never occurs in Sasanian written vestiges and all that survives is the name Dārā, a later deformation of Old Persian Dārayava^{h}uš, 'Darius'.[1084]

[1080] Schmidt 1970, III, 65; Callieri 2006b, 342.

[1081] For the exploration of this notion in the framework of Sasanian art and archaeology, see Canepa 2010.

[1082] Canepa 2010.

[1083] For this interpretation, see Daryaee 1995 and 2001 as well as Shahbazi 2001.

[1084] See namely Yarshater 1971 and Huyse 2002.

The debate concerning the presence or absence of a historical memory for the Achaemenids in the Sasanian period – which probably says more about our views of the Sasanians than about how they perceived themselves – will not be taken up here. Still, the brief overview of this issue above illustrates the striking symbolic significance of Šābuhr's choice to have his trilingual inscription carved on a monument that had towered over Fārs for half a millennium and the many questions it still raises for scholars today.

Dating Šābuhr I's ŠKZ.

Šābuhr I's trilingual inscription on the Ka'ba of Zoroaster (henceforth ŠKZ) is not dated, but based on certain historical events scholars have been able to identify a *terminus post quem*. The inscription celebrates the capture of the Roman emperor Valerian and therefore must have been engraved after 260 (the dare of the battle of Edessa). It is more difficult to determine a *terminus ante quem*. Šābuhr I's troubles with Palmyra began in 262 – these go unmentioned in the text – and Philip Huyse therefore proposed to view the inscription as having been engraved in the 260-262 CE interlude between these two military events,[1085] when the Sasanian king may have had more leisure to be concerned with domestic affairs. New elements are needed to resolve this question in a definitive manner. Nevertheless, I would personally favour a later date, towards the end of Šābuhr I's reign (r. 240-270 CE). As we will see below, the provisions made by Šābuhr I in the second part of his inscription read as a testamentary bequest – this is in fact how the inscription had been understood by Martin Sprengling in his very first studies of the text.[1086] There is ample evidence that testamentary provisions like those of Šābuhr, established in the context of *pad ruwān* or 'soul' foundations (see below), can be made in the founder's lifetime rather than right before his death: this element alone is therefore not conclusive. Still, in a study of the complex and intricate relationship between Šābuhr's ŠKZ and the later inscription of the high-priest Kerdīr – which is engraved right beneath the Middle Persian version of ŠKZ and dates from the reign of Wahrām II (r. 274-293) – I concluded that both texts had probably been engraved at relatively close intervals in time: Šābuhr I's foundations had important legal and financial implications for Kerdīr which are vindicated in the high priest's text.[1087]

[1085] Huyse 1999a, I, 10-14 and Huyse and Loriot 2006, 310.

[1086] Sprengling 1940a, 208-209.

[1087] Ramble (forthcoming, b), "Kerdīr's *bun-xānag*: funding foundations in Sasanian Iran".

III. Text and context (II): the relationship between Sasanian inscriptions and the lost Sasanian manuscript tradition.

Traces of a cursive manuscript model in ŠKZ.

In terms of palaeography, the Middle Persian version of ŠKZ displays a beautiful, highly ornate monumental script. The layout of the inscription is largely defined by the stone blocks of the Achaemenid tower on which it is engraved. Philip Huyse noted that the letters at the end of the lines in the Parthian and Greek versions are crowded, to respect the limit marked by the end of the inscribed blocks.[1088] Similarly, ŠKZ begins just underneath the break between two blocks, at about a foot above eye level, with long, straight lines running several meters from right to left, filling up the block entirely. The text then skips a line because of the crack left by the space between this block and the following one beneath it and fills the lower block in the same manner. A link between both inscribed blocks is cleverly effected by a graphic trick: the long stems of the *lamed* in the first line of the lower block are exaggeratedly elongated and made to cross over the crack between both blocks and reach the lower part of the upper block **[Fig. 8.10]**. Rather neatly, the 'gap' between the two stone blocks also corresponds to a thematic split in the text: while the first part of the inscription on the upper block describes the king's military campaigns and outlines his newly conquered territory, the text on the lower block is dedicated to the king's soul foundations and his provisions for the soul fires. This suggests that the façades of the Achaemenid tower were in a relatively comparable state in the Sasanian period to the one in which they are today: at least the gaps between the bared blocks, which would have been originally filled in the Achaemenid period, were visible. In other words, the Achaemenid tower on which Šābuhr had his inscription engraved was conscientiously being treated as a 'ruin'.[1089]

The letters of ŠKZ are not as large as those at Hājjiābād, only about four to five centimetres high for an *alef* for instance, but they are much more neatly and delicately engraved and perfectly proportioned. The letter shapes of this inscription essentially correspond to that described for the label inscriptions of Naqš-e Rostam and Naqš-e Rajab: the loop of the *mem* is almost perfectly round with a deep dip while the upper stem of the leftward cross ends in a wavy flourish; the upper right hook of the *ṣade* similarly ends in a twirl-like embellishment;

[1088] Huyse 1999a, I, 10.

[1089] Rather than covered with stucco for instance. Of course, this does not mean that the Achaemenid tower was not reinvested or used in the Sasanian period. For a recent overview on the different hypotheses put forward concerning the function of the Kaʿba in both the Achaemenid and Sasanian periods, see Potts 2007.

most of the examples of *lamed*s have straight stems with a neatly defined lower hook; the *nun* has an elegant wavy stem with a straight lower right 'foot'; the lower horizontal stroke of the *bet* is drawn at an angle; the *alef* is still *à la parthe*, by contrast to the square *alef* of later label inscriptions; the *dalet* and *kaf* boast a well-defined 3-shape, with a clear cedilla for the latter.

Curiously, for such an important royal inscription, the script betrays telling features of cursive. Many examples of the aramaeogram ZY, which stands for the Middle Persian connective particle *ī*, present a ligature of the two graphemes. These are written as a single grapheme, which looks like an open-topped square with an upper hook in the left stem: in these instances, the waviness of the *zain* is simplified to a straight line and the *yod* is elongated and upright rather than crescent-like **[Fig. 8.11]**. As the preceding chapter demonstrated, this is a common manuscript feature. Like in other examples of 'linked letters' at Hājjiābād, this is not a true ligature in the sense that the stone mason who was engraving the inscription would have necessarily lifted his instruments to carve the letters: the ligature was probably not much more 'comfortable' or natural for his hand than writing the graphemes separately; in a manuscript context by contrast, it would have. As such, the ZY ligature in ŠKZ can be considered as an example of the transposition onto stone – and in a monumental version – of a manuscript, scribal habit. Similarly, in line 33, the letters *lamed* and *waw* in the middle of the name *kltslwby* (Kerdsraw) are joined, with the lower curve of the *lamed* meeting the 'foot' of the *waw*. In the same word, the final *yod* is embedded in the elongated *bet*, almost touching its lower horizontal bar. This is a recurring feature, and in several instances the *yod* rests on the *bet*: in line 15, the final (silent) *yod* of the word *dstglwby* (*dastgraw*, 'captivity'), is carved onto the lower horizontal bar of the *bet* that immediately precedes it. Although many of the examples of *lamed*s are ornate and present an 'Aramaic style' lower hook, many others have been much simplified, with the lower 'hook' becoming a slight curve to the left; several also present a left-slanting upper stem, which is characteristic of this grapheme in later manuscripts. These manuscript features do not have counterparts in the label inscriptions.

Legal aspects of ŠKZ: the first part of ŠKZ as an imperial land register.

Like at Hājjiābād and Tang-e Borāq, ŠKZ is written in the first person. The first word is in fact 'I', (*an*, ANE), followed by Šābuhr's full royal titulature,[1090] as it appears in the label inscriptions. The text thus reads as a first-hand declaration by the king, which provides its contents with the stamp of authenticity that derives from royal authority. Šābuhr states that he

[1090] Huyse 1999a, I, 22.

is the king of Iran and provides an itemised list of the provinces of his kingdom. Much of ŠKZ, in fact, is dedicated to lists: of cities captured and destroyed, of peoples conquered and now fighting in the Sasanian army, of new cities founded, of soul fires established, of the names of those in whose honour these were established, of provisions dedicated to the foundations for their maintenance. The lands under Šābuhr's sway are described with geographic precision; landmarks are used to outline their extent when necessary for added clarity. These are typically introduced by the phrase *tā ō* 'up to': for instance, *Balāsagān tā frāz ō Kaf kōf ud Alānān dar, ud hamag Parišwār kāf* (ŠKZ§2, *Balāsagān*, up to the mountains of the Caucasus and the Gate of the Alans); *az ān ālāg ī drayān Mazūnšahr* (ŠKZ§3, 'and on the other side of the sea, the land of Oman').[1091] As such, the inscription almost reads as a legal land register, enumerating the provinces of the Sasanian empire and providing a clear delimitation of the conquered territory. Similarly, in the list dedicated to the cities conquered from the Romans and now paying tribute, the anaphoric repetition of the phrase *az parwār hammis* 'with its environs' after the name of every single fortress and city appears to quash any possible contention over the extent of Šābuhr's land ownership. As in a memorandum, the list is even summed up, with the total number of cities and fortresses *with their environs* calculated for each of Šābuhr's campaigns to avoid any possible misunderstanding: *āmār šahrestān az parwār hammis* 37 (ŠKZ§17, 'a total of 37 cities with their environs').[1092]

ŠKZ: Relationship between text and image.

With equal precision, Šābuhr records the full sum of the reparation money, 500 000 denarii, he obtained from Philip the Arab in 244 (CE) to maintain the peace between Rome and Iran over Armenia. This is one of three great victories over the Roman emperors detailed in ŠKZ. Šābuhr also claims he killed Gordian – Gordian III did die in battle during the Roman army's retreat in 244 CE, but probably not at the hand of the Sasanian king himself – and describes the infamous capture of Valerian (in 260 CE), whom the Sasanian king declares capturing *himself with his own hand* (*xwad pad xwēbaš dast dastgraw kerd*, ŠKZ§22).[1093] The three major humiliations inflicted upon Rome are synthesised in a single bas-relief at the same site of Naqš-

[1091] Huyse 1999a, I, 22-24.

[1092] Huyse 1999a, I, 33.

[1093] Huyse 1999a, I, 37. For a study of the historical backdrop to the events reported in ŠKZ, see Huyse and Loriot 2006.

e Rostam, carved just opposite the tower on which ŠKZ is engraved **[Fig. 8.12]**.[1094] The triumphant Šābuhr is depicted in full royal regalia mounted on his richly caparisoned horse; under the horse's hooves lies a figure in Roman dress, probably meant to represent the emperor Gordian.[1095] Šābuhr holds the wrist of a second Roman with his right hand, in a clear depiction of the latter's capture: the prisoner is evidently the emperor Valerian, and the relief directly echoes Šābuhr's declaration that he captured him 'with his own hand'. In front of the Sasanian king's horse, with both hands outstretched to him in a gesture of supplication, kneels a third figure in Roman dress, no doubt representing Philip the Arab, literally brought to his knees by the heavy tribute imposed on him by the Sasanian king. While the inscription details these three victories in succession according to their historical chronology, the bas-reliefs effects a time collapse, representing all three events in a single scene, concentrating in a single frame the highlights of the Sasanian king's triumph, projected for all to see on the cliff side in which were cut out the majestic Achaemenid tombs.

Scribal motifs and auto-referential passages in ŠKZ: the shadow of manuscript and the materiality of text.

The first part of the inscription ends with an old scribal motif, known in ancient Iran since Achaemenid times. At ŠKZ§31, Šābuhr explains that he had his exploits written down so that he who would come after him would know of his deeds and of his rule. However, he also clarifies that much else was accomplished by him – many lands acquired and many feats achieved – that was *not* written down ('here') in the inscription (*čē ēdar nē nibišt*), in addition to what is recorded in the rock-cut text.[1096] The high-priest Kerdīr similarly declares in his own inscriptions (KKZ§15, KSM§23, KNRm§46) that much else was achieved by him that was not written in *this* document (*ēn nāmag*), for should these had been recorded it 'would have been too much' (presumably for the space available): *abardar was būd ī abar ēn nāmag nē nibišt, čē agar nibišt hē ēg was būd hē.*[1097] This clause occurs twice, at the end of two different lists in which Kerdīr's pious actions are enumerated. It is directly reminiscent of Darius' own *caveat*

[1094] For the identification of the three Romans in the bas-relief, see MacDermot 1954 as well as Herrmann, Howell and MacKenzie 1989, 18-23.

[1095] For a full description with high-resolution images of this bas-relief, see the dedicated volume by Herrmann, Howell and MacKenzie 1989.

[1096] Huyse 1999a, I, 44.

[1097] MacKenzie 1989, 55.

at DB.IV§45-50 that much else was done by him that was not written in his (this) inscription (*aniyašciy vasiy astiy kṛtam ava ahạyāyā dipiyā naiy nipištam*), for had he recorded everything, those (in the future) that would read his inscription would think it too much and think it a lie.[1098] The possible reasons for the existence of parallel formulae and motifs between Old Persian and Middle Persian texts is a much-debated issue and falls beyond the scope of this chapter.[1099] For the time being, it is enough to observe that in such passages, where the content of the text explicitly refers to the physical inscription – these might be described as 'auto-referential' passages – attention is drawn to its materiality: it is the opportunity for the author both to point out the limits of this materiality – it is not possible to make a full inventory of the king's deeds for lack of space/because it would not be appropriate – but also his reason for having the inscription made, in other words the *raison d'être* of the text – the inscription records the king's achievements and conquests for posterity (for those who will 'come after' him) so that these will be remembered/not be forgotten/their truth not doubted.

Legal aspects of ŠKZ: establishing royal soul foundations.

Another auto-referential passage follows this one and is equally significant, for it introduces the second part of the inscription, dedicated to the foundation of soul fires: at ŠKZ§33, Šābuhr

[1098] Schmitt 1991, 70.

[1099] However, see Sprengling 1940b, 344; Gignoux 1971, 85-86; Skjærvø 1985; Huyse 1990; Shayegan 2012; Ramble (forthcoming, c), "Stock formula or textual citation? The case of Kerdīr's KKZ". The vector for stock formulae and thematic motifs is generally regarded as a lost Old Iranian epic. Many motifs common to both Achaemenid and Sasanian inscriptions may well bear the mark of a common Iranian oral literary tradition, perhaps indeed a royal epic, which offered a reservoir of key formulas and themes that were remoulded and used for stately compositions. Nevertheless, exploring the complex and intricate relationship not only between Kerdīr's four inscriptions, but also between Kerdīr and Šābuhr I's inscriptions (see below) as well as more generally between Achaemenid and Sasanian inscriptions highlights the difficult and fundamental methodological problem of distinguishing between the structural use of stock themes, fixed formulaic expressions deriving from oral literary traditions, and cases of direct intertextual referencing. To complicate matters further, these are probably not mutually exclusive and a generic theme (such as the presentation of the king's descent or the assurance that the king acted with the help/will of the gods) or a fixed formula ("other (things) in large numbers," "plundered, burned and ruined," "from place to place and province to province") may in a given context constitute a textual citation. Still, I would like to suggest that the immediate literary context of Kerdīr's KKZ – and by extension the high priest's other inscriptions – is also, and perhaps above all, Šābuhr I's trilingual inscription at Naqš-e Rostam. Furthermore, the example of the recurring motif concerning the 'lack of space' to fully enumerate the king's – or important dignitary's – deeds suggests the transmission of *scribal* motifs also.

explicitly declares that he establishes these *by this inscription* (*ud ēdar-iz pad nibišt nišāyēm*).[1100] In legal terms, this passage can be described as containing the operative sentence which effects the foundation of the Fires: now, this operative clause makes a direct reference to the physical inscription as the (legal) tool which ratifies their establishment. In a recent article dedicated to the high-priest Kerdīr's role in Šābuhr's soul foundations at Naqš-e Rostam, I had the opportunity to explore the legal and fiscal mechanisms that accompany such pious foundations and appreciate to what extent Šābuhr I followed the legal procedure detailed in late Sasanian period legal literature for their establishment and endowment.[1101] Indeed, Šābuhr's endowment of *pad ruwān* foundations at the site of Naqš-e Rostam was made in strict conformity with the legal prescriptions recorded in the *Thousand Judgements* and reflects the use of key legal vocabulary.[1102]

It is made in two separate steps. The first consists in the establishment of five name-Fires: one in Šābuhr's own name and for his own soul (*pad amā ruwān ud pannām*); one in the name and for the soul of the queen of queens, his daughter; three others for each of his sons reigning over the other three divisions of the empire. The establishment of the Fires is then duly accompanied by the conveyance to them of profit-yielding property, a procedure widely illustrated in the legal literature. The list of provisions made for the celebration of the rites for the soul and maintenance of the foundations is introduced by yet another explicit reference to the physical inscription and its written content. At ŠKZ§40, Šābuhr[1103] clarifies that 'it is specifically written in the inscription in the following order' (*ud nāmčišt pad nibišt abar stān nibišt ēstēd*),[1104] before detailing the exact quantity of bread, meat and wine dedicated to each fire foundation and the names of those in whom each foundation is established. The text thus points to the engraved words as the written and verifiable testimony of what was declared by the king for the provisions dedicated for each Fire. As such, the auto-referential clauses highlighted above can be seen as pivotal passages that warrant the terms of the foundation and cast the rock inscription as an important legal document.

Remarkably, the king declares recording the 'further details' of the property transferred to each one of the Fires (*ān* [*čē imēšān*] *ādurān dād*) in a charter, according to custom (*ān-iⁿ*

[1100] Huyse 1999a, I, 45-47.

[1101] Ramble (forthcoming, b), "Kerdīr's *bun-xānag*: funding foundations in Sasanian Iran".

[1102] Perikhanian 1983, 662; Macuch 1991.

[1103] Or the scribe in charge of composing the text.

[1104] Huyse 1999a, I, 52-53.

ōh-iz harw abar pādixšīr nibišt);[1105] he also clarifies that the establishment of the Fires was done legally (*ī-šān pad ēwēn*[1106] *nihād*).[1107] In this way, two types of legal documents are evoked by Šābuhr to record the establishment of *pad ruwān* foundations with dedicated, profit-yielding property to ensure their maintenance. First and foremost is the inscription itself, which operates, through a written declaration in the first person (*ud ēdar-iz pad nibišt nišāyēm*), the foundation of the fires; it records in stone, for all to see and verify, the list of provisions made to sustain the foundations throughout time – just as it recorded in the first part, the list of the newly conquered lands and the king's deeds for the sake of posterity. The king refers to another type of written document, this time manuscript: the charters (*pādixšīr*) which contain all 'further details' concerning his provisions of profit-yielding property (*harw abar pādixšīr nibišt*).

From this it emerges that the inscription is a form of monumental memorandum which contains a succinct version of the longer and more detailed manuscript records of the establishment of the fire foundations: its importance is in its monumental and lasting medium – the stone – which the king trusts will survive the test of time. It is impossible to appreciate the ritual/religious role that this monumental inscription may have had, but the choice of the ancient sanctuary and monumental Achaemenid-'Kayanid' tower for the engraving of the trilingual text is certainly suggestive of such an aspect. It is important to appreciate that the monumental inscription does not stand alone but must be understood against a broader background of legal manuscript literature, to which it in fact makes explicit reference. Šābuhr's inscription was thus both engraved in the physical landscape of an ancient Iranian sacred site and also embedded within a broader Sasanian literary landscape of written documents and archives: both these contexts, the physical, monumental and sacred on the one hand and the textual, manuscript and legal on the other, underpinned the inscription's authority, authenticity and legal value.

A fleeting allusion to the manuscript composition of ŠKZ before its inscription, in monumental version, on the Achaemenid tower can be found at the very end of the Parthian version. This version contains the signature of the scribe who was in charge of writing/composing the text; neither of the other two (Greek and Middle Persian) versions

[1105] On the particle *ōh* as meaning 'in the regular manner', see Skjærvø 2010, 194-199.

[1106] On the legal connotations of the expression *pad ēwēn*, see Macuch 2002, 121, n. 46.

[1107] ŠKZ§33-35; Huyse 1999a, I, 46-48.

present this addendum.[1108] At ŠKZ§51, it is stated that Hormizd the scribe, son of Šilag the scribe – this detail has sometimes been interpreted as a possible indication that the office of scribe was hereditary in Sasanian Iran – wrote *this* document with his ('my') own hand (*dast nibēg im man Hormezd dibīr puhr*).[1109] The declaration, in the first person, by the scribe that he wrote it with his *own* hand, reads as the certification of the validity of the written document and its contents: Hormizd the scribe is personally guaranteeing the authenticity of the text. In this respect, it is worth noting that although Šābuhr is clearly presented as the author of the content of the text, he is never associated with the act of writing as such. He *orders* documents to be written (*u-n framād nibištan*) and refers the reader to further details in written charters, but he himself never writes. Rather, the authority of the written words of the inscription – and the legal value of the king's foundations – comes from the king's oral declaration in the first person (I am Šābuhr and I hold these lands '*An* […] *hēm ud dārēm*', I found '*nišāyēm*'; I ordered to be written '*u-n framād nibištan*'). We then have a second guarantee of authenticity that the words were properly transcribed with Hormizd's signature. No mention is made of the engraver who was no doubt an entirely different person – however, he evidently worked with a manuscript version in front of him for, as we saw, he appears to have transferred to the stone certain ligatures and other such scribal features that belong to the sphere of manuscript writing.

IV. Text and context (III): cases of intertextuality within the corpus of Middle Persian monumental inscriptions.

Reading Kerdīr's four inscriptions in light of Šābuhr's ŠKZ.

The legal quality of rock-cut texts as well as the transposition of different aspects of the manuscript original onto the monumental, stone version of it are recurring features of Sasanian inscriptions and not confined to royal commissions like those of Šābuhr. The high-priest Kerdīr's four monumental inscriptions also contain explicit references to an important series of manuscript legal documents and archives as well as other activities directly linked to scribal

[1108] This signature does not necessarily indicate that the Parthian version was the first to be composed, before being translated into Middle Persian and Greek. Philip Huyse has carefully analysed all three versions with respect to one another and concluded that the text for the trilingual inscription was probably first composed in Middle Persian, the Sasanian king's mother tongue, and then put into Parthian; the Greek version, however, appears to have been translated after the Parthian version. For a full discussion of the relationship between all three versions, see Huyse 1999a, II, 182-201 and Huyse and Loriot 2006, 315-322.

[1109] Huyse 1999a, I, 63-64.

protocol such as sealing and signing. Like the Parthian version of ŠKZ, his inscription at the site of Naqš-e Rajab also presents the 'manuscript' signature of his personal scribe. Kerdīr's inscriptions are worth examining in the light of the key features of ŠKZ discussed above, as they entertain a very close linguistic and textual relationship with this royal text. The following aims to draw out the intricate palaeographic and textual correspondences between Kerdīr's inscription (KKZ) engraved on the Ka'ba of Zoroaster at the site of Naqš-e Rostam and Šābuhr I's ŠKZ. A close study of the use of key vocabulary and phrasing in both inscriptions reveals that Kerdīr's KKZ contains numerous allusions and references to Šābuhr I's ŠKZ, constituting a rare example of intertextuality within the corpus of monumental Sasanian inscriptions.

To this day, four inscriptions by the high priest Kerdīr have been brought to light.[1110] All four are located in Sasanian dynastic sites and engage directly with monuments commissioned by the kings Ardašīr I (r. 224–242 CE), Šābuhr I (r. 240/42–270 CE) and Wahrām II (r. 274–293 CE). Kerdīr's inscriptions at Naqš-e Rostam, Naqš-e Rajab and Sar Mašhad are carefully articulated around the monumental bas-reliefs next to which they are engraved; the high priest's fourth inscription however, engraved on the Ka'ba of Zoroaster at Naqš-e Rostam, is somewhat different in that it establishes a direct relationship not with a royal bas-relief but with a royal inscription, Šābuhr I's ŠKZ, engraved just above on the same monument.

The first of the high priest's rock cut texts to be documented by early European travellers to Persia was Kerdīr's inscription at Naqš-e Rostam (henceforth KNRm).[1111] It is engraved in 73 lines right behind the victory relief of Šābuhr I carved on the rock face and placed directly beneath the Achaemenid cruciform tombs, opposite the monumental Achaemenid tower (known as the Ka'ba of Zoroaster). Carefully entwined around the hindquarters, tail and tail-ribbons of the king's richly harnessed horse, Kerdīr's KNRm follows the outlines of the royal bas-relief but never encroaching upon it. Hovering over the inscription is a bust of the high-priest himself: he is wearing his distinctive *kolāh* decorated with a scissor-shaped emblem and he points his right hand with curved index-finger towards the royal figure, in a gesture of deference.

A shorter but almost perfectly preserved inscription by Kerdīr was then recorded by Flandin and Coste in the rocky recess located between the sites of Persepolis and Naqš-e

[1110] For a synoptic edition of Kerdīr's inscriptions, see MacKenzie 1989 and Gignoux 1991.

[1111] See chapter 2.

Rostam and known as Naqš-e Rajab.[1112] The inscription (henceforth KNRb) is engraved on a prepared, deeply cut and neatly framed surface placed right behind the investiture relief of the first Sasanian king Ardašīr I (r. 180 – 242 CE). Here again, the immediately recognisable bust of Kerdīr is carved adjacent to his inscription and the high priest points a curved finger towards the royal figure.

It was not until about a century later that the German archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld reported locating a third inscription by Kerdīr, engraved in 59 lines above a bas-relief representing Wahrām II slaying (?) two lions carved on a rock cliff in the small town of Sar Mašhad (henceforth KSM).[1113] Relatively isolated and progressively deserted in modern times, the town lay off the main roads taken by travellers coming from the Gulf and on their way to Shiraz and then Esfahān, and it had attracted little of the attention enjoyed by the Marvdašt plain and Persepolis. As at Naqš-e Rajab, a special rectangular panel was cut into the rock and prepared to receive the high priest's inscription, although this surface is much larger at Sar Mašhad, measuring over five meters in length and almost three meters high; at the bottom left corner the inscription works around Wahrām II's high dome-like hairdo known as the *korymbos*. The figure of Kerdīr is this time directly included in the royal bas-relief, rather than only represented as a bust: the high priest stands directly behind Wahrām II in the small party accompanying the king on his hunting expedition (?),[1114] alongside the queen and a third dignitary who is probably the crown prince.

Research on the elusive figure of Kerdīr and major progress on the decipherment of his inscriptions was suddenly propelled forward a decade later thanks to an extraordinary archaeological find. The 1939 archaeological campaign carried out by the Chicago Oriental Institute in Persepolis and its environs under the direction of Erich Schmidt revealed a second, practically intact inscription by the high priest at the site of Naqš-e Rostam, placed on the base of the Ka'ba of Zoroaster.[1115]

[1112] Flandin and Coste 1851, II, 135 and IV, pl. 190.

[1113] Herzfeld 1926, 256-257.

[1114] For the inscription, see Gignoux 1968 and Gignoux 1991; the exact subject-matter of this relief is much debated, see Trümpelman 1975 and Katsumi 1990.

[1115] Sprengling 1940a.

The plasticity of palaeography, or how to play with the materiality of text.

Kerdīr's text on the Ka'ba is placed right under the last line of ŠKZ, about 15cm below the royal inscription, and towards the left: the first 26 cm of KKZ's 19 lines thus run parallel to ŠKZ; they then continue beyond it, until the lines 'hit' the pilaster at the left corner and stop. Concerning this particular position of KKZ with respect to ŠKZ, Sprengling remarked: "The leftward position may be due solely, as has been pointed out, to the accident of good writing surface on the stones; it may possibly have been influenced by some idea of indicating rank below the great king, after the manner of seating at a diplomatic table".[1116] Like Kerdīr's other inscriptions, KKZ is aligned on the right and engraved in regular, straight lines. It begins at the very top right-hand corner of the massive stone block on which it is engraved, the first line of text running along right underneath its upper edge: the inscription is thus neatly 'framed' by the rectangular-cut block. The individual letters in KKZ are slightly smaller in size (about a fourth smaller on average) compared to those of the bottom lines of the Middle Persian version of ŠKZ; the spacing between the letters, words and lines is accordingly also reduced.[1117] Otherwise however, the script used for KKZ is, as in all the high priest's works, the same monumental Middle Persian alphabet as the one used in the royal inscriptions from the early Sasanian period, characterised by its detached and stylised letters, spaced out evenly, almost as on a grid. In this sense, a remarkable aesthetic harmony is achieved between the two inscriptions engraved on the east wall of the Achaemenid tower, and, visually at least, KKZ seems to continue ŠKZ. This brief description also shows that the placement of Kerdīr's KKZ differs somewhat from the high priest's other inscriptions in that it is not articulated around a royal bas-relief but instead establishes a direct relationship with a royal inscription.

In this respect, a detail of the palaeography of KKZ is worth highlighting **[Fig. 8.13]**. In the first few words of his inscriptions, the author introduces himself as being the high priest Kerdīr with the solemn phrase "*ud an Kerdīr ī mowbed*" ("and I, Kerdīr the *mowbed*"). In KKZ his name is spelled with two *lamed* graphemes, "*kltyl*", rather than with the letters *resh* ("*krtyr*") as in the analogous introductory phrase at Naqš-e Rajab, or with one *lamed* and one *resh* ("*kltyr*") as in the other occurrences of the high priest's name such as at KRNm §8, 11 etc. The *lamed* and *resh* are of course interchangeable in both Middle Persian inscriptions and later

[1116] Sprengling 1940a, 202.

[1117] Note that the letters of ŠKZ also become smaller and more cramped as they reach the bottom of the text, Sprengling 1937, 128.

manuscript Middle Persian literature: even very common heterograms such as that representing the term *šāh* ('king') are arbitrarily spelt either MLKA or MRKA.[1118] Nevertheless, the two *lamed* letters in Kerdīr's name in the first line of KKZ – it is the third word from the right and therefore falls right beneath Šābuhr's ŠKZ – are in this instance highly stylised and exaggeratedly elongated so that they spill well beyond the stone block which delimits KKZ, across the crack between this block and the one above it and encroach upon the upper block, which bears the royal ŠKZ.

Omissions and additions: exploring the textual discrepancies between Kerdīr's inscriptions. The subject-matter of Kerdīr's inscriptions can be readily separated into two main sections. The first part focuses on Kerdīr's achievements during the first decades of the Sasanian dynasty and lists the honours and titles obtained by the high priest under kings Šābuhr I (r. 240–270), Hormizd I (r. 270–271), Wahrām I (r. 271–274) and Wahrām II (r. 274–293). Because Kerdīr mentions all the titles given to him by Wahrām II (r. 274–293), Philip Huyse proposed dating the high priest's texts to the end of this king's reign in the early 290s.[1119] This would imply an interval of about thirty years between the engraving of Šābuhr I's inscription on the Ka'ba and Kerdīr's own on the same monument.[1120] Interestingly, the first Sasanian king, Ardašīr I (r. 224–242), is omitted from Kerdīr's career in both KKZ and KNRb, but included in his KNRm and Sar Mašhad texts. This is particularly surprising in the case of KNRb as the high priest's inscription is engraved directly adjacent to this king's investiture scene. Possible reasons for this omission will be discussed below. The second part of the high priest's text is dedicated to the narrative of his visionary journey into the beyond. This section is entirely omitted from KKZ although it is summarised in his much shorter inscription at Naqš-e Rajab.

Kerdīr's KNRm and KSM are badly damaged but on the basis of the close parallels between his inscriptions, scholars were able to fill the many lacunae of both longer texts. Philippe Gignoux published in 1991 a synoptic transliteration of all four inscriptions separately along with a complete line-by-line comparative transliteration of the texts, according to the

[1118] See for example NPi§35 where both forms are used in a single line, Humbach and Skjærvø 1983, III, 24.

[1119] Presumably on the assumption that Wahrām II bestowed these on Kerdīr regularly throughout his nineteen-year reign, Huyse 1998, 112–113.

[1120] Concerning the dating of ŠKZ to 260-262 CE, see Huyse 1999a, 10-14 as well as Huyse and Loriot 2006, 310. As stated above, I personally favour a later date for Šābuhr I's inscription on the Ka'ba and a much earlier date for Kerdīr's iown text on the same monument: this would reduce the time gap between the engraving of both inscriptions significantly.

method put forth by Skjærvø.[1121] This edition is particularly precious as it highlights the correspondences between the different inscriptions while allowing the reader to immediately identify the discrepancies between them.

The detailed comparative study of these discrepancies was developed in a separate article by Gignoux in order to establish the history of the composition of the high priest's inscriptions, and notably the order in which they were engraved.[1122] The textual variations highlighted by Gignoux concern both the content of the text – namely, the inclusion or omission of certain sentences and even whole passages – as well as its form, such as notable discrepancies in orthography. Instances of the first type of variation include: the absence, already noted above, of the first Sasanian king Ardašīr from Kerdīr's career in both KKZ and KNRb; the omission of the long list of provinces of Ērān from KKZ; the inclusion, in the two Naqš-e Rostam texts only, of Šābuhr I's donation to Kerdīr of the much debated "*bun-xānag*",[1123] in reward for the high priest's services to the crown and to the gods. In terms of discrepancies in the orthography, Gignoux notes for example the marked preference in KKZ for heterograms over phonetic spellings in rendering both nouns and verbs. His premise is that Kerdīr's long inscription at Sar Mašhad was the first, 'original' text and served as the template for the composition of the near-replica at Naqš-e Rostam and the shorter versions on the Ka'ba tower and at Naqš-e Rajab. This, however, he argues on the grounds of the archaeological context of the Sar Mašhad inscription rather than on the basis of textual criticism.[1124]

The divergences both in content and in spelling displayed in KKZ would indicate that this inscription is not merely a 'slavish' copy of the first part of KSM but a fully reworked version. For the scholar, this inscription was the second to be commissioned by the high priest. Then would come the engraving of KNRm: like KKZ, this inscription includes the paragraph recording Šābuhr I's royal grant to Kerdīr, an indication of KNRm's direct dependence on the version on the tower.[1125] Finally, the summary of the high priest's career and vision would have been engraved last, with the shorter Naqš-e Rajab text. Several different configurations of the order in which Kerdīr had his four texts engraved have been put forward by scholars over the

[1121] Gignoux 1991, 23, n. 36.

[1122] Gignoux 1973.

[1123] See below for a summary and short discussion of this passage.

[1124] Gignoux 1973, 214-215 and Gignoux 1991, 23.

[1125] Gignoux 1973, 204.

years, with MacKenzie preferring a KNRb–KKZ–KNRm–KSM order and Philip Huyse favouring a KKZ–KNRb–KNRm–KSM configuration; this debate will not be taken up here.[1126]

The intricate textual relationship between KKZ and ŠKZ.

More directly relevant to our study, however, is Gignoux's tentative suggestion that Kerdīr may have omitted the list of provinces of Ērān from his text at the Ka'ba for the very reason that the empire's territories were detailed in full in Šābuhr I's inscription engraved above.[1127] Sprengling had noted the close correspondence between Šābuhr I's and Kerdīr's lists of provinces in his very first edition of KKZ, observing that "practically all of this activity [Kerdīr's activity in the provinces of Anērān] follows the track of Šābuhr's raids and conquests northward and westward".[1128] Gignoux was even able to use the list of provinces in Šābuhr I's inscription to restore the one recorded in the damaged versions of KNRm and KSM.[1129] He notes that the main distinction in the organisation of the provinces in their respective lists was that the high priest explicitly separated them into those belonging to Ērān (KNRm§35–36; KSM§16–17) and those belonging to Anērān (KNRm§37–40; KSM§18–19; KKZ§12), whereas Šābuhr I records the territories under his dominion at the outset of his inscription in a single lengthy catalogue. He also highlights some variations, such as minor changes in the order of appearance of the provinces as well as the omission of certain territories (for example Pārdān or again Mazūn/'Omān) in Kerdīr's version. Gignoux explains these differences historically: discrepancies in the order of provinces indicate that the list is not composed according to a strict geographical progression and reflects the evolution of the empire's organisation, with certain territories gaining or losing prominence in the years that separated the engraving of ŠKZ and KKZ.[1130]

In this way, ŠKZ would find a direct echo in Kerdīr's texts and, paradoxically, even more so in KKZ, because of the absence of the list of territories of Ērān in that inscription: Kerdīr's text on the Ka'ba thus seems to be working directly with the royal inscription engraved just above, relying on it to record the territories under Sasanian control and allowing the high

[1126] But see Huyse 2011, 165-169 and Gignoux 1991, 23-27.

[1127] Gignoux 1973, 211.

[1128] Sprengling 1940a, 224.

[1129] Gignoux 1971.

[1130] Gignoux 1971, 93

priest to focus, in the limited space left at the tower beneath ŠKZ, on his work regarding the restoration of fire temples and priests in the provinces of Anērān.

I would like to go further and suggest that the immediate literary context of Kerdīr's KKZ – and by extension the high priest's other inscriptions – is Šābuhr I's trilingual inscription at Naqš-e Rostam. Not only are KKZ and the Middle Persian version of ŠKZ adjacent to one another physically, with the high priest's name conspicuously encroaching onto the stone block bearing ŠKZ: Kerdīr also frequently refers back to the royal inscription engraved just above, bringing his own text into line with it by deliberately using either identical or very similar vocabulary, phrasing and fixed expressions. From the very first few words of KKZ, Kerdīr positions himself very much as a successor of king Šābuhr I, in the matter of piety at least, suggesting his actions are a fulfilment of the Sasanian king's will: Šābuhr I had finished his inscription by expressing his hope that he who would succeed him might be more obedient (*huparistādar*) and well-wishing (*hugāmagdar*) towards the gods—Kerdīr takes up the thread so to speak where Šābuhr left it, using the same (unusual) vocabulary, "I, Kerdīr the Mobed shall (continue to) be obedient, (*huparistā*) and well-wishing (*hugāmag*)".[1131] The same sentence, but in the past tense, also closes his detailed description of his founding of fires and other good works and introduces the second section of his narrative, dedicated to his visionary journey into the beyond (*bē ān owōn čiyōn an az ahy ōrōn yazdān ud xwadāyān huparistā ud hugamāg būd hēm*).[1132] As Sprengling noted, Kerdīr even starts off 'semi-royally' by presenting himself with the formula "And I, Kerdīr, the mowbed" in a markedly similar manner to Šābuhr I in the (reconstructed) opening lines of his own inscription "I, the Mazdaean lord, Šābuhr".[1133] This of course is the opening formula of many old Iranian inscriptions, but it is possible to see Kerdīr's opening "*ud*" ('and') as yet another way to directly link back to ŠKZ.[1134]

In the opening lines of his inscription, the high priest describes Šābuhr I's founding of many Wahrām fires (*was ādur ī Wahrām nišānī*) throughout the kingdom (*šahr ō šahr, gyāg ō gyāg*) with the help of the gods (*pušt ī yazdān*), the king's celebration of many rites for the gods (*was kerdagān ī yazdān abzāyī*), his signing of charters with priests concerning these newly founded fires (*was ādurān ud mowūn pādixšīr āwišt*) and the resulting benefit for the priesthood (*was mowmard urwāhm ud padēx bawēd*). This description directly echoes ŠKZ§32

[1131] This use of identical vocabulary is similarly remarked upon in Huyse 2011, 160.

[1132] KNRm§49 and KSM§25; MacKenzie 1989, 55 and Gignoux 1991, 80.

[1133] Sprengling 1940a, 203.

[1134] This possibility is similarly evoked in Gignoux 1973, 196.

where Šābuhr I states that with the help of the gods (*pad yazdān pušt*) he founded many Wahrām fires (*was ādur Warahrān nišast*) throughout the kingdom (*šahr ō šahr*) and did many good works benefitting the priests (*was mōwmard kirbagīh kerd*).[1135] The king further declares recording his foundation of a series of name-Fires for the members of the royal family in a charter (*harw abar pādixšīr nibišt*).[1136] The key elements of these passages are re-moulded by Kerdīr in a refrain-like paragraph that is repeated after each main section of his text (*ud šahr ō šahr, gyāg ō gyāg was kerdagān ī yazdān abzāyī ud was ādur ī Wahrām nišānī ud was mowmard urwāhm ud padēx bawēd ud was ādurān ud mowūn pādixšīr āwišt*).[1137] The high priest even adapts this formula to describe his own founding of fires and good works, appropriating for himself his praise of the king's founding policy: thanks to him, many fires and priests throughout the kingdom were made prosperous (*padēx bawēd*); he also signed charters (*padixšīr*) concerning many fires; he founded many Wahrām fires from place to place.

Finally, there may well also be a direct reference to ŠKZ in the much-debated passage in which Kerdīr records Šābuhr I's special grant to him of a "*bun-xānag*": at KKZ§3 and KNRm§7 the high priest declares that Šābuhr I made a particular assignment to him, Kerdīr, personally (*ān-im ōh gōnagdar Šābuhr šāhān šāh pad waspuhragān pāymār kunēd*) concerning the many fires and rites mentioned in the inscription (*ēn and ādur ud kerdagān čē pad nibišt*) with the words "Let this be your *bun-xānag*, and as you know that a deed (will be) good for the gods and for us, act so".[1138] The entire sentence concerning Šābuhr I's grant is omitted from the otherwise almost identical copy of high priest's text at Sar Mašhad, as well as from the abridged version at Naqš-e Rajab located only a few kilometres south of Naqš-e Rostam: this seems to suggest that the compound alludes to an aspect of the direct physical context of Kerdīr's two Naqš-e Rostam inscriptions that is absent from the Sar Mašhad and Naqš-e Rajab sites. What exactly Kerdīr's *bun-xānag* entailed is the subject of a dedicated study that I have developed elsewhere,[1139] and this difficult problem will not be taken up again here. Suffice it to say that in this important paragraph the high priest claims that Šābuhr I personally bestowed major administrative – and financial – responsibilities upon him and

[1135] ŠKZ§32; Huyse 1999a, I, 45.

[1136] ŠKZ§33-35; Huyse 1999a, I, 45-48.

[1137] See the end of paragraphs of KKZ§4, 6, 9, 10.

[1138] KKZ§3: *ud ēn and ādur ud kerdagān čē pad nibišt, ān-im ōh gōnagdar Šābuhr šāhān šāh pad waspuhragān pāymār kunēd, kū-t bun xānag ēn ēw bawēd, ud čiyōn danē kū kerd yazdān ud amā weh, owōn kun*, MacKenzie 1989, 54 and 57.

[1139] In Ramble (forthcoming, b), "Kerdīr's *bun-xānag*: funding foundations in Sasanian Iran".

establishes his special relationship with the Sasanian crown. The responsibilities bestowed concern the administration of 'fires and rites', and I have argued that these were none other than the huge fire and soul foundations established by the king in his inscription at Naqš-e Rostam in the second part of ŠKZ. This would explain – among other things – why this particular passage is excluded from the Sar Mašhad and Naqš-e Rajab inscriptions. For the purposes of this study, it is enough to stress that "the many fires and rites mentioned in the inscription" alluded to in KKZ§3 seem to be a direct reference to the foundations recorded by Šābuhr I in ŠKZ and that "the inscription" cited by the high priest is indeed ŠKZ itself.

The references to ŠKZ are structural to the composition of KKZ. From the very first sentence the high priest appears to be linking back to the royal inscription with an opening "*uđ*", a royal-like introductory formula ("I, Kerdīr the mowbed"), the repetition of key vocabulary (*huparistā*, *hugāmag*) found in Šābuhr's last line and the omission of the first Sasanian king Ardašīr from his *curriculum vitae*, which allows Kerdīr to immediately begin his career with Šābuhr's reign. Refrain-like phrases (such as "from province to provincem many Wahram fires were founded and many priests made prosperous", "may I be/I have been obedient and well-wishing towards the gods" etc.) also remould expressions and vocabulary found in ŠKZ and serve to open and close key passages describing the high priest's career, his pious activities and the territories in which he carried these out. This close textual articulation finds a direct counterpart in KKZ's physical placement on the Achaemenid tower as well as in elements of its palaeography. Although it cannot constitute an argument in itself, the fact that the composition of KKZ is so closely tied to Šābuhr's text suggests that Kerdīr's inscription on the Ka'ba may have been commissioned first, thereby lending weight to Huyse's suggested configuration for the engraving order of the high priest's inscriptions. Most remarkably, the numerous allusions to ŠKZ contained in KKZ and discussed above constitute a rare example of intertextual referencing within the corpus of monumental Sasanian inscriptions.

ŠKZ as the literary, political, legal and religious backdrop to KKZ.

The close textual relationship between ŠKZ and KKZ reflects the formal transfer of a pious foundation's guardianship from a reigning king to a priest.[1140] It was probably control over such wealth and Šābuhr I's formal conveyance of it to Kerdīr that justified the high priest's

[1140] So Perikhanian 1968, 22-23 and Macuch 1991.

encroaching on the royal sanctuary with two inscriptions and a relief.[1141] As the intricate referencing highlighted here shows, king Šābuhr I's ŠKZ provides the literary, as well as the political, legal and ritual backdrop to Kerdīr's KKZ.

Like ŠKZ, Kerdīr's KKZ makes explicit reference to manuscript documents and archives to underpin the authority of the statements in his inscription(s). He boasts sealing many agreements or treaties (*pādixšīr*) with priests: this was the same specialised legal document to which Šābuhr had referred his reader for the 'further details' concerning his endowment. In view of the legal backdrop of both inscriptions, this type of document likely describes endowment contracts stipulating the provisions for soul foundations and the priests' role and stipend with regards to them. One of the refrains that rhythms Kerdīr's inscriptions is a triad of such specialised documents, *gitt* ('document'),[1142] *pādixšīr* ('agreement') *mādayān* ('books, records') signed by the high priest throughout his career. At the end of each section where Kerdīr details the good works he accomplished under each Sasanian king, he clarifies what name and title he used to sign all the *gitt*, *pādixšīr* and *mādayān* prepared under that reign. Thus, he first served Šābuhr under the name 'Kerdir the hērbed' and everything (all the *gitt*, *pādixšīr* and *mādayān*) he signed under that king's reign (*zamān*) 'at court and throughout the empire, from place to place' (*pad dar ud hāmšāhr gyāg ō gyāg*) bore the signature 'Kerdir the hērbed' (*Kerdīr ī hērbed*); under Šābuhr's son Hormizd it was Kerdīr the *Ohrmezd mowbed*;

[1141] The difficulty in dating Kerdīr's inscription was briefly mentioned above. If we understand Šābuhr I's transfer of the administration of the royal foundation to Kerdīr (as reported in KKZ) as part of the testamentary provisions made by the Sasanian king towards the end of his reign/life, this may have some incidence on the date of the engraving of KKZ. Sprengling had in fact understood Šābuhr's legacy to Kerdīr as a testamentary bequest, (Sprengling 1940a, 208-209). There is no reason really to think that Wahrām II bestowed honours on Kerdīr throughout his reign rather than granting them to him upon his accession to the crown: Wahrām II's close relationship with the high priest was probably already well under way under his father Wahrām I's rule. Hormizd's and Wahrām I's reigns being so short, this could push back the date of the engraving of KKZ significantly, to a few years only after Šābuhr's death. Kerdīr may well have wanted to 'lock in' this royal grant with an inscription as soon as possible after the rather close succession of kings that followed (three kings between 270 to 274 CE after Šābuhr I's demise c. 270 CE) and the instability this would have generated. Furthermore, with KKZ, Kerdīr seems to be at the very height of his career, whereas the Paikuli inscription shows that by 293 he had rather fallen from favour (and was presumably quite elderly), another argument for dating the high priest's inscription to an earlier rather than later period. Kerdīr's securing the management of the huge royal foundations (as well as the network of Fires throughout the kingdom) and the tremendous financial power this entailed as early as the mid-270s may have in fact contributed to maintaining Wahrām II in power for some twenty years, despite the internal feuds that tore apart this king's reign.

[1142] For the translation of *gitt*/*gittag* as 'document', see MacKenzie 1989, 65.

and under Wahrām I, it was again *Kerdīr ī Ohrmezd mowbed*; finally, under Wahrām II, he bore the title *Kerdīr ī bōxt-ruwān-Wahrām ī Ohrmezd mowbed*. Kerdīr's precaution in detailing the different titles he bore under each Sasanian king and his efforts to clarify the exact nature of the signature he placed on all the different types of documents signed under each king is striking. It evidently strives to thwart any possible challenge to either his authority or the authenticity and validity of the manuscript texts that were signed and sealed throughout his impressive career: these were presumably the basis for his extraordinarily prestigious position, not least of all with respect to the royal soul foundations at Naqš-e Rostam. This is in fact explicitly stated at the end of his inscription, when Kerdīr refers to the reason for engraving his rock-cut text and gives a sum-up of his career, repeating the three main titles he bore under the four kings he served. The high priest states that he wrote this text (*u-m ēn nāmag* […] *nibišt*) because he had long (*az ahy ōrōn*) been personally signing and sealing many agreements and contracts relating to priests and fires throughout the empire, under various lords and kings: anyone who in the future (*kū kē frāstar zamān*) would see 'a charter, a record or a document or some other memorial' (*pādixšīr mādayān ayāb gittag ayāb any nāmag*), would know that he was *that* Kerdīr (*ān Kerdīr hēm*), who was named Kerdīr the hērbed under Šābuhr etc. This last sentence is the only time the recurring triad *pādixšīr–gittag–mādayān* is augmented with a fourth type of manuscript document (*nāmag*), evidently for the sake of absolute exhaustivity.

Although it is admittedly entirely unsurprising, the passages just detailed are an appreciable testimony to the existence of a royal archive of documents, contracts and other manuscript books which were carefully kept and catalogued: in the reign of Wahrām II, documents written, signed and sealed under Šābuhr were still considered as referenceable texts, cited by the high priest as proof of the responsibilities bestowed upon him; they could be consulted, discussed and – evidently – contested also. Most importantly, the intricate textual relationship between Kerdīr's and Šābuhr's inscriptions, and in particular Kerdīr's reference to the royal engraved text, further shows that the monumental stone inscriptions were themselves part of this Sasanian, consultable archive of documents.

Like the Parthian version of Šābuhr's monumental inscription, Kerdīr's inscription at the site of Naqš-e Rajab is signed by a scribe who gives his name and title: *Bōxtag dibīr Kerdīr ī xwādāy.* In his edition of this inscription, Philippe Gignoux restores the connective particle ZY between the words *dibīr* and Kerdīr.[1143] With this emendation, the signature reads *Bōxtag* the scribe of Lord Kerdīr: it implies that *Bōxtag* was the personal scribe of the high priests.

[1143] Gignoux 1991, 36 and 39.

However, Gignoux himself admits in a note that this emendation is not necessary.[1144] On the rock, the two 'units' *Bōxtag dibīr* and *Kerdīr ī xwādāy* are not juxtaposed but separated by a considerable gap of unprepared rock surface as well as a crack **[Fig. 8.14]**: the name *Bōxtag dibīr* finished the last, very short sentence, while the syntagm *Kerdīr ī xwādāy* is engraved all the way to the left. Without the connective particle, the signature would read "*Bōxtag* the scribe; Lord Kerdīr", perhaps in a direct transposition of the juxtaposed seals on the original manuscript letter? It is finally worth noting that although Kerdīr's inscription is personally signed by a scribe, the high priest also describes himself as writing (*u-m ēn nāmag* […] *nibišt*) – as we saw, Šābuhr only ever *orders* documents to be written and by contrast to Kerdīr is not directly associated with the act of writing in his inscriptions.

Preliminary conclusions: the manuscript tradition behind Sasanian inscriptions and the special status of the monumental epigraphic texts.

The detailed study of this first choice of early Sasanian inscriptions highlights certain key aspects of monumental epigraphy from this period. First, it is possible to catch a glimpse of the lost manuscript Middle Persian literature if we pay attention to certain key aspects of the rock-cut texts. Some elements of the inscriptions' palaeography betray the manuscript models that were the basis for the monumental stone versions; they are testimonies to cursive forms of writing that were being used alongside the monumental, ornamental script in this period. Similarly, highlighting the key passages in the epigraphic texts where mention is made of (now lost) manuscript documents enables us to appreciate to what extent the monumental texts were conscientiously embedded within a much vaster Sasanian corpus of written documents. This corpus forms the literary and legal-administrative backdrop of the rock-cut texts. Indeed, a closer look at the types of documents referred to 'for further details' and the reasons for the author of the inscription for mentioning them, reveals the predominantly legal value of the cited manuscripts: these served to underpin the legal authority and validity of the monumental texts; the inscriptions, in turn, act as enduring stone testimonies of royal deeds, religious foundations, fiscal transactions, sealings and signatures. From these observations it is possible to infer a certain juridical role or at least administrative of the monumental stone inscriptions. Furthermore, although we have no direct evidence for it, the careful placement of the epigraphic texts on Achaemenid ruins, Sasanian bas-reliefs, royal sanctuaries, and other locales endowed with a numinous quality – such as springs and lush grottos, if only because they were

[1144] Gignoux 1991, 36, n. 115.

the site of a royal exploit or visit – is strongly suggestive of a religious/ritual role of the early Sasanian rock-cut texts. This important aspect should probably not be divorced from the legal quality of the inscriptions highlighted above: the separation of legal procedure and law is a modern one and as later, post-Sasanian legal literature amply illustrates, it cannot be applied to Sasanian Iran.

The inscriptions' allusions to key features of their physical context calls attention to the importance of a monumental text's direct environment for understanding both its significance and its author's purpose in having it engraved. Indeed, all Sasanian monumental epigraphic texts examined in this chapter directly engage with their support and surroundings, and mention, through the use of an array of adverbs and deictic pronouns, the aspects of their surroundings that are at the root of their *raison d'être*. Through such linguistic tools, but also through certain palaeographic embellishments or exaggerations, the author defines his inscription's deictic field of reference, away from which the text makes little or no sense. Among the tools that contribute to make tangible the materiality and three-dimensionality of a text are the passages where the content of the inscription alludes to the physical phenomenon of the rock-cut words. As the above study shows, such 'auto-referential' passages are pivotal moments in the structure of the text and usually contain the clues that help appreciate the author's reasons for having the inscription engraved, and gauge what he hopes his rock-cut text – or rather, the passerby's reading of them – will achieve.

Now, in certain cases, the key feature of an inscription's environment is another, older rock-cut text: the inscription makes explicit reference to this epigraphic, textual context either through the use of deixis, by citing chosen content from the older text or echoing aspects of its vocabulary and phrasing. In such instances, it is reasonable to consider inter-inscriptional referencing as examples of inter-textuality within the (sub-)corpus of Sasanian inscriptions. A careful analysis of the palaeographic, linguistic and textual relationship between a pair or series of inscriptions not only provides precious, often overlooked, insight into an author's primary purpose in commissioning a monumental rock-cut text, but also helps elucidate core aspects of the latter's significance, such as its legal value and/or religious quality. Indeed, the exhaustive overview and critical study of the intertextual referencing between KKZ and ŠKZ allowed me to highlight with greater precision the legal and financial role that the high-priest played within the royal foundations established at the site of Naqš-e Rostam.

In this way, the combined study of key aspects of Sasanian inscriptions, such as their palaeography, their references to manuscript written documents and their intricate relationship with their natural, built and inscriptional environment, not only provides precious insight into

the lost manuscript literature and scribal practice of Sasanian Iran but also throws some light on the peculiar nature and status of the rock-cut texts themselves. An exhaustive analysis of the epigraphic corpus of Sasanian Iran falls beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, a choice of inscriptions is put forward below that should serve to illustrate the core features of Sasanian monumental epigraphy just described.

V. A choice of case studies: further evidence for the documentation of the lost Sasanian manuscript tradition and the different symbolic aspects of Sasanian inscriptions.

Narseh's Paikuli: exploring the different legal aspects of inscriptions.

One of the best illustrations of the above-mentioned role of monumental inscriptions as 'stone witnesses', implying an important political, legal and archival function of these texts, is the inscription of the Sasanian king Narseh (r. 293-302 CE) at Paikuli.[1145] The troubled political context of Narseh's accession to the Sasanian throne was briefly mentioned above, with the study of this king's usurpation of his brother Wahrām I's bas-relief at Bīšāpūr. In 293, Wahrām II, son and successor of Wahrām I, dies. According to Narseh's inscription at Paikuli, Wahrām II's young son Wahrām III was crowned in secret by a shady personage named Wahnām, son of Tadros, without consulting the Sasanian elite – as we shall see, this seems to have been an important, if not the main, cause for grievance among the nobility. Narseh's inscription at Paikuli is our only source for Wahrām III's short, four-month reign. The tensions between the different political factions of the powerful Sasanian elite that had torn apart Wahrām II's reign flare up. Narseh – still according to his inscription – was in 293 far from all this political turmoil, reigning as king of Armenia. It is unclear when Narseh was crowned king of Armenia – could it have been at the accession of his nephew Wahrām II, perhaps as a consolation for the Sasanian throne? It certainly appears that the governance of this important and volatile Sasanian province – the main buffer zone between the Roman and Sasanian empires – was an honour reserved for the prospective heir to the Sasanian throne. Be that as it may, according to Narseh, the Sasanian nobles reached out to him to return to Persis and take back the throne from Wahrām III. The following will serve to highlight that the monument of Paikuli marks the very place where Narseh met the Sasanian nobles as he was on his way down from Armenia, and was the stage for the *wuzurgān*'s official pledge of allegiance to him.

[1145] For an edition of this text, see Humbach and Skjærvø 1983.

Narseh's Paikuli: the significance of place.

The reconstruction of the Paikuli monument is a thorny issue over which specialists remain divided **[Fig. 8.15]**. To this day, the site has not benefited from systematic excavations. Its history is intricately linked, as mentioned in chapter 4, to the career of the German archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld. In the dedicated and monumental work *Paikuli* published in 1924, he painstakingly embarked on the first block-by-block restoration of the true puzzle that consisted in the remains of the bilingual inscription engraved on the monument's facades. Since then, several new inscribed blocks have been brought to light and a new edition of the inscription was published by Prods Oktor Skjærvø and Helmut Humbach, with more recent addenda by Cereti and Terribili as well as Skjærvø.[1146] Herzfeld's first reconstruction of the monument was questioned by the more recent studies for being too influenced by the Ka'ba of Zoroaster, which it doubtlessly emulates:[1147] semi-engaged columns in all four corners of the monument indicate that the Paikuli monument was in fact surrounded by a pavilion. Nevertheless, researchers converge in reconstructing a tall, square, 9x9m tower-like structure with four high-relief busts adorning each of the four facades. The Middle Persian and Parthian inscription were engraved so as to be placed on the west and east sides respectively, similarly to Šābuhr's monumental inscription at Naqš-e Rostam.

The site of Paikuli is located in modern Iraqi Kurdistan, 340 km north-east of Bagdad. At first sight, it appears to be isolated on a little hill. Herzfeld thus observed, surprised, that "Paikuli lies away from any modern high road in one of the most impenetrable regions of that part of the world, and it seems rather enigmatical that we should find so important a memorial here. It was not exactly on the road connecting Ctesiphon and Ganzaca, two of the chief cities of the Sasanian empire".[1148] Nevertheless, Walter Bruno Henning, would later take up with more assurance Herzfeld's tentative observation that Paikuli was on the road to Ctesiphon – the Sasanian capital (35km south of Bagdad) – and Ganzaca, an important Sasanian town and the departure point for any Sasanian traveller on his way to Armenia.[1149] As such, the site appears to be a carefully chosen meeting-point between the Sasanian nobles arriving from Ctesiphon and Narseh on his way down from Armenia: a "half-way mark" to stage Narseh's

[1146] Skjærvø 2006; Cereti and Terribili 2012; Cereti and Terribili 2014.

[1147] Cereti and Terribili 2012, 85.

[1148] Herzfeld 1924, 8.

[1149] Henning 1952b, 517-522.

'election' and swear allegiance to him before marching together upon the capital to seize the crown.[1150]

Herzfeld and Humbach's intuition was confirmed by the decipherment of the inscription. Indeed, Narseh explicitly states at NPi§32[1151] that the monument on which his inscription is engraved was erected on the very place where he met with the *wuzurgān:* when he arrived in Asorestān 'in this place (*ēn gyāg*)' where '*this* (*ēn*) monument (*plky*)'[1152] was set up, the princes and nobles came to meet him; here they came before him, where *this* monument (*ēn plk*) is set up. The recent publication by Cereti and Terribili of newly recovered blocks further revealed that the commemorative monument was given its own name, "Perōz-Anahīd-Narseh", which should probably be read as a possessive compound, either 'Narseh, with victorious Anahīd' or 'Victorious Narseh, by the grace of Anahīd'.[1153]

Narseh's Paikuli: the importance of writing and written documents.

Like Šābuhr's inscription at the Ka'ba, Narseh's Paikuli contains long lists of names, detailing all the grandees and nobles that came to his support and joined him against Wahrām III: it evidently serves to record and remember those *wuzurgān* that came to his aid before he carried out his coup. At the end of his inscription, Narseh in fact clearly states that those members of the aristocracy who either came to his court in person [following the coup], or sent an envoy, presents, letters (*nibēg*) or 'hostages as promises/loyalty' would be guaranteed fame and other things, and would be pardoned (?) and accepted in his service[1154] – no doubt those who did not were earmarked as traitors. It is worth noting that sending a *nibēg* – a written document, perhaps a written 'pledge' – was considered enough proof of one's loyalty to be pardoned and was treated as having the same importance as coming to Narseh in person or sending a messenger. Manuscript written documents certainly play a crucial part in Narseh's narrative of his

[1150] "When one travelled from Persia to Armenia in Sassanian times, one set out from Ganzaca in Atropatene; Narseh coming from the opposite direction, no doubt went first to Ganzaca... The shortest road from Ganzaca to Seleucia/Ctesiphon passed through the plain of Siarazur, where one reached the half- way mark...The very road along which Narseh was travelling, on the Sassanian road from Seleucia/Ctesiphon to Siarazur over the pass of Paikuli", Henning 1952b, 518.

[1151] Humbach and Skjærvø 1983, 20-22.

[1152] For *plky* as a term describing the special type of monument that was erected at Paikuli, see Henning 1952b, 518, n. 6 as well as Cereti and Terribili 2012, 78.

[1153] Cereti and Terribili 2014, 357-358, n. 42.

[1154] Humbach and Skjærvø 1983, 51.

accession to the Sasanian throne and are referred to at each important turning point of the coup's chronology. When Wahrām III was crowned, the furious (faction of the) Sasanian nobility sent a message to Narseh in Armenia: it was upon seeing the letter (*frawardag*, NPi§19)[1155] that Narseh decided to set off to conquer the throne; the verb to 'see' confirms that this was a written message rather than an oral one relayed by the messenger. After his first meeting with the nobles, Narseh himself sends a letter (*frawardag*, NPi§47)[1156] to the young Wahrām III warning him that he is marching upon him; upon receiving it Wahrām III abdicates. It is more difficult to decide where the series of exchanges that took place between Narseh and the nobility before he finally accepted the throne is written or oral.[1157] Upon his successful military coup, Narseh does not immediately seize the crown, but calls a council and sends a message (*paygām*) to the *hargbed* and other *wuzurgān* asking them whether they believed anyone to be a more worthy king in Ērānšahr than himself. There is a series of exchanges, and Narseh eventually receives a 'message and answer' (*paygām ud passox*) from the *hargbed,* landlords, princes, grandees, nobles, Persians and Parthians, saying that they cannot see a better king to rule Iran. Narseh reminds the elite that with this council and 'election' he was respecting an old Sasanian tradition, observed by Ardašīr and Šābuhr themselves. Whether the messages exchanged were written or oral, the inscription at Paikuli certainly served to record in stone the full proceedings of this council along with the names of those who took part in it. In this respect, it is worth noting Narseh's careful distinction between Persians and Parthians among the empire's grandees: this detail no doubt explains Narseh's choice of having the inscription engraved in two versions, Middle Persian and Parthian.

A final observation concerning the Paikuli inscription's palaeography ought to be made. In their recent article, Cereti and Terribili note that the letters of the inscription – which is written in the monumental, ornamental Middle Persian and Parthian scripts, familiar from the early Sasanian royal sites – are not all the same size.[1158] The sentences that were placed higher up on the monument's façade were written in larger letters than those coming in the middle of the text, while the smallest letters were reserved for the lower 'register'. The regularity of the letter sizes within their respective 'section' would suggest that this was planned (rather than the engraver running out of space): the inscription was written in perspective. Indeed, for Cereti

[1155] Humbach and Skjærvø 1983, 14.

[1156] Humbach and Skjærvø 1983, 31.

[1157] NPi§63-90; Humbach and Skjærvø 1983, 37-51.

[1158] Cereti and Terribili 2012, 86-87.

and Terribili this was evidently an optical device used to make the words placed higher up on the monument larger, to be better seen from the ground. If their suggestion is verified, this suggests the clear intention on the part of Narseh/the scribe in charge of redacting the inscription to make the engraved text readable, an aspect which has not been documented in other Sasanian inscriptions.

For the sake of the soul: Mihr-Narseh's inscription at Fīrūzābād.

Šābuhr's inscription at Naqš-e Rostam, which establishes his soul foundations and lists his endowment for their upkeep, was a telling example of the difficulty in distinguishing the legal from the religious aspects of many Sasanian inscriptions. Although the choice of support and location for his inscription, a sumptuous ruin in an ancient dynastic site, is suggestive of a sacred quality of the physical rock-cut text, we have no direct information concerning a possible ritual treatment of it – such as with blessings or libations, well attested, for instance, in the case of Assyrian royal foundation texts. Nevertheless, several examples of monumental inscriptions from Sasanian Iran explicitly belong to the religious sphere and were evidently regarded by their authors as being beneficial to their soul. Now, the following will show that it is the very fact that the physical inscription was seen or read that brought blessings upon its author.

High up in the cliff side, overlooking the (now dried) river which leads to modern Fīrūzābād, a city founded by Ardašīr I in Fārs and known as *Ardašīr-xwarrah* in Sasanian times, the grand vizier Mihr-Narseh, whose long career spanned the reigns of four Sasanian kings in the fifth century CE,[1159] had an inscription engraved to commemorate his construction of a bridge providing safe passage over the roaring waters. Mihr-Narseh's inscription is directly adjacent to a bas-relief commissioned two hundred years earlier on the same cliff side by king Ardašīr I, and which depicted the latter's investiture by Ohrmazd. The inscription begins similarly to the 'label inscriptions' discussed at the beginning of this chapter, pointing to the object which it serves to explain or describe: *ēn puhl*, 'this bridge'. The rock-cut text provides the name and title of the person, Mihr-Narseh, who had it built, and clarifies that he paid for it from his own personal funds (*az xīr ī xwēš*, MnFd§3) for the sake of his own soul (*rūwān ī xwēš rāy*, MnFd§2). This crucial piece of information is a recurring *topos* of monumental

[1159] Yazdgerd I (r. 399-421 CE), Wahrām V (r. 421-439), Yazdgerd II (r. 439-57) and Pērōz (r. 459-84); on the personage of Mihr Narseh, see Daryaee 2000; for an edition of this inscription, see Henning 1954 and Daryaee, *Sasanika*, https://sites.uci.edu/sasanika/mehr-narseh-inscription-at-firuzabad-mnfd/.

Sasanian inscriptions and carries important legal and religious implications. Thus, Kerdīr explicitly assures his readers in his own four inscriptions that he established many cathedral fires and celebrated many rites for the gods from his own personal estate (*u-m pad xwēš-iz xānag … pad xwēš xānag*, KKZ§15-16). Similarly, Šābuhr's scribe, Apsāy, who had a bilingual inscription commissioned on a votive monument dedicated to his master in the town of Bīšāpūr, clarifies that he paid for it from his own estate (*az xwēš xānag*, VŠ§10).[1160]

The (admittedly later) Middle Persian legal literature concerning the establishment of soul foundations is extremely clear that, for the founder's soul to benefit from it, he must fund it with his own personal money/estate. Indeed, in the the *Dādestān ī dēnīg*, *pursišn* (question) 7 asks whether a man who has died would receive the benefit of a pious action (*kirbag*) performed for his sake (*ōy rāy*) but that he did not provide for during his lifetime, in other words that he had not endowed: Dd.§7.2, *nē bun kerd*.[1161] The issue seems to be that the deceased did not pay for the pious action; it was performed *and provided/paid for* by somebody else *for* him. The conclusion of *pursišn* 7 is that the deceased would not benefit from a *kirbag* (it would not count in the Weighing) for which he did not give dispositions (*handarzēnīd*) or provide for/endow (*bun kerd*) in his lifetime: Dd.§7.2, *agar ōy ī be widardag andar zīndagīh ān kirbag nē framūd u-š nē handarzēnīd ud nē bun kerd u-š nē-z pad jād būd ēg-iš be ō tarāzūg nē šawēd ud nē rasēd* 'When anyone does a good deed for one who has passed away, after his death, if he who has died did not order that good deed and did not put it in his will and did not bequeath it in his lifetime and also if it was not done by means of his property, then it does not go into the balance and does not reach him'.[1162] Further down, the author reinforces this statement by confirming that, *a contrario*, one who did provide for a *kirbag* to be performed in his name with an endowment (*agar ān ī kirbag ī ōy widardag andar zīndagīh ī xwēš framūd ayāb-iš handarzēnīd ayāb bun kerdār*) would receive the full benefit of the good deed (*ī-š ruwān rasēd*, Dd. §7.5). Then only would the one who ordered the foundation of the thanksgiving services (?) (*bun ī spās framūdār*) and the owner of the good deed (*xwēšīg [ī] kirbagīh*) be certain/valid (*ēwar*).[1163]

[1160] For an edition of this inscriptions, see Ghirshman 1936.

[1161] Jaafari-Dehaghi 1998, 54-57.

[1162] Jaafari-Dehaghi 1998, 54-55.

[1163] In this respect, Dd.§7 can be linked to MHD§35. 9-17, which addresses a parallel problem, but from a different angle. The passage in the *Thousand Judgements* stipulates that if a man establishes (i.e., pays) and performs (*nihēd ud kunēd*) for the sake of the soul of *another* man, then this is as if he had established and performed services for his own soul: *ud yazišn ī pad ruwān ī mard mard nihēd ud kunēd pad-iz ruwān ī xwēš nihād ud kard bawēd*.

The inscriptions of Mihr-Narseh, Kerdīr and Apsāy thus recorded in stone and for all to see that their foundations, good works and votive dedications were made in due form and would legitimately accrue benefits to their soul. Securing this understanding was essential to another clause in Mihr-Narseh's inscription, also found in a number of other Sasanian monumental texts. The Grand Vizier concludes by entreating the passer-by *(kē pad ēn rāh āmad*) using his bridge to make a blessing in his name and for his children (*Mihrnarseh u-š frazandān āfrīn ēw kunēd*), in thanks for securing the safe passage across the river at his own expense. Mihr-Narseh's appeal to the reader is reminiscent of the closing statement of another Middle Persian inscription engraved on a large boulder in the vicinity of the city of Meškin in eastern Azerbaijan, dated to the 27th year of Šābuhr II (309-379).[1164] It commemorates the foundation of a fortress (*diz*) built in seven years by a personage name Narseh-[…], in the name of the gods and for the glory of the king of kings (*pad nām ī yazdān xwarrah ī šāhān šāh*, ŠMŠ§7-8). Like Mihr-Narseh he asks the passer-by, should the fortress please him, to make a blessing for the sake of its founder's soul (*kē tar ēn rāh bē āmad ēn diz passandād ēg Narseh*-[…] *pad ruwān āfrīn ēw kunēd*, ŠMŠ§11-14). The inscription adds, perhaps with a touch of humour, that on the contrary, should the visitor not be impressed by Narseh-[…]'s fortress, he should go make one of his own that surpasses it. The challenge made by the founder of the fortress to the reader of his inscription is reminiscent of Šābuhr's challenge at Hājjiābād and Tang-e Borāq that should the reader consider himself strong(er) armed, then he should attempt to outdo the king's bowshot.

Sacred aspects of Sasanian inscriptions: epigraphic texts and ritual performance.

That passers-by did make blessings to the authors of inscriptions upon seeing/reading their engraved texts is illustrated by a precious pair of Middle Persian inscriptions carved on the majestic ruins of the portico of Darius' *tačara* at Persepolis.

The two Middle Persian inscriptions are engraved one above the other, on the right doorjamb of the portico's entrance **[Fig. 1.1]**. The first Middle Persian inscription, the upper one in the pair, was commissioned by Šābuhr king of the Sākas, son of the king of kings

[1164] For an edition of the inscription, see Nyberg 1970 (with a photograph of this now almost entirely effaced inscription); Frye and Skjærvø 1996; Daryaee, *Sasanika*, https://sites.uci.edu/sasanika/meshginshahr-inscription/.

Hormizd, and is dated to the second year of Šābuhr II's reign (r. 309-379 CE).[1165] The author is a Sasanian prince and he has travelled 1200 km from his province to the capital, Staxr, to pay homage to the newly crowned king. On the way back he stopped at 'A Hundred Columns' (*sadstūn),* for piety/the accomplishment of pious actions (*pad kirbagīh*); he ate and drank with his companions, whose names are all recorded – not least that of the scribe, Narseh – and he had rites performed for his own soul, for that of his father and ancestors *and* for those (anonymous) individuals who built the structure: the *tačara.* With demonstrative pronouns, adverbs of place, place names and visual triggers, the inscription positions itself, temporally, geographically and spatially. The prince passed on *this* road (*ēn rāh*), between the capital and his province — a reference to the royal road that cut across the Marvdašt plain, skirting the Persepolis Terrace. His inscription's location is thus first defined according to two main imperial points of reference. The text then becomes more precise, pointing to the ruins on which it is engraved: the prince stopped 'here' (*ēdar*), at 'A Hundred Columns', in 'this building' (*im xānag*), gradually narrowing down the deictic field of reference. The name 'A Hundred Columns' is almost a metonym: the many stone columns still standing were a striking feature of the Achaemenid ruins. The structure, perhaps in a wider sense, is referred to again at the end: rites (*āfrīn*) were also made in honour of those 'who built this house/structure' (*kē ēn mān kard*). The exact meaning of the concluding formula (*yazd yād*) is difficult to determine; suffice it to say that it encapsulates the inscription's primary commemorative function by invoking the gods to remember.

The second inscription is signed by the judge Seleukos, who travels to the Sasanian court sixteen years later, all the way from Kabul. On his way he stops at 'A Hundred Columns' and sees the inscription that the Sasanian prince had ordered engraved.[1166] He has the first inscription read (out loud?, *pahipurs*-), has rites performed for the King of kings, for the Sasanian prince and for his own soul. He records his own visit to the site with a new inscription, placed right beneath the first, describing this as a 'pious action' (*kirbag*). The second inscription is also dated, but the reign is not recorded — probably precisely because this information is already contained in the first text. Thus, from the very first lines, the second inscription works

[1165] For an edition of the first inscription, see Frye 1966 as well as Daryaee, *Sasanika*, https://sites.uci.edu/sasanika/sabuhr-sakansah-inscription-persepolis-sps-i/; for a recent translation of this text see also Canepa 2018, 269. For the second Middle Persian inscription at the *tačara* see Frye 1966.

[1166] In his edition of both inscriptions, Frye assumed that Seleukos had been ordered by the Sasanian king to go to Persepolis *in order* to visit the inscription he had left there several years earlier, but this is not explicit from the second text.

with the first one, placed just above. The judge also refers to his text's location, again calling the Terrace 'A Hundred Columns'. This time however, the rites performed are not to honour those who built the structure, but to honour the author of the first text, the king of the Sākas (ŠPII§6). Remarkably, the second inscription does not 'geolocate' itself in terms of the royal road and the Achaemenid ruins as the first one had done. Rather, it locates itself spatially with respect to the first text, by pointing to it directly: (ŠPII§3), 'this inscription (*ēd nāmag*, lit. 'document') which is written above (*abar*)'.

The first text can be described as a "secondary"[1167] inscription in the sense that it does not belong to its medium, the ruins of the *tačara*, in its original state. As in the case of most secondary epigraphy, it functions as a material trace of a traveller's evanescent presence in a place of significance, capturing his response to it; the final formula suggests a reflection on the passing of time and the fleetingness of memory. Most importantly however, the two Sassanian inscriptions *together* effect the transformation of a secondary inscription *into* a primary monument. The first text is the reason for the judge Seleukos' visit to Persepolis: it has become *the monument that was visited,* and libations are performed for its author in the same way that the first text had recorded libations performed for the builders of the *tačara*, the texts' medium and the original point of reference. The first inscription has become a primary monument by the performative action of the second inscription, placed just beneath in line both with chronology and hierarchy.[1168] If the first inscription has no meaning outside its material and geographical context, the second inscription has no *raison d'être* without the first. The first

[1167] The notion of primary and secondary epigraphy was recently developed in collective volume entitled *Scribbling Through History* (Ragazzoli *et al.* 2017), dedicated to 'rehabilitating' graffiti as a constituent part of a site, monument or artwork. The authors explore the role of graffiti in 'place-making', with several case studies tracing the long-term accumulation of such writings in certain significant sites; they also address and define the so-called 'and-me phenomenon', or 'injunction of writing', the apparently universal reality according to which we tend to write where others have written (or drawn), where writing invites more writing. This work offers a valuable methodology with which to *untangle* the many writings in different languages and scripts engraved on the ruins of the *tačara* from one another, see Ramble (forthcoming, a), "Generations of writing: the secondary inscriptions of Darius' *tačara* at Persepolis".

[1168] This joins Ragazzoli's observation concerning the graffiti in the Scribes' Cave at Deir el-Bahari that signatures are in a 'relative position' to one another so that in a 'sequence of epigraphic events […] the focal point is very likely to be the centre of the panel, the first graffito that was written;' the central panel is turned into a monument 'to be seen' by the transformative power of the secondary inscriptions, Ragazzoli *et al.* 2017, 31.

inscription directly produces the second one: in this respect we can speak quite literally of 'generations of writing'.[1169]

Above all, the pair of Middle Persian inscriptions from Darius' *tačara* are suggestive of the religious honours performed before such rock-cut texts. The judge Seleukos explicitly records having the Sāka king's inscription read before performing libations and making blessings in the name of its author, suggesting that *reading* the texts or having them read was part of their ritual treatment. We may infer from these observations that, although it is much more difficult to document, monumental rock-cut texts not only played a part in the political and legal life of Sasanian Iran but in the religious and ritual one too.

[1169] This 'genealogy of writing' is only just beginning: in time, many Arabic and Persian inscriptions were added to the pair, at first next to this epigraphic group, and then further and further into the ruins, a dynamic in which writing generates writing, little by little crystallising collective memory around the ruins.