



# EPIGRAPHY I. OLD PERSIAN AND MIDDLE IRANIAN EPIGRAPHY

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## EPIGRAPHY

### i. Old Persian and Middle Iranian epigraphy

Definitions, classification, and method.

Inscriptions are texts carved, incised, or engraved on durable materials like stone and metal. Often they are public messages intended to be permanent, but graffiti scratched, drawn, or painted on walls are also included. Manuscripts, on the other hand, are texts written on less durable material like leather, papyrus, bast, or paper; they are primarily of administrative, juridical, economic, private, religious, or literary character. Sometimes administrative and economic documents are written on unbaked clay, pottery (ostraca), bone, or wood and thus occupy a position between inscriptions and manuscripts. As this third category of texts fills many gaps in the knowledge of epigraphy, it seems useful to include it in epigraphic studies. In a narrow sense epigraphy also includes paleography, which cannot, however, be treated separately from the paleography of manuscripts.

Inscriptions can be classified on various continua, for example, between



monumental and small examples. The inscription of Darius I (522-486 B.C.E.) at Bisotūn (qq.v) is the largest known example of the former category from the pre-Islamic period, whereas the smallest inscriptions are found on coins, seals, gems, utensils, and other portable objects. Inscriptions can also be classified as monolingual, bilingual, trilingual, and so on or as royal, priestly, official, and private or as “lapidary” and cursive. In Iranian epigraphy the lapidary paleographic style was sometimes archaizing, whereas cursive usually reflected the contemporaneous style of writing.

Iranian epigraphy of the pre-Islamic period covers mainly inscriptions in the Old and Middle Iranian languages: Old Persian, Middle Persian, Parthian, Chorasmian (see [CHORASMIA iii](#)), Sogdian, and Bactrian (see [BACTRIAN LANGUAGE](#)). Old and Middle Persian inscriptions span by far the longest period of time, from the Bisotūn inscription until the early Islamic period, yet limiting study to inscriptions in Iranian languages cannot fully account for historical reality. Many non-Iranian traditions were incorporated into Iranian culture, which complicated the linguistic aspects of epigraphic remains from the multinational empires of the Achaemenids, the Parthians, the Sasanians, and the Kushans. As a consequence Iranian epigraphy has from the beginning required attention to materials in such non-Iranian languages as Babylonian, Elamite (see [ELAM v](#)), Aramaic (q.v. i), Greek (Huyse), Sanskrit, and Middle Indian.

Iranian epigraphy is underdeveloped, in that the publications of inscriptions are widely dispersed and the particular requirements for epigraphic work not always recognized by authors. The only attempt at collecting and studying Iranian inscriptions systematically from a consistent point of view was undertaken by the founder of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum* (q.v.), W. B. Henning, who “in his later years . . . stressed the importance of making known to the scholarly world all inscriptions by photographic or other reproductions” (Frye, 1970, p. 152). It can be inferred from the volumes of the *Corpus* published by Henning himself that his attention was focused on epigraphic fieldwork, with all its hardships, rather than on publishing materials kept in European museums. Yet, despite his efforts and those of his successors, the majority of important epigraphic publications have appeared outside the *Corpus*. For example, most of the inscriptions from Persepolis and its surroundings must still be consulted in E. F. Schmidt’s archeological reports, the illustrations of which are, however, usually too small for epigraphic work.



The famed archeologist and epigrapher Ernst Herzfeld documented about 100 blocks of the Paikuli inscription (1924), developing a completely new method of presenting the material. As he demonstrated, in attempting to establish a reliable text of such weathered material, it is insufficient merely to publish available squeezes and photographs; often it is necessary to retouch duplicate copies in order to make visible relevant evidence and to facilitate restoration of sequences of half-illegible characters as entire words (see, e.g., Davary and Humbach, 1976, pp. 14-15). Descriptions of graphic details, which are usually both complicated and ineffective, are thus rendered superfluous, and scholarly discussion becomes possible. Following a somewhat different approach, Rüdiger Schmitt (1991), in his masterly edition of the Old Persian text at Bīsotūn, which is visible only from a great distance, combined modern photographs with old drawings like those by Henry C. Rawlinson, which were made when the inscription was in much better condition than it is now.

The origins of Iranian epigraphy.

A.-H. Anquetil-Duperron first introduced in the West some information on the Avestan and Pahlavi languages, from Parsi sources, including strange Aramaic spellings in Pahlavi, for example, *malca* for “king” and *boman* for “son” (today transliterated *MLK*/*MLKA* and *BRH*/*BRE* respectively). He thus opened the way to decipherment of Middle Persian and eventually Old Persian inscriptions. Small and inexact drawings of details of such inscriptions had first reached Europe in the work of Jean Chardin, who was in Persia in the mid-17th century. The first exact documentation was provided by Carsten Niebuhr, who visited Persepolis, Naqš-e Rostam, and Naqš-e Rājab in March 1765 and published complete copies of several cuneiform inscriptions: the Old Persian-Elamite-Babylonian trilingual inscriptions DPa and XPe; Old Persian DPd, DPe, XPb; Elamite DPf; and Babylonian DPg (for identification and location of Old Persian inscriptions, see Kent, *Old Persian*). He also reproduced the three short Middle Persian-Parthian-Greek trilingual inscriptions ANRm and ANRmβ of Ardašīr (q.v.; 224-40 C.E.) and ŠNRb of Šāpūr (240-70), as well as the Middle Persian KNRm of the high priest Kardēr (for identification and location of Middle Persian inscriptions, see Back). The last provides an informative example of the way in which poor lighting conditions can distort visual acuity, but all Niebuhr’s other copies were of such accuracy that A. I. Silvestre de Sacy was able to make scholarly use of them (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Beginning with the Greek versions of ANRm and ŠNRb, which he restored by mutual comparison, and including the short ANRmβ as well, Silvestre de Sacy



succeeded for the most part in deciphering the respective Middle Persian versions. For example, he read and restored the crucial sections of the Greek version of ANRm as *Masdasnou theou Artaxarou basileōs basileōn Arianōn̄huiou theou Papakou basileōs* (1793, p. 30), corresponding to Middle Persian *mzdysn beh 'rthštr MLK'n MLK' yr'n . . . BRH p'pky MLK'* (in modern transliteration) “of the Mazdayasnian lord Ardašahr/Ardašīr, king of kings of Ērān, son of the king lord Pābag.” His only error here was in reading *beh* “better,” rather than *hgy* “lord.”

Silvestre de Sacy clearly recognized that what are now known as the Middle Persian versions are in the language of the Sasanians (1793, p. 121). He was less successful in classifying the language of the Parthian versions as Deylamite (1793, p. 123), but their true character was soon recognized, as is clear from Edward Thomas' comment (p. 267) that the alphabet “was once designated ‘Parthian’ . . . but has latterly been known as Chaldeo-Pehlvi.” This early identification was later credited to F. C. Andreas (Meillet, p. 242), though he himself preferred the terms *arsacidisch* and *Nordwest-Dialekt* (cf. Nyberg, 1923, p. 186 n. 1). Herzfeld used the terms *Parsik* and *Pahlavik* to designate epigraphic Middle Persian and Parthian respectively. It seems to have been Henning who reintroduced the term *Parthian* (1934; cf. 1951).

Today little attention is paid to Silvestre de Sacy's fundamental epigraphic studies, including work on the Middle Persian inscriptions at Ṭāq-e Bostān and the coin inscriptions of the Sasanian kings. The names of G. F. Grotefend, who, in 1802, took the first important step toward decipherment of Old Persian cuneiform script, and Rawlinson, who completed it except for a few details (1847), are better known.

At Persepolis Niebuhr had recognized three types of cuneiform, all written from left to right, with increasing inventories of characters. As it later turned out, the languages of the three are Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian respectively; Old Persian was the first of the three to be deciphered. O. G. Tychsen (pp. 24 ff.) identified the Old Persian word divider. Friedrich Münter (pp. 124 ff.) recognized the Achaemenid origin of the monuments at Persepolis and, drawing on Silvestre de Sacy's work, deciphered the sequence of characters for the Old Persian title “king of kings,” though without their phonetic values. Grotefend, combining Silvestre de Sacy's evidence with Herodotus' report that Darius I's father had not been royal (3.70), correctly contrasted the graphic structure of DPa *dārayavauš xsāyaθiya . . . vištāspahyā puça* “Darius the king, the son of Vištāspa” (not called “king”) with XPe



*xšayā@ršā xšāyaθiya . . . dārayavahauš xsāyaθiyahyā puça* “Xerxes the king, the son of Darius the king.” He was thus able to derive first readings of the proper names in the two inscriptions.

During the next few decades only a few details were added to Grotefend’s fundamental achievement (Weissbach, pp. 65-73), but Rawlinson’s careful documentation of the Bīsotūn inscription and his admirable decipherment of its Old Persian version vastly increased knowledge of Old Persian and laid the foundation for decipherment of the Babylonian and Elamite versions.

#### Old Persian.

Apart from Bīsotūn, Old Persian royal inscriptions have been discovered at Pasargadae/Morḡāb (M), Persepolis (P), Naqš-e Rostam (N), Susa (S), and Suez (Z). Most are official proclamations carved on stone, but inscriptions on seals, weights, and utensils have also been preserved. Most of these inscriptions are of Darius I and Xerxes (486-465 B.C.E.). Although there are inscriptions of their successors Artaxerxes I, Darius II, and Artaxerxes II and III (qq.v.), most are stereotyped repetitions of well-known patterns and exhibit increasing dissolution of the grammatical rules of Old Persian. A set of gold tablets from Hamadān, bearing the names of Ariaramnes (ArH) and Arsames (AsH) respectively, are of a later time (see ARIYĀRAMNA; ARŠĀMA).

Most Achaemenid inscriptions are trilingual, in Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian in that order. Walther Hinz and most other scholars concluded from the Old Persian version of the inscription at Bīsotūn (DB 4.88-92, par. 70) that the Old Persian script was created on Darius’ orders and first used in that inscription. Doubts on this point arose from the trilingual inscription of Cyrus (q.v. iii; 559-530 B.C.E.) the Great at Morḡāb (CMa), the oldest Achaemenid inscription found in Persia, but the arrangement of the three versions suggests that only the Elamite and Babylonian versions were contemporary and that the Old Persian version was added later (Stronach).

Remains of a hieroglyphic text were found with the trilingual inscription DZc. Much more precious is the trilingual DSab, discovered at Susa, to which five hieroglyphic texts were also added, one of them containing a list of provinces of the Achaemenid empire (Yoyotte). Two fragments of a copy of the Babylonian version were unearthed in Babylon. (On the Aramaic version of the Bīsotūn inscription, see below.)



Babylonian.

Babylonian clay tablets earlier than the Old Persian inscriptions provide important information on the early history of the Achaemenids. On a prism dated in the year 30 of the Assyrian ruler Aššurbanipal (q.v.; 639 B.C.E.) Cyrus, king of Persia (see [CYRUS ii](#)), is mentioned as a tributary. Cyrus the Great's revolt against the Median king Astyages (q.v.) and his conquest of Ecbatana (qq.v.) are described in the so-called "Nabonidus Chronicle" (Pritchard, pp. 305-6); the defeat of Nabonidus and the transition from his rule in Babylon to that of Cyrus the Great is alluded to in the abusive "Verse Account of Nabonidus" (Pritchard, pp. 112-15). The earliest Achaemenid imperial document, preserved on the famous Cyrus cylinder and datable after the conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C.E. (Pritchard, pp. 315-16; see [CYRUS iv](#)), includes the proclamation of Cyrus the Great as "king of Babylon, king of the countries." Closely related is the Babylonian inscription of Antiochus Soter (q.v.; Pritchard, p. 317) of 268 B.C.E.

Babylonian cuneiform texts include numerous transcriptions of Old Persian proper names and titles, thus contributing to knowledge of Median and Persian onomastics and the structure of the Achaemenid administration (Eilers; Hinz, 1975; Moore). Dates by regnal year attest an uninterrupted sequence of rulers at Babylon from Cyrus I through Cambyses, Nebuchadnezzar, Smerdis, Darius I, Xerxes I, and Artaxerxes I down to the Seleucids and Arsacids.

Elamite.

Achaemenid Elamite played an important part in the court administration at Persepolis. Two assemblages of clay tablets inscribed in Elamite were discovered there by George Cameron: eighty-four "treasury tablets" dated 492-458 B.C.E., recording "disbursements of silver . . . chiefly in lieu of rations in kind" (Hallock, p. 1, after Cameron pp. 83-199), and 2,087 "fortification tablets" dealing with "administrative transfer of food commodities" in 509-458 (Hallock, p. 1). Cameron stressed the significance of both groups for Achaemenid economic and religious history, as well as their archeological and linguistic significance, yet it is mainly the onomastics that have attracted scholarly attention, as a number of Old Persian proper names appear in Elamite, stimulating etymological research (Gershevitch, 1969; Hinz, 1975; Mayrhofer, 1973).



## Aramaic.

Fragments of an Aramaic version of the Bīsotūn inscription were found in the collection of papyri from Elephantine (q.v.) in Egypt (Greenfield and Porten), providing evidence that Imperial Aramaic was the language of the central Achaemenid chancery in correspondence with provincial chanceries. Among numerous lapis lazuli mortars and pestles discovered by Schmidt at Persepolis 163 items were inscribed in ink in Aramaic, the inscriptions being of economic, rather than ritual, character, as R. A. Bowman had originally thought. The objects themselves apparently originated in what is now Afghanistan, in Arachosia, which is mentioned on a number of them, but few scholars have doubted that they were inscribed in or near Persepolis. Nevertheless, the use of Aramaic, rather than Elamite, suggests that the inscriptions were added in the province where the objects were produced and collected before delivery to Persepolis. Still unpublished are “a number of brief Aramaic texts incised or written in ink or both, on small clay tablets discovered along with the fortification tablets” (Bowman, p. 19).

Owing to the scarcity of other materials, several imperial Aramaic inscriptions discovered in remote parts of the Achaemenid empire are of interest for Old Persian studies. For example, in the Aramaic version of the Lycian-Greek-Aramaic trilingual inscription from Xanthos in Anatolia the Iranian equivalent of “Apollo and the nymphs” is *ḥštrpty w’ḥwrnš*, that is, “Xšaθrapati and the Ahurānīs,” and in the inscription of Arebsun in Cappadocia the Mazdean religion is described as “sister and wife” of King Bel.

## The development of scripts of the Pahlavi type.

Scribes in the provincial chanceries probably developed their own spellings and writing customs as early as the late Achaemenid period. After the fall of the Achaemenid empire different Iranian scripts developed from these provincial styles: Middle Persian, Parthian, Sogdian, and Chorasmian, all of the “Pahlavi type,” that is, with varying numbers of Aramaic elements preserved in their spelling. Some of them came over time to be read with their Iranian lexical equivalents, whereas others were replaced by purely Iranian spellings.

The development of the four scripts of Pahlavi type, with their varying orthographic and calligraphic rules, was governed not only by inner dynamics but also probably by a strong tendency among chanceries and scribal schools to distinguish themselves from one another. This tendency resulted, for



example, in divergent spellings of the Iranian words for “year-month-day” in dating formulas: Middle Persian *ŠNT-BYRḤ-YWM*, Parthian *ŠNT-YRḤ-YWM*, Chorasmian *BŠNT-YRḤ-YWM*, and Sogdian *ŠNT-YRḤ-YWM* (Tolstov and Livshits, p. 240; in Panjikant replaced by *ŠNT-m’γ-myδ* and even by *srδ-m’γ-myδ*); they are to be compared with the date *B ’LWL m’ḥ ŠNT 10* in the Aramao-Iranian inscription Laḡmān II (Davary and Humbach, 1974).

The poorly preserved inscription to the right of the entrance to the tomb of Darius at Naqš-e Rostam (Frye, 1982) is exceptional in that no non-Iranian word is discernible. The month *m’ḥy sndrm(t)* is all that remains of the date. In line 20 it is possible to discern the Iranian verbal form (. . .) *t hyndy*; the name *’rthšs* Artaxerxes shows the typical Persian development of *s* from Iranian *θr*.

*The Aramao-Iranian of Aśoka.* Most of the stone edicts of the Mauryan emperor Aśoka (q.v.; ca. 272-231 B.C.E.), intended to propagate Buddhist morals, were composed in slightly varying Middle Indian dialects and written in Indian scripts (in the northwest usually Kharoṣṭhī, elsewhere Brāhmī, q.v.). Several Aśoka inscriptions discovered in Arachosia and neighboring areas are written in Greek or Aramao-Iranian, a regional form intermediary between Imperial Aramaic and Pahlavi script, or in Aramao-Indian, that is, Middle Indian written in unvocalized Aramaic script. These inscriptions, consisting of both literal and partly free renderings of passages from the edicts, were evidently addressed to people who followed the tradition of Alexander’s chancery in the eastern parts of his former empire, which had been ceded by the Seleucids to Candragupta and his grandson Aśoka. The Aramao-Iranian inscriptions from Taxila (in the Panjāb; Humbach, 1976) and the Laḡmān valley (I and II; Dupont-Sommer; Davary and Humbach, 1974) and the Greek inscription from Qandahār are monolingual. There are bilingual inscriptions as well: two fragments in Aramao-Indian and Aramao-Iranian, one from Pol-e Darūnta (Henning 1949-50) and the other from Qandahār (II; Benveniste and Dupont-Sommer), and a completely preserved Greek and Aramao-Iranian inscription from Qandahār (I; Scerrato et al.; Schlumberger et al.; Pugliese Carratelli and Garbini).

The coexistence of Greek and Aramao-Iranian is apparent also in Parthian leather documents from Avroman (q.v.; 1st century B.C.E.) in Kordestān and in the inscriptions from Armazi (q.v.) near Mtskheta in Georgia, one of which is bilingual in Greek and Aramao-Iranian (middle or end of the 2nd century C.E.; Tsereteli, 1942), another monolingual in Aramao-Iranian (end of the 1st century C.E.; Henning, *Mitteliranisch*, p. 39 fig.; Altheim and Stiehl, pp. 243-61),



and a third monolingual in Greek (period of Vespasian, 69-79 C.E.; Tsereteli, 1960).

Middle Persian.

In the Persian-speaking area the transition from Imperial Aramaic to the Pahlavi script of the Sasanian period can be followed on the legends of the early coins of Persis in the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C.E. (Alram, pp. 162-86). The Frataraka (q.v.) governors like Artaxerxes I (who spelled his name in the Medo-Parthian way as *ʾrthštr*, rather than *ʾrthšs*) still used Aramaic ductus and syntax, for example, in *bgdt prtrk' zy 'lhy' br bgwrt* ("Bayād, *frataraka* of the gods, son of Bayward"). Typical Pahlavi spellings did not occur before the rise of the governors to petty kings in the mid-2nd century B.C.E. Aramaic *br* "son" was then replaced by Pahlavi *BRH* in *d'ryw MLK' BRH wtprdt MLK'* "King Darēw [II], son of King Wātfraḏāt" (Henning, *Mitteliranisch*, p. 25).

On the first coin issues of the Sasanian kings, in the 3rd century C.E., there is a sharp difference in quality between the neatly engraved portraits and the confusing paleography of the legends. The die engravers apparently had difficulty reproducing the contemporary lapidary script. Late Sasanian legends increasingly exhibit cursive features, particularly from the time of Khosrow I (531-79) and after. Leaving aside certain graphic archaisms like logograms for mint names, there seems to have been a straight line of development toward the ductus on the coin legends of the early Arab governors of Ṭabarestān (Unvala).

For unclear, perhaps technical, reasons the trilingual inscription of Ardašīr ANRm at Naqš-e Rostam (Plate I) follows the sequence Parthian, Greek, Middle Persian, whereas the inscription ANRmβ on the relief of Ahura Mazdā on the same monument provides the canonical sequence Middle Persian, Parthian, Greek, which recurs on Šāpūr I's inscription ŠNRb. In Šāpūr's great trilingual inscription ŠKZ, cut into the outer walls of the base of the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt, the Middle Persian version is on the left side, the Parthian on the right, and the Greek on the back of the building. This inscription, which provides much information on the history and inner structure of the Sasanian empire, has also contributed materially to knowledge of inscriptional Middle Persian and Parthian. The Greek version includes various renderings of such Middle Iranian proper names as *krtyr/kltyr*. When referring to the famous high priest, it is rendered as Greek Karteir, revealing a deliberately archaizing pronunciation, but, when referring to another person, the Greek rendering is



Kirdeir, adapted to contemporary Middle Persian phonetics. Owing to religious principles, the high priest Kardēr's inscriptions at Sar-Mašhad (KSM), Naqš-e Rostam (KNRm), Naqš-e Rajab (KNRb), and the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt (KKZ, immediately below the Middle Persian version of ŠKZ) are in Middle Persian only. In this connection it is worth mentioning that the monolingual Middle Persian inscription of Abnūn, found at Barm-e Delak (q.v.) and dated in the year 3 of Šāpūr's reign, shows a composition very similar to that of Kardēr's NRb (Skjærvø).

Two of six rectangular recesses hewn into the rock at Hājīābād in Fārs are covered respectively by Middle Persian and Parthian versions of an inscription (ŠH), in which a shooting by Šāpūr is described (MacKenzie). It is not clear whether the remaining four recesses were destined for further versions of the same text, for documentation of similar feats, or both. At any rate, the parallel "shooting inscription" at Tang-e Borāq (ŠTBq; Gropp, in Hinz, 1969, pp. 229-37) is also only bilingual, as is Šāpūr's inscription at Bīšāpūr (q.v.; ŠVŠ).

The monumental Middle Persian and Parthian inscription at Paikuli (NPi; Herzfeld, 1924; Humbach and Skjærvø) is a description of events in connection with Narseh's accession to the throne in 293 and is thus an extraordinary document on Sasanian political practice. There is no Greek version, and Parthian appeared for the last time. In his inscription at Bīšāpūr (NVŠ) Narseh dispensed with Parthian, as did Šāpūr II and Sāpūr III at Tāq-e Bostān (ŠTBn 1, ŠTBn 2) and the author of the inscription at Meškīnšahr in Azarbaijan (ŠMS).

A cursive ductus closer to that of Book Pahlavi appears on private stone inscriptions of the later Sasanian and early Islamic periods. Among them horticultural work is recorded at Tang-e Kōšk (TX), but most are *daḵma* (places for exposure of the dead), funerary, or commemorative inscriptions like those found at Eqlīd, Taḳt-e Tāūs/Eṣṭaḳr, Maqšūdābād, Bīšāpūr, Tang-e Jelow, Shah Esmā'īl, Kāzerūn, Bāḡ-e Larda, Darband (q.v.), Istanbul, and Sian in Shensi province (Gropp, in Hinz, 1969, pp. 257-60; idem, 1970; idem 1975; Kasumova, 1979; idem, 1988; Tafazzolī; Humbach, 1988). The tomb inscription from Sian (874 C.E.) is in Chinese and Pahlavi but is not really bilingual: The Chinese text follows the Chinese pattern of commemorating an official (perhaps of Iranian descent), whereas the Pahlavi text dedicated to his wife is typically Mazdean in character (Humbach, 1988). A bilingual construction text in Arabic and Pahlavi from Qal'a Bahman in Fārs was published by Ali Hassuri, but his reading of the dates should be reconsidered. An Arabic and Pahlavi construction text



from Rādkān in Māzandarān (ca. 411/1020-21; Blair, no. 31) is a late offshoot of the Pahlavi tradition of Ṭabarestān, as is a similar text from Rasget in the same region, in which the Pahlavi is written in the same decorative paleography as the Arabic (Bivar and Yarshater, pls. 35-40).

The 199 Pahlavi ostraca reproduced by Jean de Menasce (1957) and deciphered by Dieter Weber, most of them collected by Herzfeld near Varāmīn and datable to the 6th century, are written in a cursive shorthand closely related to that found on the papyri from Egypt. The excavations at Dura Europos (q.v. ii) also yielded Pahlavi *dipinti*, one ostrakon, and several graffiti.

A large number of Sasanian seals has survived, many inscribed with uncial or cursive script, though the characters are often decomposed into their single elements. Richard N. Frye (1960) distinguished three main types. The common type of private seal includes conventional figures or monograms, to which proper names, religious slogans, or both have been added (e.g., *'pst'n 'L yzd'n* "(I take) refuge in the gods," *YWM ŠPYR* "(May my?) day (be) good," *l'st* or *l'sty* "truthful, righteous," *l'styhy* "truth, rectitude"). Of greater historical value is the second type, personal seals belonging to officials and dignitaries, whose inscriptions expressed political power (e.g., *whwdynšhpwhry ZY 'nblkpty* "Wehdēnšābuhr, master of the storehouse," *w'l'n ZY mgw 'L 'twlplnbg'n* "Wārān, the magus (assigned?) to Ādurfarnbayān"). The third type consists of seals of office with no figures but only writing, usually with a place name plus the office but no personal name (e.g., *wh'ltħštl štlđst'n mgwh* "the 'magushood' of the city of Wehardaxšahr/Wehardašēr"). A special group consists of magic seals, which sometimes contain relatively long inscriptions (Gyselen, 1995). Extensive collections of available material have been published by Philippe Gignoux and Rika Gyselen (Gignoux, 1978; Gignoux and Gyselen; Gyselen, 1993; for bullae, usually found in multiples on single items, see Frye, 1973; Göbl, 1976).

Parthian.

Unlike the coin legends of the Frataraka governors and petty kings of Persis, those of the Arsacids are of limited epigraphic value. Until the time of Vologases I (51-77 C.E.) they were exclusively in Greek; then one or two Parthian letters were added, but full Parthian legends did not appear before Mithridates IV (ca. 130), and even then they were graphically unsatisfactory. With rare exceptions they included no ruler's personal name, and years are rare (Sellwood; Alram, pp. 121-37). The Gotarsēs Geopothros mentioned in a



Greek inscription on a relief at Sar-e Pol in Kordestān (Gropp, 1986) recalls the Gotarzēs mentioned on the relief of Mithridates II (123-87 B.C.E.) hewn into the rock at Bīsotūn (Silvestre de Sacy, 1815, p. 191, pl. I) but now destroyed.

Outstanding among epigraphic sources are the ostraca discovered at Nisa (in Turkmenistan), the ancient royal capital of the Parthians. There are a total of 1,448 items inscribed with black ink (D'yakonov and Livshits, 1976-79). Many of them bear dates in the Arsacid era corresponding to years of the 1st century B.C.E. Similar materials were later excavated at other sites in Turkmenistan (Livshits, 1977, pp. 157-58; idem, 1984b). In Persia only one Parthian ostrakon has come to light, at Šahr-e Qūmes west of Dāmḡān (Bivar, 1970), but more have been discovered at Dura Europos (q.v. ii).

Other Parthian materials include the inscription at Kal-e Jangal, the rock inscription of one Vologases at Bīsotūn, and a small relief, perhaps of the same ruler (Gropp, 1970, pp. 200-201, pl. 101/1). The only pre-Sasanian Parthian stone inscriptions of some relevance are the bilingual (Parthian and Greek) inscription of Arsaces Vologeses of Mesene, son of Mithridates (Morano), and that of Artabanus V, discovered at Susa, both dated in the year 462 of the Seleucid era (151 C.E.). The latter was discussed by Henning (1952) in connection with the Elymaic inscriptions at Tang-e Sarvāk in Kūzestān (2nd century C.E.) and Elymaic coins.

Chorasmian.

Whereas books in Late Chorasmian are written in Arabic script, Middle Chorasmian inscriptions (less precisely called “Old Chorasmian”) are written in a script of the Pahlavi type (see CHORASMIA iii). Two small early inscriptions on clay vessels from the site of Koy-Krylgan Kala are tentatively attributed to the 2nd or 1st century B.C.E. (Livshits, 1968, p. 435). Middle Chorasmian is, however, attested mainly through coin legends (Vainberg), a large number of dated inscriptions in ink on ossuaries excavated at Tok Kala (Tolstov and Livshits; Gudkova; Henning, 1965), and inscriptions on silver vessels, some of them dated (Henning, 1965, p. 167). The dates are apparently in the same unknown era as those on the documents of wood and leather from Toprak Kala (Livshits, 1984a).

Sogdian.

Paleographically the Sogdian coins fall into two groups, the smaller with



legends in Bukharan script, the larger with legends in Samarkand uncial script (Frye, 1949; Smirnova, 1963). Although the Bukharan script is attested only fragmentarily on these coins and a few utensils (Livshits, Kaufman, and D'yakonov), the Samarkand variant is well known, particularly from Sogdian Buddhist manuscripts written in the calligraphic "sutra style" and juridical and economic manuscripts from Mount Mugh (Panjikant). An earlier stage of development can be recognized from the Sogdian letters found at Dunhuang (in Xinjiang) and is epigraphically attested in most of the more than 600 short rock inscriptions discovered by Karl Jettmar on the Upper Indus (Sims-Williams).

Notable inscriptions in cursive ductus include one found in the Ladakh region of the Himalayas (Müller; Klyashtornyĭ and Livshits, 1972, p. 83 no. 3); the Old Turkish-Sogdian-Chinese inscription of Karabalgasun in the Orhon region of Mongolia (Hansen; Yoshida; Hamilton); the Sogdian-Turkish inscriptions from Sevreĭ Somon on the southern border of the Gobi desert and Bugut in Mongolia (Klyashtornyĭ and Livshits, 1971; idem, 1972); and twenty-five small inscriptions (ostraca and so on) from the temple at Panjikant (Livshits and Shkoda 1982).

Bactrian.

The only unequivocal trace of the Aramaic tradition found on the former territory of Bactria is a short inscription from Āy Kānom (q.v.) south of the Oxus (Livshits, 1977, pp. 166 n. 15, 167; Livshits and D'yakonov, in Rapin, 1992, p. 105), whereas the Greek tradition is well attested there (Huyse, pp. 113-15; Rapin, pp. 95-121, 387-92). The coins of the Greco-Bactrian rulers have legends in Greek, and even from north of the Oxus there is a Greek dedication to the deified river, dating from the 2nd century B.C.E. (Litvinskiĭ, Vinogradov, and Pichikiyan). Inscriptions in the Bactrian language were written in a variant of the Greek alphabet.

In the Indo-Iranian borderlands numerous coins with inscriptions in more or less correct Greek were issued at the beginning of the common era by such rulers as the Indo-Parthians Azes, Azilises (qq.v.), and Hermaios. From the epigraphic point of view, the coins of the Kushan dynasty of Bactria are the most noteworthy. The copper issues of Kujula Kadphises include bilingual inscriptions in corrupt Greek and Middle Indian, but those on the gold coins of his successor, Vima Kadphises, are quite correct. Bilingualism was abandoned a few decades later by Kanishka, whose first issues are inscribed only in Greek



but who later changed to exclusive use of Bactrian language and script.

Thanks to the efforts of French and Soviet archeologists in particular, a substantial number of Bactrian inscriptions have been discovered. An outstanding epigraphic task is the decipherment of the inscription of a Kushan king named Vima (Ooēmo Taktio) dated in the year 279 of the Seleucid era, month Gorpiaios, found at Dašt-e Nāwor (q.v.), of which only poor photographs survive (Davary and Humbach, 1976). The Bactrian text is accompanied by some lines in Kharoṣṭhī and some in the same unknown script attested from Issyk and Āy Kānom (Vertogradova).

A similar date (279 or 275) occurs in an unfinished inscription from Sork Kotal, consisting of the beginning of the first line on a large monolith. The sanctuary was perhaps beginning to fall into disrepair in that year. Later reconstruction work, begun in the year 31 of an unknown era, is recorded in a monumental inscription preserved in three parallel versions, which, however, differ noticeably in their final lines. The earliest is version B (thirty-one blocks inscribed rather carelessly); the next is A (twenty-one blocks; for correct rearrangement of the blocks of the two versions, see Humbach, 1966-67, II, pls. 17-19). Both were reused in construction of a well (Gershevitch, 1979; idem, 1980). Version M, preserved on a monolith, includes additions in the last lines that are not present in B and A. M is thus the final and most authoritative version. Although it is carefully inscribed, decipherment is complicated by unsystematic writing of final vowels and perhaps by omission of certain simple words because of constraints on space, which has resulted in the often contradictory evidence about which Henning complained (1960, p. 47). The so-called “Palamedes inscription” from Sork Kotal provides a combination of a Bactrian and a short Greek text. A new long monumental inscription, giving the genealogy of Kanishka, was made known by Nicholas Sims-Williams at the conference of the Societas Iranica Europaea in Cambridge in September 1995 (P. O. Skjærvø, personal communication).

In the area between the Hindu Kush and the Oxus Soviet archeologists have unearthed a monumental inscription at Delbarjīn (q.v.; Livshits and Kruglikova). Notable findings made north of the Oxus include the graffiti from Kara Tepe in Tajikistan, written in an early cursive ductus, one dated year 35 of an unknown era, another year 97 (Livshits, 1969; Harmatta, 1969; Humbach, 1970), as well as the monumental inscription from Airtam dated in the year 4 of Huvishka (Turgunov, Livshits, and Rtveladze 1981)



The lapidary script of the Bactrian stone inscriptions and coins seems to have been influenced by the cursive ductus attested at Kara Tepe. After the Sasanian conquest the cursive script itself was revived in Bactrian inscriptions on coins produced by the Sasanian Kushanshahs (Humbach 1966-67, I, pp. 50-52), followed by the Huns (pp. 53-59) and the Turkish rulers of Kabul and Gandhara (pp. 59-66). Among the latter, whom Robert Göbl took to be Huns as well (1967, I, p. 1), there are several issues with bilingual and trilingual legends in Bactrian, Pahlavi, and Sanskrit.

The latest known Bactrian inscriptions have been discovered in the Tochi valley (Wazīrestān) in a group comprising an Arabic-Sanskrit inscription (ITAS) dated in the Islamic era 243/857, Sanskrit year 32 (= Laukika 3932 = 857 C.E.); a Sanskrit-Bactrian inscription (ITSB), with Sanskrit date 38 (= Laukika 3938 = 863 C.E.) and Bactrian 632, a synchronism suggesting that the Bactrian era began in 231 C.E.; an Arabic-Bactrian inscription (ITAB) dated in Bactrian 635 (866 C.E.); and a Bactrian inscription with traces of an unidentifiable script (ITBX) dated in Bactrian 636 (867 C.E.). Whereas the three Bactrian texts, written in cursive script, are the latest evidence for the epigraphic use of the Bactrian language, the two Arabic versions seem be the earliest evidence of the language of the conquerors in the Indo-Iranian borderlands (Humbach, 1994). See also [AŚOKA](#).

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Figure 1. Trilingual Middle Persian-Greek-Parthian inscription of Ardašīr and Ohrmazd/Zeus at Naqš-e Rostam.

Figure 2. Trilingual Middle Persian-Parthian-Greek inscription of Šāpūr at Naqš-e Rajab.