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Middle Persian Private Inscriptions in the Sasanian and Post-Sasanian Period: Funerary and Memorial Inscriptions

Manuchar Gugushvili¹ 

Middle Persian Private Inscriptions in the Sasanian and Post-Sasanian Period: Funerary and Memorial Inscriptions, Cyrus Nasrollahzadeh, Tehran, Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 2019, 2 vol. (vol. 1: Text. vol. 2: Picture), 340 + 272 pp, ISBN: 978-964-426-998-1; Vol 1: 978-964-426-996-7; Vol 2: 978-964-426-997-4.

The Sasanian era is one of the most important periods of Iranian history and there are many books and articles written by archaeologists, historians and linguists about this period (for the latest articles about the Sasanian era see: Rostami & Aryamanesh, 2020; Maksymiuk, 2021; Skupniewicz, 2021; Matloubkari & Shaikh Baikloo, 2022; Skupniewicz, 2022). The book “Private Persian Inscriptions of Middle and post-Sasanian Era (Epitaph, Memorial)” is written by Cyrus Nasrollahzadeh, an Iranian linguist and published in two volumes by Liberal Arts and Cultural Studies Research Center.

The first volume of this book consists of three chapters with titles: “Burials in Ancient Persia”, “Memorial Inscriptions” “Private Sasanian-Pahlavi Inscriptions of Iran’s Christian”. Also, in the end of the book there are glossary, bibliography and index. The second volume of this book includes photograph of inscriptions.

As we know there are two kinds of inscriptions from the Sasanian period: governmental imperial inscriptions and private inscriptions. The difference between these two categories is the use of “inscriptional detached alphabet”. This kind of alphabet belongs to Sasanian kings or courtiers. These belong to kings like Artaxerxes I, Narseh, Shapur II or high-ranking religious and official authorities like *Abnūn* inscription, Kartir, Mihr-Narseh and others.

Another characteristic feature of these inscriptions is that they are trilingual (Sasanian Middle Persian, Parthian Language and Greek). Being trilingual has the promotional and political message in proof and confirmation of the new Sasanian dynasty. The Greek part of inscription is for international language of most of Syria and Eastern Roman Empire and was for the purpose of “globalize speeches of Shapur in lingua franca of that time” the Parthian language was for the Parthian society of the Sasanian Empire and the Middle Persian was the official language of that period.

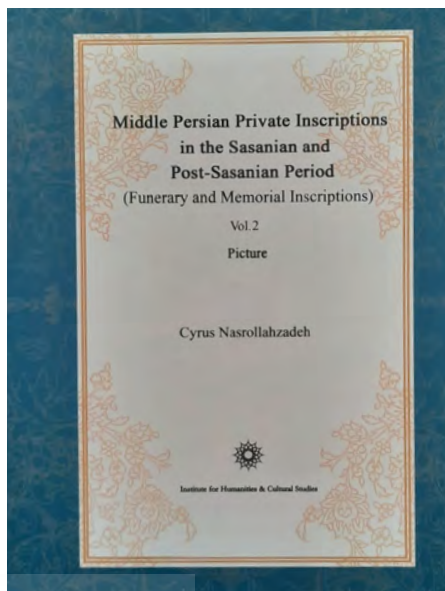
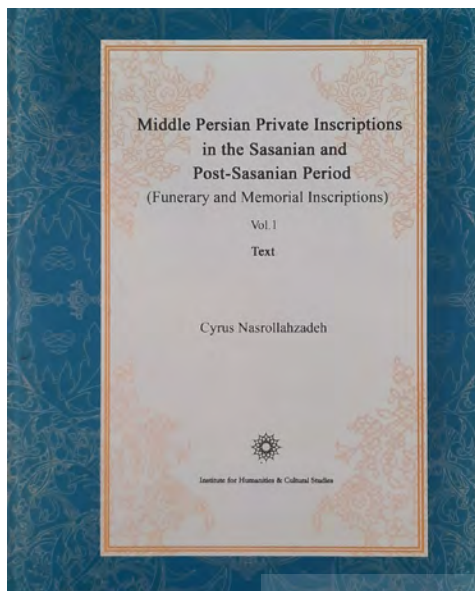
The second category is inscriptions from the late Sasanian period and the beginning of Islam in Iran that were written in “Pahlavi continuous or formal alphabets” and are familiar as private inscriptions. In other words, private inscriptions have a

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number of varieties. One is epitaphs that are in abundance while and the other category is memorial inscriptions.

All these private inscriptions, except in two cases, were inscribed in Pahlavi continuous alphabets or formal alphabets. One of these two cases is “two inscriptions of Shushtar” that is inscribed in continuous alphabets and perhaps belongs to the Sasanian period and the other is the Derbent inscriptions that include continuous and detached alphabets simultaneously. Beside these inscriptional resources from the early Islamic period in Iran, other inscriptions have been found as well.

Some of the private inscriptions considered in this book are estimated to be 122 pieces. Explaining method of each inscription consists of a brief introduction, how it was found and a research history. Then there are transliteration and phonetic transcription and Persian translation and in response to each one, there are linguistic and historical attachments.

In the first chapter, **Burials in Ancient Persia**, the author explains about the death with Indo-European worldview and follows by examining burials in Indo-European costumes as well as death terminologies in Indo-European languages. In the following, there are types of burial in ancient Iran, including in the Sasanian period based on archaeological evidences.

The author in the following examines Zoroastrian resources like Avesta and based on that, explains the Zoroastrian burial practice. The author has not forgotten Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* and hence, described some of the examples of burials that are reflected in the poems of this epical work. As a matter of fact, the burial ceremony of Siamak, Fereydon, Iraj as well as Esfandiar and Rostam have been mentioned.

Burial terminology in epitaphs also have concluded in the following of this book and the author explains words like *astōdān* (Ossuary), *daxmag* (Tower of Silence), *ašwar* or *aspānūr*, *tnbryk* and *gōr* (grave) as used in inscriptions.

Epitaphs are also included in this book. Some important parts of private inscription are Zoroastrian societal epitaphs that are found in Iran, China and Turkey. These epitaphs are based on the burial method prevalent in the Zoroastrian religion. The most ancient of these inscriptions are the last era of Yazdegerd III and the newest is related to Lajim Tower in Mazandaran, north of Iran.

The second chapter entitled **Memorial Inscriptions**, where inscriptions are sometimes about well devoted or land and sometimes about the visit of Zoroastrians from places like India or renovating a castle in Persia. These kinds of inscriptions have found in Iran, India, Derbent of Caucasus. We could count inscriptions in India's Kanheri Caves and also Bishapur memorial inscription, Tangeh Khoshk inscriptions and Pahlavi language inscription in Derbent, Russia.

The third chapter of this book, **Private Sasanian-Pahlavi Inscriptions of Iran's Christian**, is about Christian Private Inscriptions. In Iran Christianity got its firm footing during the Sasanian period. Even the Sasanian Empire succeeded to developed one section of Iranian Christianity named Nestorianism against Orthodox Christianity in Byzantine. There are inscriptions available in Sasanian-Pahlavi language on this matter.

Istanbul inscription in Sasanian Pahlavi language is obtained from Tashkasp Courtyard which is inscribed on a coffin. Also, on a cross has been found in southern India with an inscription in Pahlavi language. Furthermore, in Harat, a cross with Pahlavi inscription has been found. The second volume of this book contains photographs of inscriptions that were inscribed on buildings, coffins and crosses.

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