Irene Madreiter. “Der Raum alltäglicher weiblicher Literalität im Achaimeniden-Reich”

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- 1 This contribution assesses the significance of literacy in the Achaemenid Empire. In the A.'s view, the ability to read and write was not held in high esteem among the Persians (p.123) and consequently, there was little scope for literacy in private contexts, which in turn explains the absence of evidence for female literateness. In the imperial context, writing predominantly served as a technology of social and political control (p. 129). The situation in the Persian heartland is then contrasted with the evidence from the provinces of Egypt and Babylonia.
- 2 Central aspects of the argumentation are questionable, in particular the equation of absence of evidence in form of private archives with absence of (desire for/need for) writing. Were it not for the peculiar medium of clay tablets, the finding of a low level of literacy and the use of writing for the purpose of ostentation only would equally apply to Babylonia. Note also that the Babylonian documentation contains a not negligible number of texts issued in places such as Susa and Humadēšu in southwest Iran, showing that writing did play a role e.g. in transactions among private individuals also in this region not adequately covered by the documentation at our disposal. Peculiarities of the Achaemenid Empire such as the strong influence exerted by its neighbouring cuneiform cultures of Babylonia and especially Elam as well as the integration of royal family's female members into the state economy as evidenced by

the Persepolis archives (which at least allows for the possibility of female written agency) are not addressed.

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