

MASSIMILIANO VASSALLI

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EDUCATION

17th Advanced Training Course in Bookshop Management, Rome Mar. — Jul. 2023

PhD in Philology and History of the Ancient World (Iranian studies) 2017 — 2021

- Sapienza University of Rome
- Dissertation: *The figure of Zarduxšt on the path of sacred history. Transliteration, transcription, translation of Dēnkard VII and analysis of the narrative structure*
- Final grade: *cum laude*

Master's degree in Historical Sciences 2010 — 2012

- Sapienza University of Rome
- Thesis: *Epigraphy and palaeography in the middle-republican age. The contribution of the inscriptions of Rome and Praeneste*
- Final grade: *cum laude*

Bachelor's degree in History, History of Religions, and Anthropology 2005 — 2010

- Sapienza University of Rome
- Thesis: *A website for the Res Gestae. Projects and working materials.*
- Final grade: *cum laude*

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Research Fellow, Sapienza University of Rome Jun. 2024 — May 2025

- Research grant [assegnista di ricerca cat. B) tipologia II] within the PRIN project *PolEmA - Polycentric Empires in Western Asia. Connectivity, texts and settlements from Ctesiphon to Afrasiyab and beyond*, in collaboration with the University of Pisa and University of Turin.

Research Fellow, Sapienza University of Rome 2023 — 2024

- Research grant [assegnista di ricerca cat. B) tipologia II] within the PRIN project *Cultural interactions and linguistic contacts: Iranian and non-Iranian languages contacts from antiquity to contemporaneity.*

Research Fellow, Sapienza University of Rome 2021 — 2022

- Research grant [assegnista di ricerca cat. B) tipologia II] within the PRIN project *Eranshahr: Man Landscape and Society in Arsacid and Sasanian Iran. Texts, material culture and society from Arsaces to Yazdegard III*, in collaboration with the University of Bologna and the University of Turin.

Scholarship holder, Sapienza University of Rome

Sept. — Dec. 2019

- Winner of the call within the Department of Glottology of Sapienza - University of Rome, for the development of a platform for the collection and management of written sources in Old and Middle Iranian languages.

Scholarship holder, Sapienza University of Rome

April 2019

- Winner of the call within the Department of Glottology of Sapienza - University of Rome, for the development of a platform for the collection and management of written sources in Old and Middle Iranian languages.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE**Communities, Diversity, and Preservation of Cultural Heritage**

2025

Workshop teacher, Sapienza University of Rome

- Teacher in a workshop (50h per year) organised within the master's degree course *Cultural Heritage in the Near and Middle East, and Africa*.

Travel literature Workshop teacher, Sapienza University of Rome

2024 — Present

- Teacher in a workshop (50h per year) organised within the master's degree course *Cultural Heritage in the Near and Middle East, and Africa*.

New Persian Workshop teacher, Sapienza University of Rome

2021 — 2024

- Teacher in a workshop (44/50h per year) organised within the master's degree course *Cultural Heritage in the Near and Middle East, and Africa*.

Middle Persian Workshop teacher, Sapienza University of Rome

2021

- Teacher in a workshop (44h per year) organised within the master's degree course *Cultural Heritage in the Near and Middle East, and Africa*.

High school teacher, Italian School of Tehran “Pietro della Valle”

2014 — 2016

- Teacher of history and philosophy.

Secondary school teacher, Italian School of Tehran “Pietro della Valle”

2014 — 2016

- Teacher of history and geography.

Italian teacher, Italian School of Tehran “Pietro della Valle”

2015 — 2016

- Teacher of a B1 Italian language course for Iranians.

AWARDS AND RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**MSCA Postdoctoral Global Fellowships “TRAVELS”**

2025 — Present

- Project number and name: 101204827 — TRAVELS
- Topic: Horizon-MSCA-2024-PF-01-01 — MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships 2024
- The project seeks to retrace the history of Iranian Zoroastrians in the late modern period (1773–1854), weaving together European travel accounts and Zoroastrian sources in order to situate this community within world history, and to explore the complex entanglements between East and West.

- Project manager** “Rich & Ker Porter – Studio delle antichità iraniche in Kurdistan attraverso gli occhi dei viaggiatori europei” 2023 — 2024
- Project manager of a one-year Sapienza Research Call “Avvio alla Ricerca - Tipo 2,” focusing on the study of the archival material of the two travellers C.J. Rich and Sir R. Ker Porter.
- Archival research**, in Manchester, London (UK) Mar. — Apr. 2024
- Archival research on the diaries of 19th-century British travellers to Iran, conducted at various British institutions, including the University of Manchester (Rylands Library), the British Library, and SOAS.
- Archival research**, in London (UK) Nov. — Dec. 2022
- Archival research relating to Rich and Rawlinson's testimony on Zoroastrian or Sasanian ruins in south Kurdistan at the British Library, Royal Asiatic Society, and Royal Geographic Society.
- Cataloguing Manuscripts in the UK**, in Cambridge, London (UK) Nov. — Dec. 2019
- Study trip for cataloguing Zoroastrian manuscripts at the institutions of University Library (Cambridge), Ancient India & Iran Trust (Cambridge), SOAS (London), British Library (London), and Royal Asiatic Society (London).
- MAIKI Paikuli Project Collaborator**, in Slemani (Kurdistan, Iraq) Apr. — May 2019
- External collaborator for the installation and musealisation of the Narseh inscription at the Slemani Museum in Iraqi Kurdistan, in collaboration with Kurdish Institutions, the Department of Antiquities of Sapienza and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation.
- Cataloguing of archaeological material**, in Firuzabad (Shiraz, Iran) Sept. — Oct. 2018
- Study and cataloguing of archaeological material at the deposit of the Antiquity Department of Firuzabad.

PUBLICATIONS

Vassalli M., “A Portrait of Sasanian Dusk: A Study in the Language of the Empire Collapse,” in *Sēnmurw*, forthcoming (Peer-reviewed paper).

Insom C., **Vassalli M.**, “On Roads and Ruins. Across the Zagros and the Shahrazur in the accounts of Western travellers in the early 19th century,” in *Atlante del Vicino Oriente Antico*, forthcoming (Peer-reviewed paper).

Vassalli M., *Zarathustra nella letteratura pahlavi*, Rome: Paideia, 2024. (book).

Cereti C.G., Gaspari A., Marchetti C., **Vassalli M.** (eds.), *Scienze dell'antichità. Storia, archeologia, antropologia* 29/3, 2023 (editing).

Vassalli M., “European Travellers' Accounts of the Zoroastrians in Iran,” in *Sēnmurw* 2, 2023, 191-219 (Peer-reviewed paper).

Vassalli M., “How to Develop a Fabula: The Case of Dēnkard VII,” in *Journal of Persianate Studies* 14, 2021, 111-139 (Peer-reviewed paper).

Vassalli M., “Difendere la propria identità culturale: l'incesto come atto pio nello zoroastrismo,” in S. Quadrelli & E. Urbani (eds.) *I figli di Eolo. Il motivo mitico e letterario dell'incesto tra antico e moderno*, 2020, 93-102 (book chapter).

Cereti C.G., Faticoni B., Marchetti C., Terribili G., **Vassalli M.**, “Il Monumento di Narseh da Paikuli a Sulaimaniyah. Nuove attività archeologiche e allestimento espositivo del materiale presso lo Slemani Museum,” in *Scienze dell'Antichità*, 2020, 3-11 (Peer-reviewed paper).

Cereti C.G., Colliva L., Terribili G., **Vassalli M.**, “The Monument of Paikuli. The activities of the Italian Archaeological Mission in Iraqi Kurdistan, past and present,” in *Proceedings of the 3rd International Scientific Conference; Archaeology and Heritage of Kurdistan*, 2019 (conference proceedings).

Vassalli M., “Il progetto ASCReS,” in *Frate Francesco*, 2019, 167-174 (Peer-reviewed paper).

Italia Epigrafica Digitale, vol 12.5.1, Rome, 2017 (Contributions of specific inscriptions).

Available at

<https://rosa.uniroma1.it/rosa03/italia_epigrafica_digitale/issue/view/IED%2012.5.1/54>.

Italia Epigrafica Digitale, vol 12.4.1, Rome, 2017 (Contributions of specific inscriptions).

Available at

<https://rosa.uniroma1.it/rosa03/italia_epigrafica_digitale/issue/view/IED%2012.4.1/51>.

Italia Epigrafica Digitale, vol 12.3.1, Rome, 2017 (Contributions of specific inscriptions).

Available at

<https://rosa.uniroma1.it/rosa03/italia_epigrafica_digitale/issue/view/IED%2012.3.1/49>.

PRESENTATIONS

“A Portrait of Sasanian Dusk: A Study in the Language of Empire Collapse.” PolEmA – Polycentric Empires in Western Asia, Department of Antiquities, Sapienza University of Rome, Roma, Italian (July 2025).

“The ‘Zoroastrian Idolatry’ According to 19th-Century Europeans.” The Third International Conference. Anatolia – The Caucasus – Iran: Ethnic and Linguistic Contacts, Institute of Oriental Studies, RAU, Yerevan, Armenia (May 2025).

“Weaving Faith and Fiction – Theology and Narrative Entwined in the *Dēnkard VII*.” ‘A Spark of the Glimmer of the Original Light’: A Workshop on the *Dēnkard* as Literature, Theology, and Scholasticism, University of Oxford, Oxford, Great Britain (October 2024).

“Idolatry, ugliness, and poverty: Europeans’ perceptions and prejudices towards Iranian Zoroastrians in the early 19th century.” International Conference on Contemporary Iranian Studies, Iran Academia and Goethe University, Frankfurt, Germany (August 2024).

“Idolatry, ugliness, and poverty: Europeans’ perceptions and prejudices towards Iranian Zoroastrians in the early 19th century.” International Conference on Contemporary Iranian Studies, Iran Academia and Goethe University, Frankfurt, Germany (August 2024).

“The TGAW project: interference and compatibility, a year later.” Iranian and Non-Iranian Languages and Cultures in Contact from the Past to the Present, Sapienza University of Rome, Roma, Italy (May 2024).

“Routes and Ruins: The Shahrizor and the Zagros in the Accounts of 19th-Century British Travellers.” Final Round Table of the PRIN 2017 Project *Eranshahr: uomo, ambiente e società nell'Iran arsaacide e sasanide*, Alma Mater Studiorum, Ravenna, Italy (February 2024). With Dr. Camilla Insom.

“TGIAW – A Multimodal platform for non-literary sources in Iranian Ancient World.” 34th Deutscher Orientalistentag, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany (September 2022). With Prof. Maria Carmela Benvenuto.

“The Monument of Paikuli: the Activities of the Italian Archaeological Mission in Iraqi Kurdistan, Past and Present.” 3rd International Scientific Conference (Archaeology and Heritage of Kurdistan), Salahaddin University, Erbil, Iraq (April 2019). With Prof. Carlo G. Cereti, Prof. Luca Colliva, Prof. Gianfilippo Terribili.

“The Use of cunning by the Goodness to Deceive the Evil in Pahlavi Literature.” Symposia Iranica, University of St. Andrews, St. Andrews, Scotland, April 2019.

“Gurgīh hūnēnd - procreating wolves: the Mazdak episode in the ‘Life of Zarathuštra’ (*Dēnkard VII*).” Semi di Sapienza, Sapienza University of Rome, Roma, Italy (March 2019).

“Defending one's cultural identity: incest as a pious act in Mazdaism.” I figli di Eolo. Il motivo mitico e letterario dell'incesto nel passaggio tra culture e epoche diverse, University of L'Aquila, L'Aquila, Italy (February 2019).