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A Stone Jar with Inscriptions of Darius I in Four Languages

Description of the vessel - Inscriptions of Darius I in four languages are incised on the fragments of a stone jar in the Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem, BLMJ 1979 (fig. 1-2). An inscription on one shoulder of the jar is in Egyptian, in hieroglyphic script (figs. 3-4). A different text appears on the opposite shoulder, in Old Persian, Elamite and Akkadian (figs. 5-7). The jar is mentioned and illustrated in the guide to the museum; it is also described and illustrated in the catalogue of an exhibition at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 1997-98.¹ It is an artifact of a familiar kind, and the inscriptions

¹ *Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem, Guide to the Collection* (Tel Aviv, 1992, 1994), 27-28. *Land der Bibel, Jerusalem und die Königstädte des Alten Orients, Schätze aus dem Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem*, ed. Wilfried Seipel (Vienna: Skira, 1997), 115-17



have familiar texts, but the combination of the four versions on a piece from the reign of Darius is unique.

Old Persian *d-a-r-y-v-u-š*: XŠ [: *v-z-r-k*]

Elamite ^{DIŠ}*da-ri-ia-ma-u-iš* ^{DIŠ}EŠŠANA i[*r-šá-ir-ra*]

Akkadian ^m*da-ri-ia-a-muš* LUGA[L GAL-ú]

Darius, Great King

Egyptian *nysw.t bi.ty nb tꜣ.wy Intrywš 'nh ꜥ.t ḥsb.t 36*

King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Lord of the Two Lands, Darius, living forever, year 36

An appropriate siglum for the inscriptions would be DVsc (in the system established by Kent and extended by Mayrhofer and others) or VDc (in the system suggested by Schmitt).²

no. 164. An image of the restored vessel, an image of the cuneiform inscriptions, and a description of the object can be viewed at www.blmj.org/TheMuseum/highlights/Higmain1.html (second row, second thumbnail).

² Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian*, American Oriental Society 53 (New Haven, 1953); Manfred Mayrhofer, *Supplement zur Sammlung der altpersischen Inschriften*, SÖAW 338 (Vienna, 1978); Rüdiger Schmitt, *Beiträge zu altpersischen Inschriften* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1999), 61 n. 6; *idem*, "Eine weitere Alabaster-Vase mit Artaxerxes-Inschrift," *AMI NF* 33 (2001), 197f.

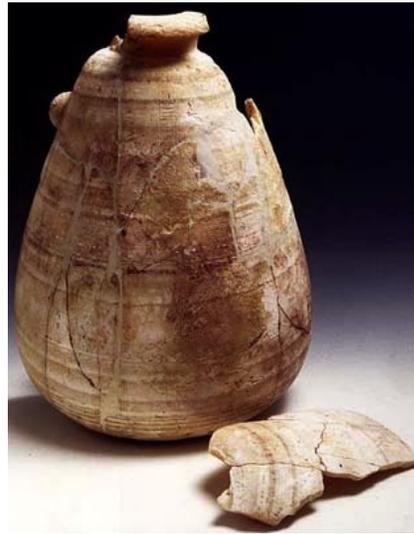
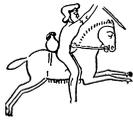


fig. 1. BLMJ 1979.
(photo: David Harris)

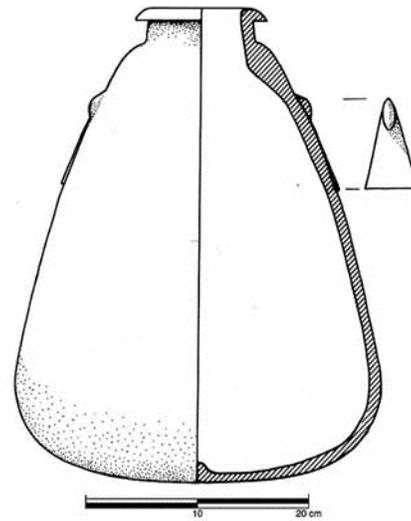
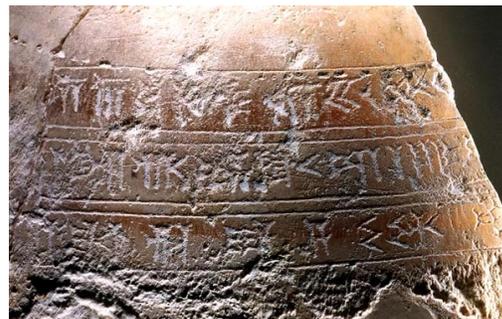


fig. 2. profile and section.
(drawing: Dalit Weinblatt-Krausz)



figs. 3-4 (left). hieroglyphic text.
(photo: David Harris; drawing: Dalit Weinblatt-Krausz.)



figs. 5-6 (below). cuneiform texts.
(photo left: David Harris; photo right: M. Amar and M. Grejevsky.)



The vessel is of the kind often referred to as “alabastron,” with a rounded bottom and thick everted rim. One of the two unpierced lug handles is preserved. It is made of a fine-grained white calcite.³ The overall dimensions of the jar are 37 x 30 cm.

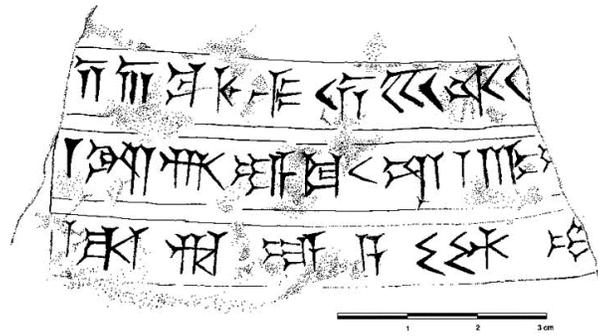


fig. 7. BLMJ 1979: cuneiform texts (drawing: Takayoshi Oshima & Dalit Weinblatt-Krausz)



fig. 8 BLMJ 1979: purple stain.
(photo: Regula Müller-Shacham)

There is a purple stain on the outer surface (fig. 8). The museum guidebook suggests that it is purple dye from the *murex* mussel. Mineralogical analysis of a minute sample has not resulted in a positive identification. Dr. Shimon Ilani of The Geological Survey of Israel finds the main elements to be aluminum, silicon and oxygen, with some iron. He speculates that the

³ Loosely called “alabaster” in labels and catalogues. Other vessels of the same kind with inscriptions of Achaemenid kings are said to be made of alabaster or aragonite. Cf. Schmitt, *AMI NF* 33, 191 n. 2.



pigment might be kaolinite ($\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3 \cdot 2\text{SiO}_2 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$) enriched with hematite (Fe_2O_3). He finds it equally possible that it is organic. The stain on the outside of the jar is presumably not a trace of the ancient contents.

The Egyptian hieroglyphic text runs vertically, on the shoulder

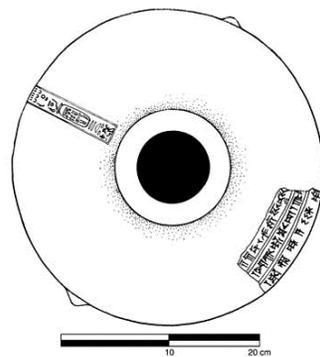


fig. 9. BLMJ 1979: reconstructed position of texts (Dalit Weinblatt-Krausz)

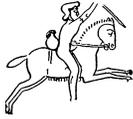
between the handles, roughly centered between them (fig. 9). The cuneiform texts run horizontally, with the Old Persian uppermost, Elamite in the middle, Babylonian lowest. Because the fragments that bear the cuneiform texts do not join directly with the other parts of the vessel, the position of the block of cuneiform with respect to the lugs,

on the shoulder opposite the Egyptian text, is not certain. The shape, thickness and appearance of the pieces with the cuneiform text exactly match those of the other joined pieces. The pattern of banding matches so exactly that there can be no serious doubt that all the pieces come from a single vessel (fig. 10).

The Egyptian hieroglyphic text runs vertically, on the shoulder between the handles, roughly centered between them (fig. 9). The cuneiform texts run horizontally, with the Old Persian uppermost, Elamite in the middle, Babylonian lowest. Because the fragments that bear the cuneiform texts do not join directly with the other parts of the vessel, the position of the block of cuneiform with respect to the lugs,



fig. 10. BLMJ 1979: banding of fragments (photo: Regula Müller-Shacham)



Comparanda - The jar's provenience is not known. In shape and material the vessel resembles examples with inscriptions naming Darius, Xerxes and Artaxerxes (but it is bigger than some of the comparable jars). Most intact examples of comparable vessels were purchased, with hearsay proveniences (including the ruins of Persepolis and Babylon, as well as Syria, Egypt, and Bactria) or with no provenience. Fragments of similar vessels with inscriptions of Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes were excavated at Susa,⁴ Persepolis,⁵ Uruk,⁶ and Sepphoris in Galilee.⁷ An intact example with inscriptions of Xerxes was excavated in 1856 at the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus.⁸ An intact example with inscriptions of Artaxerxes was found in 1971 in a Sarmatian burial tumulus,

⁴ E.g., Georges Posener, *La Première domination perse en Égypte*, Bibliothèque d'Étude 11 (Cairo, 1936), 139f. nos. 38-42 (Darius, Susa), 80 (Artaxerxes, Susa).

⁵ Erich Schmidt, *Persepolis, II: Contents of the Treasury and Other Discoveries*, OIP 69 (Chicago, 1953), 87ff., pl. 51:3 = pl. 51:4 (granite, not calcite).

⁶ J.J.A. van Dijk, "Inscriptliche Funde," in: H. Lenzen (ed.), *XVI. vorläufige Bericht über die ... Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka*, Abhandlungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 5 (Berlin, 1960), 57-60 and pl. 33h, i; Mayrhofer, *Supplement 27* 4.9.4 (sherds from alabaster multilinguals of Xerxes).

⁷ Stolper, review of Mayrhofer, *Supplement*, *AfO* 27 (1980), 176; *idem* in: Rebecca Martin Nagy *et al.* (eds.), *Sepphoris in Galilee* (Raleigh: North Carolina Museum of Art, 1996), 166f.

⁸ Posener, *Première domination perse* 143 no. 51; Max Burchardt, "Datierte Denkmäler der Berliner Sammlung aus der Achämenidenzeit," *ZAS* 49 (1911), 76f., with bibliography.



subsequently excavated, near Orsk (Orenburg) in southern Russia.⁹

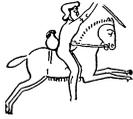
Comparable vessels of Xerxes and Artaxerxes have quadrilingual inscriptions giving the ruler's name and title in Old Persian, Elamite and Akkadian cuneiform and in Egyptian hieroglyphics. Comparable vessels of Darius, however, have inscriptions only in Egyptian, in hieroglyphic script.¹⁰ Identical inscriptions appear both on stone jars and

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Mayrhofer, *Supplement* 28 5.2, with earlier literature; Schmitt, *AMIN* 33, 197.

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See Burchardt, *ZÄS* 49, pls. VIII-X and pp. 74-76 (monolingual vessel of Darius, multilingual vessels of Xerxes and Artaxerxes, well illustrated); Posener, *Première domination perse*, 140-145 (monolingual hieroglyphic and multilingual vessels of Xerxes), 146f. (multilingual vessels of Artaxerxes), 148-151 (fragments of uncertain attribution); Kent, *Old Persian*, 115 s.vv. 'XVs' and 'AVs' (multilingual vessels of Xerxes and Artaxerxes); Mayrhofer, *Supplement*, 26 4.91-4.94 (multilingual vessels of Xerxes), 28 5.2-5.3 (multilingual vessels of Artaxerxes); *Ancient Persia, The Art of An Empire*, ed. Denise Schmandt-Besserat (catalogue of an exhibition at University Art Museum, University of Texas, Austin, 1978), 36f. no. 29 (entry = quadrilingual vessel of Xerxes, illustration = quadrilingual vessel of Artaxerxes) and 90 nos. 114 (entry = quadrilingual vessel of Artaxerxes, illustration = quadrilingual vessel of Xerxes); Gerry D. Scott, *Ancient Egyptian Art at Yale* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1986), 145 no. 79 and Robert K. Ritner, "The Earliest Attestation of the *kpd* Measure," in: Peter Der Manuelian (ed.), *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1996), 683-88 (multilingual vessel of Xerxes); Günter Schweiger, "Miscellanea Indoiranica: 3. Zwei beschriftete Gefäße im Museum Reza Abbasi in Tehran," in: H. Eichner et

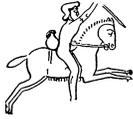


bottles and on stone dishes and bowls. The inscriptions change over time, in this sequence:¹¹

- 1 From the late reign of Darius (years 33 and 34, 489/88 and 488/87 BC, are attested), and the early reign of Xerxes (years 2 and 5, 484/83 and 481/80 BC, are attested), monolingual hieroglyphic inscription with the royal name, epithets, and

al. (eds.), *Fremd und Eigen, ... in memoriam Hartmut Katz* (Vienna: Edition Praesens, 2001), 245-247 (multilingual vessel of Artaxerxes); Rüdiger Schmitt, "Eine weitere Alabaster-Vase mit Artaxerxes-Inschrift," *AMI NF* 33 (2001), 191-201 (multilingual vessel of Artaxerxes, review of issues, literature, and edition of all multilingual vessels of Artaxerxes). An example with inscriptions of Xerxes has appeared in several auction sale catalogues of Sotheby's London and New York ("Egyptian, Middle Eastern, Greek, Etruscan, Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, and Roman Antiquities ...," cat. of a sale 12-13 December 1983, Sotheby's [London], no. 81 = "Egyptian, Classical and Western Asiatic Antiquities ...," cat. of an auction sale 8-9 Feb. 1985, Sotheby's [New York], no. 41 = "Greek, Roman, Egyptian and Western Asiatic Antiquities," cat. of an auction sale 17 Dec. 1991, Sotheby's [New York], no. 36). An example with inscriptions of Xerxes has also appeared in a sale catalogue of Antiquarium (New York) (cf. Ritner, *Studies Simpson*, 683 n. 3). One smaller vessel, c. 14 cm tall, is inscribed with the name of Darius in Old Persian script, within a cartouche: see Georges Michaélidis, "Quelques objets inédits d'époque perse," *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 43 (1943), 93-5; and Mayrhofer, *Supplement*, 17 3.13. The word-divider following the king's name suggests that it was copied (in antiquity or later?) from a longer text. Schweiger expresses doubt about the authenticity of the text (*Fremd und Eigen*, 243).

¹¹ See Schmitt, *AMI NF* 33 192 with references and bibliography.

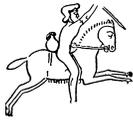


regnal year.

- 2 From the early reign of Xerxes (year 2 is attested), similar hieroglyphic inscriptions accompanied by Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian cuneiform versions of a text giving only the royal name and the title “Great King.”
- 3 From the reign of Xerxes (probably in or after regnal year 5), and the reign of Artaxerxes I (and perhaps Artaxerxes II or III), similar trilingual cuneiform inscriptions with matching hieroglyphic Egyptian text giving the royal name and the title “great Pharaoh.”
- 4 From the reign of Artaxerxes quadrilingual inscriptions with the title reduced to “King.”¹²

It is possible that this chronological development reflects political change. That is, the development from monolingual to multilingual, and the later change of epithets, from Egyptian to Achaemenid style, represents a change in the way in which the Achaemenid king was presented in Egypt. The

¹² Some examples with inscriptions of Xerxes and Artaxerxes, and fragments of uncertain reign have indications of the volume of the container: Posener, *Première domination perse*, 151 nos. 78 (Artaxerxes), 98, 99 (uncertain), expressed in Egyptian units (all in the Louvre); *ibid.* no. 53, in a Persian unit, transcribed in Demotic, see Ritner, *Studies Simpson*, 683-88, Pierre Briant, “Bulletin d’histoire achéménide (BHACH I),” *Topoi*, Suppl. 1 (Lyon, 1997), 37 and 84.



change may be connected generally with the change of reign, from Darius to Xerxes. It may be connected specifically with political changes or reprisals in Egypt after Xerxes suppressed a short, small-scale revolt that broke out at the end of Darius's reign.¹³

The existence of quadrilingual monumental inscriptions of Darius that combine texts in Egyptian, written in hieroglyphs, with texts in Old Persian, Elamite and Akkadian, written in cuneiform, cast doubt on such political inferences.¹⁴ BLMJ 1979, the first multilingual jar from the reign of Darius, breaks the pattern of development in the jar inscriptions. The cuneiform texts resemble multilinguals on jars of Xerxes and Artaxerxes. The Egyptian text resembles monolingual Egyptian inscriptions on jars of Darius and Xerxes and multilinguals of Xerxes. The date given is the last year of Darius's reign, year 36 (486/85 BC).¹⁵ On its face, therefore, it appears to rule out a political explanation for the formal changes in the jar inscriptions.

¹³ As reluctantly conceded by Briant, *Histoire de l'Empire perse* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 564.

¹⁴ The "Suez" stela, with texts DZc (see esp. Kent, "Old Persian Texts, I. The Darius Suez c Inscription," *JNES* 1 (1942), 415-421; *Old Persian*, 111); and the Darius statue excavated at Susa, with texts DSab (see Mayrhofer, *Supplement*, 15 3.9).

¹⁵ Also indicated in hieroglyphic inscriptions from the quarries at Wadi Hammāmāt, some of which also mention regnal years of Xerxes: Posener, *Première domination perse*, 117-124, nos. 24, 28 and 30.



Nevertheless, the extraordinary disposition of the texts on BLMJ 1979 leaves even this inference open to doubt. On other examples with multilingual inscriptions, the hieroglyphic text is centered directly beneath the cuneiform texts, the four versions forming a neat, symmetrical ensemble, placed neatly between the lugs. The layout of this piece, with the cuneiform and hieroglyphic texts on different sides, raises the possibility that the hieroglyphic and cuneiform texts were made at different times, and perhaps at different places - e.g., the Egyptian first, at a point of origin (in Egypt), and the other versions later, at a final repository (perhaps at one of the royal residences). It remains at least possible that the jar was originally made with a monolingual Egyptian inscription in the last year of Darius I (conforming to the other examples with texts of Darius) and that the cuneiform versions were added only in the reign of Xerxes (conforming to other examples from the reign of Xerxes).

Function - There is a consensus that these vessels were made in Egypt, and that the inscriptions were carved in Egypt, the only part of the Achaemenid empire where hieroglyphic inscriptions and Egyptian versions of multilinguals had any meaningful use.¹⁶ There is less clarity and consensus on the use, distribution (and re-distribution and re-use) of the vessels.

¹⁶ As Posener, *Première domination perse*, 189f. argued persuasively; cf. Briant, *BHach I*, 84; Ritner, *Studies Simpson*, 683 n. 3 (“a typical, and well-studied, artifact of Achaemenid Egypt”); Schmitt, *AMI NF* 33, 192.



At least some were sent to the Achaemenid palaces at Susa, Persepolis and perhaps Babylon, as fine containers for valuable contents - cosmetics, unguents, perfumes and/or dyestuffs.¹⁷ The Apadana reliefs at Persepolis do not show bearers of tribute bringing vessels of this kind.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the regnal years indicated in the hieroglyphic texts on jars of Darius and Xerxes suggest that they were included in annual deliveries to the palaces.¹⁹ Door jamb reliefs in the palace of Darius at Persepolis that show attendants with cosmetic bottles in one hand and towels in the other suggest that some of the smaller inscribed alabastra were also part of the ceremonial of court life.²⁰ It is plausibly argued that vessels of this kind were

- 17** Giron offered the fanciful hypothesis that messages from the king to officials in the provinces were sealed in such vessels for transport (*RA* 18 [1921], 144f.; cf. Schmitt, *AMIN* 33, 191 n. 3).
- 18** P. Calmeyer, "Die Gefäße auf den Gabenbringer-Reliefs in Persepolis," *AMIN* 26 (1993), 147-160.
- 19** Cf. Anon., "Antiquities from the Norbert Schimmel Collection," cat. of an auction sale, 16 Dec. 1992, Sotheby's (New York), on no. 29: "The dated examples found at Susa prove that annual consignments of these small perfume bottles were sent from Egypt to Persia in the reigns of Darius and Xerxes."
- 20** Schmidt, *Persepolis*, I: *Structures, Reliefs, Inscriptions*, OIP 68 (Chicago, 1953), plates 148-150. Cf. Margaret Cool Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art*, *Acta Iranica* 9 (Leiden, 1979), 82; Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "Gifts in the Persian Empire," in: Pierre Briant & Clarisse Herrens Schmidt (eds.), *Le Tribut dans l'empire perse*, *Travaux de l'Institut d'Études Iraniennes de l'Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle* 3 (Paris, 1989), 133; Françoise Tallon in: Prudence O. Harper



among gifts handed out by the Achaemenid kings in recognition of services rendered to the crown, their immediate intrinsic value enhanced by their value as tokens of status and potential power, and that such gifts account for examples found (or said to have been found) far from the royal residences.²¹ Some of these, in turn, like the examples from the Mausoleum and the Orsk tumulus, or those from the temple at Uruk, were treated as valuable sumptuary goods, traded, bequeathed, dedicated or interred, even centuries after the end of the Achaemenid empire.

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et al. (eds.), *The Royal City of Susa* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 252 no. 180. The bottles shown in the reliefs are smaller than BLMJ 1979 and comparable stone jars (about two hand-breadths, c. 18-20 cm, tall and less than one hand-breadth in diameter), and differently shaped (narrow throats and beveled rims, or perhaps stoppers, without lugs or animal-head handles); they resemble a granite bottle with inscriptions of Xerxes excavated in the Persepolis treasury (Schmidt, *Persepolis II*, pl. 51:3 = pl. 52:4).

²¹ Sancisi-Weerdenburg, “Gifts in the Persian Empire” 134 and 142 n. 14; Schmitt, *AMI NF* 33, 199.