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Two Achaemenid Elamite Stone Tablet Fragments from Persepolis: A23122 and PM 3148

Abstract

Among hundreds of inscribed fragments at the reserves of the Persepolis Museum, there is a stone fragment bearing Elamite signs on both sides. A similar fragment was found in 1936 during the Oriental Institute excavations led by E. F. Schmidt (1935–1939) at the Treasury building on Persepolis Terrace. The current article discusses the content of the two fragments in Chicago and Persepolis and features of their signs, in connection with other late Achaemenid royal inscriptions from Susa and Persepolis.

Keywords

Treasury, Persepolis, Achaemenid Elamite, Palaeography, Artaxerxes II. Trésorerie, Persépolis, Élamite achéménide, Paléographie, Artaxerxès II.

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Introduction

During the recent project of documenting and classifying the Achaemenid royal inscriptions at the museum reserves of Persepolis (since August 2020), the author found a dark grey limestone fragment bearing Elamite signs on both sides (museum no. PM 3148). The fragment once belonged to a stone tablet containing an Elamite inscription with peculiar sign forms similar to those of some late Achaemenid inscriptions. According to entry no. 1474 in the old inventory of the Persepolis Museum, it was found in 1959 in the east part of the Treasury building during the excavations led by Ali Sami (from 1939 to 1959). Its findspot was close to the findspot of a similar fragment at the Treasury of Persepolis in 1936 by E. F. Schmidt (now in the Oriental Institute Museum, museum no. A23122). The similarities in sign forms of the two fragments suggest that A23122 and PM 3148 belong to the same period, likely the late Achaemenid period; still, the differences in carving methods indicate that each fragment belongs to a separate tablet. Therefore, these fragments suggest that at least two stone tablets containing Elamite version(s) of royal inscriptions were made in the late Achaemenid period in Persepolis.

Findspots and Physical Observations

a. A23122

According to Schmidt's report (1953, p. 175), fragment A23122² was found "half a meter higher" than the floor of "Room 16" at the northeast corner of the Treasury building. There were other finds in this room, such as "a flake of an inscribed weight stone" of Darius I, a "thick-walled stone saucer, a fragment of a plain votive(?) cylinder of greenish-blue composition and an eye stone of onyx." According to Schmidt, these finds did not have "any connection with their find-spots." Regarding the function of Room 16, Schmidt believes that "there are no indications that it was used for storage" (Schmidt, 1953, p. 175).

The "cubical" shape of the fragment A23122 led Schmidt (1957, p. 53, fn. 54) to suggest that the fragment was "fashioned into this shape (to be used as pounding stone?) from a piece of the foundation slab." The polished lower edge of the fragment indicates that the upper and lower edges of the original stone tablet were left intentionally blank, unlike the stone tablets of Xerxes (XPf, XPh and XPl) and Artaxerxes I (A¹Pb). Some of Darius' stone tablets found in Susa, like the Babylonian version of

² Field no. PT4 17



DSe, have similar blank edges.³ The blank edge of fragment A23122 and epigraphic considerations⁴ suggest that “side a” of the fragment is the obverse of the original tablet. In that case, the blank edge would be its lower edge.

If “side a” was the lower part of the obverse, then the preserved text may be part of the *Reich-* or *Werk-Formel*, rather than the typical beginnings (*Gott-* or *Herrscher-Formel*) or endings (*Schutz-* or *Sprecher-Formel*) of the majority of the Achaemenid royal inscriptions.

b. PM 3148

According to the old inventory of the Persepolis Museum, PM 3148 was found in the east part of the Treasury in the area of the so-called Garrison Quarters by the workers of the “workshop of Gorji Zare” (گرجی زارع) in 1959 (1338).⁵ Gorji Zare (1908–1984) was one of the foremen of Ali Sami who continued the excavations at Persepolis after the departure of the OI excavation team. The “workshop of Gorji” is frequently mentioned in the old inventory. Other objects found by Gorji Zare and his workers, mainly in the east part of the Treasury building, include several clay tablets.⁶ The “east of the Treasury” mentioned in the old inventory could cover rooms of the so-called Garrison Quarter. Unfortunately, there is no detailed report of the excavations in this area, and it is impossible to determine firmly where PM 3148 was found. It must have been found either in the Garrison Quarter (those parts excavated between 1956/1335 and 1959/1338) or at the northeast corner of the Treasury outside the building close to the findspot of A23122.⁷

Unlike A23122, PM 3148 does not have physical features that indicate which part of the original tablet is covered by the fragment. There is a slight change in the thickness of the fragment (from 10.3 cm to 9.7 cm), but that does not help determine if it

³ Now at the National Museum of Iran. Museum No. B.K. 806. For the textual analysis, see Daneshmand (2017).

⁴ If “side b” of the fragment were the obverse, one would expect elements of the *Gott-Formel* or even the *Herrscher-Formel* (if the text begins with a king’s name) in its preserved lines. For the terms and classification of the formulae in the Achaemenid royal inscriptions, see Hauri (1973).

⁵ For the excavations of Sami in the east part of the Treasury Building, see Sami 1960, p. 199–201, 224–225.

⁶ Despite Sami’s *Archaeological Reports* in four volumes (between 1950 and 1960), numerous unpublished inscribed fragments and clay tablets were found by his excavation team, e.g., see Delshad (2022, p. 3); cf. Sami (1960, p. 232–270).

⁷ The reason why Sami did not publish any further information on his excavations is unknown. According to his report (Sami, 1960, p. 224) the excavations at the Garrison Quarter were ongoing at the time he was writing the fourth volume.



covers a part of the top, middle, or bottom of the tablet. The attestation of the word “king” on “side a” is also not decisive about the position of the preserved text in the original inscription.

The severe damage to PM 3148 suggests that the fragment was deliberately broken to be used for other purposes such as building material.⁸ Tiny scratches on both sides may also indicate that the fragment was exposed to the open air, especially the heavily damaged “side a.” It is even possible that the fragment was used as a cobblestone. Furthermore, traces of damage to the fourth line of “side b” suggest that at some point, someone tried to erase the cuneiform signs.

Textual Analysis

The only attempt to read and translate A23122 was made by G. G. Cameron (apud Schmidt, 1957, p. 53). Cameron proposed a preliminary analysis of legible words and concluded that “the inscription cannot be fitted into any known text.” Regarding the dating of the fragment, he compared the sign forms of late Achaemenid Elamite inscriptions to suggest that the fragment might have come from the late Achaemenid period. The contents of the two fragments cannot be used to reconstruct a single text. The original contents of the two fragments cannot be determined, although they must have included common formulae attested in most Achaemenid royal inscriptions. Some recognizable words on fragment A23122, such as *taššup* and *hamer*, are not attested in other Achaemenid royal inscriptions of the Fārs Region but appear in other inscriptions, like DB and DS, in administrative tablets and in the pre-Achaemenid Elamite corpus (see Hinz & Koch, 1987, p. 297-298 and 613). Both words suggest a more elaborate narrative context than most Persepolitan inscriptions have. However, the reconstructions proposed here rely heavily on the Elamite versions of the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II, from Susa, Babylon, and “Hamadan,”⁹ and on other Achaemenid royal inscriptions from the Fārs Region.

a. A23122 (field no PT4 117)

Grey limestone, 98 (Height) x 137 (Width) x 129 (Thickness) mm, 3.100 kg.

Found in 1936, “55 cm. above the floor of Room 16” at the north-east corner of the Treasury building (Persepolis).

See Schmidt, 1957, p. 53.

⁸ For Achaemenid inscriptions reused as building materials, see Delshad (2020, p. 291-299).

⁹ A²Sa-b-d-e, A²B’a-b-c and A²Ha.



Transliteration

Side a (Obverse)

- 1'. [...]𐎧𐎠𐎡𐎠 *e-ki-ti*¹(-)𐎧𐎠𐎡𐎠(-)[...]
- 2'. [...]𐎧𐎠𐎡𐎠 *hu-be-na ku-ud*¹-[da ...]
- 3'. [...]𐎧𐎠𐎡𐎠-*na* ^{HAL}*taš-šu-íp-na*¹ [...]
- 4'. [...]𐎧𐎠𐎡𐎠 *ap-pa*(-)𐎧𐎠𐎡𐎠(-)[...]

Side b (Reverse)

- 1''. [...]𐎧𐎠𐎡𐎠-*ni ha-me-ir ku*¹-[...]
- 2''. [...]𐎧𐎠𐎡𐎠-*ak hu-ud-da*¹(-)[...]
- 3''. [...]𐎧𐎠𐎡𐎠-*ud-da-iš-ni* [...]
- 4''. [...]𐎧𐎠𐎡𐎠-^{HAL}*Ú*^{MES}𐎧𐎠𐎡𐎠-*ir-ra-na hu*¹-[...]

Translation

Side a

- 1'. ... you heed(?) ...
- 2'. ... of that..., and ...
- 3'. ... of the people/army ...
- 4'. ...

Side b

- 1''. there and(?) ...
- 2''. ... I/he/they did/made ...
- 3''. may he/they make ...
- 4''. ... for man(?) made(?) ...

Commentary

Side a

- 1'. *e-ki-ti*¹(-)𐎧𐎠𐎡𐎠(-)[...]

The word division is uncertain. If the word begins with *e*, then it may be based on a stem *eki-* attested in PF 2071: 9. The meaning is not clear. Hallock (1969, p. 684) proposed the meaning “they heed(?)” for the form *ekimanpi* (see also Hinz & Koch, 1987, p. 393). The fragment’s *e-ki-ti* may be a second person Conj. I form, singular or plural.

- 2'. [...]𐎧𐎠𐎡𐎠 *hu-be-na*



The word *hube* follows a word ending in *-iš* twice in inscriptions from Fārs, both times in the same context: ^{DIŠ}*da-a-ia-u-iš hu-be* (DNa 32, 44) and ^{AS}*da-a-ia-ú-iš hu-be* (XPh 49).

3'. [...]-^Γ*ir*¹-*na*

Traces of the ends of two horizontal wedges on the left edge of the upper part of the line limit the possible readings of the first preserved sign to *ir* or *ni*.

4'. [...]-^Γ*um*¹ *ap-pa(-ri-^Γna*¹)(-)[...]

Three preserved wedges on the left edge offer two possibilities, *um* or *pa*. Comparison with *pa* attested in the same line suggests that *um* is more likely (cf. *um* on “side b” of PM 3148). If so, ^Γ*-um*¹ may be the end of a transcribed Iranian word like *ši-ia-ti-um*, *da-ad-da-um*, *bar-ru-za-na-na-um*, *pír-ra-ma-da-ra-um*, *da-iz-za-ra-um*, etc. Among the attestations of words ending with *-um* in inscriptions from Fārs, *da-ad-da-um ap-pa* (XPh 14f) is similar, but does not clarify this passage. Word division is uncertain. Whether ^Γ*ri*¹ or ^Γ*ri*¹-*na* belong to the previous word or begin a new word, no such form is attested.

Side b

3''. [...*hu*]-*ud*²-*da-iš-ni*

If [*hu*]-*ud*²-*da-iš-ni* is correct, a Conj. I precative form of *hutta-*, attested in PFA but not in the Achaemenid royal inscriptions (Hinz & Koch, 1987, pp. 711 and 73). Also possible is [...]-*na*² *da-iš-ni*, with a Conj. I precative of *da-*, also attested from the Middle Elamite period (Hinz & Koch, 1987, pp. 254, 269 and 296).

4''. [...^{HAL}^{LÚ}^{MEŠ}]-^Γ*ir*¹-*ra-^Γna*¹

The following *-ra-* favors reading ^Γ*ir*¹ rather than ^Γ*ni*¹. The sequence *-ir-ra-na* occurs in inscriptions from Fārs only in ^{DIŠ}^{LÚ}^{MEŠ}-*ir-ra-na*.¹⁰

b. PM 3148 (museum archive box 21, previously no. 1474)

Grey limestone, 170 (Height) x 115 (Width) x 103 (Thickness) mm, 3.360 kg.

Found in 1959, east of the Treasury building/Garrison Quarters (workshop of Gorji Zare^o).

¹⁰ ^{DIŠ}^{LÚ}^{MEŠ}-*ir-ra-na* (DNa 4, DNb 2, XPb 4, XPc⁰¹⁻⁰² 3, XPc⁰³ 5, XPd⁰¹ 3, XPd⁰² 3f, XPd⁰³ 6, XPh 3), cf. ^{DIŠ}^{LÚ}^{MEŠ}-*ra-na* (XPa 3f).



Transliteration

Side a

- 1'. [...]
- 2'. [...] Ꞁx¹ [...]
- 3'. [...] -Ꞁx-me hu-ud¹-[...]
- 4'. [...] -(x)-Ꞁx¹ HAL EŠŠANA ꞀHAL²Ꞁ1[...]
- 5'. [...] -Ꞁka₄^{Ꞁ1} ku-ud-[da ...]

Side b

- 1''. [...] Ꞁx ak^{Ꞁ1} [...]
- 2''. [...] -Ꞁum^{Ꞁ1} an-ka₄ HAL Ꞁx¹-[...]
- 3''. [...] -Ꞁda^{Ꞁ1}-na-um ak-Ꞁka₄^{Ꞁ1} [...]
- 4''. [...] Ꞁda^{Ꞁ1} iš^{Ꞁ1} (x^{Ꞁ1}) ku [...]
- 5''. [...] Ꞁx iš^{Ꞁ1} gal [...]
- 6''. [...] Ꞁki^{Ꞁ1} [...]

Translation

Side a

- 4'. ..., the King, ...
- 5'. ... and ...

Side b

- 2''. ... if/when PN/King(?)...
- 3''. ... who ...

Commentary

Side a

- 4'. [...] -(x)-Ꞁx¹

Space is insufficient for -Ꞁiš^{Ꞁ1}. Traces do not support -Ꞁšá^{Ꞁ1}.

If the sign before HAL ends with three vertical wedges, possibilities are limited to ú, zí, and *ib/p*. The last of these suggests [HAL EŠŠANA-in]-Ꞁna-ip HAL EŠŠANA “...of kings, the king...” after the Elamite version of A²Sa (see Steve, 1987, pp. 91–92).

HAL EŠŠANA ꞀHAL^{Ꞁ1}[...]

The final preserved horizontal wedge is somewhat lower on the line than the horizontals of HAL preceding EŠŠANA. It may instead be the beginning of Ꞁna^{Ꞁ1} (but compare the *na* on “side b”). However, it is neither clear if the remaining horizon-



Fragments A23122 and PM 3148: Two Fragments of Late Achaemenid Period?

In the absence of persuasive evidence for a text-based dating for the fragments, one must rely on the forms of the cuneiform signs. Cameron (apud Schmidt, 1957, p. 53) commented on the signs in A23122 in this way:

“The forms of some of the signs resemble more closely those of Artaxerxes III (e.g. *na*, *ki*, *iš*); others seem to show a somewhat earlier stage; still others (e.g. *ni*, *ir*) have no known parallels and may have arisen through the influence of some Old Persian signs (e.g. *a*, *pa*).”

Cameron did not mention which inscriptions of Artaxerxes III were the basis of his comparison. Forms of *na*, *ki* and *iš* in the two fragments do not resemble forms of those signs in the labels above the figures of throne-bearers on the royal tomb V (attributed to Artaxerxes III).¹² The cutters of the two fragments, unlike the cutters of the tomb labels, represent the *Winkelhaken* as an oblique wedge similar to the form of *Winkelhaken* on Persepolis administrative tablets.

There is no other known inscription of Artaxerxes III with an Elamite version apart from A³Pb.¹³ The sign forms of the two fragments, and the way in which they are carved, do not resemble A³Pb.

Other groups of Late Achaemenid Elamite inscriptions are those of Artaxerxes II found in Susa (A²Sa-b-d-e), “Hamadan” (A²Ha) and Babylon (A²B’a-b-c).¹⁴ Steve (1975, no. 18; 1987, no. 39) published another Achaemenid Elamite fragment found at the northeast slope of Apadana Palace at Susa during the 1959–1960 excavations under the heading “Incertum.” Some of its sign forms resemble those of the two Persepolis fragments.

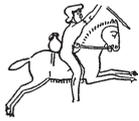
The following table compares attested signs on the two Persepolis fragments with A³Pb, A²Sa, A²Se and the Susa Incertum fragment. Comparisons prompt these observations:

1. The similarities between A23122, PM 3148, A²Sa and “Incertum” in using diagonal wedges instead of *Winkelhaken*, e.g., *ri*, *ki*, *iš* and *hu* (despite the use of *Winkelhaken* in A³Pb and A²B’a-b-c);

¹² For discussions regarding A³Pb and its dating, see Schmitt (1999, p. 1-25) and Schmitt (2009).

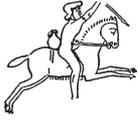
¹³ Note that apart from A³Pa (OP) and A³Pb (trilingual), there is only one confirmed inscription of Artaxerxes III found at Susa, A³Sa, which contains only the Babylonian version (see Scheil, 1929, p. 99-100, no. 30).

¹⁴ For the Elamite fragments in Babylon, see Weissbach (1957, p. 49, no. 11-13) and Schmitt (2010, p. 288). For the orthographical features of the Elamite version of the late Achaemenid royal inscriptions, see Schmitt (2010, p. 289-290).



Sign value	A23122	PM 3148	A ³ Pb	A ² Sa	A ² Se	Incertum
<i>ri</i>		-			-	-
<i>e</i>		-	-		-	-
<i>ki</i>		 ?	-		-	-
<i>ti</i>		-		-	-	-
<i>hu</i>			-			
<i>be</i>		-	-	-		-
<i>na</i>						
<i>ku</i>				-	-	-
<i>ud</i>						-
<i>da</i>		 ?				
HAL			-		-	-
<i>taš</i>		-	-	-	-	-
<i>šu</i>		-	-	-	-	-
<i>ip</i>		-	-	-	-	-
<i>um</i>	 ?		-	-	-	-
<i>ap</i>		-	-	-		
<i>pa</i>		-	-			
<i>ni</i>		-	-	-		-
<i>ha</i>		-	-			-
<i>me</i>			-		-	
<i>ir</i>		-	-			
<i>ak</i>						
<i>iš</i>						
<i>ra</i>		-				-
<i>an</i>	-					
<i>ka₄</i>	-					
<i>gal</i>	-		-	-	-	-
EŠŠANA	-		-			-
<i>za</i>	 ?	-	-		-	-

Table 1. Comparative Palaeography of the Cuneiform Signs of Late Achaemenid Elamite.



2. The use of determinative ^{HAL} in A23122 and PM 3148 and ^{AŠ.AŠ.AŠ} in A²Sa despite the use of determinative ^{DIS} in A³Pb and A²B'a-b-c;
3. Apparent similarities in some specific signs in A23122, PM 3148, A²Sa and "Incertum," e.g., *iš*, *da* and *na*.

Concluding Remarks

Although both fragments were found in the same vicinity, the Treasury and the area to the east of it, different carving methods of the signs suggest each fragment belongs to a separate stone tablet.

Sign forms indicate that Persepolis fragments could belong to a time close to that of A²Sa and "Incertum" fragments. The forms of the common signs in the Persepolis fragments differ notably from those of A³Pb and A²B'a-b-c. The difference may be chronological, or it may simply be a matter of different carvers using models written in different hands.

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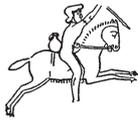
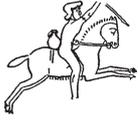


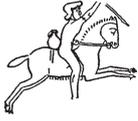
Fig. 1. General view of all sides of fragment A23122.
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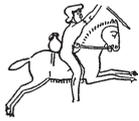
*Fig. 2. Detail view of the inscribed sides of fragment A23122.
(©Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago)*



Fig. 3. Drawing of the signs on fragment A23122.



*Fig. 4. General view of all sides of fragment PM 3148.
(Photograph by M. A. Mosallanezhad)*



*Fig. 5. Detail view of both inscribed sides of fragment PM 3148.
(Photograph by M. A. Mosallanezhad)*

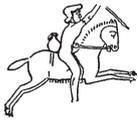


Fig. 6. Drawing of the signs on both sides of fragment PM 3148.

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