



## ELAM IV. LINEAR ELAMITE

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Linear Elamite was a system of writing used at the end of the 3rd millennium B.C.E. by Puzur-Inšušinak, the last of the twelve “kings of Awan,” according to a king list found at Susa (Scheil; Gelb and Kienast, pp. 321 ff.; see i, above). He ruled ca. 2150 B.C.E. and was a contemporary of Ur-Nammu, the first ruler of the Ur III dynasty in Mesopotamia, and Gudea, *ensi* of Lagash (Wilcke, p. 110). Linear Elamite (Meriggi, pp. 184-220, tables I-IV: “script B”) may have been derived from Proto-Elamite script (“script A”; see iii, above), with which it has some signs in common; it may not have survived Puzur-Inšušinak. It was written either from left to right or from right to left.

There are only twenty-two known documents in Linear Elamite; they are identified by letters A-V (Hinz, 1969, pp. 11-44; Hinz 1971; André and Salvini, 1989, pp. 58-61); nineteen of them are on stone and clay objects excavated in the Acropole at Susa and are now in the Louvre, Paris (cf. André-Salvini, 1992). There is also a fine silver vase with a line of perfectly executed text (Q) preserved in the Tehran Museum; its provenance is unknown (Hinz, 1969, pp. 11-28). Six linear signs, three of which are without parallel (*hapax legomena*) in known Linear Elamite writing, are engraved on the rim of a vase (S) from Shahdad (Šahdād) in Kermān (Hinz, 1971). Finally, on a marble stamp seal (V) of unknown origin there is a representation of a bull surmounted by three linear signs (two of them unattested variants), which probably hide a personal



name (Glock, Auction Drouot, no. 466). A tablet bearing the only Susa Linear Elamite text (O) that does not come from the Acropole includes signs analogous to but different from those on the other objects and must be considered to represent a different and probably older system of writing.

The most important longer texts, appear in monumental contexts, and are partly bilingual. They are engraved on large stone sculptures, including a statue of the goddess Narunte (I), the “table au lion” (A; [Figure 1](#), [Figure 1a](#)), and large votive boulders (B, D), as well as on a series of steps (not steles! cf. Scheil, MDP X, pp. 9-11, pl. 3; F, G, H, U) from a monumental stone stairway, where they alternated with steps bearing texts with Puzur-Inšušinak Akkadian titles (cf. André and Salvini, 1989). There are also a few texts on baked-clay cones (J, K, L), a clay disk (M), and clay tablets (N, O, R). Some objects include both Linear Elamite and Akkadian cuneiform inscriptions: A, I, C (on an alabaster statue), the monumental stairway as a whole, and B (votive boulder Sb 6 joined with Sb 177) have bilingual and bigraphic inscriptions (André and Salvini, 1989), which inspired the first attempts at decipherment of Linear Elamite (Bork, 1905; idem, 1924; Frank).

No decisive progress seems to have been made in more recent times. Walther Hinz’s reading and translation of the documents (1962; 1969, pp. 11-44) and his list of sign values must be considered overoptimistic. His list (1969, p. 44) includes fifty-six signs, which are not numbered; he proposed logographic values for four of them, phonetic (syllabic) values for the rest. The signs are ordered on the questionable principle of the alphabetical order of the transcription. Piero Meriggi’s approach is more appropriate, in that he has ordered and numbered sixty-two signs, excluding hapax legomena and including some variants, according to form (a criterion already used successfully in deciphering cuneiform writing). Béatrice André-Salvini and the present author are now preparing a new list, taking into consideration also the frequency of signs, an important element in testing proposed values for those signs. The most frequent sign, attested forty-three times, is a lozenge ([Symbol 8](#)), ([Symbol 9](#)), to which Meriggi attributed the value *ri*, though formerly it was read *ki*.

All attempts at deciphering and reading Linear Elamite have been based on the likelihood that the texts are in the Elamite language (see v, below), which is known for certain only from an older cuneiform text (a treaty between the Akkadian king Naram-Sin and a king of Awan) and from later texts in cuneiform script (see vi, below). Only Ferdinand Bork attempted, in 1924, to



link the signs of linear Elamite with cuneiform signs both morphologically and semantically, but his attempt was not successful. Linear Elamite is now generally considered to be unrelated to cuneiform writing in the morphology of the signs. Scholars agree that Linear Elamite is primarily syllabic, with a few logograms. Meriggi attributed open consonant-vowel (CV) values to seventeen signs and vowel-consonant (VC) values to six signs. He also identified two probable vocalic signs (V) and six complex consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) or ideographic signs: those for “sky,” “son,” “god,” “country,” and “king” and the purely phonetic sign *hal*. Meriggi and Hinz agreed on fifteen phonetic and ideographic values. About ten of them had already been proposed by Carl Frank or Bork and are derived, on the basis of the corresponding Akkadian texts, from the name of the sovereign Puzur(Hinz: Kutik)-Inšušinak, from his patronym (son of Simbi-išhuk), and from the toponym Susa. Frank’s sequence *in-šu-ši-na-ak*, *su-se-en-ki* (1912) corresponds to Hinz’s *in-šu-ši-na-ik*, *šu-ši-im-ki* (1969, text A ll. 1, 3; Figure 1). The variant *in-šu-uš-na-ak* (on step F l. 1), read by Meriggi, appears to confirm the correctness of the earlier readings. The sign unanimously read as *nap* (Symbol 10) “god” had already been identified by Bork in 1905 as a divine determinative, but personal names plus this determinative are not alone sufficient to verify the assumption that the underlying language is Elamite, although the historical context suggests that it was.

In addition to his sixty-two “principal” signs, Meriggi included numbers 63-103, which are hapax legomena. Some of the latter can be considered variants of the basic signs, but others must be recognized as distinct, as they recur only in tablet O, for which an independent list must be drawn up. On the other hand, certain signs not present in either Hinz’s or Meriggi’s list, including those that are incomplete because of damage to the documents but are certainly different in form from the recorded signs, must be taken into account. The total number of signs in Linear Elamite must therefore be estimated at more than 100.

One fundamental problem in defining the corpus of texts and consequently what is to be considered Linear Elamite is the necessity of identifying two or three analogous but different Linear Elamite scripts and of investigating their genesis and the relations among them.



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Figure 1. Linear Elamite text A, from the “table au lion” (Sb 17) in the Musée du Louvre, Paris. It is written from right to left and from top to bottom.

Symbol 8.

Symbol 9.

Symbol 10.