



PERSEPOLIS ADMINISTRATIVE ARCHIVES IV. SIGNIFICANCE

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The Persepolis administrative archives are an exceptional resource for the study of Achaemenid languages, both individually and in connection with each other, as they were written in the heart of the empire at its zenith. The Elamite texts are the largest single corpus in the Elamite language. The Aramaic texts constitute one of the largest corpora of Imperial Aramaic, a dialect used throughout the empire for local recording and inter-regional communication. The single Old Persian Fortification text is the only explicit evidence for the use of Persian in practical recording, rather than in display and sumptuary uses. The transcriptions of Iranian words and names in the Elamite and Aramaic texts constitute the largest single corpus of Old Iranian preserved in indirect transmission, including evidence of lexicon, phonology, and dialect variation that cannot be found elsewhere (Tavernier, 2007). The collocation of these languages in a large, consistent corpus is the densest evidence for contact and interference among Achaemenid languages.

The Persepolis administrative archives are an exceptional resource for the study of Achaemenid heartland society. The recipients of food payments and the participants in administrative transactions recorded in the texts show a cross-section from livestock through gods. Between these extremes are gangs of workers, classified by sex and age, and sometimes with ethnic labels that



indicate their origins (in Egypt, Babylonia, Cappadocia, Caria, Lydia in the west, or in Carmania, Arachosia, Ghandara and India in the east, or elsewhere); workers identified by their occupations (craftsmen, agricultural workers, builders); clerks who operated the system that the texts record; supervisors of the workers; religious personnel; travelers going to, from or through Persepolis on official business, with their retinues, often classified by social status; and members of the elite, including some related to the king by blood or marriage. The terms and contexts in which such people are described enable reconstruction of social texture that other sources do not reveal.

The Persepolis Fortification Archive documents a regional system of administration and redistribution and a network of interlocking institutions. The chief officer, Parnakka, belonged to high Persian nobility, but was not necessarily a kinsman of the king (Henkelman, forthcoming[d]). Other members of the royal family had estates and households where goods controlled by the Persepolis administration were stored and expended, and where workers supported by the administration were employed (Henkelman, 2010, 2011c; Stolper, forthcoming[b]). District centers included strongholds, storehouses, stockyards, treasuries, trading posts, and facilities for craft production. Distinct administrative branches controlled fruit, cereals, wine and beer, and livestock, and another branch controlled the workers whom the commodities supported. The Persepolis Treasury Archive, mostly dealing with the support of workers and craftsmen at Persepolis itself, exemplifies some operations of regional centers. Both archives mention or imply parallel contemporary institutions of market exchange (Aperghis, 1997, 1999; Hinz, 1970, 1971; Kawase 1980, 1984, 1986; Koch 1980, 1983; Henkelman 2005).

The Fortification texts provide unique detail on the Achaemenid crown's support of religious personnel (for example, "priests" [Elamite *šatin*, Aramaic *kmr*] and Magians (Magi) [Elamite *makuš*, Aramaic *mgwš*]) and provision of offerings to divinities, including some with Iranian names (for example, Auramazdā, *Miždušī, *Narēsanga, *Spantārmatiš, *Šēθrapatiš) and others with Elamite names (for example, Humban, Šimut, Napiriša), as well as to mountains and rivers. They supply terminology of offerings and ceremonies (for example, Elamite *lan*, *šip*, Old Iranian **dauča*-), and sites of religious activities that are found rarely or not at all in other sources (Henkelman, 2008a, 2011f, 2017b, forthcoming[b], forthcoming[c]). The seal impressions on all classes of tablets include imagery of religious activity, symbols, and figures, some of it unique to this corpus (Garrison, 2011, 2017a, 2017c).



Legible impressions of more than 3,400 distinct cylinder seals and stamp seals have been identified, and further recording may yield legible impressions of 4,000 or more distinct seals. This is one of the largest bodies of imagery from anywhere in the ancient world. Its range surpasses that of Achaemenid monumental art, including scenes of heroic combat and control, hunting, worship, chariotry, erotic activity, animals in combat or in heraldic attitudes, and abstract designs. It displays adaptations of earlier Mesopotamian and Iranian art along with Achaemenid innovations. It displays a range of styles and skills in the designers and engravers. Because many seals are associated with individuals or offices whose relative social or administrative status is known, this corpus displays an extraordinary connection between art and social context (Garrison, 2000, 2014b; Root, 1989, 1997, 2008).

The Persepolis administrative archives, the largest body of primary documents from the political heart of the Empire, elucidate fragmentary narrative sources on Achaemenid history. Some of the members of court who appear in the texts are known to such sources (e.g., [Artystone](#) and [Atossa](#), wives of Darius, or [Gobryas](#), son-in-law of Darius, [Arsames](#) and [Xerxes](#), sons of Darius; see Lewis, 1985; Henkelman, 2003, 2010, 2011c; Garrison, 2014b, 496-500; Stolper, forthcoming[b]). Others are previously unknown figures of similar status (for example, daughters of Vištāšpa-/Hystaspes [[Goštāsp](#)], other women of the king's family), and the texts present them in contexts unknown to the narrative sources. Because official travelers were required to show authorizations from governors at the points of origin of their trips, the texts name some satraps known from narrative sources (e.g., [Artaphernēs](#) at Sardis), and more satraps previously unknown (e.g., governors at Arachosia, Carmania, [Susa](#), Babylon). Fortification tablets of this kind elucidate reflections of the same practices in Greek and Aramaic documents (for example, satraps' support and regulation of official travel, see Briant, 2002, pp. 364-68; Henkelman, 2010, 2011a, Lewis, 1984, 1987, Seibert, 2002, Tuplin, 1998, Henkelman and Jacobs).

The Persepolis administrative archives account for isolated or fragmentary Achaemenid Elamite administrative texts from other sites as evidence of similar administrative activity and recording across most of Iran itself, from Susa (Garrison, 1996) to [Kandahar](#) (Helms, 1982, p. 13; 1997, p. 101; Fisher and Stolper). Particulars of administrative vocabulary, practice and recording found in the Persepolis administrative archives elucidate particulars in archival sources from Achaemenid Bactria (Shaked; Naveh and Shaked),



Babylonia, Anatolia, Judea, and Egypt.

Each of the Persepolis archives documents operations of a narrow sector of administrative activity over a short period. The two archives together document a continuity of activity and recording over more than fifty years. A few of the sources that the Persepolis archives elucidate document similar administrative practices in the Persian heartland in the reign of Cambyses or earlier (Henkelman and Kleber), and many more document similar administrative institutions and systemic continuities in much of the Achaemenid Empire through and after its last years (Briant, 2009, pp. 164-68; forthcoming; Henkelman and Folmer, 2016; Henkelman, 2017c).

The Persepolis administrative archives are thus the key to a manifold view of Achaemenid imperial structure and practice, the centerpiece in a discontinuous array of dense documentary sources that reveal commonality and variability, inheritance and innovation, adaptation and continuity in the operations of control, support, and governance within Achaemenid Iran, across the breadth of Achaemenid empire, and throughout the life of the Achaemenid empire.

See also [PERSEPOLIS ELAMITE TABLETS](#).

Abbreviations

Fort. = Persepolis Fortification tablet.

PF = tablet published in Hallock 1969.

PFAT = Persepolis Fortification Aramaic Tablet.

PFUT = Persepolis Fortification Uninscribed Tablet.

PT = tablet published in Cameron 1948.

PTS = Persepolis Treasury Seal (designating seals represented by impressions on tablets and/or sealings excavated the Persepolis Treasury).

PFS = Persepolis Fortification Seal (designating seals represented by impressions on Elamite tablets from the Persepolis Fortification Archive; see Garrison and Root 1998, 2001, forthcoming[a], forthcoming[b]).



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