



# PERSEPOLIS ELAMITE TABLETS

---

**PERSEPOLIS ELAMITE TABLETS**, administrative records in Elamite inscribed on clay tablets. Parts of two archives of such tablets were discovered in Persepolis in 1933-34 and 1936-38 by the archaeological expedition of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. They belonged to administrative records kept by agencies of the Achaemenid government during the reigns of Darius the Great, Xerxes and Artaxerxes I.

The first group of the texts was found in the Fortification area at the northeastern corner of the terrace platform, hence their designation as "Persepolis Fortification Tablets." The find consisted of over 30,000 tablets, whole or fragmentary, of which 2,120 texts (44 with Aramaic glosses, see below) have already been edited and translated by Richard T. Hallock (1969; *idem*, 1978), while the rest remain unpublished (including many he edited and translated, although his manuscript archive has been used by several scholars, most notably Walther Hinz and Heidemarie Koch, 1987). The documents were drafted between the 13th and the 28th regnal years of Darius I, that is, from 509 to 494 B.C.E. Although all were found in Persepolis, they originated from a large area of Persis and Elam, and some were actually written in Susa.

The second group of the tablets was discovered in a northeastern room of the Treasury of Xerxes; hence they are conventionally called "Persepolis Treasury Tablets." They date from the 30th year of the reign of Darius I to the 7th year



of the reign of Artaxerxes 1 (i.e., 492-458 B.C.E.). In all 753 tablets and fragments were discovered, and of these, 128 have so far been published (Cameron, 1948; idem, 1958; idem, 1965). A large number of the fragments are too worn out or broken to afford connected texts and meaningful readings.

The Fortification Tablets include many records of transactions (chiefly concerned with distribution of foodstuffs, management of flocks, and provisioning of workers and travelers) at locations throughout most of Persis and eastern Elam, and probably at some locations to the northwest and southeast of those areas. The records drawn up at those sites were sent to a central office at Persepolis. The Fortification texts also include many records compiling and tabulating information from similar registrations into accounts covering many months, or relatively large areas, or both. These compilations were made in the offices of Persepolis itself. The tables vary in size, shape and format. Many of them are small in format, and record single transactions or single groups of transactions in outlying areas.

The Fortification Tablets contain two sub-groups. One represents records of large operations for the transport of various commodities from one place to another in accordance with economic requirements and for the creation of state reserves or a seed fund. The other category gives registers regarding the distribution of products to workmen (*kurtaš*) of the royal economy and to state officials, as well as fodder for livestock and poultry. Among these registers there are journals with eighty or more lines, which record the expenditure of barley, flour, dates, fruit, beer, etc. at a particular place by a particular department in the course of one or more years, repeating the contents of separate receipts for the issue of products for specific purposes. Official correspondence of highly placed royal officials has also been preserved as well as texts recording the receipt of livestock and grain that had been turned over as royal taxes in Persis and Elam. According to one text, 3,000 *bar* (1 *bar* = ca. 10 liters) of barley were brought into Persepolis by a single storekeeper (Hallock, 1969, No.6). Another document indicates that nearly 700 shepherds drove “the sheep of the king” from Persis to Susa (Hallock, 1969, No. 1442).

The Treasury Tablets record the issue of silver and foodstuffs primarily to workmen of the royal economy in Persepolis (*Pārsa*) and its suburbs. The most frequently mentioned are Cappadocians, Lydians, Carians, Thracians, Ionians, Sogdians, Bactrians, Babylonians and Egyptians. All documents were apparently drawn up in the immediate vicinity of Persepolis. All intact tablets have rounded right edges and squared-off left edges stamped with seal



impressions.

The Treasury Tablets are divided by their formularies into “letters” and “memoranda.” The letters from various officials, addressed to the head of the treasury in Persepolis, order that a certain sum be paid to individuals who carry out specified work, while the memoranda record the nature and duration of the work performed, the official responsible, and the amount of silver or foodstuffs paid to workmen in various categories according to their qualifications.

Some of the Fortification and Treasury texts contain the personal decrees of Darius I. For instance, he ordered the issue of 200 *marriš* (1 *marriš* = ca. 10 liters) of wine from the palace stores and 100 sheep to the queen Irtašduna (see [ARTYSTONE](#)), who was one of his wives (Cameron, 1942, pp. 214ff, corrected by Hallock, 1969, No. 1795). According to a Treasury text, 530 *karša* (44kg) of silver were distributed by personal order of Darius to thirteen individuals, mostly with Iranian names, who had rendered some important service to the king (Cameron, 1948, No. 4). A number of Fortification Tablets contain records of the activity on estates belonging to members of the royal family. Evidently such records also constituted a part of the palace archive.

The distribution of pay is quite interesting. In 509-494, workmen and officials were paid only in kind (grain, flour, rams, wine, beer, fruit). In 492-458, they received un-minted silver in addition to foodstuffs. But not even the highest state official was ever paid with money, although the invention of Persian coinage by Darius the Great dates from the last decade of the sixth century, if not earlier (see [DARIC](#)). For instance, the manager of the royal household received daily two sheep, 18 *bars* of flour and 9 *marriš* of beer and wine, i.e. 90 to 180 times more than the workmen and couriers (Hallock, 1969, Nos. 666-669, etc.).

The texts also contain rich data on the delivery of state mail to various regions of the empire. Couriers were sent to nearly all the satrapies from Susa, the administrative capital of the Achaemenid Empire, bearing the king’s decrees. Reports from the satraps and other officials addressed to the king were usually forwarded to Susa; most of them were probably destined for the royal chancellery there. Many civil servants arrived in Susa on state business from various lands of the empire, stretching from Egypt to India. In particular, the documents speak of travel to Susa and Persepolis by state officials and messengers from Media, India, Arachosia, Sagartia, Areia, Gandara and



Bactria. Provisions for them were issued *en route* from storerooms. Stations with reserves of foodstuffs were situated on the main roads at intervals of one day's journey. Vouchers regarding the receipt of foodstuffs along the road were drawn up at road stations and were later delivered to Persepolis for accounting purposes. A Babylonian, Bēl-eṭir by name, was engaged in the delivery of documents from Persepolis to Susa and back (Hallock, 1969, Nos. 1381, 1382). Another Babylonian was the manager of the royal storehouse for flour and wine at one of the road stations (Hallock, 1969, Nos. 81, 489, etc.).

The Persepolis texts also constitute a valuable source for the study of the Old Iranian lexicon, since they contain many Iranian words and names in Elamite garb. Of the approximately 1, 900 names in the texts, one-tenth are Elamite and a small number Babylonian, while the rest (nearly 1,700) are Iranian (see Benveniste, pp. 75ff.; Gershevitch, 1969, pp. 167ff.; idem, 1969 a, pp. 165ff; Mayrhofer; Hinz, 1975). In addition to Persians and Medes, representatives of many other Iranian tribes (Chorasmians, Bactrians, Sakai, Areioi, etc.) are also mentioned. Since various Iranian groups used dialect forms of one and the same name, the names recorded in the tablets naturally show graphic variants. As expected, many Elamites were also employed in the administration apparatus in southwestern Iran. But a large number of them apparently bore Iranian names as a result of long-term contacts with the Persians.

The texts also shed fresh light on religion in ancient Persis, and on the religious policies of the Achaemenids (see Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, pp. 132-49). Thus, in 500 B.C.E., a priest received 80 *bar* of grain, of which 40 were destined for the cult of Ahuramazdā, the supreme Persian god, and 40 for Mišduši, another Iranian deity (Hallock, 1969, No. 337). Another priest was issued 7 *qa* (1 *qa* = ca. 1 liter) for Ahurmazdā, 2 *marriš* for Humban, the supreme Elamite god, and 3 *marriš* for libations to three rivers, 1 *mariš* for each (Hallock, 1969, No. 339). Grain and wine were issued also for the Iranian god Narišanka (Nairyōsanha), the Elamite deity Šimut and the Akkadian Adad as well as for other divine beings of uncertain origins, Nabbazabba, Anturza, and Turma. (Hallock, 1969, Nos. 338, 770, 1956, 1960, 2073, etc.; idem, 1978, No. 2 ). Thus, produce was supplied from the royal storehouses for the performance of the cult not only of Iranian gods, but also of Elamite and Babylonian deities. Moreover, the gods of the Iranian pantheon appear less frequently in the texts than the Elamite deities, and the royal administration treated all these gods equally.



Some of the Fortification Tablets are accompanied by short glosses or docketts in Aramaic, written on the labels in ink. About 700 or more of the tablets have monolingual Aramaic inscriptions (unpublished). A large but as yet unascertained number of the tablets bear no inscription but carry seal-impressions of various types. The holes and remnants of the cords at the corner of the Treasury Tablets indicate that they were originally attached to leather scrolls bearing Aramaic duplicate of each Elamite text. In addition, 199 clay tablets with impressions of seals containing an Aramaic inscriptions have been discovered. It appears that the Persian civil servants gave their orders orally and their scribes translated them simultaneously into Elamite and Aramaic (see Altheim – Stiehl, pp. 78-82; Gershevitch, 1979). Although during the period when the Fortification and Treasury tablets were written the Elamite language was extensively used in clerical work alongside Aramaic, in the second half of the fifth century B.C.E., Aramaic finally supplanted it.

The Fortification and Treasury tablets have considerably advanced our knowledge of Achaemenid glyptic art. They bear the impressions of official seals used by royal bureaucrats. Most of them are [cylinder seals](#), although there are also a few stamp seals. More than 100 impressions are labeled in cuneiform script, many of them trilingual (in Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian) but some in Old Persian only. A small number are inscribed in Aramaic. The royal seal with the trilingual cuneiform text “I, Darius . . .,” which continued to be used even during the reign of Xerxes, was at the disposal of the chief of the treasury (see Hinz, 1971, p. 262). Some seals belonged to senior officials. Many labels with impressions of seals have also been preserved. These labels were attached as accounting documents to objects, which were stored in the treasury. A fair number of the impressions on the Treasury tablets have been published (cf. Cameron, 1948, pp. 55-8; Root, pp. 118-22; Schmidt, pp. 10ff.; Schmitt, pp. 20-6).

The impressions on the Fortification tablets are being published by M. B. Garrison and M. C. Root (2001-). Some have already been well publicized. Of these, one depicts a mounted warrior who is striking down an enemy with his spear while two other foes are lying prostrate beneath his horse. This seal bears the inscription in Elamite: “Cyrus the Anshanite, son of Teispes” (see Garrison 1991, pp. 4-7; Idem and Root, 1996, pp. 6-7 and fig.2a-c). It had originally belonged to [Cyrus I](#) (r. ca. 640-600 B.C.E.), the grandfather of Cyrus the Great (Hallock, 1977, p. 127).

It is worth mentioning in passing that a Babylonian private legal document



drafted at Persepolis in the time of Darius I has been preserved among the Fortification tablets (Stolper, pp. 299ff.). One Babylonian document has also been found among the Treasury tablets (Cameron, 1948, No. 85). It records the payment of state taxes by several Medes in 502. Finally, a short inscription scrawled in Ionic letters has been found among the Fortification tablets (Hallock, 1969, p. 2).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

F. Altheim and R. Stiehl, *Die aramische Sprache unter den Achämeniden*, parts 1-3, Frankfurt am Main, 1961-1962.

A. Arfa'i, "La grande route Persépolis-Susa. Une lecture des tablettes provenant des Fortifications de Persépolis," *Topoi, Orient–Occident*, 9/2 1999, pp. 33-45.

E. Benveniste, *Titres et noms propres en iranien ancien* (Travaux de l'Institut d'études iraniennes de l'Université de Paris 1), Paris, 1966, pp. 75-99.

G. G. Cameron, "Darius' Daughter and the Persepolis Inscriptions," *JNES* 1, 1942, pp. 214-18.

Idem, *Persepolis Treasury Tablets* (The University of Chicago. Oriental Institute Publications 65), Chicago, 1948.

Idem, "Persepolis Treasury Tablets old and new," *JNES* 17, 1958, pp. 161-76.

Idem, "New Tablets from the Persepolis Treasury," *JNES* 24, 1965, pp. 167-92.

M. B. Garrison, "Seals and the Elite at Persepolis: Some Observations on Early Achaemenid Persian Art," *Ars Orientalis* 21, 1991, pp. 1-29.

Idem and M. C. Root, *Persepolis Seal Studies* (Achaemenid History IX), Leiden, 1996.

Idem and M. C. Root, *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets. I: Images of*



*Heroic Encounter* (in two parts: 1. Text, 2. Plates), The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications 117, Chicago, 2001 (Vol. II: *Images of Human Activity* and Vol. III: *Animals, Creatures, Plants, and Geometric Devices* are in preparation).

I. Gershevitch, "Amber at Persepolis," *Studia Classica et Orientalia Antonio Pagliano Oblata* 29, Rome, 1969, pp. 167-251.

Idem, "Iranian Nouns and Names in Elamite Garb," *TPS*, 1969, pp. 165-200.

Idem, "The Alloglottography of Old Persian," *TPS*, 1979, pp. 114-89.

R. T. Hallock, "A New Look at the Persepolis Treasury Tablets," *JNES* 19, 1960, pp. 90-100.

Idem, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications 92, Chicago, 1969.

Idem, "The Persepolis Fortification Archive," *Orientalia* 42, 1973, pp. 320-23.

Idem, "The Use of Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets," *Bibliotheca Mesopotamica* 6, 1977, pp. 127-33.

Idem, "Selected Fortification Texts," *CDAF* 18, 1978, pp. 109-36.

Idem, "The Evidence of the Persepolis Tablets," *Camb. Hist. Iran* II, 1985, pp. 588-609.

W. Hinz, "Zu den Persepolis-Täfelchen," *ZMDG* 110, 1961, pp. 236-51.

Idem, "Die elamischen Buchungstäfelchen der Darius-Zeit," *Orientalia* 39, 1970, pp. 421-40.

Idem, "Achämenidische Hofverwaltung," *ZA* 61, 1971, pp. 260-311.

Idem, *Altiranisches Sprachgut der Nebenüberlieferungen*, Wiesbaden, 1975.

Idem and H. Koch, *Elamisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols, Berlin, 1987.

H. Koch, *Die religiösen Verhältnisse der Dareioszeit. Untersuchungen an Hand der elamischen Persepolis-Täfelchen*, Wiesbaden, 1977.

M. Mayrhofer, *Onomastica Persepolitana. Das altiranische Namengut der*



*Persepolis-Täfelchen*, Vienna, 1973.

M. C. Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art* (Acta Iranica. Encyclopedie permanente des etudes iraniennes, troisième série 9), Leiden, 1979.

E. F. Schmidt, *Persepolis 2: Contents of the Treasury and Other Discoveries*, Chicago, 1957. ŽR. Schmitt, *Altpersische Siegel-Inschriften* (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. K1. 381), Wien, 1981.

M. W. Stolper, "The Neo-Babylonian Text from the Persepolis Fortification," *JNES* 43, 1984, pp. 299-310.