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RAWLINSON, HENRY II. CONTRIBUTIONS TO ASSYRIOLOGY AND IRANIAN STUDIES

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ii. Contributions to Assyriology and Iranian Studies

Rawlinson's fascination with cuneiform (see CUNEIFORM SCRIPT) began shortly after he was posted to the Near East. His first relevant activity was to copy the trilingual inscriptions of Darius I (r. 522-486 BCE) and Xerxes I (r. 486-465 BCE) at Mount Alvand (Elvend) near Hamadān (DE and XE in modern sigla), in April 1835. Not long after (Adkins, 2003, is useful for relative chronology but rarely provides exact dates of the unpublished correspondence and journals she cites), he had his first sight of Bisotun, but his military duties prevented him from investigating the inscriptions (DB) until more than a year later. In late May 1836 he climbed repeatedly up to the ledge (on no occasion was he "let down by ropes," *pace* the statement in CUNEIFORM SCRIPT) to copy the first lines of the Old Persian; in early 1837 he transcribed almost half of the Old Persian and finished the rest of it in the first week in September. On 4-10 September 1844, he recopied the Old Persian and took squeezes (paper casts)

of the Elamite and the detached Babylonian labels—and carved his name below the inscriptions. Not until September 1847 did he copy the main Babylonian text: by telescope twice over, and by hiring a "wild Kurdish boy" (in early accounts, two boys) to scramble up the cliff, rig a sort of bosun's chair and make squeezes. Rawlinson's description of the casts (1850 [1852]) lacks dates but includes a different engraving of the "general view" accompanying the first part of the publication of the Old Persian (1846), and also a portion of the Elamite reproduced to actual size. The facsimiles of the Elamite and Babylonian, taken by pantograph from the squeezes, were not published until 1855 (8 plates facing pp. 53-60) and after 1866 (3R [1870], plates 39-40), respectively, so it cannot be said that "by making his copies ... available to scholars, Rawlinson paved the way for the decipherment of the Elamite and Babylonian writing systems," *pace* the statement in CUNEIFORM SCRIPT.

In 1836, Rawlinson had learned of the ruins at Paikuli, site of a monument with a bilingual inscription later identified with the Sasanian king Narseh (r. 293-303; see HERZFELD, ERNST iv. Herzfeld and the Paikuli Inscription), but he did not visit the site at that time. In 1844, likely in September, at the time of the work at Bisotun, Rawlinson made copies of the 32 fallen blocks of the Paikuli inscription on which he could discern text—22 from the Middle Persian version, 10 from the Parthian.They were published, albeit in Pahlavi and Hebrew type, respectively, by E. Thomas (1868, pp. 278-96), who notes (p. 289) that Rawlinson seemed to have been more comfortable with the Middle Persian. Rawlinson's own description of the discovery hints (1868, p. 298) that he could not interpret what he was copying. The copies were used in subsequent editions of the texts; 14 of them were published by H. Humbach (1974, 1978).

In 1835, "aware that Professor Grotefend had decyphered some of the names of the early sovereigns of the house of Achæmenes" (Rawlinson, 1839 [1846], p. 3), Rawlinson replicated that feat using the old Persian inscriptions DE (of Darius I) and XE (of Xerxes I). Rawlinson claims (1846, p. 16) that he did not read German and therefore had Lassen (1839) "explained ... by Dr. Aloys Springer, at Calcutta, in 1843." However, he states (1846, p. 6, n. 3) that he consulted Grotefend's 1815 German publication in Tehran in 1836, and he also cites Rask (1835) from an 1826 German translation. Rawlinson acknowledges that though his work proceeded independently, he was anticipated in his results by European scholars; on the crucial point of the syllabic (rather than alphabetic) nature of the script, he and Edward Hincks (1792-1866) made that

discovery simultaneously and independently, both of them having written to Edwin Norris (1795-1872) of the Royal Asiatic Society in August 1846 (Hincks, 2007, p. 155; for an excerpted version of the letter, see Adkins, 2003, p. 223).

Rawlinson's military duties, perfectionism, and dilatoriness account for the sluggish publication history of his Old Persian work, and the biweekly (Larsen, 1997, p. 356, n. 8) post between Baghdad and London took just over a month for delivery. His first transmission to the Royal Asiatic Society (1 January 1838; Arnolt, 1889, provides a full bibliography) included a transcription and translation of the first two paragraphs that, while fairly wide of the mark, soon made their way to interested scholars. Lassen (1839, pp. 175-76) discusses but forbears to cite them and [1844, p. 164] offers only his own interpretation; the transcription and translation were not published until 1876 by Gildemeister. On 30 July 1838, Rawlinson received Eugène Burnouf's (1801-52) *Commentaire* and hence was able to take into account that pioneering analysis of the Avestan ("Zend") language. It is not clear why he considered Vedic Sanskrit, and not Zend, "to approach nearer to the Persian than any other dialect of the family" (Rawlinson, 1846, p. 9); it may be because he rightly perceived the Zend alphabet to be late (Idem, 1846, p. 43, n. 4), and wrongly assumed that the language must also be. In April 1839, a letter from Lassen communicating his results led Rawlinson to rewrite his report again; it was sent on 25 July and read to the Royal Asiatic Society in January 1840, but published only years later. A complete translation was sent in February 1845; he worked hard on the accompanying *Memoir* for the next several months, but in August he received Lassen, 1844 (sent by the author more than a year before), and on its basis made revisions (without help with the German). In September he sent the plates, transcription, and notes (incorporating restorations and emendations from Lassen's edition of the other texts), together with a Latin translation (pp. i-xxvi, xl-lxxi). In October he sent chapters I-II (the history of decipherment [Hincks's review, 1847, adds significant detail] and an overview of all three kinds of cuneiform writing), in November chapter III ("The Alphabet"), in February 1846 chapter IV (analysis of DB), in April chapter V (the other inscriptions), in August the supplementary note on the syllabic nature of the script, and late in 1846 the first half of chapter VI (vocabulary)—as published, it covers half the Old Persian alphabet and breaks off mid-word; the manuscripts have apparently not survived and it is impossible to know whether a few lines or many pages were deferred. Norris did a remarkable job seeing these materials through the press without the participation of the author—overseeing the cutting of cuneiform type, for

instance—but some of his choices obscured Rawlinson's progress: the translation at 1846, pp xxvii-xxxix, was meant to reflect the February 1845 version, but Norris emended it toward the February 1846 version given in chapter IV—but printed, e.g., "That crown, or empire," for "That crown, (or empire,)"; he altered the text of chapters IV and V to reflect the revisions of the supplementary note, albeit with some uncertainties (1847, p. 195, n. *). *JRAS* 11/2 was presumably to accommodate the second half of chapter VI and *JRAS* 11/3 the abandoned chapters VII-VIII, "Historical" and "Geographical Illustrations," respectively (Adkins, 2003, p. 176). These last might have provided the justifications for the decipherment, as Rawlinson never explained how he settled on the identifications (which have largely stood the test of time) of personal and geographic names that, by comparison with known Greek proper names, provided most of the keys to the readings. Rawlinson's interest in the Old Persian materials presumably waned as he took up the challenge of the other two cuneiform scripts; he published the text and translation (with minimal notes) of DB in his brother George Rawlinson's (1812-1902) ambitious edition and commentary on the *History* of Herodotus (1858, with revisions in at least two further editions—sometimes his earlier, sometimes his later interpretations have prevailed, sometimes neither).

Rawlinson made at least some progress on the Elamite inscriptions, as he restored some lacunae in the Old Persian on the basis of the "Median" text. He knew (1845 [1846], p. 36) that "Median" must have been the name of an Iranian language and that there was no similarity between the languages of the Old Persian and "Median" inscriptions, and suggested "Scythic" as a label instead (Idem, 1846, p. 20; n. 1, 34); but he also used "Scythic" for what would eventually be called Sumerian. He turned over his materials to Norris, who published his edition of DB, with an analysis based on Westergaard's work (1844, 1845) in *JRAS* 15 in 1855.

Rawlinson published no progress reports on his Babylonian decipherment, but provided two accounts of Babylonian inscriptions before two editions and translations (one partial) of DB. Chapter II, October 1845, includes a survey (1846, pp. 20-32) of the known inscriptions, classified paleographically as Babylonian (*Primitive*, on cylinders, bricks, and the India House inscription; and *Achaemenian*, in the trilinguals); Assyrian (*Medo-Assyrian*, from Van and environs; and *Assyrian*, from Khorsabad [Ḵorsābād] and elsewhere); and *Elymæan* (little known). Rawlinson was not convinced that the three varieties were versions of a single script (on 27 October 1846, he acknowledged in a

letter to G. C. Renouard, though never publicly, that he was indebted to Hincks for discovering the key to the equivalence of Babylonian and Assyrian characters; Hincks, 2007, p. 158). Though he had been working on the Elamite and Babylonian inscriptions at least since early 1845, for the next five years we have only his unpublished letters to the excavator A. H. Layard, from which Larsen (1997) quotes numerous expressions of frustration and despair. As late as in his 1850 lectures he had not realized that the Elamite syllabary comprises a subset of the Babylonian; or that none of the Babylonian signs were "literal," that is, alphabetic (resulting in utter befuddlement over verb conjugation; see Rawlinson, 1850, p. 413). Although he had recognized polyphony (one sign might have unrelated readings), he had no explanation for this fact. His transcriptions of Babylonian words show that he had gotten many readings wrong (and thus greatly underestimated the usefulness of Semitic cognates), but he does not associate cuneiform signs with transliterations, so we cannot tell where he erred. On each of these points, Hincks had pointed the way before 1850 (Cathcart and Donlon, 1983; Daniels, 1994). Rawlinson's impressive ability to translate the Old Persian, due in large measure to his familiarity with modern Iranian languages, is not matched for Babylonian, as he was far less well acquainted with Hebrew and Arabic. His rendition (1850, pp. 431-48) of the Black Obelisk of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (r. 859-824 BCE), whom he called Temen-bar II, in part agrees fully with modern translations and in part is sheer fantasy (he renders Damascus as Atesh and misses the first discovered mention of a biblical personage, Jehu "son of Omri"—the identification was made by Hincks, 1851).

Because of its poor preservation, the Babylonian inscription at Bisotun was far from ideal as a framework for decipherment. Again, Rawlinson provides an interlinear Latin translation but to a transliteration, not a transcription, of the 112 lines (1851, 17 foldouts, printed by early 1850) and the detached inscriptions—still not recognizing the strictly syllabic nature of the phonetic signs; "Analysis" with English translation of lines 1-37, corresponding to the first column of the Old Persian (1851, pp. i-civ); the beginning of chapter I of a "Memoir on the Babylonian and Assyrian Inscriptions," covering only the first two characters of Babylonian writing (1851, pp. 1-16); and a list of 246 characters with phonetic and logographic readings (1851, 11 unnumbered pages). The memoir once again breaks off mid-word, likely due to Rawlinson's return to Baghdad in October 1851, but it is clear that he had far less command of these materials than of the Old Persian. He may have simply given up, but in May 1853 he reported that a "full account" intended to be read to the Royal

Asiatic Society had been lost to brigands.

By early 1857, public confidence in the decipherment of cuneiform was low, not least because of the perpetual disagreements between Rawlinson and Hincks. W. H. Fox Talbot (1800-77), a protégé of Rawlinson's, had received a prepublication copy of a lithograph of an inscription (1R 9-16) of the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I (r. 1114-1076 BCE) and submitted a translation under seal to the Royal Asiatic Society with the suggestion that Rawlinson and Hincks be invited to submit theirs as well. Hincks received the text too late to render it all and Jules Oppert (1825-1905) of Paris, in London at the time, participated using his own incomplete copy. On 29 May 1857 the jury, comprising some of England's most distinguished intellectuals, reported in considerable detail on the congruences of the four versions (Rawlinson's and Hincks's were closest) and pronounced the decipherment a success (Talbot et al., 1861). Rawlinson's last significant contribution to cuneiform studies was to put his name onto five 70-plate portfolios (1861-84) of lithographs of texts in the British Museum (known by the sigla 1R-5R), generally understood to be the work of the "assistants," though Rawlinson was responsible for many "joins" (reconstructions of tablets from broken fragments).

In later years, Rawlinson published only a handful of formal articles, which may be summarized as follows (see Bibliography for full details): 1853 (1855), recast as a chapter in his brother's *Herodotus*, 1858; 1855 (1861), an archeological report including a translation of the "commemorative inscription," which received a fuller treatment in the accompanying article by Talbot, 1861, pp. 35-52, 104-5; 1864 (1865), a dilettantish investigation of some 17 Aramaic ("Phœnician") dockets—he assigned this name to them—on cuneiform tablets (the four plates are reprinted as 2R 70) and 18 such inscriptions on other objects (Delaporte, 1912, treats his readings respectfully but dismissively); and 1879 (1880), coming full circle to a treatment of an annal of the Achaemenid Cyrus the Great (r. 559-530 BCE) and he promised at least as many more that never saw print (e.g., 1846, p. 44, n. 0: "The early Sassanian Pehlevi is to all appearance a connecting link between the Zend and the Semitic type; for it is only through the Pehlevi that we can compare the Zend letters with the Hebrew. I must reserve this difficult subject for future examination"; 1R preface: "transliterations in the Roman character, and translations in a modern language, will shortly appear"; 1865, p. 189, n. 2: "The contents of the legal tablets of Assyria and Babylonia will form the subject of a second paper, which I propose to publish in the next volume of the Society's

Journal"), except for a great number of informal notes and reports that were mostly published in the weekly literary and scientific magazine *The Athenæum*. The most important of these is a digest (1862a, 1862b) of what would come to be known as the eponym canon (Hincks and Oppert apparently devised that term independently). Made from four exemplars that he had reconstituted from British Museum fragments (2R 68-69), Rawlinson's transliterations (except for considerable uncertainty in resolving the logograms) agree with those of Ungnad's standard edition (1938), and his absolute dates are just two years earlier. Many of the reports are of papers read to learned societies and, beginning in the later 1860s, they deal more and more with political matters to the east and north of Mesopotamia and Persia. Rawlinson contributed to two general reference works besides his brother's *Herodotus*, namely, *Records of the Past* (the Bisotun inscription, 1873, and the Tiglath-Pileser inscription, 1875) and *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th edition (entries on geographical topics; "Baghdad," "Euphrates," "Herat," "Ispahán," and "Kúrdistán," published 1875-82). That he did not contribute entries on other similar topics—"Nineveh," for instance, is contributed by Robertson Smith (1846-94)—suggests some sort of falling-out with *Britannica*'s editorial team (Sayce, 1923, p. 284, remembers him as "old and infirm" in 1892).

The eclipse of Hincks and apotheosis of Rawlinson as decipherer of cuneiform did not begin during his lifetime. Appreciations by Oppert (1878, pp. 1051-52), Haupt (1889), and Flemming (1894), and the *Athenæum*'s obituary (no. 3515, 9 March 1895, pp. 313-14) judiciously evaluate their respective contributions (Oppert credits Hincks with correctly reading 103 cuneiform signs, Rawlinson with 61—and himself with 147). In George Rawlinson's adulatory biography (1898) of his elder brother, Hincks goes unmentioned; and in E. A. Wallis Budge's (1857-1934) chauvinistic history of Assyriology (1925), the Irishman Hincks is derogated at every turn (see quotations in Daniels, 1994, pp. 52-53 and 57, n. 56). But A. H. Sayce (1907, pp. 15-25) and, more fully, R. W. Rogers (1911; 1915, I, pp. 225-44) had already provided accurate accounts; A. J. Booth (1902) primarily cover the discoveries of the inscriptions; he may not have fully grasped the nature of cuneiform writing, but he presents the work of scholars besides Rawlinson and Hincks who made (or did not make) contributions to their understanding; the fullest modern discussion is, surprisingly, by Bermant and Weitzman (1979, chap. 4, esp. pp. 91-107).

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