

OLD PERSIAN ON CLAY*

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Abstract: The discovery of the Old Persian administrative tablet (Fort. 1208-101) in 2006 prompted this brief review of the Old Persian documents on clay. Beside the administrative tablet from Persepolis, which remains unique, some Achaemenid royal inscriptions were written on clay tablets and cylinders. Among them, the most conspicuous is the oversized clay tablet (Sb 2789) bearing an exemplar of the Old Persian inscription DSf. A reassessment of the internal report (1912) and the published account (1947) written by Mecquenem, even if discordant, may shed some new light on its archaeological context, which would be decisive to understand if Sb 2789 represents a foundation document or a master text to be copied on stone.

Keywords: Achaemenid royal inscription, Old Persian, DSf, Susa, foundation document.

The context of an epigraphic find is often underestimated in face of the fascinating effect of writing and of the written message. Sometimes the context is perceived as superseded by the content of the text, even if the original setting of an inscription, just like its material support, recounts an important part of the message, a part which is unknowingly taken for granted in the text itself.¹ Sometimes the context is neglected failing to manage the complexity of the archaeological record. When discussing the Achaemenid epigraphic evidence from Shush/Susa, it is usual to quote the second sentence from the following passage written by the French epigraphist father Vincent Scheil (1858-1940)² in 1929:

*les fragments des tablettes de marbre se sont présentés disséminés sur tous les points de la ruine, Apadana, Acropole, Ville royale, Donjon, etc. Il semble donc oiseux de vouloir indiquer pour chacun d’eux le lieu précis de sa provenance.*³

In this case it was the high number and the apparent dispersion of the epigraphic finds to shift attention away from the context.

* It is a pleasure to acknowledge the help of the scholar honoured in this volume, Rémy Boucharlat, who put at my disposal his knowledge of Susa and the related bibliography. Adriano V. Rossi (“L’Orientale” University, Naples) has kindly read a draft of this paper providing corrections and advice, as always. The subject treated here has been developed in the meetings of the DARIOSH Project, directed by Adriano V. Rossi, with Ela Filippone (Tuscia University) and Grazia Giovinazzo (“L’Orientale” University). Thanks are due to the editors, Ernie Haerincx and Sébastien Gondet, for their help during all the editorial process. Noëmi Daucé has helped in accessing the AdS materials.

The following Achaemenid royal inscriptions have been collated in the framework of the DARIOSH Project, partially funded by the Italian Ministry of Education under PRIN contract 2009JHSEE7: CMc (with the support of the Parsa-Pasargadae Research Foundation and thanks to Hassan Rahsaz); DSf 1 = Sb 2789; DSab; A³Pa (with the support of the Parsa-Pasargadae Research Foundation). The referencing system of the Achaemenid royal inscriptions follows Schmitt 2009: 7-32, ‘Liste der Achaimenideninschriften’; after a slash (/), an abbreviation corresponding to the language is added when needed: OP = Old Persian; AE = (Achaemenid) Elamite; AB = (Achaemenid) Babylonian. The numbering of DSe and DSf fragments follows Steve 1987, nos. 28-29. The referencing system of the rooms and courts in the Palace of Darius (I) at Susa follows the plans in Ladiray 2010: 210-215, figs. 213-217.

¹ As today one can easily distinguish a bottle of water from one of detergent just looking at the shape, the material, and the colour of the container, without reading the label.

² Biographical notes in André-Salvini 1997 and Nasiri-Moghaddam 2006. I owe to the kindness of Jean-Claude Muller (personal communication, September 22, 2014; information excerpted from *Koenigsmacker : mon village et Metrich son annexe (les familles reconstituées de 1681 à 1938)*) the genealogical reconstruction of five Scheil generations living in Koenigsmacker (Lorraine) until Jean Scheil, son of Pierre (1823-1908) ‘tisserand en lin, manœuvre et journalier’, entered the Dominican order in 1881 taking the name of Vincent. His grandfather, Nicolas Scheil (1749-1825), was a ‘cordier’ and this explains the Latin epithet for his house, ‘« Funaria » dicta’, in the poem quoted in the obituary Roques 1940: 373. An obituary appeared also on the newspaper *La Croix*, 62, no. 17777 (January 9, 1941), p. 3, signed ‘L.-H. V.’ (available in *Gallica*, <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k444150w/f3.item>>).

³ Scheil 1929: 4. Quoted, e.g., in Vallat 2010: 302.

Several fragmentary Achaemenid inscriptions were found also later during the excavations led by Roman Ghirshman (1895-1979) in the ‘chantier’ Ville Royale A (1946-1966). Their findspots are usually provided by Marie-Joseph Steve (1911-2001)⁴ in MDP53,⁵ often in a system of reference defined by a ‘couche’ and a ‘locus’, and can be crosschecked in the ‘Inventaire des textes’ published by Steve, Hermann Gasche & Léon De Meyer in 1980.⁶ Limiting the inquiry to the well-documented Ville Royale A (VR A), Achaemenid inscriptions were found in several layers (VR A XIV, XIII, XII, XI, IX, and VI) dated from the 17th to the 1st century BCE.⁷ The spots range from the north-eastern to the north-western limits of the excavated area, ca. 0.6 ha wide. Unfortunately the Achaemenid period, which should be attested in layer VR A VIII, is nearly unrepresented.⁸ In some cases, out-of-context finds in earlier layers have been explained in connection to later pits,⁹ while re-use has been invoked to explain finds in later layers¹⁰ but, in general, the layer recorded for the various finds ‘*n’implique nullement qu’elles appartiennent à la couche en question*’.¹¹ Even leaving aside the dating, the knowledge of layers and loci is not enough to associate findspots to archaeological features or architectural structures. So we know that clay cylinder,¹² clay tablet,¹³ and stone table¹⁴ fragments were found in the area of the ‘enceinte achéménide’ on the north-eastern limit of Ville Royale A,¹⁵ but it is not possible to state if they were found in the masonry of the ‘enceinte’ except perhaps in one instance.¹⁶

Paradoxically, the resulting picture is not much different from the one programmatically stated in the above-quoted Scheil’s words, because the raw context data is not meaningful without a practical knowledge and a prolonged acquaintance with the site. It is as if archaeologists and epigraphists were speaking two different languages. From the point of view of an epigraphist, this perception changes when an archaeologist is able to explain the context transmitting also his knowledge of the site, as Rémy Boucharlat has done in many articles, lectures, and meetings. An example is provided by the section ‘Visite de Suse’ on the website

⁴ Biographical notes in Gasche 2001, Spycket 2001, and Vallat 2002.

⁵ Steve 1987.

⁶ Steve & al. 1980: 119-133, Annexe 3.

⁷ See Steve & al. 2002-2003, cols. 396-397, for a brief introduction to the layers and their dating.

⁸ Steve & al. 2002-2003, col. 396.

⁹ E.g. the clay tablet fragment DSf 10 (Steve & al. 1980: 121, A.3.1.3).

¹⁰ E.g. the column bases with inscription DSg (Steve 1987: 78).

¹¹ Steve & al. 1980: 119.

¹² DSf 0025 (TS A/XI 49): ‘chantier A de la «Ville royale», couche XI, loc.55 ... Recueilli à proximité du secteur où l’on mettra au jour une partie de l’enceinte achéménide’ (Steve 1987: 73); ‘28.3.1956 (10^e camp.). Locus 55 ... L’emplacement précis, dans le locus 55, a été probablement mal observé. On notera, dans le locus 55, la présence d’un four et d’une installation en briques cuites, tous les deux intrusifs en A IX (*Journal* II, 43)’ (Steve & al. 1980: 121, A.3.1.3, TS.IX.49 [sic, instead of TS.XI.49]); locus ‘055’ in the plan in Steve & al. 1980, fig. 8.

¹³ DSf 11 (TS A/XIII 72): ‘dans le secteur N-E du chantier A de Suse, au cours du dégagement du rempart achéménide, côté nord’ (Steve 1987: 67); ‘A XV, en 910 × 1080’ (Steve 1987: 67, fn. 175); ‘14.2.1964 (18^e camp.). Chantier «Rempart Nord de la Ville Royale»’ (Steve & al. 1980: 129, A.3.5.3, TS.XIII.72). See also the findspot of DSf 13 below.

DSf 13 (TS A/XII 100): ‘Comme DSf 11 ... provient des parages de l’enceinte achéménide, à l’Est du chantier A: il se trouvait précisément dans le gravier qui encaisse le mur’ (Steve 1987: 68); ‘26.2.1963 (17^e camp.) ... trouvé dans la chemise de gravier des remparts extérieurs (passage des wagonnets)’ (Steve & al. 1980: 128, A.3.4.3, TS.XII.100). The ‘gravier’ in Steve 1987: 68, should be the ‘chemise de gravier derrière l’enceinte achéménide’ in Gasche 1973, plan 5 (see also the section in Ghirshman 1965: 20, fig. 22: ‘chemise de gravier’). It should be the fragment found ‘près du mur d’enceinte’ in Ghirshman 1964: 10.

¹⁴ DSf 011 (TS A/XI 25): ‘Chantier A, couche XI, loc. 52’ (Steve 1987: 71); ‘8.12.1962 (17^e camp.). Fosse 7 (Parthe-Hellénistique)’ (Steve & al. 1980: 125, A.3.3.2, TS.XI.25); locus ‘052’ in the plan in Steve & al. 1980, fig. 8.

¹⁵ On the ‘enceinte’, see Ghirshman 1965: 6 and 20-21, figs. 22-23; also Perrot 2010c: 136.

¹⁶ The only epigraphic exemplar whose findspot is explicitly related to the ‘enceinte’ seems to be the baked tablet fragment DSf 13 (TS A/XII 100), as explained in the footnote 13 above. This correlation would be relevant because the referent of DSe (Steve 1987, no. 28) seems to be the fortification wall (Old Persian *didā-* in DSe/OP:46 and [48]; Akkadian *birtu* in DSe/AB:33 and 35; the corresponding Elamite passage is lost) but Adriano V. Rossi rightly warns to be careful in recognizing only one *didā-* in Susa (the toponym is restored in the passage) and in interpreting it exclusively as a fortification (Rossi 2010; the relevant passage is quoted in Rossi 2010: 213; see also Rossi 2003: 689-690, fn. 22, and Root 2010: 187-190). Another Susa wall, whose Achaemenid dating has been recently reassessed by Boucharlat, is the ‘mur d’enceinte’ of the Acropolis (Boucharlat 2010: 376, ‘La date de la muraille et son abandon’). Comparative evidence is provided by the Cyrus Cylinder, where the city wall of Babylon, named *Imgur-Enlil* (line 38), is mentioned; few lines below, the discovery of an inscription of Ashurbanipal is related, perhaps in the masonry of the wall (line 43), but other architectonic features are mentioned in the middle, which is partially damaged; even in the case that the discovery was fictional, the embedding of inscriptions in the masonry of a city wall is highly plausible. On the findspots of cylinders in Mesopotamia, see Ellis 1968: 110-113.

Achemenet,¹⁷ entirely structured and mainly written by Boucharlat, where the epigraphic finds are clearly connected (with all their related issues) to the topographical and architectural features. It is not only a matter of providing an excavation spot, but also and especially to provide meaning towards the understanding of functions as much as possible. In this way the archaeological and epigraphic evidence or, better, the contextual and textual data, do not remain disjointed pieces but converge in an integrated study of the past.

THE OLD PERSIAN ADMINISTRATIVE TABLET FROM PERSEPOLIS (FORT. 1208-101)

In June 2006, Matthew W. Stolper was looking at the twelve unpublished Persepolis Fortification tablets kept in the excavation box no. 1208 in his office at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. As he remarked, tablet Fort. 1208-101, ‘seen at arm’s length and among other tablets’, is not distinctive, having the same shape (‘a tongue-shaped tag, fitting easily into the palm of a hand’) and size (ca. 4.4 × 4.0 × 1.8 cm) of many other Elamite tablets of Hallock’s categories A-S.¹⁸ The tablet had been touched by many hands since its discovery in 1933 at Takht-e Jamshid/Persepolis,¹⁹ however none had recognized what Stolper saw in June 2006: a script entirely different from the ordinary Elamite cuneiform generally used in the Persepolis tablets. Nevertheless, Stolper knew that script: he had just found the only extant administrative document in Old Persian.

The joint publication with Jan Tavernier in 2007, just one year after the discovery, arose a great interest among Old Persian scholars worldwide. It arose also a crucial and still unanswered question: as Stolper and Tavernier put it, was it the tip of the iceberg or the isolated diversion of a scribe in the framework of a diffused literacy?²⁰ The Old Persian tablet is not the only non-Elamite document among the Fortification tablets: a bit less than a twentieth of the documents are Aramaic monolingual tablets,²¹ while it seems that the Persepolis administration accepted “expense accounts” in different languages, including Greek (Fort. 1771) and possibly Phrygian (A. 29797).²²

Another peculiarity of Fort. 1208-101 is its being one of the rare Old Persian texts not mentioning the king, the others being two private seal inscriptions.²³ However, Fort. 1208-101 was not a private document but a product of the royal administration, just as the private seals were probably used by members of the ruling class or, at least, by individuals who wanted to emphasize their acquaintance with the royal family.

THE OLD PERSIAN TABLET FROM THE PALACE OF DARIUS AT SUSAN (SB 2789)

Fort. 1208-101 is the only known administrative document in Old Persian, but not the only extant Old Persian text on clay.²⁴ While most of the extant Achaemenid royal inscriptions were engraved on rock or stone, some were painted on glazed bricks, and few exemplars impressed on clay have been found.²⁵

¹⁷ <www.achemenet.com/fr/visit/?/suse/vue-generale-du-site-archeologique>, available online since 2015, November 2. Boucharlat had already structured the ‘visite’ and written a draft of all the accompanying texts in late 2013, when I was asked to help with the description of the Achaemenid royal inscriptions, maintaining in several cases his original wording.

¹⁸ Stolper & Tavernier 2007: 11; size given on p. 12 (width × height × thickness). For a reassessment of Hallock’s categories, see the comments interspersed in Azzoni & Stolper 2015: 9-12, including footnotes.

¹⁹ On the discovery and archaeological context of the Persepolis Fortification tablets, see Basello in press 2, with further references.

²⁰ Stolper & Tavernier 2007: 16.

²¹ Jones & Stolper 2008: 43; a similar proportion can be deduced from Henkelman 2013: 531 (‘preserved tablets and fragments with Elamite cuneiform stem from 15,000 or more original documents’) and 532 (‘some 800 monolingual Aramaic texts on clay tablets’).

²² Stolper & Tavernier 2007: 3-5, with further references.

²³ BM 89133: Schmitt 1981: 37-38, ‘Sa’; Merrillees 2005: 74, no. 74 (with a slightly different reading on lines 7-8 by Rüdiger Schmitt). BM 89210: Schmitt 1981: 38-39, ‘Sb’; not included in Merrillees 2005 being ‘recut on an Early Dynasty seal’ (Merrillees 2005: 139, §V.8). The fragment of stone table TJM 3282, recently studied in the Takht-e Jamshid/Persepolis Museum by Ela Filippone and notable for the mention of Parnaka (side, line 3: *f-r-n-k*), the head of the Persepolis administration, also bears the name of king Darius (I).

²⁴ Stolper & Tavernier 2007: 8-9.

²⁵ Royal inscriptions on artefacts in stone, metal, and blue composition are also known.

As a writing carrier for royal inscriptions, clay is well known from the cuneiform world in the shape of bricks²⁶ and cylinders.²⁷ Royal inscriptions were written also on clay tablets, but tablets were not written directly for the display of power, which is one of the main concerns for the committee of a royal inscription. Another fundamental concern was the writing of the name of the king,²⁸ i.e. the preservation of its memory, and in some cases this was done concealing the inscription in a foundation deposit or inside a wall,²⁹ as we will see later.

Coming back to the Achaemenid royal inscriptions, the following ones are attested on clay:³⁰ CB^{2a}, better known as the Cyrus Cylinder, in Babylonian on a barrel cylinder, now known also from two small tablet fragments;³¹ CWa from Uruk (Warka) and CUa from Ur, both stamped in Babylonian on the upper or lower surface of some bricks;³² DSa, DSb, DSk, and DSI on bricks from Susa, stamped in Old Persian on the upper or lower surface (DSb) and on the side face (DSa, DSk, and DSI).³³

The following Achaemenid royal inscriptions, mainly known from stone exemplars, were also written on clay: in Babylonian we have two exemplars of DSe (DSe 002 and DSe 003) and two of DSf (DSf 0025 and DSf 0026) on cylinder fragments, whose immediate cognate is the Cyrus Cylinder from Babylon, then a tablet fragment (DSf 0027)³⁴; in Elamite we have a cylinder fragment of DSf (DSf 09) and a tablet fragment of DSz (DSz 03)³⁵; in Old Persian we have some tablet fragments of DSf (DSf 9², DSf 10-13),³⁶ nothing in comparison to Sb 2789 (DSf 1), the masterpiece of its class, an oversized clay tablet (26.5 × 22.5 × 2.5 cm) partially restored from rejoined fragments, preserving most of the Old Persian text of inscription DSf.³⁷

Sb 2789 is often reproduced in print³⁸ and is permanently exhibited at the Louvre.³⁹ It was found during the excavations led by Jacques de Morgan (1857-1924) at Susa in 1911 or 1912. According to a later essay (1947) on the ‘palais achéménide de Suse’ by Roland de Mecquenem (1877-1957),⁴⁰ who succeeded Morgan as director of the Délégation en Perse (renamed in Mission Archéologique de Susiane) together with Vincent Scheil in 1912 but was working at Susa since 1903, the discovery is reported as follows:

²⁶ Mesopotamia: see, e.g., Walker 1981 and Sass & Marzahn 2010: 19-39, ‘The royal cuneiform impressions’. Elam: see, e.g., Malbran-Labat 1995: 151-164, ‘Les briques’. The coincidence of the usual writing and building material was surely a lucky chance, even if the preparation of tablets and bricks required two rather different production chains and skills.

²⁷ Mesopotamia: see, e.g., Ellis 1968: 108-144, ‘Cones, Cylinders, and Prisms’, and Studevent-Hickman 2006.

²⁸ One of the terms used in Akkadian to refer to a royal inscription is *mušarû*, a loanword from Sumerian MU.SARA ‘written name’ (Seminara 2004: 547 and 568).

²⁹ It is perhaps noteworthy that Elamite royal inscriptions were handwritten on the side face of the brick, i.e. the visible one, and stamped mainly on the upper or lower surface, usually hidden into the masonry (Basello 2013b: 9-10).

³⁰ The fragment of clay tablet found at Gherla (Transylvania, Romania) may be added to the following list (see Schmitt 2009: 10, s.v. DGa, with references).

³¹ The Cyrus Cylinder (BM 90920) has been the object of several publications in the last years, as a consequence of the discovery of the new fragments (Finkel 2013) and of its tour in Iran ([anonymous] 2010) and USA (Curtis 2013). See also Basello 2013a, with further references. The two fragments (BM 47134 and BM 47176, from a same large tablet even if ‘non-joining and widely separated’) are published by Irving Finkel in Finkel 2013: 129-135, ‘Appendix’, and presented also in Curtis 2013: 44-45, nos. 2-3. Note that in Finkel 2013: 19, caption to fig. 9, the two fragments are inverted: BM 47176 is one-sided, BM 47134 is two-sided.

³² Schaudig 2001: 548-549, K1.1 (CWa) and K1.2 (CUa). An exemplar of CUa (BM 118362) is reproduced and briefly presented in Curtis 2013: 46-47, no. 4.

³³ Schmitt 2009: 121-122 (DSa and DSb) and 137-138 (DSk and DSI); see also 13-15, s.v., with further references (Schmitt described the carriers of DSa and DSb as ‘Verblendziegeln’ and those of DSk and DSI simply as ‘Ziegel’). According to Scheil 1929: 48, DSb was stamped (on the upper or lower surface) together with one exemplar of DSa, DSk, and DSI (on the side face). A third exemplar of DSa (Sb 15567), showing a misaligned double impression, is exhibited at the Louvre, Aile Sully, Iran, l’empire perse achéménide : Persépolis et Suse, Salle 15 (former Salle 14). See also the detailed treatment of DSa and DSb in Schweiger 1998, vol. 2: 277-287.

³⁴ Steve 1987: 60-61 (DSe 002 and DSa 003) and 73 (DSf 0025 and 0026); Vallat 1983 (DSf 0027).

³⁵ Steve 1987: 70 (DSf 09) and 82 (DSz 03). The sequence ‘AŠ AŠ’ in Steve’s transliteration of DSf 09 corresponds to the personal classifier HAL, used in stead of DIŠ as it is usual in the Elamite tablets from Persepolis.

³⁶ Steve 1987: 65-68 (DSf 9-13).

³⁷ Scheil 1929: 16-21 and pls. VIII-IX.

³⁸ E.g. M.W. Stolper in Harper & al. 1992: 271, catalogue and fig. no. 190; André-Salvini 1997: 121, fig. 99; J. Curtis & Sh. Razmjou in Curtis & Tallis 2005: 56, catalogue and fig. no. 1; Vallat 2010: 302, fig. 328.

³⁹ Aile Sully, Iran, l’empire perse achéménide : Persépolis et Suse, Salle 15 (former Salle 14). Related page on the Louvre website: <www.louvre.fr/oeuvre-notices/charte-de-fondation-du-palais-de-darius-ier-en-vieux-perse>.

⁴⁰ Some autobiographical notes in Mecquenem 1980: 5-16. See also AdS, Biographie, <www.mom.fr/mecquenem/index/biographie>, and Martinez-Sève 2004.

une de ces tablettes [with the inscription DSf], portant le texte vieux-perse, mesurait 0 m.,265 sur 0 m.,22 et fut trouvée en 1911, sous une grosse pierre de seuil de l'Apadana. D'autres fragments furent trouvés sur la Ville Royale.⁴¹

Unfortunately this reference to the archaeological context is rather meagre and reminds the above-quoted words of Scheil, which indeed were immediately preceded by a useful remark on Sb 2789 findspot:

Mise à part la grande tablette du texte perse, qui a été trouvée en son lieu naturel, l'Apadana, — les fragments des tablettes de marbre se sont présentés disséminés sur tous les points de la ruine, Apadana, Acropole, Ville royale, Donjon, etc.⁴²

In Scheil's terminology, Apadana points to what we are used to call today the Palace of Darius (I). The tablet itself was instrumental in confirming the attribution of the palace to Darius I (521-486 BCE), as already suggested by the late Achaemenid inscription A²Sa of Artaxerxes II (404-359 BCE),⁴³ even if DSf does not use the word Apadana (*apadāna-* in A²Sa/OP:4, used as a loanword in the Elamite and Babylonian versions) but *hadiš* (DSf/OP 1:22).⁴⁴ Adriano V. Rossi, in a seminal contribution published in 2003, emphasized the dangerous relationships — methodologically speaking — between a text like DSf and its referent(s).⁴⁵ As Rossi pointed out, we do not know how many 'palaces of Darius' there were in Susa,⁴⁶ so in what follows 'Palace of Darius' is used as a general reference to the architectonic complex built on the Apadana mound.

It is tempting to understand 'son lieu naturel' as a foundation deposit in the Palace of Darius.⁴⁷ The mere fact that a good part of the original tablet is preserved suggests that it was interred on purpose. This interpretation seems to be ruled out by Mecquenem who, immediately before the above-quoted passage, reported:

D'après les documents analogues trouvés à Persépolis, nous savons que ces tables étaient enterrées aux angles des édifices dans les fondations.⁴⁸ A Suse, nous n'avons jamais trouvé une de ces pierres en place ; nous en avons trouvé des fragments sur l'Apadana, mais davantage en divers points de la Ville Royale.⁴⁹

Anyway, the fact that no stone table was found in place does not mean that there were no foundation deposits. In the same essay, Mecquenem reported the discovery of 'une petite case en briques de champ' which was found empty in the middle of Court C1 ('Cour de l'Ouest'); another one was found in the middle of Court C2.⁵⁰ Later, during the excavations led by Jean Perrot (1920-2012) from 1969 to 1979, other foundation cases, also empty (or, maybe, emptied), were found in correspondence to some doors on Court C1.⁵¹ Moreover, the 1911 campaign revealed 'deux curieux dépôts de fondation', one of sealed bullae and one of

⁴¹ Mecquenem 1947: 91.

⁴² Scheil 1929: 4.

⁴³ The trilingual inscription A²Sa (Steve 1987, no. 35) was found during the first excavations of William Kennett Loftus in 1850-1852, engraved on four column bases, the central ones in the first two rows towards the northern portico, in the great hypostyle hall of the Palace of Darius at Susa. The focus of the inscription is the restoration of 'this Apadana' that 'Darius (I), my [= of Artaxerxes II] ancestor, made' (the Old Persian term *apaniyāka-*, here translated as 'ancestor', is discussed in Rossi 1995). From this passage, the entire architectural complex and the related tell in Susa have been named Apadana, the palace itself has been called 'of Darius', and the Old Persian term *apadāna-* has been applied to other palaces with a columned hall (like the Apadana of Persepolis) by modern scholars. Four fragmentary exemplars of A²Sa were found in close vicinity to the hypostyle hall during the excavations led by Roman Ghirshman in 1958-1963 (Steve 1987: 88).

⁴⁴ On the different terms used to name the referent of the inscription, see Rossi 2003.

⁴⁵ Rossi 2003.

⁴⁶ Rossi 2003: 689, 691, and *passim*.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., J. Curtis & Sh. Rasmjoui in Curtis & Tallis 2005: 56: 'Susa, Palace of Darius, uncovered *in situ* buried under a threshold in the southern area of the palace'. Cf. Root 2010: 179, criticizing Curtis and Rasmjoui: 'None of the exemplars of DSf, including *Louvre Sb 2789*, was found *in situ*'. It has to be noted that, while not mentioning the southern area of the palace, Mecquenem's statement that Sb 2789 was found under a threshold (Mecquenem 1947: 1) could be interpreted either as a deliberate (as in Curtis and Rasmjoui's description) or a chance burying (as implied by Root's statement), even if it seems likely that he had in mind a primary deposition.

⁴⁸ The reference is to the findspots of the silver and gold plaques bearing the inscription DPh in the so-called Apadana of Persepolis, discovered by Friedrich Krefter (1898-1995) in 1933 (Mousavi 2012: 172-178 and figs. 8.10-19).

⁴⁹ Mecquenem 1947: 91.

⁵⁰ Mecquenem 1947: 12 and 22, fig. 13.3 (Court C1); 11 (Court C2). See also Ladiray 2010: 176, 'Les cases de fondation', and Mousavi 2012: 178, fn. 65 (read 'fig. 13/3' instead of 'fig. 13/1').

⁵¹ Perrot & Ladiray 1972: 20, 'Cases de fondation'; Ladiray 2010: 176. Photos in Perrot & Ladiray 1972: 40, pl. III.1-2 (Doorway 840); 41, pl. IV.2 (Doorway 880); 49, pl. XII.1 (Passage 795); Ladiray 2010: 176, figs. 154-155 (upper photo: perhaps to the east of Passage 768, close to Wall 774). See also Mousavi 2012: 178-179, fn. 65.

Egyptian amulets.⁵² In this instance, the objects do not seem to be found in brick cases but the circumstances of the finds led Mecquenem and Pézard to describe them as foundation deposits, i.e. documents (in a broad sense, including objects that were distinctive, i.e. that conveyed some sort of message) purportedly, ritually, and symbolically interred during the construction of a building. So, in my opinion, the interpretation of Sb 2789 as a foundation document remains possible, especially if one goes back to Mecquenem's words where its find-spot is described as 'sous une grosse pierre de seuil' i.e. 'under a stone threshold'.⁵³ Considering its size and regular writing, the alternative would be that Sb 2789 was a master text used by the royal chancellery to produce exemplars of the inscription DSf on stone, glazed bricks, and also clay cylinders. In this case, its original location would have been some archival storeroom of the royal chancellery. However, it seems preferably to consider 'sous une grosse pierre de seuil' as the indication of a primary deposition in the framework of foundation deposit (in a broad meaning, i.e. not necessarily inside a foundation case), even if it was not explicitly recognized as such.

In the last years, Rémy Boucharlat committed himself, besides the actual archaeological activities on the field in Iran, to an archival digging, promoting and directing the online publication of the *Archives de Suse (1912-1939)* of Mecquenem. Thanks to this resource, one can browse the internal reports that Mecquenem, as director of the mission, filed yearly to the Ministère de l'Instruction Publique. In the first one (Paris, Archives Nationales, F/17/17255),⁵⁴ addressed to Morgan (who was still in charge) and related to 1912, the discovery of Sb 2789 is briefly but interestingly referred to:

Le déblaiement du palais de Darius fut activement poussé ; mais les constructions s'étendirent beaucoup plus vers l'Est qu'il n'avait été prévu dès le début, et la grande distance à laquelle il fallut porter les déblais ralentit trop ce travail pour qu'il fut possible de le terminer.

Il fut déblayé à côté du grand parvis découvert en 1911, un deuxième parvis dallé de grandes briques et bordé de salles. Il reste surtout du palais des pavages intérieurs exécutés en béton recouvert d'ocre rouge, mais les travaux en profondeur ont retrouvé presque partout les fondations en briques cuites des murs en terre crue ; également ont mis à jour de grosses pierres, sans doute fondations de colonnes.

*Près de l'une de ces pierres il fut trouvé une grande tablette d'écriture perse, au nom de Darius.*⁵⁵

According to this report, the tablet was found near a great stone in the floor, considered by Mecquenem as a base for a column. However, stones in the floor were not used only as column bases: several stone bases were found in the Palace of Darius, serving to support statues, poles, and, perhaps, the throne and the royal bed.⁵⁶ Note also that 'près d'une grosse pierre' in the 1912 report became 'sous une grosse pierre de seuil' in the 1947 essay. This could be due to a wrong recollection or an afterthought. It seems also that the tablet was found during the campaign to which the report is devoted, i.e. the 1912 campaign started on January 8 and ended on March 28 employing 1300 workers,⁵⁷ instead of 1911 as related in the 1947 essay.⁵⁸

⁵² Mecquenem & Pézard 1911: 55-56.

⁵³ In Pézard & Pottier 1926: 92, 'pierre de seuil' is used in reference to what is called elsewhere a 'crapaudine' (in French), i.e. a stone set at the foot of a doorjamb with a hemispheric cavity where the pivot of a door rotates into. This would be interesting since pivot stones were used in Mesopotamia and also Elam (e.g. EKI 48a, EKI 48b, and EKI 65: 'Türangelsteine' of Shilhak-Inshushinak I and Hutelutush-Inshushinak; Henkelman 2010: 494, §1.4: three unpublished 'stone door-sockets' of Shilhak-Inshushinak I) as text carriers for royal inscriptions. The bricks with the above-mentioned inscription CUa of Cyrus were found 'in a gateway in the north-east wall of the inner enclosure' of Ur and 'had been used to build a box against the south-east door-jamb for the pivot-stone on which the gate turned' (Curtis 2013: 47). However, in Mecquenem 1947: 22, fig. 13.2, 'Seuil de porte' is used as caption to the drawing of a stone slab without a curvilinear shape possibly representing a hemispheric cavity; conversely, 'Crapaudine en bronze' is used as caption for fig. 13.5. Anyway, we cannot ignore that Perrot rendered the passage in the 1912 report as 'à proximité d'un bloc support de crapaudine de porte' (Perrot 2010b: 254, endnote 47). I would like to thank François Desset for linguistic help in French usage.

⁵⁴ Report 'au ministère des Affaires étrangères' in Perrot 2010b: 254, endnote 47; 'Archives Nationale F¹⁷ 17246 in Steve & al. 2002-2003, col. 394, 'Les travaux de 1912'.

⁵⁵ AdS, Rapport de 1912, <www.mom.fr/mecquenem/rapport/afficher/annee/1912>.

⁵⁶ Ladiray 2010: 166, 'Pierre de seuil et autres éléments d'infrastructure', and 171, 'Autres pierres de fondation'.

⁵⁷ AdS, Rapport de 1912, <www.mom.fr/mecquenem/rapport/afficher/annee/1912>. The 1912 date is supported also by the lacking of references to the discovery of Sb 2789 in the preliminary report of the 1910-1911 campaign in Mecquenem & Pézard 1911; see, e.g., Mecquenem & Pézard 1911: 55, where clay tablets are not mentioned at all: 'Le palais de Darius, comme en 1910, a fourni une nombreuse série d'inscriptions sur bases et supports de colonnes, briques et stèles de calcaire gris'. Steve & al. 2002-2003, col. 394, 'Les travaux de 1912', and Perrot 2010b: 254, endnote 47, follow the 1912 date mentioning the evidence of the 1912 report.

⁵⁸ Mecquenem 1947: 91 (quoted above).

The palace plan attached to the report (Pl. 1) shows clearly the area excavated at that time.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, there is no indication of stone bases as in later plans. Notwithstanding this, starting from the assumption that no stone base was removed or discovered there in the meantime, we can check the 1912 excavated area on the later plans where the extant stone bases are marked with a specific pattern labelled as ‘Bases de colonnes et en calcaire’ or ‘Pierres – Bases de colonnes’.⁶⁰ The exemplars are not many: three stone bases are aligned along the east wall of Room 751⁶¹ and one is in the doorway of Room 842.⁶² Room 751 was considered then as an entrance to the palace on the southern side, while now it has been clarified that the room was close, being the last and relatively smaller room in a series of three rooms whose entrance was on the court C1. Room 751 is now generally considered as the ‘chambre du roi’,⁶³ i.e. one of the focal points of the palace, as the discovery of stone foundation tables in 1972 has shown.⁶⁴ The foundation tables, one in Babylonian (DSaa) and one in Elamite (DSz), were found below the walls to the east (DSaa, Wall 770) and west (DSz, Wall 769) of Doorway 766, leading to Room 751 from Room 752, and bear inscriptions similar to DSf. The foundation tables were intentionally buried as permanent records of the building activities of king Darius, probably as part of a ritual ceremony when the construction started.

The stone base in the doorway of Room 842 is described as ‘un seuil en pierre, calcaire gris, soigneusement poli et fait de plusieurs morceaux ou réparé’ in the 1947 essay by Mecquenem.⁶⁵ Room 842 is immediately to the east of Room 751, sharing a wall with it, a wall which is thinner than others due to a niche occupied by the three stone bases mentioned above. It is connected to Room 751 through Room 752.

If one can trust the stone bases drawn in the plans and the 1947 essay, Sb 2789 was probably found below the threshold of Room 842, described in the same way (‘pierre de seuil’) of its findspot in Mecquenem’s essay. If this chain of suppositions is correct, Sb 2789 could represent the Old Persian text which was paired with the Elamite and Babylonian stone tables DSz and DSaa, suggesting that all these three inscriptions were buried as part of the same ritual event and conceived to complete each other, both for the language and the content.⁶⁶ In this hypothesis, a direct relationship between DSz, DSaa, and Sb 2789 would be assured by their findspots, which would be in a sort of sequence: at both sides of Doorway 766 and under the threshold of Room 842, which is immediately to the west of Doorway 766, probably part of the same functional sector of the building. It would remain in the folds of microhistory why Sb 2789 was written on clay while the DSz and DSaa on stone.

In this case, the differences in the three texts should be explained. In the view developed in the framework of the DARIOSH Project,⁶⁷ it is quite clear that the chancellery had several modules to be used to compose what we call today a royal inscription. These modules could be combined following a predefined order to suit the needs of the moment, especially considering the available space.⁶⁸ The many variants in the combination of the modules attested in the Achaemenid royal inscriptions assure, in my opinion, that the king was not directly involved in the process of composition. The king could be consulted in some major cases, like the text of an inscription like Bisotun or in the thematic sections of more articulated inscriptions like DSf, but surely was not the author of the text, which was a literary product, made by specialized scribes. The mere fact

⁵⁹ AdS, Rapport de 1912, plan no. 2, <www.mom.fr/mecquenem/photo/viewer/id/mecquenem_photo_suse_1912_002_plan.jpg/rapport/1>.

⁶⁰ Respectively Mecquenem 1922, pl. II = Chevalier 2010: 103, fig. 70; Mecquenem 1947: 8-9, plan I = Chevalier 2010: 104-105, fig. 71.

⁶¹ Drawing in Mecquenem 1947: 22, fig. 13.1 = Chevalier 2010: 170, fig. 146. Photo no. 10 in the album *Palais de Darius I^{er} à Suse, 1913* by Maurice Pillet published in Ladiray 2010: 170, fig. 145 (the point of view of the photo is marked on the related plan published in Chevalier 2010: 99, fig. 64). See also Ladiray 2010: 171, ‘Autres pierres de fondation’.

⁶² The doorway is labelled ‘p30’ in Mecquenem 1947: 8-9, plan I = Chevalier 2010: 104-105, fig. 71.

⁶³ Ladiray 2010: 218, ‘Les « salles d’apparat »’; Perrot 2010b: 245, ‘L’appartement royal’.

⁶⁴ Perrot & Ladiray 1972: 20, ‘Tables de fondation’; 36, fig. 13 (plan; the findspots are marked by two small black squares to the east and west of Doorway 766; see also the plan in Ladiray 2010: 214-215, fig. 217); 51, pl. XIV.1-2 (photos). See also Perrot 2010b: 244, fig. 256.

⁶⁵ Mecquenem 1947: 23. The stone base is drawn in Mecquenem 1947: 22, fig. 13.2.

⁶⁶ See also the treatment of variations, versions, and ‘same content, different text’ in Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions in Da Riva 2008: 49-57, §§4.3-4.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Filippone in press a: 159-160, and in press b.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., the comparative evidence of the Middle Elamite royal inscription EKI 44 in Basello 2012: 15-16.

that these modules remain more or less the same from one Achaemenid king to the other, is another proof that the king had no role in the composition. Every time something was built or restored, there was an office in the chancellery that was requested to draft the related inscription. Considering the usual shortcomings of a bureaucratic apparatus, it would not be surprising if a text prepared for a building was used for another one without changes or only with minor ones. Some inscriptions required more interactions between the architects and the scribes, e.g. the inscriptions on glazed bricks, while others, e.g. the inscriptions on clay bricks, especially if stamped, could be prepared in a rather independent way by the chancellery. What matters was the systematic choice of using writing and three different languages as a mean to display power.

However, one has to admit that several details were not drawn in the plans and therefore it is likely that other stone bases were found but not marked. Moreover, considering the peculiarity of the threshold of Room 842, Mecquenem would have explicitly mentioned it in connection to Sb 2789. Finally, this area of the palace was discovered before the 1912 campaign⁶⁹ and, as explained above, it seems more likely that Sb 2789 was found in that year and not before. In the 1912 report, Mecquenem mentioned the discovery of Sb 2789 in connection to the discovery of ‘grosses pierres’ in the ‘deuxième parvis dallé de grandes briques et bordé de salles’ discovered in that year. If one looks at the plan attached to the 1912 report (Pl. 1), the ‘parvis’ is the Court C2. It seems more likely that Sb 2789 was found in the vicinity of one of the doorways around the Court C2 or in the rooms around the same court. Having interpreted the area to the south of the Court C2 as the chancellery,⁷⁰ Perrot remarked that Sb 2789 came from this same area referring to the 1912 report.⁷¹ As we have seen, the 1912 report is not so detailed, so Sb 2789 could have been found also in the opposite area with respect to the Court C2.

A further hypothesis, which will remain no more likely than the others discussed above, could be advanced. Mecquenem was quite confident in interpreting the ‘grosses pierres’ as ‘fondations de colonnes’ in the 1912 report. Maybe Sb 2789 was found where Mecquenem thought that there were columns, even if the subsequent researches rejected this interpretation. In his ‘essai de restitution’, he reconstructed a hypostyle hall in the Court F,⁷² which is separated by the Court C2 only by a narrow corridor. In the excavation plan attached to the 1912 report, this area is blank and therefore would be unexcavated. Anyway, two long corridors in ‘sol bétonné’ (Corridors 370 and 872) were excavated to the west and south of Court F, while the rooms on the east (Rooms 357 and 358) were also drawn in the plan. Therefore it seems possible that Sb 2789 was buried in this court which, similarly to Courts C1 and C2, could have foundation deposits in its middle or in correspondence to some of its doors.

PALAEOGRAPHICAL REMARKS

At a first look, the forms of the Old Persian signs on Sb 2789 are the same of the other royal inscriptions on stone. The following features do not seem to be peculiar or relevant: the sign mu (e.g. on line 50) is written with three horizontal wedges to the left of the angular wedge (cf. the two occurrences with four horizontal wedges in DSab/OP:2); the horizontal and vertical wedges in the upper part of the sign vi (e.g. on line 30) do not cross, as it is usual, and the horizontal wedge precedes the vertical one; the diagonal wedge used as word divider occupies the full height of the line. More remarkable is the sequence of three vertical wedges with the lowered middle one, occurring in signs m and t. In most of the occurrences the left and right wedges are raised, with the lower end touching the tip of the head of the lowered middle wedge (Pl. 2); sometimes the left and right wedges are impressed for nearly the entire height of the line, but very close to the middle wedge. The resulting form, excluding the first one or two horizontal wedges, is the same of the Elamite (and Akkadian) sign šá, which, in turn, has also a graphic variant corresponding to the standard Old Persian rendering of the

⁶⁹ As can be seen in Mecquenem 1910, plan = Chevalier 2010: 95, fig. 60.

⁷⁰ Ladiray 2010: 220; Perrot 2010b: 246, ‘La chancellerie’.

⁷¹ Perrot 2010b: 254, endnote 47.

⁷² Mecquenem 1947: 24-25, plan II = Chevalier 2010: 106-107, fig. 72. On the interpretation of this area, see Perrot 2010b: 248-249, ‘Le quartier nord-ouest de la Résidence’.

three vertical wedge sequence (attested, e.g., in CMc/AE).⁷³ This is not, in my opinion, an intentional graphic variant but a differentiation due to the kind of material support.

In the Old Persian administrative tablet, the signs are easily recognizable for anyone having experience of the Old Persian royal inscriptions. Anyway, there is a peculiar feature that makes them rather different from the ones on the Sb 2789: the horizontal wedges are systematically shifted towards the upper half of the line (Pl. 3). See, for example, the groups of three horizontal wedges, one above the other, in the signs r and y; the same is true for the two horizontal wedges composing t and k, and for the single one composing v, m, tu, and g. This feature is known also from some royal inscriptions (e.g. the exemplars of A³Pa of Artaxerxes III) but only as a tendency, not in such a coherent way. In the administrative tablet, also the angle wedges composing signs u, y, and g have the vertex raised, becoming very similar to the diagonal wedges and being actually impressed nearly in the same way.⁷⁴

At the same time, the signs are carefully written and spaced, and the whole appearance is rather different from the Elamite tablets crowded with signs. Are we facing a fully developed Old Persian handwriting (as opposed to the regular monumental script) or not? It is difficult to answer. If one answers affirmatively, this would be one among many other Old Persian tablets unfortunately lost. Otherwise, this would be a unique item, maybe a learned exercise. It is difficult to figure out the circumstances of the writing of the tablet, since it is sealed on the reverse as the other Fortification tablets and its content seems to be a regular administrative record.⁷⁵ How many people were able to write, read, or file similar tablets? How could it be used in a standard administrative process? These and other questions will remain unsolved until such Old Persian administrative record will remain a unique item against the mass of Achaemenid political inscriptions.

CONCLUSIONS

It is not possible to write about writing without dealing with language. Similarly, we cannot talk about language without dealing with the people who spoke it. The extant documentation offers only a part of their daily or extraordinary concerns, but much more data has to be studied and discussed. On one hand, royal inscriptions show the royal propaganda, the strategies set up by the chancellery to gain and maintain consensus. On the other one, the tablets call on the scene of history (our history) high officials, travellers, animal tenders, stone masons, and thousands of other individuals and groups working for or collaborating with the administration. They spoke many languages and many languages were written down at Susa and Persepolis, either occasionally or systematically.

It is not easy to understand the resulting picture in each of its details. It reminds me of a painting by Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1564 or 1565-1636) that I saw in the Ghent Museum voor Schone Kunsten in December 2009 after one of the most relevant conferences about Elam.⁷⁶ The painting represents the office of a village lawyer around 1621, but it could also depict one of the administrative offices at Persepolis or surroundings ca. 500 BC: just replace the bundles of papers with heaps of tablets. People came in those offices after a long journey or a full workday. Maybe their faces were tired and their eyes bewildered in front of the architectural power exhibited at Persepolis, even if seen only from the distance. Notwithstanding its disorder, that office was expression of the royal power. It existed because there was a power keeping so many people and peoples together, giving or trying to give them a (subordinated) identity and a place to stay. Finally, Brueghel's painting reminds us of the complexity and idiosyncrasies of such a bureaucratic system. Since then, many things have changed. Knowledge has accumulated in an incredible way. Then and today, language and writing are no more perfect than before. Languages, writing supports, and writing implements have changed, but even

⁷³ Steve 1992: 140-141, no. 597.

⁷⁴ Basello 2013b: 6.

⁷⁵ Sealing: Stolper & Tavernier 2007: 13. Administrative record: Stolper & Tavernier 2007: 16.

⁷⁶ Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *The Village Lawyer*, painted in 1621, Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent, Belgium. The proceedings of the conference are published in De Graef & Tavernier 2013.

today I am writing putting in sequence one word after another and one character after another. So Rémy Boucharlat, as a polyhistoric archaeologist, has faced for all his career a double task: to make order in the archaeological record and in the life of ancient individuals, providing the archaeological data with meaning and function.

Sigla

- AdS: R. BOUCHARLAT (ed.), *Roland de Mecquenem. Archives de Suse (1912-1939)*, with the collaboration of N. Daucé, <www.mom.fr/mecquenem/>, online since 2010 (last accessed on 2015, September).
 EKI: Elamite royal inscriptions in König 1965.

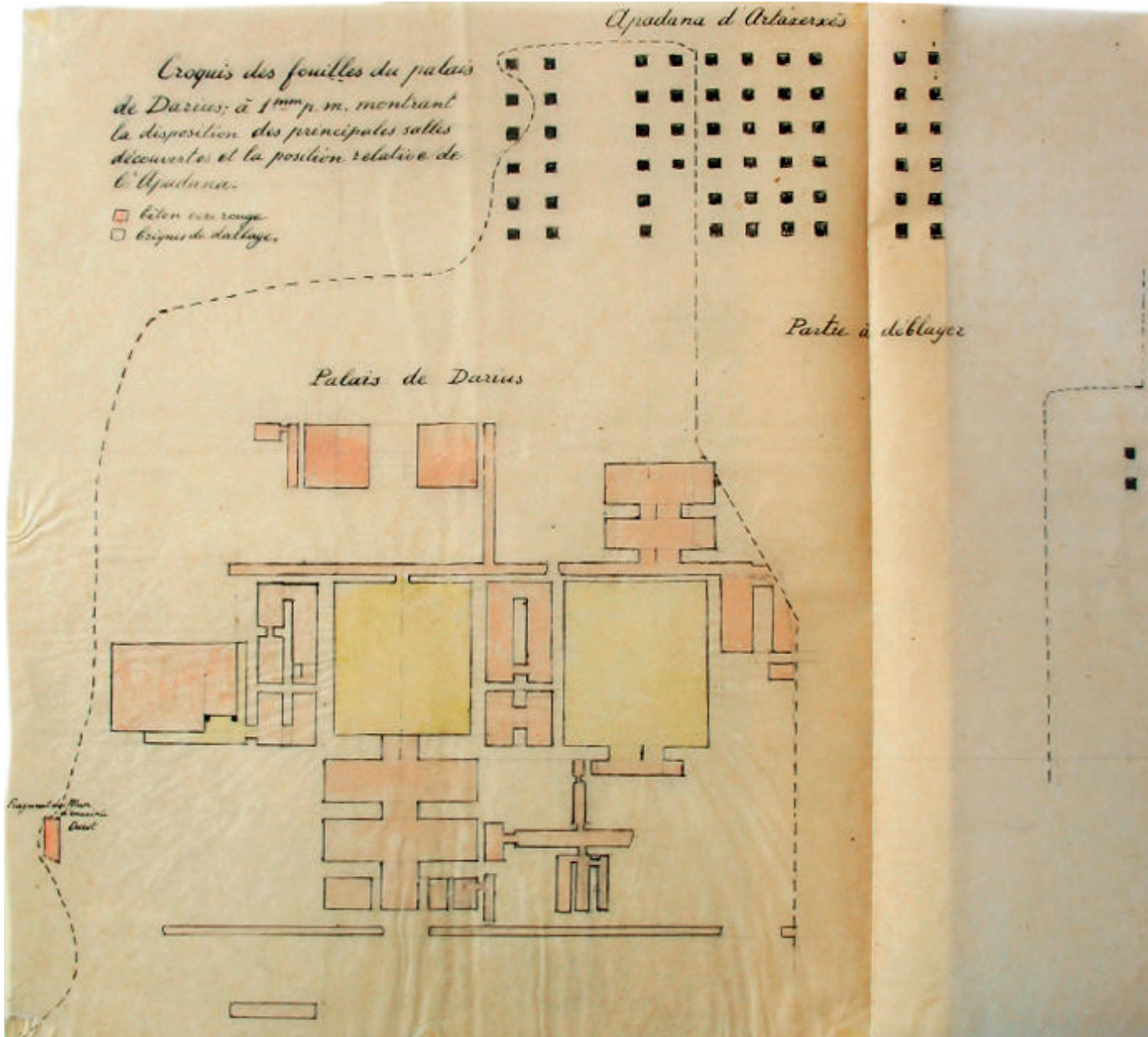
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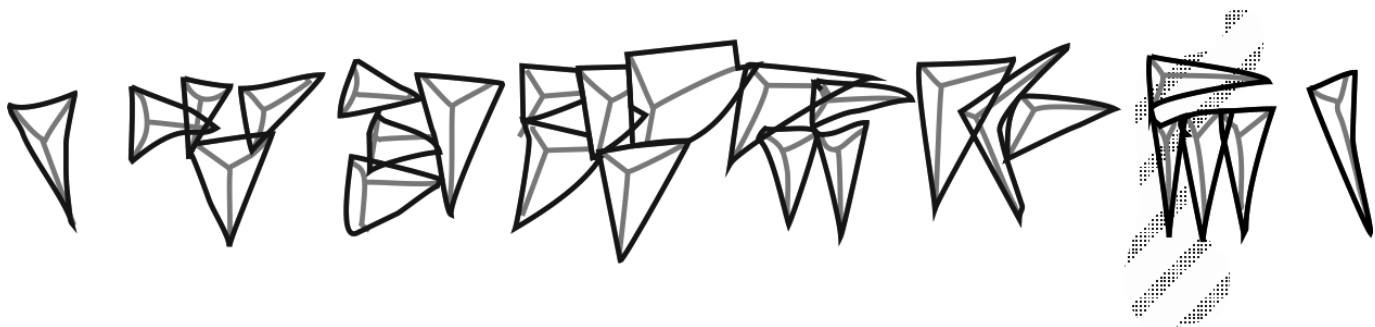
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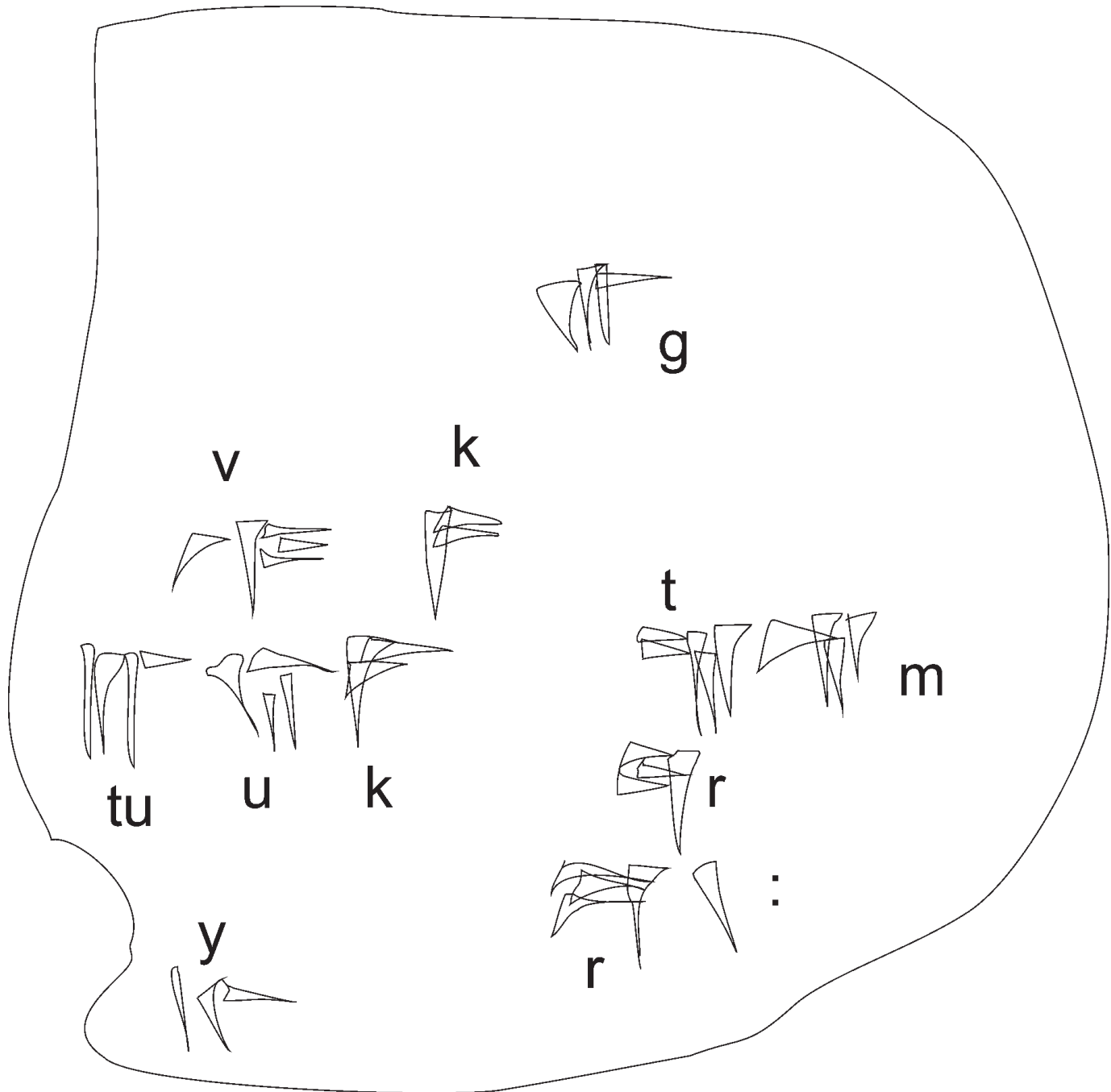
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Pl. 1: Plan no. 2 attached to the 1912 excavation report addressed to Jacques de Morgan by Roland de Mecquenem (Paris, Archives Nationales, F/17/17255; published with permission).



Pl. 2: Example of Old Persian cuneiform writing from Sb 2789, line 47 (reverse), with the signs : m-r-t-i-y-a : composing the word 'men' (computer aided design by Gian Pietro Basello).
Black: contours of sign depressions; grey: contact lines of the edges of the stylus.



Pl. 3: Example of Old Persian cuneiform signs from the obverse of the administrative tablet Fort. 1208-101 (computer aided design by Gian Pietro Basello).

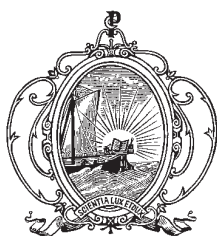
ACTA IRANICA 58

L'ORIENT EST SON JARDIN

HOMMAGE À RÉMY BOUCHARLAT

textes réunis par

Sébastien GONDET et Ernie HAERINCK



PEETERS

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2018

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