

# PERSEPOLIS FORTIFICATION ARCHIVE PROJECT

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On August 31, 2023, ISAC interim director Theo van den Hout, accompanied by Matthew W. Stolper and conservation laboratory head Laura D'Alessandro, handed over nine crates containing 3,506 Elamite and Aramaic tablets from the Persepolis Fortification Archive (PFA) to His Excellency Amir Saeid Irvani, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Iran at the United Nations in New York. Three weeks later, they arrived in Iran on board the presidential plane of the late Ebrahim Raisi, returning from the UN General Assembly. Iranian news outlets were quick to point out the significance of the returned artifacts: “They are very important sources of information revealing economic, social, and religious data about the Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC) and the larger Near Eastern region in the fifth century BC” (*Tehran Times*, September 21, 2023).

Of the 2,670 Elamite tablets included in the shipment, about 2,580 were read by Richard T. Hallock between 1937 and 1980. (Most of the remaining ones were read by Charles E. Jones.) Although only 33 were actually published (Hallock 1978), the unpublished editions of the others in the Hallock *Nachlaß* were shared with the editors of the *Elamisches Wörterbuch* (Hinz and Koch 1987); the author of the *Répertoire Géographique des Textes Cunéiformes* volume on Elamite topo- and hydronyms (Vallat 1993); and various other scholars, such as David M. Lewis in Oxford and Theo Krispijn in Leiden, who used the material for reading groups in Achaemenid Elamite. Wouter Henkelman started processing these and other PFA texts in 1995, in what eventually would become the PFA Project database. About 500 of the 836 Aramaic tablets included in the 2023 shipment had previously been read by Raymond A. Bowman, whose unpublished manuscript was accessible to a small group of scholars. Therefore, the returned Aramaic and Elamite documents had already had their bearing on Achaemenid scholarship before the PFA team started working on them—creating high-resolution images, collated editions with commentary of the Elamite and Aramaic texts (Henkelman and Annalisa Azzoni, respectively; fig. 1), and seal identifications and analyses (Mark Garrison).

As an example of early impact, we cite Lewis’s 1980 note on Elamite tablet PF-NN 1809, which Hallock had allowed him to publish. Lewis recognized that the “Datiya” traveling to the king at Persepolis in the express service in January–February 494 BCE was the same as Datis the Mede, a Persian general in the 490 BCE Greek campaign. What Lewis realized, and what has since entered commentaries to Herodotus’s *Histories*, is that Datiya/Datis’s earlier mission likely related to the Persian counter-offensive at the time of the Ionian Revolt.



Figure 1. PFAT 0056, an Aramaic tablet reading “In year 23, the man of Gandhāra; he is the barber to the king; food, household flour.” Reading by Annalisa Azzoni; photo taken with polarizing and red filters, PFA Project.

Lewis's two-column note was the start of a series of further reflections, including John Hyland's reconstruction of a larger Elamite dossier relating to the revolt, that illustrated central Achaemenid planning, collaboration between satraps, and general connectivity (Hyland 2019). Along the same lines, Henkelman was able to identify Dayurisa in the PFA with Daurises, the commander during an earlier phase of the Persian counteroffensive (Henkelman 2023a). Lewis considered the recipient seal PFS 3059s (fig. 2), impressed on the reverse of the Datiya/Datis text, unassuming and thought that it more likely belonged to his travel guide. Its design is accomplished, however, and shows an interesting variation of what we call the Late Babylonian worship scene. It may therefore have belonged to Datiya/Datis himself. The Babylonianizing imagery on PFS 3059s may have stood out positively within the social circles Datis moved in (Garrison, in press).

A few days after the 3,506 Persepolis Fortification tablets had reached the National Museum in Tehran, its director, Jebrael Nokandeh, reached out to ISAC's new director, Timothy P. Harrison, and the PFA team to propose a celebratory exhibition and symposium in the spirit of international collaboration. Following opening statements by Nokandeh and Harrison, the online meeting that took place on December 20, 2023, included papers read by Sedigheh Piran, Abdul-Majid Arfaee, Parsa Daneshmand, Shahrokh Razmjou, and PFA Project members Azzoni, Garrison, Henkelman, and Stolper. As with the previous return of tablets in 2019, a catalog was prepared to accompany the ensuing exhibition, which opened in the National Museum of Iran on May 18, 2024, and featured 160 tablets of different categories.

"By the grace of God," Nokandeh wrote hopefully in his preface to the catalog, "the process of the restitution of this corpus is going at a higher speed" (Nokandeh et al. 2023, 75). Indeed, ISAC conservator D'Alessandro made an effort to have the next planned shipment ready for handover in August 2024. The 1,100 items, which she reviewed and carefully packed with the help of student assistant Aiyana Leigh, are all uninscribed tablets, a category important for the many seal impressions it contains.

Beyond the 1,100 tablets of the 2024 shipment, more than 2,300 additional uninscribed tablets are projected to return to Iran in 2025. For this purpose, Garrison and PFA glyptic editors Erin Daly and Delphine Poinot checked all photographic records. The glyptic evidence on the tablets has been reviewed three times, and a fourth round of review is underway by PFA glyptic editor Emma Petersen focusing on less well preserved seal impressions. During three visits to Chicago she studied 200 items, registering 250 new seals and making about 50 seal collations. Research on the seal images preserved in the archive continued on other fronts as well. Daly identified seals on 304 Elamite tablets in the summer of 2023. Garrison and PFA editor Elspeth Dusinberre, assisted by University of Colorado student Helen Donovan and PFA glyptic editor Christina Chandler, prepared drawings and photographs of many of the 703 seals that occur on the Aramaic tablets (now in Tehran). These seals will be published in an upcoming catalog by Dusinberre and Garrison. Currently, the PFA Project has documented 4,491 distinct and legible seals.

To stay with numbers, Henkelman added about 300 Elamite tablets, previously read by Stolper, to the corpus that is ready for publication; Stolper himself read 40 new texts, including 30 larger livestock



Figure 2. Collated drawing of PFS 3059s, perhaps the seal of Datiya/Datis, by Mark B. Garrison.

accounts, and continued his collation of other records in this category. PFA senior photographic editor Young Bok Kim joined the faculty of the College of Theology at Belmont University but kindly agreed to continue his work for the project, attacking a backlog of unprocessed polynomial texture mapping (PTM) images and photographing new tablets. He and Miller Prosser, project consultant at the University of Chicago's Forum for Digital Culture, also relocated and reinstalled the PFA photo lab facilities to ISAC room 306 and replaced the camera and lenses of the project's PTM setup. Prosser continued curating PFA Project data stored at the Digital Library Development Center at the University of Chicago library, to make sure images and other datasets are properly filed and labeled.

The data generated by the PFA Project now amount to about 100 terabytes (including 2.8 million image files), but that measure is just one way to quantify its output or the increasing weight the archive has in Achaemenid studies. This message is the one Daly and Henkelman tried to convey when they were interviewed on September 25, 2023, for a documentary film on Persepolis that, unusually for this type of production, allocated ample space to the archival sources and the life in the Achaemenid heartland they help reconstruct (Berland 2024).

Similar to Henkelman's interview, which took place in the ISAC Museum galleries with the Khorsabad sculptures in the background, Garrison held the 2024 Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg Memorial Lecture in front of a Roman-period Lower Nubian temple in the great hall of the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden on February 29, 2024 (fig. 3). In attendance were Elena Sancisi, granddaughter of Heleen, and her coauthor Mehlika Alan, who had just submitted what would turn out to be a prizewinning high school graduation project on the Achaemenid road system. Also in Leiden, a few months later, the International Association of Assyriology awarded its annual subsidy for cuneiform studies to Hamaseh Golestaneh, who is preparing a doctoral dissertation on Indo-Iranian gods in the PFA.

PFA Project alumnus Rhyn King organized an inspiring workshop on "Quantification and the Persepolis Fortification Archive" at the University of St. Andrews on May 31, 2024, which featured papers on birth rates (Gian Pietro Basello and Filippo Pedron), the population of dependent laborers (King, Henkelman), animal husbandry (Stolper), poultry production (Yixin Lu), and connections with the Idumean ostraca (Mitchka Shahryari). Also in 2023–24, PFA Project members, alumni, and affiliates presented lectures on Achaemenid women in institutional documentation (Yazdan Safae, in Paris, December 6, 2023), the building of Persepolis (Henkelman, in London, December 14, 2023), relations with the Indian subcontinent (King, at University of St. Andrews, January 19, 2024), the institutional landscape of ancient Pārsa (Henkelman, in Columbus, April 16, 2024), and satrapal houses (King, in Munich, June 5, 2024). Chandler, Henkelman, and King joined forces with brief PFA-related contributions to the "Centering Achaemenid Persian Imperialism" panel at



Figure 3. The PFA Project codirectors during the Q&A session in the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden after Garrison gave the 2024 Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg Memorial Lecture.

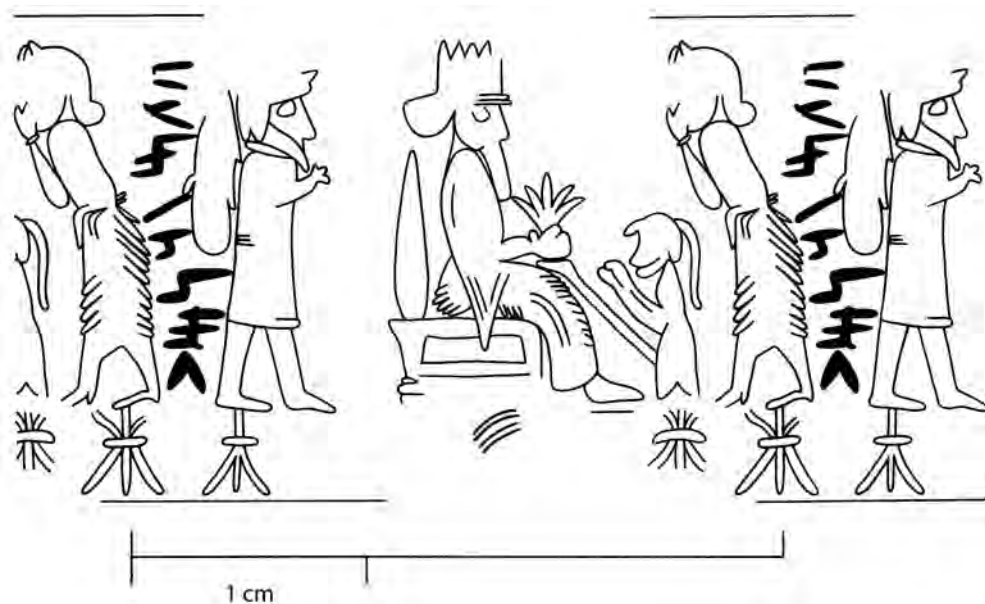


Figure 4. Collated drawing of PFUTS 0305\*, a seal reflecting imagery from the central panels of the Apadana at Persepolis and from the rock-cut relief at Bisotūn, by Mark B. Garrison.

the joint Archaeological Institute of America / Society for Classical Studies meeting in Chicago on January 7, 2024.

Azzoni's new reading of the Aramaic epigraph on Elamite tablet PF 0999 (*ptp ʾšprt* "rations (for) female weavers") in turn allowed for the understanding of the long-enigmatic Elamite term *pašap* as "weavers," a fortunate insight elaborated in Safaee's study on the subject (Safaee 2024). By another stroke of luck, Henkelman was able to recognize the system governing ration categories among dependent workers (Henkelman 2023b). Yet another recent publication, by Garrison, discusses the contribution of the glyptic evidence from Persepolis (e.g., fig. 4) to analyses of Darius's famous relief at Bisotūn (Garrison 2023).

The past year also saw the appearance of two significantly PFA-informed collective volumes. The first, the proceedings of a hybrid conference organized at Persepolis by Soheil Delshad (Fadaei et al. 2024), includes contributions by Garrison (a glyptic workshop at Persepolis), King (royal camels on the road to Bactria), Adriano Rossi (multilingual administration), and Zohreh Zehbari (goldsmiths). The second, a Festschrift for Bruno Jacobs (Garrison and Henkelman 2023), contains papers on Achaemenid Kermān as evidenced in the archive (Daniel T. Potts), the winged symbol in Persepolitan glyptic (Garrison), and a group of recently edited Elamite tablets attesting to at least ten "chiliarchies" of 7,000 or more Babylonian stonemasons working at Persepolis (Henkelman).

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