

# PERSEPOLIS FORTIFICATION ARCHIVE PROJECT

MARK B. GARRISON AND WOUTER F. M. HENKELMAN

This year's report of the Persepolis Fortification Archive (PFA) Project starts with the news that Young Bok Kim, who operated the polynomial texture mapping (PTM) and BetterLight photo stations beginning in 2016 and became our senior project photographer, was hired as an assistant professor of biblical studies at Belmont University in Nashville. We warmly congratulate Kim, to whom we owe much, and not just in terms of photography. Though it is sad to see him go, we are grateful that he made time to train his successor, Peter Raulwing, who joined the project in late June 2025.

More unsettling news came from Tehran, where our dedicated colleagues at the National Museum of Iran had to evacuate all movable objects from the galleries and reinforce the remaining ones with sandbags on the eve of the extensive bombardments of the city on June 13–24, 2025 (fig. 1). In the same galleries, Iran's president, Masoud Pezeshkian, opened a new PFA exhibition on October 8, 2024 (fig. 2); the small presentation, cocurated by the two of us as project directors, celebrated the fourth shipment of clay tablets to Iran since 2004. ISAC director Timothy P. Harrison, accompanied by conservation laboratory head Laura D'Alessandro and Wouter Henkelman, handed the 1,100 items to the Iranian legation to the United Nations in New York City on August 22, 2024.

All 1,100 items returned in 2024 were Persepolis Fortification Uninscribed Tablets, a category comprising a total of 3,463 cataloged items. Uninscribed tablets are mostly triangular or tongue shaped; they are formed around a knotted string and bear the impressions of one or several seals. Among other purposes, they may have functioned in tandem with Elamite memoranda, especially the unsealed Elamite documents in that category.



Figure 1. The statue of Darius I found at Susa in the National Museum of Iran before and after protective sandbags were placed around it. Photos courtesy of the National Museum of Iran.



Figure 2. President Masoud Pezeshkian of Iran (left) listens to the deputy minister for cultural heritage, Ali Darabi, at the opening of the third tablet exhibition at the National Museum of Iran on October 8, 2024. Photo courtesy of the *Tehran Times*.

While the precise administrative function of the uninscribed tablets remains uncertain, the seals applied to them have enormously enriched the corpus of glyptic imagery in the archive. Some 2,002 seals appear only on uninscribed tablets; many of them preserve scenes otherwise undocumented among the seals that occur on the Elamite and Aramaic documents. For instance, the fragmentarily preserved PFUTS 0603 may be the same seal as, or a replica of, the famous London Darius seal (fig. 3). PFUTS 1050 shows an unparalleled worship scene, in which a worshipper holds an amphora before a large, winged disk that hovers over another amphora or pitcher (fig. 4). One royal-name seal, PFUTS 0018\* (fig. 5), occurs only on the uninscribed tablets.

After glyptic editors Erin Daly, Emma Petersen, and Mark Garrison checked database and photographic records for the 2,363 uninscribed tablets remaining in Chicago, the tablets were handed to ISAC conservator D'Alessandro and her assistant Aiyana Leigh, who reviewed and carefully packed all of them over the course of twelve months. Once the tablets are handed over to the Iranian authorities, the packing of the next category—materials deemed too fragmentary for cataloging and

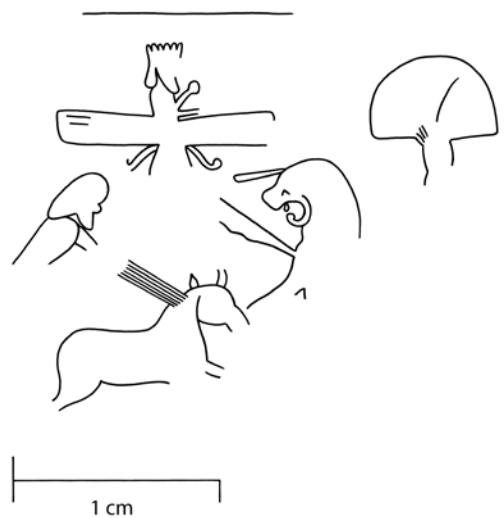


Figure 3. Collated line drawing of PFUTS 0603 by Mark Garrison.



Figure 4. Collated line drawing of PFUTS 1050 by Mark Garrison.

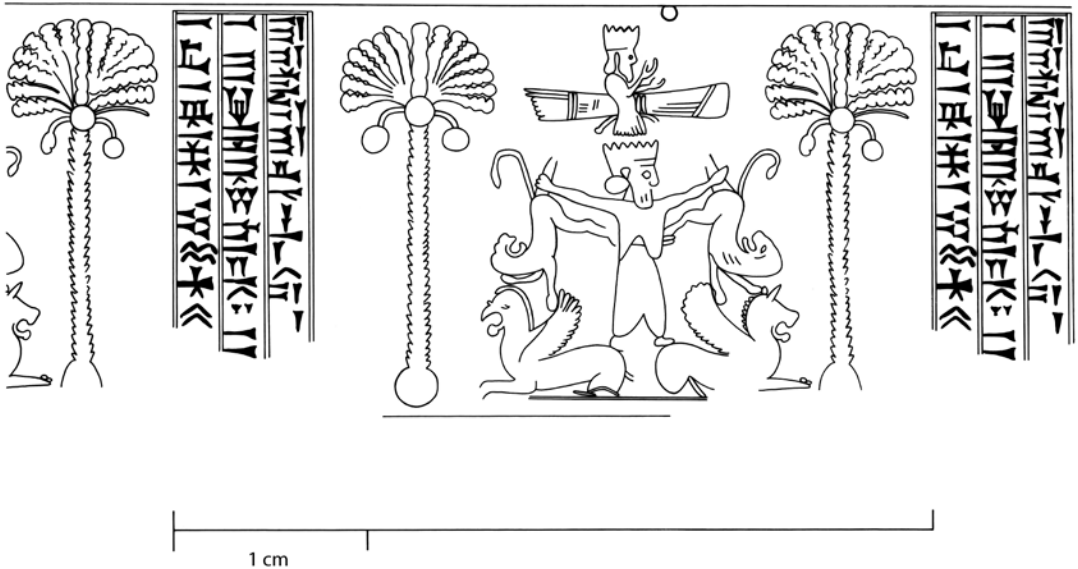


Figure 5. Collated line drawing of PFUTS 0018\* by Mark Garrison.

study—will commence. All PFA tablets and fragments were originally packed in cardboard boxes, with descriptive labels in French made by or deriving from Ernst Herzfeld’s excavation team. Replaced by plastic containers in the 1980s, the boxes have been mined by successive PFA Project editors, starting with Richard T. Hallock in the late 1930s. All removed items are numbered, put in individual containers, cataloged, photographed, studied, and entered into the project databases.

The PFA Project team has carried out several reviews over the past ten years of what remains in the plastic boxes, but to be on the safe side Garrison decided to do one last inventory in June 2025 with the help of Petersen. Although their main goal was to identify any additional impressions of important known seals and any new and interesting seals applied to Elamite texts, their secret hope was to find a new impression of PFS 2899\*, the celebrated seal of Prince Iršama (Aršāma), son of Darius I. Garrison had previously discovered two tablets bearing impressions of this magnificent seal, which had otherwise been known only from impressions on bullae belonging to the so-called Aršāma Correspondence in the Bodleian Library at Oxford (Garrison and Henkelman 2020). Since PFS 2899\* is a large seal, none of the known impressions preserves a complete reading of the imagery and its inscription. As Garrison and Petersen laboriously



Figure 6. Plastic box 2233 containing fragmentary tablets; the tablet with the Aršāma seal impression is in the middle. Photo by Mark Garrison.



Figure 7. PFS 2899\*, the seal of Aršāma, impressed on tablet Fort. 2233-101. Photo by Peter Raulwing.

worked their way through more than 2,000 boxes, reviewing thousands of fragments, their hope dwindled until, predictably in one of the last containers they checked, a tablet bearing two beautiful impressions of PFS 2899\* turned up (fig. 6). The new impressions preserve several letters of the Aramaic inscription not visible in other impressions.

The image shown in figure 7 of tablet Fort. 2233-101, with the impression of PFS 2899\*, was one of the first produced by Raulwing, our new project photographer. Previously during the 2024–25 report year, Kim photographed 150 surfaces from 18 Elamite cuneiform tablets using PTM technology. In the same period, Henkelman collated about 200 Elamite tablets, mostly memoranda, while Matthew Stolper added readings of 30 Elamite texts, mostly complex livestock accounts in connection with his forthcoming book on livestock management. Petersen completed the final records on almost 100 uninscribed tablets, in the process identifying some 97 new seals. PFA editor Elspeth Dusinberre (University of Colorado) and Garrison, with the assistance of former University of Colorado student Helen Donovan and PFA glyptic editor Christina Chandler, continued editing the catalog of the 702 legible seals that occur on the 837 tablets that carry Aramaic text.

Three students (co)supervised by Henkelman defended doctoral dissertations directly relating to the Elamite materials from the PFA: Yazdan Safaei (November 15, 2024, on Achaemenid women), Marco Ferrari (January 23, 2025, on Phrygians and “Skudrians”), and Kiumars Alizadeh (June 13, 2025, on the Neo-Elamite courts). Henkelman also acted as advisor to Mitchka Shahryari’s thesis on the Idumean ostraca, which engages extensively with the Aramaic and Elamite documents from Persepolis (defended on December 12, 2024).

The year 2025 saw the publication of Garrison’s study of the Late Babylonian worship scene in Persepolitan glyptic, a work that traces the adoption and adaption of traditional Babylonian glyptic themes in the Achaemenid context (Garrison 2025). Henkelman’s 2025 study of a fragmentary stone inscription of Artaxerxes II (repatriated to Iran in 2024) connects the Old Persian architectural term *tacara-*, referring to palatial constructions at Persepolis and elsewhere, to the word *\*tacarana-* found in Elamite transcription in PFA texts and possibly referring to a tent or movable structure (Henkelman 2025). Also published during the report period was Rhyne King’s long-awaited monograph *The House of the Satrap: The Making of the Ancient Persian Empire* (King 2025) (fig. 8). Covering very diverse materials from the empire’s wide expanse, this work contains an important chapter on Bakabaduš, satrap in Arachosia around 500 BCE. Known exclusively through the PFA, Bakabaduš held critical authority in organizing movement across the Iranian



plateau. King lectured, with Alice Collet, on a related subject (“India” and Gandhāra in the earliest Iranian, South Asian, and Greek sources) at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies in February 2025, and he presented a paper on social and economic transformations in Achaemenid Babylonia at the University of Toronto in November 2024.

Other members of the PFA team joined in promulgating discoveries from Persepolis. Petersen, lecturing on “The Banquet Scene in Achaemenid Glyptic” (Fowler Museum, University of California, Los Angeles, April 2025), presented preliminary results from her ongoing dissertation project. Garrison spoke on “The Emergence of an Achaemenid Court Style: Glyptic Imagery from the Persepolis Fortification Archive” at the 26th Journée Monde Iranien (Paris, April 2025); at the same event, Ferrari presented “La route des Skudriens: quelques réflexions sur les dynamiques migratoires entre l’Anatolie et le Fārs.” Henkelman gave eleven PFA-related lectures at, among other venues, the Austrian Academy of Sciences (Vienna, November 2024: “Chiliarchien in Persepolis”), the Musée du Louvre (Paris, December 2024: “Les tribus perses à l’époque de Darius I<sup>er</sup>”), and, with Margaux Spruyt (University of Clermont Auvergne), Heidelberg University (March 2025: “A Time for Drunken (Express) Horses: Wine Rations for Equids at Persepolis”). Henkelman was also the keynote speaker at Oxford University for its Journée Jean-Pierre Vernant (Maison Française, April 2025: “Hellenism before Hellenism: The Opening of the World under the Achaemenids”), with additional contributions by Rémi Bois (“The Persian Ruling Class and Its Multicultural Roots”), Ferrari (“The Formation of an Inter-Ethnic Ruling Class in Achaemenid Anatolia”), and Spruyt (“Horses in Persepolis”). Upon the invitation of Johannes Hackl at the Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, Henkelman taught a course on the PFA as a guest teacher there in July 2024.

We close this report by mentioning the festive inauguration of the Centre Sarikhani d’Études Élamites (CSEE) in the Grand Salon of the Sorbonne building in Paris on November 6, 2024 (fig. 9). Attended by more than 200 invitees, including the director and chief curator of the ISAC Museum, Marc Maillot, the ceremony featured lectures by Daniel T. Potts (Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York) and Pierre Briant (emeritus, Collège de France). Although the mission of CSEE is to address all

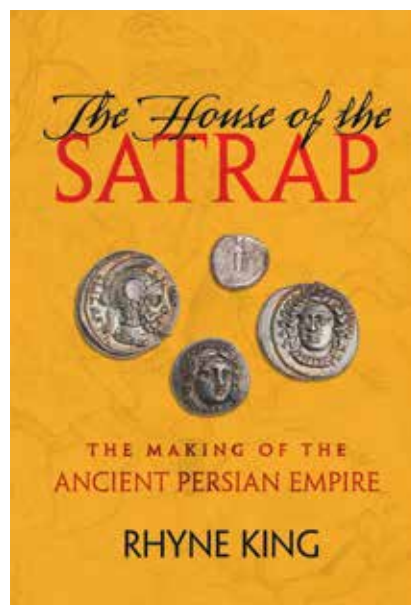


Figure 8. Cover of Rhyne King’s monograph, which draws extensively on PFA materials. Image courtesy of the University of California Press.



Figure 9. Wouter Henkelman speaking at the inauguration of the Centre Sarikhani d’Études Élamites in the Grand Salon of the Sorbonne, Paris. Photo by Marie-Pierre Lamotte.

aspects of Elam and Elamite culture, it pays notable attention to the use of Elamite in Achaemenid contexts, as two of its currently five projects exemplify. The first, directed by Bois and CSEE director Henkelman, aims to produce a dictionary of Achaemenid Elamite, one that will profit from the glossaries produced by the PFA Project (exported and processed by CSEE team member Eric Whitacre). The second project envisions a new (re)edition with commentary of all tablets and fragments belonging to the Persepolis Treasury Archive in Persepolis, Tehran, and Chicago. Directed by Soheil Delshad, a CSEE postdoctoral researcher, this project convenes a team of specialists from the PFA stable: Chandler and Garrison (glyptic), Henkelman (Elamite), and King (historical significance).

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