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PROTO-ELAMITE TEXTS FROM TALL-I MALYAN

1. Introduction

In view of the resemblances in form and composition between the account tablets in the Proto-Elamite script and those in Linear A, this new corpus is presented in Kadmos, which has earlier announced Proto-Elamite texts from Tepe Yahya (10, 97–99), Shahr-i-Sokhta (16, 1–2) and Shahdad (16, 95).

Tall-i Malyan is in Fars province, Iran, 46 km north of Shiraz, 43 km west of Persepolis, and about 460 km southeast of Susa. It is a very large site; the line of its ancient fortification wall encloses about 200 ha, including a main occupation mound of about 130 ha as well as several smaller mounds. It is also a historically prominent place; Elamite cuneiform texts found there corroborate the identification of Malyan as the site of ancient Anshan, one of the chief political centers of Elamite states between the third and first millennia B.C.[1]

2. Archaeology

The earliest large settlement known from excavation at Malyan, however, antedates documented Elamite states; it is Proto-Elamite. It belongs to the Middle Banesh phase of occupation, approximately contemporary with Acropole levels 16–14 at Susa, c. 3200–2900 B.C. The estimated settled area of Malyan late in Middle Banesh times is about 45 ha, as much as five times the estimated area of contemporary settlement at Susa. By Late Banesh times, c. 2800 B.C., the fortification wall was built, although Malyan's occupied area was undoubtedly still much smaller than the 200 ha surrounded by the wall.

The Middle Banesh occupation of Malyan is known from two extensively excavated areas (see Fig. 1). One, called ABC, is near the middle of the main occupation mound; the other, called TUV, is on a 3-ha satellite mound about 900 m to the east, within the line of the city wall but surrounded by unoccupied terrain. In ABC, building levels II–V (num-

[1] See John Hansman, Elamites, Achaemenians and Anshan, Iran 10, 1972, 101–125; Erica Reiner, The Location of Anšan, Revue d'Assyriologie 67, 1973, 57–62; idem, Tall-i Malyān, Epigraphic Finds, 1971–72, Iran 12, 1974, 176; Matthew W. Stolper, Texts from Tall-i Malyan, I: Elamite Administrative Texts (1972–1974), Philadelphia 1984, 15.

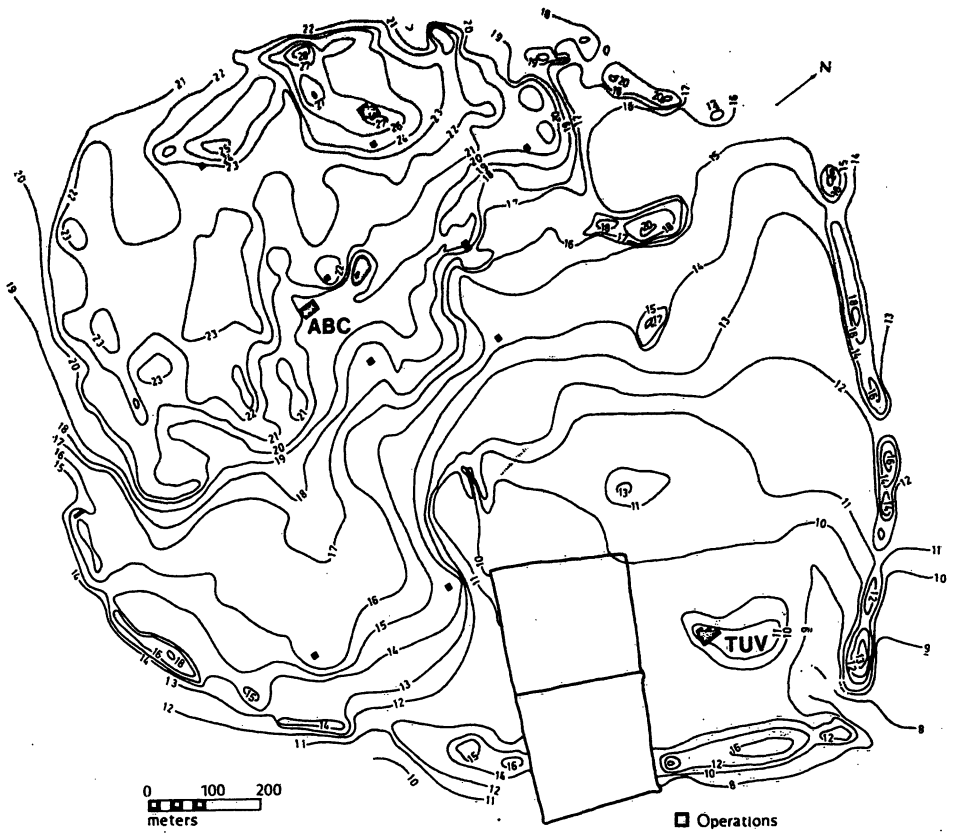

Fig. 1. Plan of Tall-i Malyan

bered from latest to earliest) belong to the Middle Banesh phase. The excavated structures are parts of large, regular, heavily constructed complexes, with rooms decorated with red, black, and white plaster. Building level III is distinguished by the presence of many fragments of polychrome wall paintings, and building level II by a storeroom containing a dozen pithoi set on mudbrick platforms. In TUV, building levels II and III (also numbered from later to earlier) are Middle Banesh. The structures are rambling, lightly constructed complexes, with diverse remains of domestic activities and small-scale craft production. In the opinion of William Sumner, director of the Malyan excavation, TUV building level III is roughly contemporary with ABC building levels II and III. To all appearances, the buildings of ABC were controlled by persons or institutions of high rank and power, while the buildings of TUV reflect a humbler or peripheral social context. By standards of size, diversity, and concentration of resources, Middle Banesh Malyan was an early city – perhaps a small one, but nevertheless the largest one of its time known in Iran.[2]

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[2] On Banesh settlement in the Kur river basin and Banesh occupation at Malyan, see William M. Sumner, Excavations at Tall-i Malyan, 1971–72, Iran 12, 1974, 155–180; idem, Excavations at Tall-i Malyan (Anshan) 1974, Iran 14, 1976, 103–113; idem,

3. The tablets

The characterization of this occupation as Proto-Elamite relies above all on thirty-two tablets and tablet-fragments found in Banesh deposits, fourteen at ABC and eighteen at TUV (see Table 1). Five tablets from ABC and six from TUV are complete or nearly so (ABC: M-628, 1000, 1001–1003; TUV: M-1152, 1153, 1155, 1156, 1469, 1473); the other items are fragments, some with their inscribed surfaces completely effaced, the others with inscriptions ranging from single incomplete signs to whole lines. Of the texts from ABC, six come from building level II, seven from building level III, and one from building level IV. Of those from TUV, two come from building level II and sixteen from building level III.

The size and quality of the sample preclude a clear view of diachronic changes in text types or in the script. Not much significance can be attributed to differences in the numbers or types of tablets from individual building levels. Two features of the tablets' context, however, merit emphasis. First, the texts came not only from the large, impressively decorated buildings of ABC but also from the much less imposing buildings of TUV. Second, the tablets from TUV are coeval with another sort of recording device, the seal-impressed clay balls called 'bullae.'[3]

The tablets were made from several different clays. All were well made and finished. None was deliberately baked in antiquity. The smallest intact tablet is M-628 (3.3 × 2.1× 1.2 cm); the largest are M-632 (9.0 × 7.0 × 3.0 cm) and M-1156 (10.5 × 8.5 × 3.0 cm). There seem to be standard sizes between these extremes: (a) c. 4.5 × 3.0 × 1.5 cm,

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Proto-Elamite Civilization in Fars, forthcoming in the proceedings of the Tübingen Colloquium on Jemdet Nasr, December 1983; idem, The Proto-Elamite City Wall at Tall-i Malyān, forthcoming in Iran; John R. Alden, Trade and Politics in Proto-Elamite Iran, Current Anthropology 23, 1982, 613–640; idem, Marketplace Exchange as Indirect Distribution: an Iranian Example, in The Contextual Analysis of Prehistoric Exchange Systems, ed. T. Earle and J. Ericson, New York 1982; Ilene Nicholas, A Spatial/Functional Analysis of Late Fourth Millennium Occupation at the TUV Mound, Tal-e Malyan, Iran, Ph. D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania 1980; idem, Investigating an Ancient Suburb: Excavations at the TUV Mound, Tal-e Malyan, Iran, Expedition 23, 1981, 39–47; Janet W. Nickerson, Malyan Wall Paintings, Expedition 19, 1977, 2–6; M. James Blackman, The Mineralogical and Chemical Analysis of Banesh Period Ceramics from Tal-e Malyan, Iran, in Scientific Studies in Ancient Ceramics, ed. M. J. Hughes, British Museum Occasional Papers 19, 1982; idem, The Manufacture and Use of Burned Lime Plaster at Proto-Elamite Anshan (Iran), in Early Pyrotechnology: The Evolution of Fire-Using Industries, ed. T. Wertime and S. Wertime, Washington D. C. 1982; M. A. Zeder, Meat Distribution at the Highland Iranian Urban Center of Tal-e Malyan, in Animals and Archaeology, III: Herding in Western Asia and the Mediterranean Region, ed. J. Clutton-Brock and C. Grigsam, London 1984; Matthew W. Stolper, Preliminary Report on Texts from Tal-e Malyan, 1971–1974, Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Symposium on Archaeological Research in Iran, Tehran 1976, 89–100.

[3] The bullae from TUV, however, unlike those from earlier contexts at other sites, did not contain 'tokens' or geometric objects; the sealed outer envelopes were simply moulded around solid clay spheres; see Nicholas, A Spatial/Functional Analysis, 310–316 and Expedition 23, 1981, 46.

M-	mf-	Op.	Bldg. Level	Previous Publication
625	625	ABC	II	
626	626	ABC	II	
627	627	ABC	II	
628	628	ABC	II	
632	632	ABC	II	Iran 12, pl. IIIe
634	634	ABC	II	
1000	1685	ABC	III	Iran 14, pl. IIIh; Fourth Symposium, 89ff., photo 1
1001	1686	ABC	III	Fourth Symposium, 89ff., photo 1
1002	1687	ABC	III	Fourth Symposium, 89ff., photo 1
1003	1688	ABC	III	Fourth Symposium, 89ff., photo 1
1004	1689	ABC	III	Fourth Symposium, 89ff., photo 1
1005	1690	ABC	IV	Fourth Symposium, 89ff., photo 1
1006	1691	TUV	III	Fourth Symposium, 89ff., photo 2
1007	1692	ABC	III	Fourth Symposium, 89ff., photo 1
1008	1693	ABC	III	
1152	1858	TUV	III	Iran 14, pl., IIIe; Fourth Symposium, 89ff., photo 2; Carter and Stolper, Elam: Surveys of Political History and Archaeology (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984), 253 fig. 8:20
1153	1859	TUV	III	Fourth Symposium, 89ff., photo 2
1154	1860	TUV	III	Fourth Symposium, 89ff., photo 2
1155	1861	TUV	II	Iran 14, pl. IIId; Fourth Symposium, 89ff., photo 2; Expedition 23, 45 fig. 12
1156	1862	TUV	II	Fourth Symposium, 89ff., photo 2
1469	4469	TUV	III	
1473	4474	TUV	III	
1474	4475	TUV	III	
1475	4476	TUV	III	
1476	4477	TUV	III	
1477	4478	TUV	III	
1478	4479	TUV	III	
1479	4480	TUV	III	
1480	4481	TUV	III	
1481	4482	TUV	III	
1505	4435	TUV	III	
1626	4426	TUV	III	

Table 1. Proto-Elamite texts from Banesh levels at Malyan.

(Finds from Malyan have two registry numbers: items numbered in a single series prefixed with M- are museum objects as defined by the archaeological service of Iran; items numbered in a single series prefixed with mf- include museum objects, samples for technical analysis, and other finds. In addition to the items listed here, Banesh levels at Malyan yielded a few other tablet-fragments with no preserved text or seal impression.)

usually with slightly concave edges (M-1001–1004, 1154, and 1476); (b) c. 5.5 × 4.5 × 1.5 cm, usually with slightly concave edges (M-1000, 1006, 1152, 1153).

One tablet from ABC and five tablets and fragments from TUV have seal impressions. Both cylinder-seal and stamp-seal impressions occur. The impression usually appears only on the tablet's reverse, but on M-1473 all surfaces are covered by the impression. None of the pieces has impressions of more than one seal. M-1155 and 1156 have multiple impressions of a single stamp seal around the edges of the space between the last line of the main text and the short concluding line of the tablet.[4]

4. The script

The script is unquestionably Proto-Elamite. That is, in all of its general attributes and in most particulars it is very similar to the fully developed Proto-Elamite A script on tablets from early excavations at Susa.[5]

Some of the larger texts (M-632, 1155 – see Figs. 2 and 3 – and 1156) are ruled with shallow grooves made by laying a round stylus lengthwise across the face of the tablet before the text was inscribed. The script runs from right to left. The reverses are usually either blank or contain a short line set off as a distinct component from the main text. Tablets normally turn from obverse to reverse around their vertical axes (like the pages of a book) rather than around their horizontal axes (like cuneiform tablets). Relatively long texts, however, may run from obverse to lower edge to reverse, turning around the horizontal axis (M-628, 1155, 1156), but they must still be turned around the vertical axis from obverse to reverse for the concluding line to appear in its proper orientation.[6]

The texts were written by several different hands. In most, the signs are written neatly and distinctly, with clear separation between them. In a few, the signs are a good deal more cursive and consequently less clearly pictorial (e.g., M-1006, 1153, 1155, 1156). Some look slovenly, but none looks crude or unpractised.

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[4] Compare MDP 26 5011 from Susa, a tablet laid out in similar format with a cylinder seal impression covering the corresponding blank space of the reverse.

[5] Following Piero Meriggi, La scrittura proto-elamica, Rome 1971–74, I use "Proto-Elamite A" for the script of the tablets from Susa and elsewhere, and "Proto-Elamite B" for the script otherwise called "linear" or "monumental" Proto-Elamite. No Proto-Elamite B texts and no all-numerical tablets comparable to those from Susa Acropole 18 and 17 were found in excavations at Malyan.

[6] Similar layouts occur among the Susa texts; see William C. Brice, The Writing System of the Proto-Elamite Account Tablets of Susa, Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 45, 1962, 20f.; R. Stefanini, review of Meriggi, La scrittura proto-elamica, I, in Journal of Cuneiform Studies 26, 1974, 123.

Fig. 2
Upper left: M-628 = mf-628; obverse, lower edge, and reverse
Lower left: M-1001 = mf-1686
Right: M-632 = mf-632; obverse and reverse

The signs are the usual numerals, more or less abstract patterns, and more or less representative pictograms. Most of those that are clearly drawn are identical with signs attested at Susa. A few seem to be previously unattested variants. For example: the sign  (M-626 reverse[?]

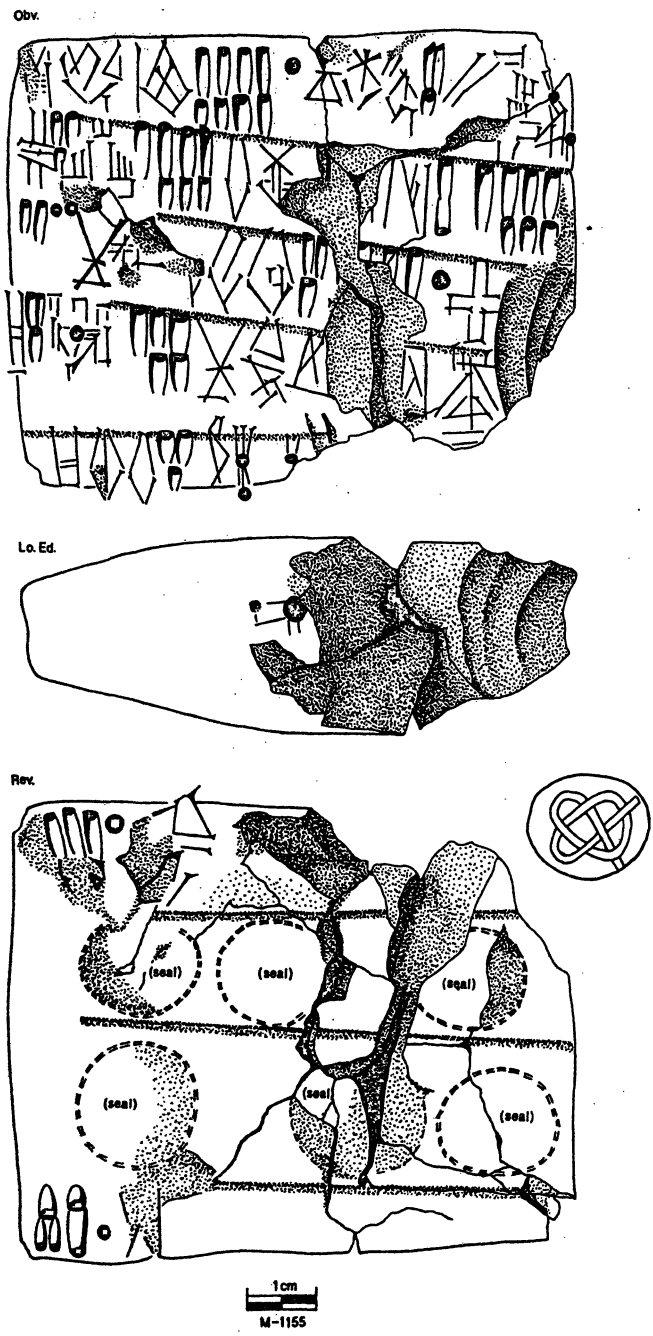

Fig. 3
M-1155 = mf-1861; obverse, lower edge, reverse and seal-impression

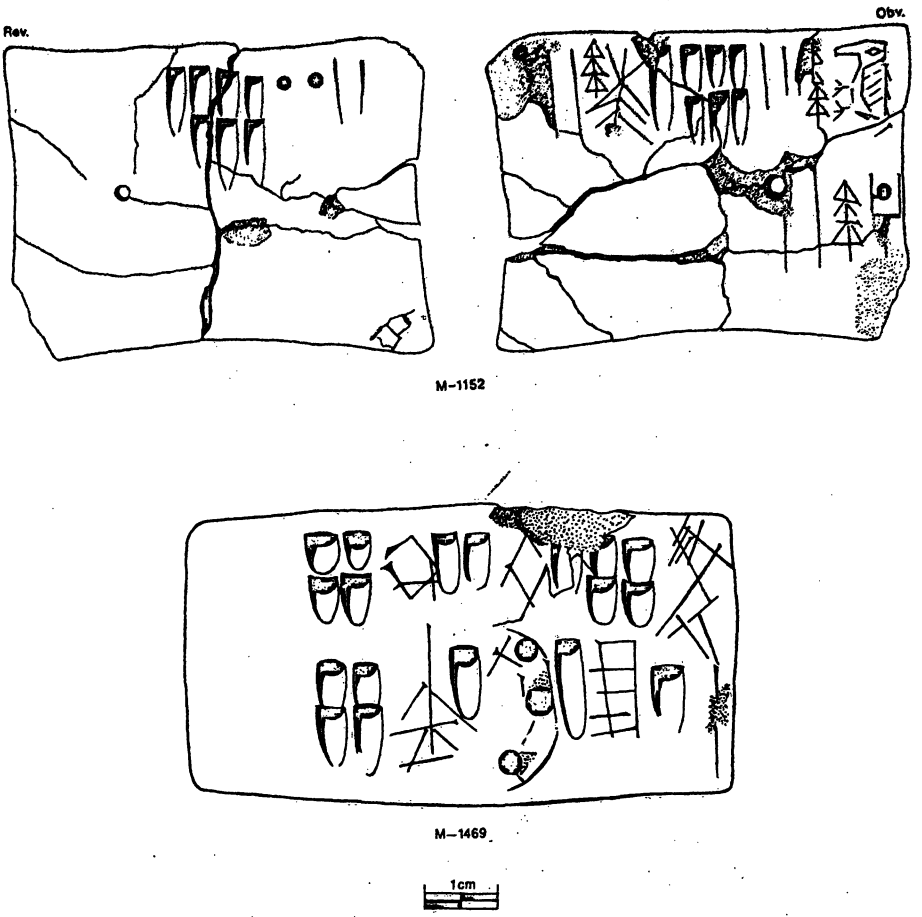

Fig. 4
Above: M-1152 = mf-1858; obverse and reverse
Below: M-1469 = mf-4469

is a simple variant of the Susa signs and (Meriggi, Scrittura, II, signs 247a and b); the sign (M-632:2 and reverse – Fig. 2) is a ligature of two signs that co-occur at Susa (Meriggi, Scrittura, II, signs 39 and 348; cf. MDP 17 461:3).

Not surprisingly, some of the signs most common in the Susa texts recur in Malyan texts in familiar positions, though not with high frequency. For example: the fringed triangle with various diacritic inserts (Meriggi, Scrittura, II, signs 136–138) is commonly the first or second sign of texts from Susa, and in texts from Malyan it appears (always with inserted four-pointed star) as the first sign of M-1000, the second sign of M-632 (Fig. 2) and probably of M-626 (all from ABC),

and once among the entries in the main body of M-1155 (from TUV – Fig. 3). The cross on a circle (Meriggi, Scrittura, II, sign 327) is also commonly the first or second sign in Susa texts, and among the Malyan texts it appears only as the second sign of M-1000. The sequence of triangle and cross at the beginning of M-1000 occurs in the Susa texts (MDP 17 146) but the reverse order is more frequent.[7]

Meriggi has interpreted both the triangle and the cross in introductory formulas as markers of *enti,* that is, corporate bodies or institutions controlling the transactions recorded.[8] The recurrence of the signs in familiar use in texts from the large buildings of ABC accommodates this view, but some scepticism is still justified. The fringed triangle also occurs, with an inserted trefoil, as the first sign on several of the published texts from Tepe Yahya,[9] and this ubiquitous usage among sites of such diverse sizes, types, and locations may be better viewed as having to do with some regularity of recording technique than with uniformity of institutions.

Others of the signs most frequent at Susa are conspicuous by their absence from Malyan texts. Most notably, none of the Malyan texts has the sign commonly called DUB (Meriggi, Scrittura, II, sign 157), extremely common in the opening and/or concluding formulas of the Susa texts and often supposed to depict a tablet and to indicate that the text is a 'bill' or 'account.'[10]

Numerals accompany most entries in the Malyan tablets. Several facts conspire against drawing any substantive conclusions from them: the interpretation of the higher-order Proto-Elamite numerals (above 100 and between 10 and 100) and of differences among the sets of numerals used to count different kinds of things is still insecure; the identity of the things counted and the units in which they are counted is entirely uncertain (thus, 50 cents would look like more things than 1 crore of rupees); arithmetic relations in the Malyan tablets are seldom plain. With these caveats, it can still be observed that in general the numbers in texts from ABC seem comparatively high and the numbers in texts from TUV seem comparatively low. For example:

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[7] MDP 17 17, 83, 122, with varying diacritic inserts. See Brice, Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 45, 1962, 28f., on such reversals of pairs of signs.

[8] Scrittura, I, §§ 350ff.

[9] C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, The Proto-Elamite Settlement at Tepe Yaḥyā, Iran 9, 1971, 89; idem, Proto-Elamite Account Tablets from Tepe Yahya, Southeastern Iran, Kadmos 10, 1971, 98.

[10] E. g., Meriggi, Scrittura, I, § 379; cf. Brice, Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 45, 1962, 30f.

ABC

M-626: entry 40 [+ x]
M-628: entries(?) 280(?), 48, 300(?); conclusion(?) 120
M-632: entries in first two lines of obverse 960 + [x] + 2, 125, 102; corresponding total on reverse 1203; entries in other lines of obverse 3, 39, 45, 706(?), 102(?), 1400(?)
M-1000: entries 5, 1, [x +] 5; conclusion [x +] 116
M-1001 and 1002: entry 30

TUV

M-1155: entries 18, 7, 7, 13 [+ x], 22, 5, 13 [+ x]
M-1156: entries 7, 4, 28, 9, 8, 3, 9, 7, 11, 17, [x +] 2, 12; conclusion(?) 153(?)
M-1153: entries 10 + fraction, 5 + fraction
M-1481: entries 1, 1, 1
M-1469: entries 5, 2, 4, 1, 1, 1, 4
M-1473: entry 1
M-1152: entries 7, 10, 10; conclusion 27

In the one case in which texts from ABC and from TUV deal with the same items (that is, have entries marked by the same sign), the numbers involved are similar at both places (M-1001–1002 from ABC; M-1152 from TUV – Figs. 2 and 4).

Some of the texts cluster in small groups defined by provenience and/or by form and contents:

(a) M-1001–1003 were found together in a single lot from ABC II. They are all made from the same pink clay and have identical shape and dimensions. M-1001 is a one-line text: the sign 𒌋 (Meriggi, Scrittura, II, sign 9)[11] followed by a seemingly non-significant vertical stroke[12] and the numeral 30. M-1002 has an identical text. M-1003 is identical in appearance, but the inscribed area could not be cleaned. M-1004 is a fragment from a different lot but with the same original dimensions as M-1001–1003 and made from the same clay; its text differs from that of M-1001 only in the numeral ([x +] 6). These unprepossessing tablets gain some interest when they are compared with M-1152 (Fig. 4), from TUV II. It is larger than M-1001–1004, but made from a similar pink clay. Its obverse has three similar entries in two lines, each entry consisting of: (1) a first sign, different in each entry; (2) a second sign, identical in each entry, (𒄑, Meriggi, Scrittura, II, sign 125); (3) the sign 𒌋, the same sign that appears on M-1001–1004; and (4) a number. The

[11] See Meriggi, Scrittura, I, § 254, identifying this sign as belonging to the class of signs identifying kinds of lumber.

[12] Meriggi, Scrittura, II, comments to sign 1a.

reverse is a total headed by the sign ‖. The total by itself, that is, looks like a text of the same sort as M-1001–1004, and the latter may accordingly be summary memoranda of transactions of the same kind noted in fuller form in M-1152. The resemblances among these tablets hint at contemporaneity and even functional connection between ABC II and TUV III. Aside from this case, however, there is little or no discernible resemblance in the appearance or contents of texts from ABC and from TUV.

(b) M-1469 (Fig. 4), 1473, and 1474, all from TUV III, begin with forms of the yoke sign (Meriggi, Scrittura, II, sign 53). M-1469 and 1474 come from a single excavation lot and M-1473 from a nearby lot. All are made from similar dark brown clay, but in slightly different sizes and shapes. M-1469 has seven entries each consisting of a single sign and a number; the yoke sign is the heading of the first of these parallel entries. The fragmentary M-1474 appears to be a similar sort of listing (as does M-1481, a fragment from a different area of TUV III). In M-1473, an intact tablet entirely covered with a seal impression, the yoke sign is followed by a form of the cross sign (Meriggi, Scrittura, II, sign 325a) over another indistinct sign. The nature of the functional connection among these texts, if any, is unclear to me.

(c) M-1155 (Fig. 3) and 1156 were found within a few inches of each other, in a lot attributed to TUV II. They differ in size, but have a similar shape and ductus, are made of the same greenish clay, are laid out in the same format, and are stamped repeatedly with the same seal. These are the longest preserved texts among the Malyan Proto-Elamite tablets, with the largest numbers of signs and numerical entries. The signs are written in a cursive fashion that makes accurate identification of them difficult. This, along with damage to the surfaces and edges, impedes formal analysis. Both texts, however, have distinctly long sign groups – there are sequences of five, six, seven, and nine signs between numerical entries. Both texts have repeated occurrences of the sign that Meriggi calls TUR ( , Scrittura, II, sign 388), usually in the middle of a sign group. In M-1155 (Fig. 3), the sequence of TUR plus two members of the class of lozenge-shaped signs (Meriggi, Scrittura, II, signs 218–231) occurs repeatedly. These texts may include comparatively large amounts of syllabic writing, and the entries may include the names of individuals rather than logographic labels of corporate bodies or public institutions. The contrast between these two texts and M-632, from ABC II, is suggestive. In the latter, the only other fairly large and nearly intact Proto-Elamite tablet from Malyan, the second sign is the fringed triangle; the first sign is damaged but apparently repeated as the first sign

of the total on the reverse.[13] The sign groups that precede numerals are short – a single sign, two ligatured signs, or two signs – suggesting generally logographic writing. The numbers are comparatively large. The single line on the reverse is a total of the entries in the first two lines of the obverse, ignoring the entries in the rest of the obverse, hence suggesting that two different sorts of transactions are recorded.

5. Conclusion

To summarize, the Proto-Elamite tablets from Malyan are similar in all essential formal respects to Proto-Elamite tablets from Susa. They show no clear signs of the earliest steps in the development of Proto-Elamite script and its application. They show considerable diversity in form and, to judge by the small amount of duplication among them, in contents and functions. They come both from the large buildings of the main mound and the smaller complexes of a satellite mound, and they hint, albeit weakly, both at differences in the general character of operations recorded at the two loci and at specific connections between them. Most of the tablets are isolated pieces of debris, certainly not good representatives of compact archives. But they appear to reflect a situation in which Proto-Elamite writing was fully elaborated, fairly standardized, and impressively widespread not only geographically but socially and functionally as well.

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[13] See Meriggi, Scrittura, II, signs 41g–h, and I, § 397 on this sign in introductory formulas in MDP 26 94f. and 113f.