

13 Proto Elamite Texts

Stuart L. Harris, October 2011

Summary of Proto Elamite Texts

Proto Elamite inscriptions occur from Susa in the west to Tepe Yahya in the east during a short period of 3100 to 2900 BC, after which literacy vanished. The earliest cylinder seals have Proto Elamite inscriptions.

Proto Elamite derives from Old European. In the beginning, scribes wrote on clay tablets from left to right, top to bottom. As tablets grew larger, scribes rotated the tablet counter-clockwise and wrote from top to bottom, left to right, and also rotated the letters. Thus before beginning a translation, rotate the inscription clockwise so that letters again match those of Old European.

I've only attempted one translation, P008012, which seems to read clearly. Jacob Dahl published sixty pages of different ways to combine syllables. From his list, the first several signs look like: M001 RA, M001~b RO, M003 PA, M003~b NA, M003~c HA, M004 A, M005 JA, M006 LO, M006~b KY, M007~b SA, M009 LY, M009a HA, M009~c PO, M10 TE.¹

Tablet P008012 conveys activities on a farm in two categories: pigs, and days of labor that sum to 65.

¹ Dahl, Jacob L.; Complex Graphemes in Proto-Elamite, June 2005, UCLA Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative

Proto Elamite Syllabary

Table 1: Proto Elamite syllabary.

A	Ä	E	I	O, Ö	U	Y	Proto Elamite	
 a	 ä	 e	 i	 o, ö	 u	 y		
ha	hä	he	hi	ho, hō	hu	hy		H
ja	jä	je	ji	jō, jō	ju	jy		J
ka	kä	ke	ki	ko, kō	ku	ky		K
la	lä	le	li	lo, lö	lu	ly		L
ma	mä	me	mi	mo, mö	mu	my		M
na	nä	ne	ni	no, nō	nu	ny		N
pa	pä	pe	pi	po, pō	pu	py	pātā	P
ra	rä	re	ri	ro, rō	ru	ry		R
sa	sä	se	si	so, sō	su	sy		S
ta	tä	te	ti	to, tō	tu	ty		T
va	vä	ve	vi	vo, vō	vu	vy		V

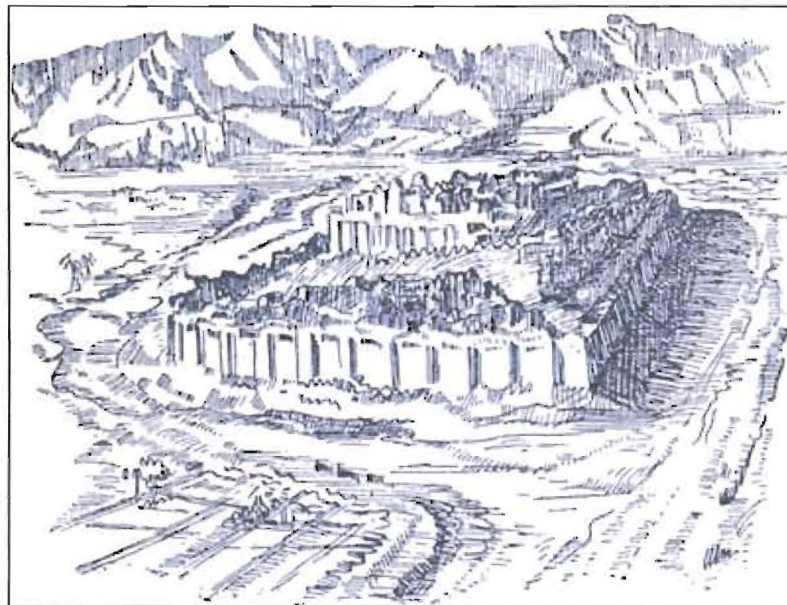
Proto Elamite Civilization

Proto Elamite in Iran largely paralleled Sumerian and megalithic civilizations around the Atlantic. Inscriptions occur from Susa in the west to Tepe Yahya in the east. Many texts reside in the Louvre Museum and the National Iranian Museum in Teheran, mostly lists from Susa. The earliest cylinder seals have Proto Elamite inscriptions.

The people who spoke Proto Elamite had a script similar to Old European. Originally they wrote on clay tablets from left to right, top to bottom. As tablets grew ever larger, scribes rotated the tablet and wrote from top to bottom, left to right, but did not rotate the letters, so letters. Thus before beginning a translation, I rotate the inscription to the right, then reverse the image so it again reads left to right, top to bottom. With this procedure, care must be taken to reverse non-symmetrical letters.

“Proto-Elamite inscriptions ... represent but a relatively short period of literacy, beginning around 3100 and ending around 2900 B.C. ... The few Linear Elamite inscriptions ... from a period some eight centuries after the proto-Elamite age, exhibit little graphic and no obvious semantic connection to the earlier writing system.”²

Figure 1: Tepe Sialk has the only remaining Proto Elamite ziggurat. The center of the city occupied a hill high above a massive perimeter wall, giving a clear view of nearby mountains and surrounding farms and offering maximum exposure to cooling breezes.



² Englund, Robert; The state of decipherment of Proto-Elamite; 2001, UCLA. Introduction to the Cuneiform Digital Library.

Tablet P008012: 'Small pigs'

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Tablet P008012 is a clay tablet written on two sides in Proto Elamite. It conveys activities on a farm in two categories: pigs, and days of labor that sum to 65.

To read the letters, rotate the tablet clockwise so that they match those of Old European. At this point, the tablet reads right to left, top to bottom. I prefer to read left to right, so I rearranged the letters accordingly.

Translation

Table 2: P008012 tablet translation.³

L.	Proto Elamite	Finnish	English	Qty.
a.1	VÄ SI	Vähä siat	Small pigs	3
a.2	A ME U MI U SA, LO	Aian meiän uuen miehuuen uuhet sait, loihe	A fence for our new manly sheep you got, he began	22
a.3	PÄTÄ A ME U MI U SA LO	Päätä aian meiän uuen miehuuen uuhet sait	He completed the fence for our new manly sheep you got	9
a.4	PÄTÄ TA-LO	Päätä talo	He completed the house	18
a.5	LY A LO	lyhyen aian louhet	and a short fence of stones	16
b.1	LO	loi	He fashioned	65

Image and Transcription

Figure 2: Tablet P008012 as originally drawn.

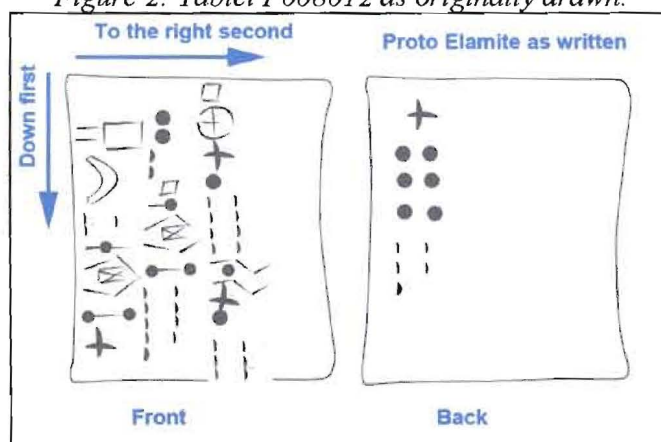
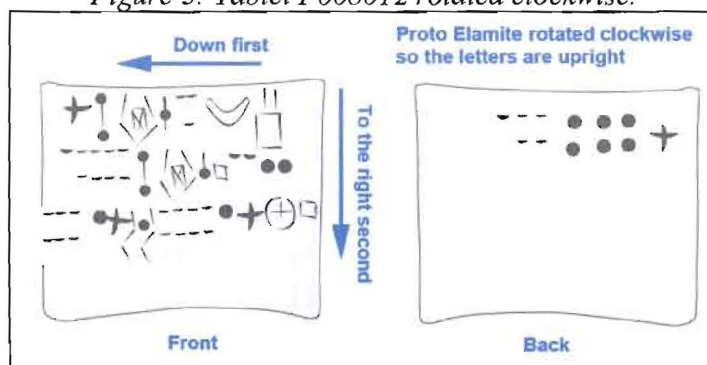


Figure 3: Tablet P008012 rotated clockwise.



³ Englund, Robert; The state of decipherment of Proto-Elamite; 2001, UCLA. Intro. to the Cuneiform Digital Library, p. 106

Tablet P008012: 'Small pigs'

Figure 4: Tablet P008012 after clockwise rotation and letters moved to read left to right.

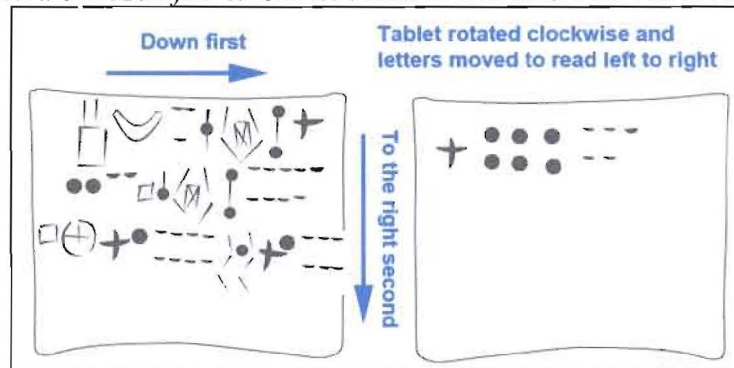


Figure 5: Tablet P008012 transcription.

Total of 65 = 22 + 9 + 18 + 16

a.1	VÄ SI	U MI U	3
a.2	A ME U MI U SA LO	20	2
a.3	PÄTÄ A ME U MI U SA	9	
a.4	PÄTÄ TA LO	10	8
a.5	LY A LO	10	6
b.1	LO	60	5

Notes on Translation

In Proto Elamite style, dots can replace short horizontal lines.

a.1 Letter SI represents a bent elbow.

a.2, a.3 the partial box with a cross expands into U-MI-U.

a.2, a.3 MI translates 'manly' in *Kalevala*, but I would say 'male'.

a.3, a.4 The circle symbol means *päätä* 'completed, he finished'.

a.5 A dot between the double zig-zags of LY is a short form of 'A'.

b.1 Items after the first entry add up to 65, so the sign implies 'total'.

b.1 'He worked' better fits the context; an obscure word löyhytteli means 'they worked', so perhaps LO or LÖ abbreviates a variation of this word.

VÄ = *vähä* 'small'; K 03.123 "A man's youth is a **small** (*vähä*) matter"

SI = *siat* 'pigs'; K46.605 **pigs** (*siat*) would have shifted it"

A = *aian* 'a fence'; K26.611 'opened up the iron fence (*aian*)'

Tablet P008012: 'Small pigs'

ME = *meidän* 'for our'; K50.260 "I am asking **for our** (*meidän*) Marjatta"

U = *uuen* 'new'; K08.128 'the **new** (*uuen*) ship onto the billows'

MI = *miehuuen* 'manly'; K35.046 'strike according to my **manly** () strength'

U = *uuhet* 'sheep' (plural); K07.316 'from the fleece of one **sheep** (*uuhen*)'

SA = *sait* 'you got'; K11.382 "**You got** (*sait*) a good thing, you met a good thing"

LO = *loihe* 'he began'; K03.285 '**He began** (*loihe*) to sing'

PÄTÄ = *päätä* 'he completed' from *päättää* ; K21.362 "or conclude (*päätä*) a song with the help of an outsider"

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TA-LO = *talo* 'house'; K23.083 '**A house** (*talo*) calls for manners'

LY = *lyhyen* 'short'; K32.227 'for a **short** (*lyhyen*) woman to milk'

A = *aian* 'a fence'; K26.611 'opened up the iron fence (*aian*)'

LO = *louhet* 'of stones'; K03.224 'heaping up blocks **of stone** (*louhet*)'

LO = *loi* 'he fashioned' from *luoda*; K15.378 '**she fashioned** (*loi*) the man, shaped the fellow'

You are invited to contact Stuart Harris about these or any other inscriptions at
PO Box 60281, Palo Alto, CA, 94306; Stuart.Harris -at- sbcglobal.net; 650-888-1859