

Nshan T. Kesecker

## THE ELAMITE VERSION OF THE INSCRIPTION OF XERXES I AT VAN (XV)\*

**Key words** - Achaemenid Empire, king of kings, Darius I, Xerxes I, Armenia, Ahuramazda.

### Introduction

The XV inscription is located on the steep southern side of the Urartian fortress of Tushpa (modern Van Kalesi) on a precarious area of the cliffs. The inscription is trilingual containing texts in Old Persian (OP), Achaemenid Elamite (AE) and Akkadian (AA) from left to right, respectively.<sup>1</sup> Each version of the text is 27 lines, with the OP taking up significantly more space than the AE and AA (the latter being the smallest). Editions of the text are Weissbach 1911, 116-119 (OP, AE, and AA); Kent 1953, 152-153; Vallat 1977, 217-221; Lecoq 1997, 263-264; Schweiger 1998; Schmitt 2009, 180-182. A legible photo comes from the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative labeled as “Xerxes Cliff Relief.”

### Context of the Inscription

Tushpa was probably the administrative center of the Armenian satrapy in its early years as part of the Achaemenid Empire. The complex was an Urartian construction, serving as the capital of the Urartian Empire after the destruction of the first known capital, Arzashkun (in the vicinity of Manzikert), by Assyrian forces in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century. Urartu became Assyria’s most powerful rival in the eighth century scoring several victories and conquering significant territories during the reigns of Argishti I and Sarduri II. A resurgent Assyria under Sargon II checked Urartian power in a devastating campaign in 714, the same year a nomadic invasion of Cimmerians defeated Urartian forces in the north. Urartu regained some of its former strength under the succeeding king, Argishti II. Despite a series of strong rulers in the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Urartu fell and was probably incorporated into the so-called Median Empire (if it, indeed, existed as such) at least by the year 585, though some scholars consider the date of collapse, to be a few decades earlier.<sup>2</sup> At the time of Urartu’s collapse the majority of its fortresses were destroyed. Though the

\*Հոդվածն ընդունվել է տպագրության 10.02.2018:

1 **Rüdiger Schmitt**, Die altpersischen Inschriften der Achaimeniden: Editio minor mit deutscher Übersetzung, (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2009), 23.

2 **Paul E. Zimansky**, “Urartian Ozymandias,” *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 58, No. 2, Anatolian Archaeology: A Tribute to Peter Neve (Jun., 1995), 100.

perpetrators were perhaps Scythians, the issue of Urartu's destruction has not been settled, and the Achaemenid royal inscriptions complicate the situation.<sup>3</sup>

In the Bisotun Inscription, the territory that had once been Urartu had another designation – Armenia (Old Persian: Armina, Elamite: Harmina). However, it had not entirely lost its old identity, as it remains Urartu (Urashtu) in the Akkadian version of the trilingual text. The Achaemenids appear to have been well aware of the Urartian past. The formulas used in the Achaemenid royal inscriptions follow their Urartian counterparts very closely. This supports Schmitt's hypothesis that the Achaemenids had scribes who could read Urartian texts rather than the theory of Urartian influence through hypothetical Median texts.<sup>4</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of Urartian military installations were destroyed around the time of its political collapse, but Tushpa's fortress remained intact. This has led some scholars to consider it the center of the Armenian satrapy in the early years of the Achaemenid Empire.<sup>5</sup> The fact that Darius I (521 - 486) commissioned an inscription on the wall of the fortress (and that Xerxes I bothered to finish it) points to the likelihood that Tushpa remained the capital of the region at least into the Achaemenid period.

Armenia plays an important role in the events described in the Bisotun Inscription. Though Darius does not go there personally, he is forced to send two generals - an Armenian named Dādarshi and a Persian named Vaumisa-to dispatct the Armenian rebels. A total of five battles are fought against the Armenian rebels, four of which take place in Armenia proper and one in Assyria (DB paragraphs 26-30). In all these battles the Armenian leaders are not named, though the fact that these battles are sandwiched between two passages detailing the Median rebellion of Fravarti may suggest that they are involved in the Median revolt. However, when describing the revolt of Parthians and Hyrcanians, the inscription clearly states that they were associated with Fravarti. Dadarshi and Vaumisa are also campaigning against different Armenian rebels since their campaigns are simultaneous and in different locations (one of Vaumisa's battles against Armenians takes place in Assyria). Additionally, the leader of the second Babylonian rebellion, Araxa, is an Armenian. The name, Araxa, has been posited as being synonymous with the Armenian term for king, *arkah*.<sup>6</sup> However, this remains unclear and his father's name, Haldita, is quite likely Urartian.

## 2. The Implications of the Text

The contents of XV are rather unremarkable. The text reuses formulae previously well-established by Darius I with a section on the construction of the inscription itself. The text begins with the creation of the universe by Ahuramazda. Xerxes I makes a few additions here the most notable one being the new title "greatest of the gods" for Ahuramazda (XV line 2). The final prayer follows this more explicit acknowledgment of

3 **Amelia Kuhrt**, *The Ancient Near East, c. 3000 - 330 BC*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 558.

4 **Rudiger Schmitt**, "Urartäische Einflüsse im achaimenidischen Iran, vor allem in den Königsinschriften," in *Babylonien und seine Nachbarn in neu- und spätbabylonischer Zeit: Wissenschaftliches Kolloquium aus Anlass des 75. Geburtstags von Joachim Oelsner* Jena, 2. und 3. März 2007, Ed. Manfred Krebernik and Hans Neumann, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 369, (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 210.

5 **Gevorg A. Tirats'yan** "Problem of Satrap Centers in the Armenian Highlands," In *From Urartu to Armenia: Florilegium Gevorg A. Tirats'yan*. In *Memoriam*, ed. by Rouben Vardanyan, (Neuchatel, 2003), 48.

6 **James Russell**, "The Formation of the Armenian People," in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, Volume 1, ed. Richard Hovannisian (New York: Palgrave), 23.

other benevolent deities’ existence when Xerxes invokes Ahuramazda “together with the gods” (XV line 25).

The Elamite version of the text is remarkable in how closely it follows the Old Persian. It follows it so well that, in fact, they use more Old Persian words than other texts. The most notable of these words is *xšačam*, which is rendered as *šaššam*. In Bisotun and other inscriptions, the Elamite term *sunkime*, meaning “kingship” is used. This could signify that the Old Persian *xšačam* has a range of meaning that *sunkime* lacks in this particular context, though this is unclear.

According to the text, Darius I had planned and completed the cutout in the wall of the fortress but did not complete the inscription. Disappointingly, Xerxes only mentions that he completed the job by commissioning the writing of the inscription. Undoubtedly this is not what Darius intended the inscription to say unless he only really wanted to convey that he had commissioned an inscription. Regardless, Xerxes buried the original intentions of Darius by remaining silent on the issue. As one of the only trilingual royal inscriptions outside of Persia proper, it was possibly made in response to suppressing the heavy resistance in the region during Darius’ war of accession as a monument to his triumph in a formerly hostile landscape.

Elamite Transliteration

ANna-ap ir-šá-ir-ra ANu-ra-mas-da  
 ak-ka<sub>4</sub> ir-šá-ir-ra ANna-ap-pi-be-ra  
 ak-ka<sub>4</sub> hi AŠmu-ru-un be-iš-<sup>l</sup>da ak-ka<sub>4</sub><sup>l</sup>  
 [ANki-ik hu-be be-iš-da ak-ka<sub>4</sub> DIŠLÚ  
 MEŠ-ir-ra ir be-iš-da ak-ka<sub>4</sub> ši-ia-ti-  
 um be-iš-da DIŠLÚMEŠ-ir-ra-na ak-ka<sub>4</sub>  
 DIŠik-še-ir-iš-šá DIŠEŠŠANA ir ú-<sup>l</sup>ud-daš<sup>l</sup>-da  
 ki-ir ir-še-ki-ip-in-na DIŠEŠŠANA ki-ir  
 ir-še-ki-ip-in-na pí-r-ra-ma-da-ra-  
 na DIŠú DIŠik-še-ir-iš-šá DIŠEŠŠANA ir-šá-  
 ir-ra DIŠEŠŠANA DIŠEŠŠANA-ip-ir-ra DIŠEŠŠANA DIŠ  
 da-a-u-iš-be-na DIŠpár-ru-za-na-iš-  
 be-na DIŠEŠŠANA AŠmu-ru-un hi uk-ku ha-za-  
 ka<sub>4</sub> pí-r-šá-ti-ni-ka<sub>4</sub> DIŠda-ri-ia-ma-u-  
 iš DIŠEŠŠANA DIŠšá-ak-ri DIŠha-ka<sub>4</sub>-man-nu-  
 iš-ši-ia na-an-ri DIŠik-še-ir-iš-šá  
 DIŠEŠŠANA DIŠda-ri-ia-ma-u-iš DIŠEŠŠANA ak-  
 ka<sub>4</sub> DIŠú ad-da-da DIŠhu-pír-ri za-u-mi-  
 in ANu-ra-mas-da-na [ir<sup>l</sup>-še-ki ap-pa  
 ši-iš-ni-nu hu-ud-daš [ku-ud-da<sup>l</sup> hi AŠ  
 iš-da-na DIŠ hu-pír-ri še-ra-iš gi-  
 iz-za-ma-na ia-na-a AŠDUBMEŠ in-ni  
 tal-li-ša tar-<sup>l</sup>maš me-ni<sup>l</sup> DIŠú še-ra  
 AŠDUBMEŠ [tal-li-ma-na<sup>l</sup> DIŠú ANu-ra-  
 mas-da u-un nu-iš-gi-iš-ni ANna-  
 ap-pi-be i-da-ka<sub>4</sub> ku-ud-da šá-iš-šá-  
<sup>l</sup>um ku-ud-da ap-pa DIŠhu-ud-da-ri<sup>l</sup>

## Translation

A great god is Uramasda,  
who is the greatest of gods,  
who created this earth, who  
created this heaven,  
who created this humanity,  
who created the bliss of humanity,  
who made Xerxes king –  
one king of many,  
one commander of many.  
I am Xerxes, Great King,  
King of Kings,  
king of the lands of many peoples,  
king on this great,  
far and wide earth,  
King Darius' son, an Achaemenid.  
King Xerxes proclaims:  
King Darius, who was  
my father, by the effort of  
Uramasda made much  
good. And this place  
he ordered to be dug out,  
in which he did not  
write an inscription. Then, I ordered  
the inscription to be written.  
May Uramasda protect me,  
together with the gods, both my kingship  
and that which I did.

## Comments

<sup>AN</sup>na-ap-pi-be-ra – nap + animate plural marker + -ra, presumably “of the gods.”<sup>7</sup> In XE, enclitic –na is used instead to correspond to the genitive plural OP form *bagānām*.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the –ra denotes “among” here.

The word order of hi mu-ru-un is flipped here perhaps to reflect the order of OP *imām būmim*, “this earth.” All other texts containing the “creation” story (Xpa, XPh, XE, etc) have mu-ru-un hi. In line 13 of this text, the order is again *murun hi*.

*be-iš-da* – Conj. I 3s + enclitic –ta, defined by Hallock as “he created”<sup>9</sup>, by Hinz and Koch as “hat geschafen.”<sup>10</sup> Corresponds to OP *adā*, “he put (in place),” though often trans-

7 Margaret Khachikjan, The Elamite Language. Documenta Asiana IV. (Rome: Istituto per gli Studi Micenei ed EgeoAnatolici, 1998), 17.

8 François Vallat, Corpus des Inscriptions Royales den Élamite Achéménide. Thèse, Doctorat de IIIe Cycle. (Paris, 1977), 219.

9 Richard Hallock, Persepolis Fortification Tablets, Oriental Institute Publications, 92. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 678.

10 Walther Hinz and Heidemarie Koch, Elamisches Wörterbuch, Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran, Ergänzungsband 17, (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1987), 183.

lated as “created.”<sup>11</sup> The –ta here likely emphasizes that these actions were completed in the past, though the debate over –ta in general remains.<sup>12</sup>

The Elamite transcription *ši-ia-ti-um* of the OP word, *šiyātim* (bliss, happiness), is notable as it renders the OP accusative singular rather than nominative, as most Elamite transcriptions of OP terms do.<sup>13</sup> Dsa (line 1), DE (line 6), Xpa (line 3), XPb (line 4), XPd (line 3) and XPh (line 3) render the OP nominative, spelling *ši-ia-ti-iš*. Xpc (line 3), like XV, renders the OP accusative.<sup>14</sup>

*pír-ra-ma-da-ra-na* is the Elamite rendering of OP *framātāra-*. It is unclear whether it should be amended to *pír-ra-ma-da-ra-<um>-na* to reflect the OP accusative singular (with Elamite possessive-attributive –na suffixed) as it does in DE (line 11), XE (line 12), XPb (line 7), Xpc (line 5), XPd (line 5) and XPh (line 5).<sup>15</sup> Xpa (line 6) has *pír-ra-ma-da-ra-na-um*, which seems to render the OP genitive plural (unclear).

*ú-ud-daš-da* – The spelling of *ú-ud-daš-da* here differs from the other inscriptions (XE line 6-7, etc.), which spell out *hu-ud-daš-da*. This is probably a result of the loss of the <h> phoneme by this period.<sup>16</sup> Its presence here is probably to acknowledge the historical <h> without writing it. The enclitic –ta here probably denotes that this action was completed in the past, though the meaning of this morpheme is unclear.

<sup>DIŠ</sup>ú<sup>AN</sup>u-ra-mas-da u-un nu-iš-gi-iš-ni – lit. I, may Ahuramazda protect me. The accusative pronoun *u-un* does not have a <sup>DIŠ</sup> determinative here. The enclitic –ni in *nu-iš-gi-iš-ni* is precativ.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>DIŠ</sup>pár-ru-za-na-iš-be-na – This is the Elamite rendering of OP *paruv zanānām* in the OP nominative singular, an Elamite plural marker <p> and enclitic –na. As in *pír-ra-ma-da-ra-na*, the –na is utilized here as a counterpart to the OP genitive plural.

Here the phrase *ha-za-ka<sub>4</sub> pír-šá-ti-ni-ka<sub>4</sub>* is used to correspond to OP *duraiy apiy*, “far and wide.” In Dna (line 9), DSf (line 10), DZc (line 3), and Dse (line 9), the term *ir-šá-anna* (spelled *ir-šá-na* in Dse) is used instead of *ha-za-ka<sub>4</sub>*, suggesting that they are synonymous (“great”). The spelling here is also simplified from other texts, such as DE (line 17) which spells out *ha-iz-za-ik-ka<sub>4</sub>* (simplified, perhaps, to save precious space in Darius’ niche?). The use of *pír-šá-ti-ni-ka<sub>4</sub>* is also notable as a possible compound of *pir*<sup>18</sup> and *šatinika* (spelled *šatanika* in DNa, line 9), which Hallock defines as “far and wide” after the OP and Hinz and Koch follow with “gar weit.”<sup>19</sup>

*ir-še-ki* – the spelling here appears to be simplified from the usual *ir-še-ik-ki*. Perhaps it was done to save space as other simplified spellings (*ha-za-ka<sub>4</sub>*) occur in this text.

OP *stānam*, “place,” is rendered here in Elamite as *iš-da-na*.<sup>20</sup> This time neither the OP nominative nor accusative show in the Elamite. *gi-iz-za-ma-na* – Conj. III<sup>m</sup> Infinitive, “to dig out,” following OP *kantaniy* (inf., “to dig out”) in the same passage.<sup>21</sup>

11 Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon*, (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1953), 152.  
 12 Matthew W. Stolper, “Elamite,” *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World’s Ancient Languages*, ed. Roger Woodard. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 82.  
 13 Tavernier, *Iranica in the Achaemenid Period* (ca. 550-330 B.C.), *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 158. (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 33.  
 14 Tavernier, *Iranica*, 37.  
 15 Hallock, PFT, 744.  
 16 Khachikjan, *Elamite Language*, 7.  
 17 Khachikjan, *Elamite Language*, 50.  
 18 Hallock, PFT, 745.  
 19 Hinz and Koch, *Elamisches Wörterbuch*, 208.  
 20 Tavernier, *Iranica*, 37.  
 21 Hallock, PFT, 713.

ia-na-a – Elamite rendering of OP *yanaiy*, “where.”<sup>22</sup>

The use of ku-ud-da corresponds exactly to OP *utā* in this passage as “both ... and.” Šá-iš-šá-um here renders OP *xšaçaṃ*, “kingship, empire.”<sup>23</sup> Notable about this rendering is that it is the OP singular accusative. Also notable is the rendering of the phoneme <ç> as <šš> indicating that the Elamite was following the OP pronunciation rather than the “Median” <θr>. The issues in rendering the OP phoneme <ç> are found in terms such as the name of the Elamite rebel Ačina (Aθrina).<sup>24</sup>

Analysis of <sup>DIS</sup>hu-ud-da-ri is unclear. Some consider it as equivalent to the OP passive construction, “what was done by me,” but this is not probable. Khachikjan points out that forms without the –ra/-ri are attested in similar passages and proposes that the –ra/-ri nominalizes the Conj. I verb.<sup>25</sup>

Xerxes Trilingual Inscription at Van (from CDLI)<sup>26</sup>



**Նշան Թ. Քեսեթեր** – գիտական հետաքրքրություններն ընդգրկում են Միջին Արևելքի հին և միջնադարյան պատմության՝ մասնավորապես Միջագետքի երրորդ հազարամյակի պատմության հիմնահարցերը: Ունի հրատարակում «Lights: The MESSA Journal»-ում Լիբիայի՝ Հոմեռական կայսրության դարաշրջանի պատմության վերաբերյալ, որը լույս է ընծայվել 2014 թվականին:

22 Tavernier, *Iranica*, 36.

23 Tavernier, *Iranica*, 33.

24 Tavernier, *Iranica*, 12.

25 Khachikjan, *Elamite Language*, 60.

26 Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative, “Xerxes cliff relief,” accessed February 15, 2015. [http://cdli.ucla.edu/dl/photo/P429415\\_d.jpg](http://cdli.ucla.edu/dl/photo/P429415_d.jpg)

**ՔՍԵՐ-ՔՍԵՍԻ ՎԱՆԻ ԱՐՁԱՆԱԳՐՈՒԹՅԱՆ  
ԷԼԱՄԵՐԵՆ ՏԱՐԲԵՐԱԿԸ (XV)**

Նշան Թ. Քեսեքեր

**Բանալի բառեր** –Աքեմենյան կայսրություն, արքայից արքա, Դարեհ I, Քսերքսես I, Հայաստան, Ահուրամազդա:

Վանում հայտնաբերված այս ոչ մեծ արձանագրությունը պատկանում է Քսերքսես Ա-ին: Այն հավելյալ լույս է սփռում Երվանդակյան դարաշրջանի Հայաստանի պատմության վրա: Պարզվում է, որ արքեմենյան զորավարներ Դադարշիի և Վաումիսայի արշավանքներից հետո Դարեհ Ա-ն անձամբ հրամայել է փորագրել տվյալ արձանագրությունը: Քսերքսես Ա արքան էլ վերջացրել է նրա գործը: Հետաքրքիր է արձանագրության լեզվյան դիտանկյունը. նրա էլամերեն տարբերակն ունի հին պարսկերենից փոխառված ավելի շատ բառեր, քան մյուս արքեմենյան արձանագրությունները: Նաև կան մի շարք ուղղագրական առանձնահատկություններ:

Резюме

**ЭЛАМЕЙСКАЯ ВЕРСИЯ ВАНСКОЙ НАДПИСИ  
ЦАРЯ КСЕРКСА I (XV)**

Ншан Т. Кесекер

**Ключевые слова** – Ахеменидская империя, царь царей, Дарий I, Ксеркс I, Армения, Ахурамазда.

Найденная в регионе Вана данная надпись принадлежит Ксерксу I. Она проливает дополнительный свет на историю Ервандидской Армении. Становится ясным, что после походов ахеменидских полководцев Дадарши и Вахумисы, Дарий I приказал высечь эту надпись. Царь Ксеркс завершил начатую работу. Весьма интересен лингвистический аспект надписи: она содержит больше заимствований из древнеперсидского, чем другие надписи. Имеются также ряд орфографических особенностей.