
De Babylone aux routes d'Arabie, portrait d'une orientaliste

Hommage à Béatrice André-Salvini



Textes recueillis par

Ariane Thomas, Pascal Butterlin,
Antoine Cavigneaux, Nicole Chevalier
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Contents

Avant-propos	vi
Ariane Thomas et Mirjo Salvini	
Béatrice André-Salvini, Neuilly-sur-Seine, 27 janvier 1949 - Paris, 24 novembre 2020	vii
Nicole Chevalier	
Bibliographie de Béatrice André-Salvini	xi
Nicole Chevalier et Mirjo Salvini	
Témoignages	xxii
Maamoun Abdulkarim, Mahmoud Alassi, Narmin Ali Amin, Jerry Cooper, John Curtis, Aleth Echalié, Florence Evin, Bruno Favel, Grant Frame, Marie-Laure Gauchery, Nicolas Grimal, Chadi Hatoum, Henri Loyrette, Catherine Metzger, Christiane Naffah-Bayle, Alessandra Peruzzetto, Marielle Pic, Karen Radner, Jesús García Recio, Ariane Thomas, Mathilde Touillon-Ricci, Yves Ubelmann	
Portfolio	xxx
L'abbé Jean Starcky et les archéologues syriens d'après deux documents photographiques conservés au département des Antiquités orientales du musée du Louvre	1
Michel Al-Maqdissi et Sidonia Obreja	
Textes cunéiformes des fouilles de Qal'at al-Bahrain, Dilmun et le Pays de la Mer à l'aube de l'ère kassite	5
Béatrice André-Salvini (†), Antoine Cavigneaux et Pierre Lombard	
Sur les traces de Gudea : recherches de provenance d'antiquités néo-sumériennes dans la base de données des objets d'art du Jeu de Paume	26
Nicolas Benoit et Anne Dunn-Vaturi	
Un lit nuptial sur un fragment de coquille d'incrustation de Mari ?	35
Dominique Beyer	
Musei e beni culturali in tempo di guerra: alcune riflessioni	39
Maria Giovanna Biga	
Le moulage du lion de Babylone du musée du Louvre	43
Vincent Blanchard	
Ur-Utu, élève ou maître ? À propos de l'apprentissage du cunéiforme à Sippar-amnanum à l'époque paléo-babylonienne tardive	48
Dominique Charpin	
Henri Pognon, un orientaliste consul en Mésopotamie	56
Nicole Chevalier	
Statues-menhirs d'Arabie : le pasteur et l'ancêtre	63
Marianne Cotty	
Note d'iconographie achéménide : le combat du lion et du taureau à Suse	72
Julien Cuny	

Oxford Proto-Elamite	85
Jacob L. Dahl	
Between Assyria and Urartu: A Study of the Political Entity of Mannaea Based on its Archaeology, Onomastic, and Toponomastic	89
Roberto Dan and Adriano V. Rossi	
Un fragment d'un très ancien évangélique syriaque au Louvre	123
Alain J. Desreumaux	
Balance and the Bilingual Brain	128
Irving Finkel	
Note sur un vase méconnu de la collection Désiré-Albert Barre. De bucchero à <i>black burnished ware</i>	133
Françoise Gaultier	
No One Likes a <i>Besserwisser</i>: A New Look at OB Akkadian Proverbs	139
M. J. Geller	
L'invention de l'écriture selon l'épopée sumérienne	141
Jean-Jacques Glassner	
The "Taymā" Stone" in the Light of New Research	143
Arnulf Hausleiter	
La conservation-restauration des tablettes cunéiformes en terre crue : un projet à long terme	152
Anne Liégey	
Un joint entre deux fragments de tablettes de Nuzi AO 7775 (TCL 9 25) et BM 81509 (SANTAG 4 61)	157
Brigitte Lion et Véronique Pataï	
La clause « aller à l'eau » à Suse : ordalie ou mise au ban publique ?	164
Florence Malbran-Labat	
Un document inédit du bureau d'Enlila dans les collections du Louvre (AO 32469)	169
Jaroslav Maniacyk	
Béatrice André-Salvini et la mission archéologique de Bash Tapa : quelques souvenirs	173
Lionel Marti	
Eine Wiedervereinigung. Schreibtechnische Betrachtungen zum astrologischen Text VAT 7814 + AO 6470 der Serie <i>Enūma Anu Enlil</i>	177
Joachim Marzahn	
Un reflet du texte du Broken Obelisk à Qasr-Shemamok/Kilizu	183
Maria Grazia Masetti-Rouault et Olivier Rouault	
Que les hommes-scorpions gardent le passage à tout jamais !	189
Valérie Matoïan	
Des échanges à longue distance entre l'Égypte et le Proche-Orient (2350-1800 avant notre ère) Acteurs et produits à la lumière de quelques découvertes récentes	198
Juan Carlos Moreno García	

Friedrich Eduard Schulz et les Annales d'Argišti I à Van Kalesi.....	203
Mirjo Salvini	
Les remparts de Larsa : le mystère résolu ?	224
Régis Vallet	
Un ancien exemple de coopération dans le domaine des études hourrites	232
Gernot Wilhelm	
Annexe « L'Irak, un patrimoine historique et culturel à faire connaître pour le sauvegarder ».....	235
Béatrice André-Salvini (†)	

Oxford Proto-Elamite

Jacob L. Dahl

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In this short note I present an edition of a previously unpublished proto-Elamite tablet kept in the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, as a small token of thanks for the unwavering support that Béatrice André-Salvini extended to me during my two years in Paris and during my later visits to the Louvre. During my stay in Paris (2003-2005) and following, I was able to publish some studies on proto-Elamite and, I hope, advance the study of this remarkable writing system, but none of that would have been possible without Béatrice's support. It was also Béatrice, who in a visionary show of support, negotiated access for the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI) to the Louvre collections, opening possibilities for research never before possible. Her early death is a great loss to French Assyriology and the study of early Iran, internationally.

The small, oblong, clay tablet with the number AN2002-2 (Figure 1) published here for the first time, is without doubt an early proto-Elamite tablet, comparable to early texts found at Susa such as TCL 32, 7, 14, 64 (see also Dahl *et al.* 2013: 365-366). It was accessioned in the Ashmolean Museum of the University of Oxford in 2002, and its route to the Museum is discussed below. As such it joins a small group of proto-Elamite tablets outside of the two main collections of this material, the National Museum of Iran, Tehran and other collections in Iran, and the Louvre Museum, Paris. In my years working on proto-Elamite I have only come across the following 56¹ tablets outside these collections (most numerous collections listed first, for texts already available online at the CDLI (<https://cdli.ucla.edu>) a reference is provided):

1. The Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of the University of São Paulo (MAE-USP), Brazil
 - a. 19 proto-Elamite tablets and fragments, unpublished.
 - b. No publicly available information.
 2. The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA
 - a. 14 proto-Elamite tablets and fragments, partially published.
- i. 1 tablet is an exchange with the Louvre Museum from 1968 (SB 2749 = UM 68-01-001 [P257277]). Published as MDP 6, 214 see also Hamlin 1968: 30.
 - ii. 11 tablets were gifted by the Brooklyn Museum in 1942, they are likely to have come from the early excavations at the Susa acropolis (Stolper 1978: 94). The first 5 were published in Stolper 1978 (UM 42-20-250b [P009434]; UM 42-20-250c [P009433]; UM 42-20-250e [P009435]; UM 42-20-250a [P009432]; UM 42-20-250f [P009436]), the remaining 6 tablets and fragments remain unpublished (UM 42-20-250d (P429740); UM 42-20-250g (P429743); UM 42-20-250h+i+j (P429744), UM 42-20-250k (P429745); UM 42-20-250l (P429746); UM 42-20-250m (P429747)).
 - iii. 2 tablets are from the Malyan Project of W. Sumner, accessioned in 1973 (UM 73-08-001 [P009457]; UM 73-08-002 [P009456]). Published in Stolper 1985.
3. Couvent Saint-Étienne, Jerusalem
 - a. 10 proto-Elamite tablets and fragments, unpublished.
 - b. Part of a collection of 159 cuneiform artefacts from the former collection of V. Scheil. Following the death of Scheil the collection was passed on to R. Tournay, who passed them on to M. Sigrist. They are now in the collection of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française, housed in the Couvent Saint-Étienne in Jerusalem (Sigrist and Ozaki 2010: 7). The collection was catalogued in Sigrist and Millard 1985, and the Ur III tablets (the majority of the collection of Scheil) was published in Sigrist and Ozaki 2010. The proto-Elamite tablets are numbered SE 118 (P431333), SE 120 (P009437), SE 121 (P009438), SE 122 (P009439), SE 123 (P009440), SE 124 (P009441), SE 125 (P009442), SE 126 (P009443), SE 127 (P009444), SE 128 (P009445).
 4. British Museum, London, United Kingdom
 - a. 3 proto-Elamite tablets, partially published.
 - i. 1 tablet (BM 120486) was purchased from Yahya Ebrahimoff in 1928, and published by C.B.F. Walker (1980: 75).
 - ii. 2 tablets on long-term loan from the Louvre (carrying the temporary numbers

¹ After the completion of this article I was alerted to the existence of three fragments of proto-Elamite tablets in the collection of The Morgan Library & Museum (NY, NY), a gift from R. Ghirshman to E. Porada, bringing the total number of proto-Elamite tablets and fragments outside the Louvre Museum and the National Museum of Iran, Tehran, and other Iranian collections, to 56, only 53 are discussed below.

L 1168 and L 1169). L 1168 was published as MDP 6, 274 (AS 274 [P008067]), L 1169 has the Susa number Sb 6375, but was not published in the MDP series; both Louvre tablets are discussed by Walker as well (1980: 75).

5. Leuven
 - a. 4 proto-Elamite tablets and fragments, to be published by H. Hameeuw and J.L. Dahl.
 - b. Likely to have been collected in the 1940s or 50s by P. Naster, professor of Assyriology at Leuven University (Hameeuw and Dahl, *forthcoming*).
6. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia
 - a. 1 tablet, unpublished.
 - b. The proto-Elamite tablet with the museum number DV-15777 is kept in the State Ermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. It entered the collection in 1938 as part of the former collection of Nikolay Likhachev, nothing else is known about its provenience (personal communication, N. Koslova, June 7, 2022).
7. Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library of Columbia University, New York, USA
 - a. 1 tablet, unpublished.
 - b. Top half of small proto-Elamite tablet is in the Columbia University in the City of New York, Art Properties, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Edith Porada Collection (personal communication, Roberto C. Ferrari, May 6, 2022) (P235646).
8. Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom.
 - a. 1 tablet (AN2002-2, P388145, see below)

Additionally, a number of proto-Elamite tablets are kept at regional museums in Iran, in particular at the Château de Suse at Shush, Iran.

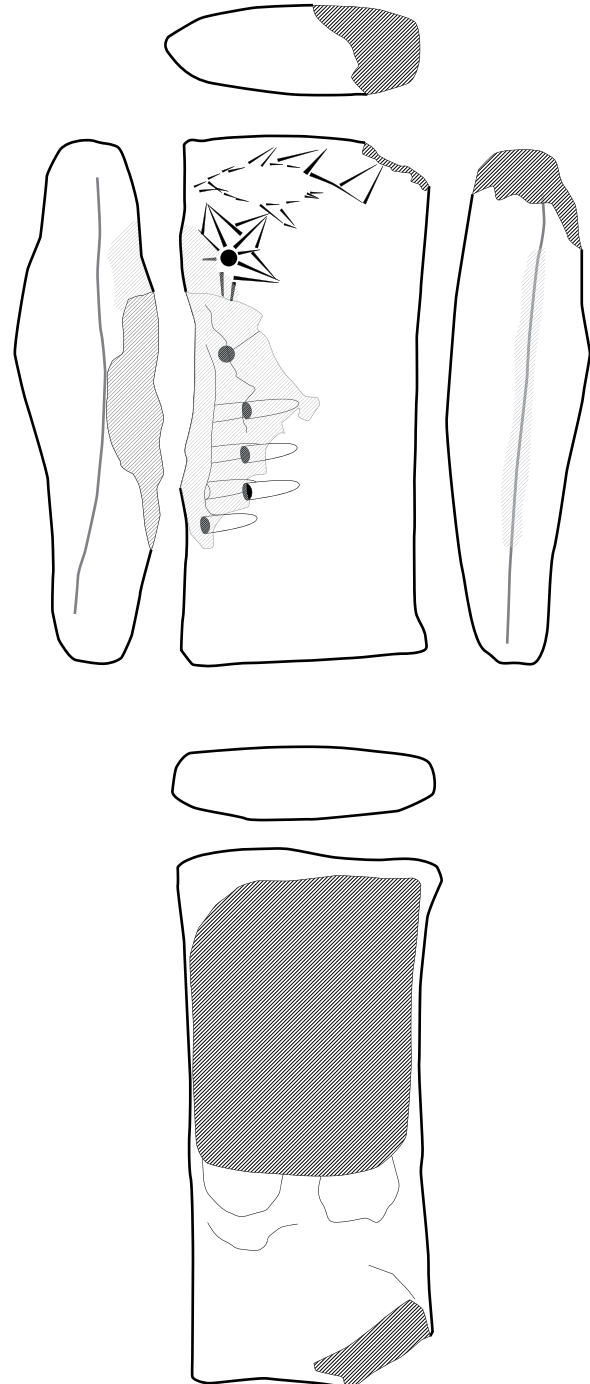
The Oxford proto-Elamite tablet was presented to the Museum in 2002 by Sir Denis Wright, Ambassador to Iran (1963-1971). In the object file there is a note from Wright which reads:

These two pots and tablet (also a pottery lamp in shelf in my study) were given to me in March 1985 by Bridget Kellas. She told me that she was almost certain that they had been given to her father, Sir John Le Rougetel (Ambassador in Iran), by Professor Ghirshman when he and Lady LeR had visited Sush.

The tablet presented here adds little on its own to the decipherment of proto-Elamite or to our understanding of early Iran, but in the spirit of the work of Béatrice André-Salvini, to whose memory this short note is

dedicated, control of the corpus is key (note in that regard André and Salvini 1989).

AN2002-2 is an early proto-Elamite tablet. Early tablets are defined as being oblong in shape and often with only one entry (per side), and with large and sometimes 'clumsily' executed signs and/or 'decorated' forms of standard signs (Dahl *et al.* 2013: 365-366). The edges



AN2002-2

Figure 1. AN2002-2. © Jacob Dahl.

of AN2002-2 are blank, and the surface of the reverse is missing, but was likely originally blank. The clay is very dark, resembling many early proto-Elamite tablets from the Louvre Museum.

Transliteration:

AN2002-2 (72 × 36 × 22mm)

Obverse

1. M502

2. \lceil M365_f M367²¹, 7N₁²¹

Reverse

Missing (presumed blank)

Comments:

Line 1: M502 is a hapax, and is graphically unrelated to any other known signs. It represents the header of the text, presumably the institution to which the transaction is related.

Line 2: M365_p is a hapax, it is similar to M365_c (another hapax, found in MDP 26, 273). It is not a graphical variant of M365 (a common proto-Elamite sign, used both alone and in combination with common header signs such as M305, M136, etc.). Several signs were grouped as variants of M365 in Meriggi's sign list (Meriggi 1974). The numbering was retained with some modifications in my own working sign list (available at <https://github.com/cdli-gh/proto-elamite_data> and <<https://cdli.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/resources/token-lists>>), although without deciding whether two signs with different alphabetic suffixes were semantically or only graphically variants. Proven graphical variants are differentiated with numerical suffixes in my working sign list. Figure 2 below gives an overview of the signs with the numbers M365, and M365_{a,c,d,g}. M365_a is found only in MDP 26, 391, an early Susa text. In Scheil's copy the sign appears as M365 turned 45° and with two lines crossing it. As such, one could be led to believe that it was a modified version

of M365. Crossing a sign with two lines is known from the numerical *Capacity System C''*, used, presumably, to measure a type of cereal other than barley (Dahl 2019: figure 9). However, Scheil's copy from MDP 26 is wrong (note that the copies in MDP 26 were apparently made by M.-G. de Mecquenem using a *chambre claire*, and lack the accuracy of Scheil's usual copies), and the sign can be described as a six-pointed star (see Figure 2, the drawing of M365_a is not normalised, interference from a broken sign immediately in front of it cannot be ruled out). This is a cautionary tale for anyone studying proto-Elamite, relying solely on the old publications or the sign list of Meriggi: with new images online through the pages of the CDLI (thanks to the support of Béatrice André-Salvini and Jebrael Nokandeh, and many others at the Louvre and the National Museum of Iran), a much refined index of signs can now be produced (see my working sign list, produced before recognising that Meriggi's M365_a is incorrectly drawn). Note that Meriggi's M365_b represents a broken sign, probably best transliterated as M175+M365 (see MDP 17, 345) (not in my working sign list), and that his M365_e is now analysed as M54+M365+M54_i, a complex grapheme, found several times in the important text MDP 26, 71 and once in MDP 26 S, 4804. Both M365_c and M365_d are hapaxes found in standard or late texts (MDP 26, 273 and MDP 31, 39 respectively), and are not likely to be related to any of the other M365 signs.

M365_g is attested only in the very damaged, and likely very late text, MDP 31, 37 and escapes all further analysis at present. M365_f of AN2002-2 is likely to be an owner-sign (Dahl 2019: 80-82).

Line 2: The reading of M367 is uncertain (see Figure 3 for a normalised version of M367). The traces could represent 1N₁₄. However, reading 1N₁₄ would suggest that M365_f should be analysed as an object sign (Dahl 2019: 79-80), a category to which it would be difficult to assign it.

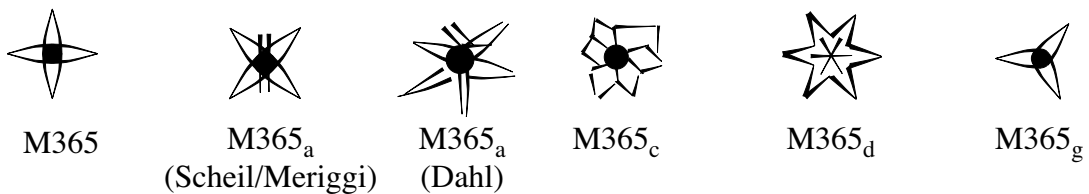


Figure 2. M365 and variants. © Jacob Dahl.



Figure 3. M367. © Jacob Dahl.

M367

Line 2: The numerical notation is then likely to record $7N_1$, it is likely to count discrete objects in the decimal system. If this reconstruction is correct, we can “translate” the entry as “7 male goats belonging to M365_f”.

In the end less than 3% of the known proto-Elamite tablets are not in one of the key historical collections for proto-Elamite: the Louvre Museum or the National Museum of Iran and other Iranian collections. This represents a unique situation in the study of ancient scripts from Western Asia, since command of the sources is far easier than for many similar sized corpora of cuneiform texts. A few of the proto-Elamite tablets in the collections listed above are long-term loans from the Louvre Museum, and together all the proto-Elamite tablets and fragments in global collections help telling both the story of the early history of the modern country Iran, the history of the excavations of Western Asia, and informs our understanding of our shared global history.

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