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One of a Bulk. Another newly-discovered brick inscription of Untaš-Napiriša

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Abstract: *This study examines an inscribed brick from the reign of the Middle Elamite King Untaš-Napiriša (ca. 1275-1240 BCE). The brick, unearthed in Choyā Zanbil not long ago, is currently under the ownership of a privately held collection in Shiraz. Its current location allowed us to thoroughly examine and decipher the text inscribed on it. By conducting a basic analysis and comparing it with other similar bricks, it becomes evident that this brick is identical to the one documented in MDP 41 as “12 (Pl. V, 2)”.*

Key words: Choyā Zanbil, Dur Untash, Middle Elamite King, Elamite Language, Brick Inscription, Untaš-Napiriša, Newly-Discovered Brick

Introduction

Untaš-Napiriša (ca. 1275-1240 BCE), whose name translates to “Napiriša protects / protected me”, is notable as the earliest Elamite king known for leaving behind a significant collection of inscriptions in the Elamite language. Zigurrat Choyā Zanbil stands as a prominent temple established within the city of Choyā Zanbil, originally known as Dur Untash, around 1250 BCE. Despite the untimely cessation of construction in this sacred urban complex following the demise of Untaš-Napiriša, the site did not fall into abandonment. On the contrary, it remained inhabited until its eventual destruction at the hands of the Assyrian ruler Ashurbanipal in 640 BCE. The brick, unearthed in Choyā Zanbil not long ago, is currently under the ownership of a privately held collection in Shiraz.

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Discussion

This brick remains undamaged and bears three inscribed lines in Middle Elamite. The origin of the brick can be traced back to Choyā Zambil, as the *aštam* set up is known to exist exclusively in Choyā Zambil. Upon comparing the texts of the brick, both the present one and the one in MDP 41, it becomes evident that they share the same content and text. However, they are attributed to different scribes due to the subtle differences in the signs used. The lengths of the lines in both texts are identical. The length of a line, although significant, should not be solely relied upon as definitive proof. The diverse dimensions of bricks utilized at Choyā Zambil, along with their positioning in the edifice, might impact the extent of text inscribed on them. Stève highlights that a total of 16 bricks were allocated for the building of an *aštam*, which was offered as a present to the goddess *Pinigir*; this specific brick is regarded as the seventeenth.¹



Fig. 1. Images of the Brick inscription. Photo by Sina Abaslou. Drawing by Manuchihir Purmira

Artifact type: Elamite brick

Language: Middle Elamite

Dimensions: 33, 5* 33, 5* 8,5; 40 *16 * 9 cm.

Discovered in: Khuzestan

Stored in: Shiraz, Personal Archive

Date: Middle Elamite

Transliteration:

1. ú^{DIŠ}un-taš-DINGIR.GAL ša-ak^{DIŠ}hu-um-pan-nu-me-na-ki
2. su-un-ki-ik an-za-an šu-šu-un-ka
3. a-áš-ta-am ku-ši-ih^{AN}pi-ni-girú tu₄-ni-ih

English Translation:

1. I Untaš-Napiriša, the son of Humpan-u-mena
2. The king of Anzan and Susa
3. I built *aštam*; I dedicated it to Pinigir

¹ Stève, 1967: 32.

Commentary:

Untaš-Napiriša (^{DIS}Un-taš-DINGIR.-GAL)

Named after an Elamite deity and self-styled as “King of Anzan and Susa”, he was the son of Humpan-u-mena.² The mere mention of his name evokes the memory of the numerous Elamite inscriptions he has left behind. As per W. Henkelman,³ the inscriptions discovered in Choḡā Zambil alone total to 53 brick inscriptions. Nevertheless, it should be highlighted that in contrast to Henkelman’s claim, a significantly greater number of inscriptions have indeed been uncovered from Choḡā Zambil. In his thorough analysis, R. Ghirshman, who carried out methodical excavations at the site, has recorded the unearthing of 659 inscribed bricks in situ;⁴ it should be noted that while some of these bricks contain identical content, they differ only in terms of orthographic details.

āš-ta-am

aštam, was under the patronage of the goddess *Pinigir*. The term *aštam* is derived from Akkadian and translates to “Temple-Brothel” in Elamite. In Akkadian, the word signifies a “tavern” or “hostel”.⁵ Stève, based on archaeological findings, associates it with pregnancy.⁶

Šilhak-Inšušinak also points to rebuilding of *Pinigir’s aštam* (EKI 48§35):

āš-ta-am^{AN}Pi-ni-gir-me ha-la-at-iaku-ši-ik a-ak mi-šir₇-ma-na ù e-ri-en-tim-ia pe-ip-ši-hku-ši-ih
“The *aštam* of *Pinigir* was made with [sun-dried] brick and as it was falling into ruin I restored and rebuilt it with [backed] brick.”

Untaš-Napiriša also points to building of *Pinigir’s aštam* (EKI 5d):

ú ^{DIS}Un-taš-^{AN}GAL ša-ak^{DIS.AN}Hu-um-pan-nu-me- na-k[i] su-un-ki-ik An-za-an Šu-šu-un-ka a-
āš-ta ku-ši-ih^{AN}Pi-ni-gir in tu₄-ni-h
“I am Untaš-Napiriša, the son of Humpan-u-mena; the King of Anzan and Susa; I built *aštam* and dedicated it to *pinigir*.”

²According to Tavernier (2023: 191), the Middle Elamite king who ruled between 1350 and 1340 BCE should be referred to as Humpan-u-mena, which translates to “Humpan is authority to me”.

³Henkelman, 2014: 339.

⁴Ghirshman, 1966: 13: “Le nombre de ces briques inscrites trouvées encore in situ dans les murs du coffrage atteint 659.”

⁵Black, George & Postgate, 2000: 29.

⁶Stève, 1967: 33.

Pinigir

She holds a significant position among the ancient deities worshipped in Elam. *Untaš-Napiriša*, a prominent figure in Elam, undertook the restoration of numerous temples, including the temple of *Pinigir*. In addition to his efforts in renovating the temple, he generously donated a golden statue of *Pinigir*.

In Elam, she was known as *kikkigalirra*, which translates to “mistress of heaven”.⁷ Kamyar Abdi argues that *Pinigir* was perceived as a warrior goddess in Elam, based on a bronze plaque discovered in Susa. This plaque depicts a procession of warrior deities and includes the names of several Elamite deities, including *Pinigir*, *Kiririša*, *Lagamar*, *Nahhunte*, and *Manzat*.⁸ It is worth noting that early scholarship mistakenly identified her as *Kiririša*, an unrelated goddess from a different region of Elam.⁹ Regarding Ur III seals one may come across a stone made of lapis lazuli, numbered 2471, discovered in Susa on which “Te...servant of Pinigir” has been inscribed.¹⁰

Abbreviations:

EKI: König, F.W. (1965). *Die elamischen Königsinschriften*. Graz: Ernst Weidner.

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⁷ Henkelman, 2008: 266.

⁸ Abdi, 2017: 10.

⁹ Henkelman, 2008: 354.

¹⁰ Roach, 2008: 2. 394.