

PERSEPOLIS FORTIFICATION ARCHIVE PROJECT

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The Oriental Institute's Persian Expedition discovered the Persepolis Fortification tablets in 1933; the Iranian government loaned the tablets to the Oriental Institute for study in 1936; they became available for study in 1937; they have been under study, sometimes by teams and sometimes by individual scholars, for seventy years now. Despite this long history, however, the tablets and the work on them have rarely appeared in the *Annual Reports* of the Oriental Institute. The Fiftieth Anniversary Report for 1968/69 mentioned Richard T. Hallock's long-awaited publication of the Elamite texts from 2,000 Persepolis tablets (Hallock 1969), and in last year's report, former Oriental Institute Research Archivist and ongoing Institute Research Associate Charles E. Jones even mentioned the tablets in connection with a Project.

This is the first report of that Project, so it seems a good idea to introduce the history, contents, and significance of the Fortification tablets, and to mention the shadow of crisis under which the Persepolis Fortification Archive Project has come together, before reporting on the last year's progress. In fact, there has been much progress, so readers who already know about the past and present of the tablets from the Oriental Institute's *News & Notes*, Winter 2007, may want to skip these preliminaries.

Background of the Project

When the Oriental Institute's excavations at Persepolis began in 1931, James Henry Breasted thought of the palaces and sculptures of Darius, Xerxes, and their successors as "the full noonday of Persian civilized development, forming a noble heritage which the modern world is now only beginning to rediscover." But he also believed that "our responsibility at Persepolis could not possibly be confined to an investigation of the great group of palaces, but must include also the related evidences which surround the place and which fuse together into a great body of cultural remains" (Breasted 1933: 316f.). A few months after he wrote these words, in the autumn of 1933, the Persepolis team found the Fortification tablets. They were to answer, in ways that surpassed Breasted's expectations, his hope to have a broad, deep, and concrete historical context for the palaces.

Workers at Persepolis began to build the palaces under Darius I soon after about 520 B.C., and their successors continued to build, adorn, and renovate them until the last moments of the Persian empire, when Alexander the Great conquered Persepolis, occupied it, basked in its luxury, then looted it, and burned it in 330 B.C.. The standing ruins were still dramatic sights when the first western travelers began

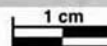
to look with serious attention at remains of the ancient world in the 1600s and 1700s. The decipherment of the cuneiform scripts began in the early 1800s with multilingual inscriptions that early explorers recorded at Persepolis, and that decipherment was the key that unlocked 2,000 earlier years of the ancient writing, almost doubling the sweep of the historical record. The Persian empire, whose kings left these inscriptions, had stretched from India and Central Asia to Greece and Egypt, dwarfing the ferocious Assyrian and Babylonian empires. In fact, it had incorporated all the imperial peoples of the ancient Near East, and with them, their literate cultures.

From the point of view of 1931, therefore, Persepolis was the starting gate from which the ancient history of the Near East had been explored, and it was one of the culminations that synthesized that history. It was the place where one could hope to see the Persian empire from the inside. The royal inscriptions told how great, good, and powerful Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes thought they were, or wished others to think they were, but the inscriptions did not tell how they got, held, and ran their empire or how they lived in their own Persian homeland. So when the Oriental Institute found tablets with written records in the homeland, great attention was paid and great hopes were raised.

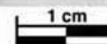
The discovery was a stroke of good luck. In 1933, the excavators were building a ramp for truck access to the terrace. They cleared away remains of a bastion in the mudbrick fortification wall on the edge of the terrace, probably at an ancient point of access to the service buildings around the palaces. They found two little rooms full of clay tablets. Hence the name, Fortification tablets, not because they say anything about fortifications, but because they were found in



PF 0698 obv.

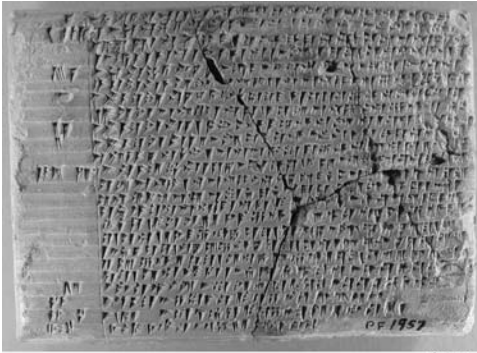


PF 0698 rev.



Persepolis Fortification tablet with Elamite text in cuneiform script (in the small, tongue-shaped format characteristic of primary records)

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PF 1957 obv.

1 cm



PF 1957 rev.

1 cm

Persepolis Fortification tablet with Elamite text in cuneiform script (in the large, rectangular format characteristic of secondary records)

the wall. Within six months, the excavator, Ernst Herzfeld, could give a good description of the find as a whole (Anonymous 1934: 231–32). There are three main components: first, tablets with texts in cuneiform script, in Elamite language, along with seal impressions — thousands of these, probably tens of thousands, some intact, more of them shattered; second, tablets with texts in Aramaic script, in Aramaic language, most of them also with seal impressions — fewer than a thousand of these; third, tablets without any texts, but with seal impressions — perhaps five or six thousand of these. And there are also some unique pieces: one tablet with a text in Babylonian script and language, one in Greek script and language, one in Phrygian script and language, a few with impressions not of seals, but of Persian or Athenian coins. Herzfeld guessed that there were as many as 30,000 tablets and fragments.

This first appraisal was a blow to the great hopes that the discovery had excited. It was daunting to realize that most of the texts were in Elamite. This was the indigenous language of southwestern Iran, but the least well understood of the Achaemenid languages. It was discouraging to realize that the texts were not about colorful deeds of kings and commanders and priests and eunuchs, but only about barley and flour

and wine and sheep, mundane, even trivial stuff. They were not even a long record; they were all dated within less than twenty years (509–494 B.C.). They represented a single ancient information system, but a system that was dense, detailed, complex, and hard to reassemble from its bits.

So the real work of discovery began after the tablets were excavated, and it went very slowly. Only one other Achaemenid Elamite tablet of this kind had ever been found, so there was no comparison to go on, and everything had to start from the bottom. When World War II began, the team working on the tablets shrank to a few scholars, working mostly in isolation, who spent their entire lives on these puzzles. Foremost among them were Richard T. Hallock, who studied the Elamite texts, and Raymond A. Bowman, who studied the Aramaic texts. Bowman's work was not completed and published, but when Hallock published his magisterial treatment of 2,087 Elamite texts (Hallock 1969), their significance began to become clear and their information began to transform many ways of understanding the Iranian past.

The texts provided a very large new corpus for the study of the latest phase of the Elamite language, a language written in Iran for more than a thousand years before the Persians arrived there, and known to modern scholars since the first decipherment of the cuneiform scripts, but still barely comprehensible. The Elamite texts also abound in transcribed Iranian names and titles, so they also gave an immense new corpus for the study of Old Iranian languages, especially the Iranian of the Achaemenid court (otherwise represented by a few royal inscriptions) and the terminology of production and administration (otherwise represented by loanwords in other ancient languages). The texts record a complex administration, so they offer a basis for reinterpreting fragmentary administrative records from other regions of the empire. Perhaps the contents of the texts are nar-

row, even dull, recording storage and payouts of food and drink, yet the institution that kept the texts dealt with almost the whole gamut of imperial society, from lowly workers and craftsmen to the king's own family and in-laws. The tablets are dated and sealed, providing a vast corpus for the study of Achaemenid Persian art, its iconography, development, technique, and social context. The study of the seals on the tablets that Hallock published, undertaken in 1979 by Margaret Root (University of Michigan) and Mark Garrison (Trinity University), resulted in a definitive treatment of more than 1,400 seals represented by more than 3,000 impressions (Garrison and Root 2001, the first of three volumes).

By showing the Achaemenids no longer as gaudy, operatic despots, but as rulers of real people with real needs, no longer as illiterate barbarian rulers of more civilized subjects, but as successors to millennia of statecraft and administrative technique, no longer as borrowers of the arts of other lands, but as the patrons and creators of vital artistic programs, this large sample of Fortification texts changed the direction of every form of modern study of Achaemenid history, art, institutions, and languages. No serious treatment of the Achaemenid empire can omit the view from the imperial center that the Fortification tablets afford. In this sense, the great hopes of 1933 began to be realized after 1969.

The Tablets Today

The Oriental Institute's permit to explore Persepolis and its surroundings was the first concession granted under a newly rewritten antiquities law that ended the French archeological monopoly in Iran. The loan of the tablets in 1936 was another extraordinary expression of trust. The parties to this decision probably did not realize either how much patience the loan would entail or what historical and philological fruit the loaned material would bear.

In 2004, the Oriental Institute returned to the National Museum of Tehran three hundred of the loaned tablets that had been published by Hallock in 1969, after complete sets of digital images of them had been made and edited. This was not the first return of loaned Persepolis tablets (others had gone back in 1948 and in 1951), but it attracted wide attention.



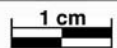
Persepolis Fortification tablet with Aramaic text written in ink over seal impression



Sealed, unscribed Persepolis Fortification tablet



1208-101



The Old Persian Persepolis Fortification tablet

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Most of the publicity was favorable, treating this gesture as an affirmation of long-standing academic trust even in strained political circumstances. But a few months later, this attention was followed by legal proceedings that sought to have the Persepolis tablets seized and sold.

The grounds of the suit and the principles at stake were discussed by Oriental Institute Director Gil Stein in *News & Notes*, Winter 2007 (Stein 2007). Since then, the stately legal process has moved along without great changes. Motions, continuances, judgments, and appeals lie ahead, but the threat still hangs over the tablets. If the plaintiffs succeed, the tablets may be seized, sold, and dispersed, and the integrity of the original discovery that is so crucial to interpreting it may be lost forever. If they do not prevail, Iran may demand immediate return of the material, making further study difficult, impractical, or even impossible. While the legal process moves on, the Persepolis Fortification Archive is available for recording, analysis, and reporting. Like salvage excavations in the face of a rising dam, the Persepolis Fortification Archive Project is coming together to face an emergency.

What is it that is really in peril? Of course, the tablets themselves are precious artifacts, literally priceless documents of Iranian cultural heritage. But the Oriental Institute is a research institution that deals with artifacts as vessels of knowledge. So what remains to be learned from the tablets and the archive? What knowledge is at risk? To paraphrase another assessment of another crisis, there are three kinds of things still to be learned: the known knowns, that is, more and better information of the kinds we are already using to interpret the archive; the known unknowns, that is, pending matters not yet worked out and whole classes of documents not yet thoroughly studied; and the unknown unknowns, that is, complete surprises of the kind that are often hidden in such floods of information.

There are a lot of known knowns still to be known. The texts deal with the storage and payment of food for various people on the government payroll. The records were mostly produced by five main branches of an organization: one dealing with grain, one with beer and wine, one with fruit, one with animals, and one with personnel. Records were produced at about 150 villages and about a dozen district centers, then brought into Persepolis to be compiled into six-month, twelve-month, or two-year summaries. Of course, no text actually describes all this, with an organizational chart and an information flow chart. Comprehension of the information system and the institution comes from a network of connections among texts, seal impressions, place names, personnel, commodities, work gangs, etc., forming a sort of tension structure that becomes more stable as more points are tied in. A large part of what remains to be gained is more data points and more connections in the network.

There are at least two big known unknowns. Almost everything so far known about the Persepolis Fortification Archive comes from the Elamite texts. The other large components of the archive, the Aramaic tablets and the uninscribed, sealed tablets, still await modern recording and thorough study. The Aramaic tablets, short administrative records with inked or incised texts of one to ten lines, are the largest known unpublished corpus of Imperial Aramaic. They are precisely dated and contextualized, and they are sure to challenge many of the suppositions of Aramaic paleography and epigraphy. The uninscribed tablets show impressions of thousands of different seals, making the archive one of the largest repertoires of seal imagery from anywhere in the ancient Near East. Furthermore, the seal impressions on a few Aramaic tablets and a few uninscribed tablets were made by seals that were also impressed on Elamite tablets, confirming what the findspot implies, namely, that all these classes of documents come from a common administrative setting. At the same time, most of the seal impressions on Aramaic and uninscribed tablets are new, made by unknown seals, implying that these documents originated with different individuals or offices of the overall administrative institution. The already intricate relationships

among the Elamite documents are only one dimension of the Persepolis Fortification Archive; the Aramaic and uninscribed tablets present a second and a third dimension. The greatest challenge for future work on the archive will be to understand the relationships among these three information streams and their implications for the institutional context.

The unknown unknowns, of course, cannot be predicted. New words and new seal impressions are plentiful. Some texts show new details that revise old ideas. The most unexpected find so far is an ordinary-looking Persepolis tablet with a text in Old Persian language and Old Persian script (Stolper and Tavernier 2007). We are in the laughable position of explaining why it comes as a surprise that at least one Persian in Persia wrote Persian in Persian script and expected someone else to know how to file what he wrote. Yet it *is* a surprise, and an important one: hitherto, Old Persian language and writing were only found in royal inscriptions; this tablet is the first “practical” Old Persian text ever found, anywhere. It will change the way we think about language and literacy at the imperial courts.

The Persepolis Fortification Archive Project

The Persepolis Fortification Archive Project came together to deal with this wealth of information and wealth of problems in these emergency conditions, with two main aims: first, to record as much of the archive as possible, at as high quality as possible, as quickly as possible; second, to make the information available widely, quickly, and continuously as we record it. Acting on these aims means using electronic media for recording and presentation, possibilities that would not have been available to earlier workers on the Persepolis tablets.

For several years Chuck Jones and I collaborated with Gene Gragg (now emeritus Professor of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations and emeritus Director of the Oriental Institute) and with Sandra Schloen (Oriental Institute Internet Database Specialist) on a trial project to record and present Elamite Fortification tablets that had been edited by Hallock but were not yet published. We adapted some of the programs and standards that were being developed for the electronic version of the Chicago Hittite Dictionary. The Persepolis Fortification Archive became one of the pilot projects of the Online Cultural Heritage Research Environment (OCHRE), the suite of online tools developed by David and Sandra Schloen for recording, analyzing, and presenting all kinds of textual, linguistic, and archaeological information. Because OCHRE is designed to have this range, it is particularly suitable for the Persepolis Fortification Archive, where records of different kinds that were stored together in antiquity — Elamite, Aramaic, and glyptic — are now the provinces of separate academic fields (Assyriology, Northwest Semitic, Art History), but where understanding any of them depends on integrating all of them. Our pilot project with OCHRE has become a kernel of the Persepolis Fortification Archive Project.



Figure 6. Jennifer Gregory photographs Elamite Fortification tablets. In the background, Darius I

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Figure 7. *Elizabeth Davidson edits photographs of Elamite Persepolis Fortification tablets*

thanks to a crew of assiduous photographers and photo editors. The mainstays have been graduate students Elise McArthur, Foy Scalf, and Jennifer Gregory, undergraduates Ivan Cangemi and Elizabeth Davidson, and Oriental Institute Volunteers Irene Glassner, Louise Golland, and Joe Rosner. We also had help from graduate students Monica Crews, Toby Hartnell, Ben Thomas, and Adam Miglio. We have improved our digital cameras, computers, data transfer, storage, and backup, but thanks to these inventive photographers, we have also learned to put other technologies to better use: pot-holders for handling hot lights, for instance, or twist-ties for propping up oddly-shaped tablets.

These digital images are not only our permanent record of the tablets, they are also meant to

be linked to the texts as they are put online, changing the ways in which the documents can be studied. This kind of detailed illustration has never been practical in conventional paper publication, and the large number of Fortification texts made even the conventional hand copies that are usual in publications of cuneiform texts impractical. As a result, until now most scholars who work with the Elamite Fortification texts have had very little idea what they look like.

The Elamite tablet photography began with support from a grant from the Oriental Institute Director's discretionary budget and continued with support from another grant from the Provost's Program in Academic Technology Innovation (ATI), made possible by the collaboration of Lec Maj (Research Computing, Division of Humanities). This ATI grant also allows us to employ undergraduate Jason Rossetto to scan an array of documents produced by earlier work on the Fortification Archive,



Figure 8. *Persepolis Fortification Archive Project Editors Wouter Henkelman and Annalisa Azzoni find droll Aramaic epigraphs on Elamite Fortification tablets*

including photographic negatives and prints made in the early 1940s under a grant from the Works Projects Administration, as well manuscripts, indexes, notes, and sketches produced by Hallock and Bowman. The scans are held on the Humanities server and made available to Persepolis Fortification Archive Project collaborators as needed. The main purpose of the ATI grant, however, has been to allow Lec Maj to help us explore advanced technologies which may help with conserving and/or recording the tablets, including various 3-D imaging techniques, CT scanning, volumetric subsurface laser scanning, and others. So far, we have some interesting preliminary results, but we have not yet found reliable, practical miracle devices.

The biggest step of the last year has been to form an editorial board to approach all the parts of the archive in a single, concerted effort. Annalisa Azzoni (Vanderbilt University) is working on the Aramaic texts, beginning with the incomplete editions by Raymond A. Bowman of about 500 of the Aramaic Fortification tablets. Elspeth Dusinberre (University of Colorado) will treat the seal impressions on the Aramaic tablets. Wouter Henkelman (Collège de France, University of Leiden) will finish Hallock's unpublished editions of about 2,500 Elamite Fortification tablets. Mark Garrison (Trinity University) will oversee work on the daunting array of seal impressions, including those on the unpublished Hallock texts, those on new tablets as they are selected and recorded, and those on the uninscribed tablets. Gene Gragg and Chuck Jones continue their collaboration on the analysis and treatment of Elamite tablets, old and new. I survey and catalog boxes of as-yet unexamined and unrecorded tablets and fragments, helping to select items for others to work on. I also select and edit new Elamite texts.

In November 2007 most of these editors took part in a previously scheduled colloquium devoted to the Persepolis Fortification Archive in the context of first-millennium Near Eastern archives, held at the Collège de France and the University of Chicago's new Paris Center. The proceedings, including preliminary reports on several phases of the project, as well as surveys of older work on the Fortification tablets, are to be published late in 2007 (Briant, Henkelman, and Stolper n.d.). The meeting was also the occasion to recruit a few colleagues with authoritative reputations in Achaemenid studies (including Rémy Boucharlat [Lyon], Pierre Briant [Paris], Amélie Kuhrt [London], and Margaret Root [Ann Arbor]), as an advisory board to help with international liaison and longer-term policy issues.

All the editors made several visits to Chicago during 2006 to begin their assignments. During Annalisa Azzoni's first visit, we discussed the problem of making adequate images of the Aramaic texts, something that posed a range of problems that images of the cuneiform texts did not encounter. We invited advice from the reigning authority on making high-quality pictures of West Semitic inscriptions of all kinds, Bruce Zuckerman of the West Semitic Research Project (WSRP) at the University of Southern California. He came, saw, and, being in Chicago, made no small



Figure 9. Marilyn Lundberg records Aramaic Persepolis Fortification tablets with large-format, very-high resolution camera and cross-polarized light

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plans. By the end of the summer, thanks to Bruce's initiative, the Oriental Institute submitted a major grant proposal to the Andrew Mellon Foundation, seeking support for a two-year collaboration between the Oriental Institute and the West Semitic Research Project to make high-quality images of the Persepolis Aramaic tablets (and a selection of the uninscribed tablets) and distribute them online. The proposal was funded and the project began in January 2007; a pilot project and equipment shake-down in March went well; and the main phase is beginning as I write this, in July 2007. A Persepolis Fortification Archive Project imaging space is being set up in one of the rooms recently vacated by the Chicago Hittite Dictionary's move, and Dennis Campbell (a recent NELC Ph.D. and long-time CHD and eCHD worker), John Nielsen (NELC), and Clinton Moyer are being trained by members of the WSRP group (Marilyn Lundberg, John Melzian, and Ken Zuckerman) to make and process the pictures.

This project will produce two kinds of images. One set will be very high-resolution digital images, using large-format scanning backs, long exposures, and filtered or cross-polarized light as necessary. The other set will be made with a technique called Polynomial Texture Mapping (PTM), developed a few years ago by Hewlett Packard Labs. The PTM images are captured with a camera and lights mounted in a dome, and then knitted in a way that allows a viewer at a computer to manipulate the apparent light source, as if holding a tablet under a light and turning it back and forth. This is very useful, of course, for recording information in low relief that one wants to examine in shifting light, like seal impressions, incised inscriptions, or impressed cuneiform texts.

The technology for capturing these images is the visibly glamorous part of this phase of the project. More ambitious, more challenging, and more consequential, but less immediately visible are the plans for distributing the information. It is to be done online, on a rolling, continuous basis, as quickly as the images can be edited, cataloged, and given basic editorial data. This bypasses some of the production costs and limitations of conventional hard-copy publication; it also bypasses some of the delay that arises from common conventions of academic study and publication, a delay that cannot be accepted under these emergency



Figure 10. Front to back: Dennis Campbell, John Nielsen, and Ken Zuckerman setting up the Polynomial Texture Mapping dome



Figure 11. A box of fragments of Elamite Persepolis Fortification tablets being cataloged, not yet conserved and edited

conditions. If this two-year project, concentrating on the comparatively small but exceptionally important group of Aramaic Fortification tablets, is successful, we hope to adapt and expand it to the entire Persepolis Fortification Archive.

The information will be presented both via OCHRE, based at the Oriental Institute, and via the WSRP's long-established Web site, InscriptiFact, (<http://www.inscriptifact.com/>). We also expect to collaborate with other online projects. Editions of Elamite and Aramaic texts will also be distributed via [achemenet.com](http://www.achemenet.com), and images of seal impressions and associated data also will be distributed via Achemenet and the Musée Achéménide Virtuel et Interactif (MAVI), both sites maintained by the Chair of History and Civilization of the Achaemenid empire at the Collège de France (<http://www.achemenet.com/> and <http://www.museum-achemenet.college-de-france.fr/>). Transliterations of Elamite texts, along with scans of the tablets, will be distributed via the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative at the University of California, Los Angeles (<http://cdli.ucla.edu>). There are two reasons for this apparent redundancy. First, OCHRE is the unique site and uniquely structured means for keeping all the components of the Fortification Archive linked to one another, the best electronic counterpart of the original composition of the archive as it was found; but OCHRE is in continuing development, while other relevant projects have established sites already set up to present some parts of the data immediately. Second, the several components of the Persepolis Fortification Archive material (cuneiform, Aramaic, glyptic) each have distinct, only partially overlapping audiences (Assyriologists, Semitists, Art Historians) served by these sites.

Thanks to the painstaking work of our predecessors, especially indefatigable Hallock and Bowman, we have a large number of Fortification tablets ready to record and distribute, plenty of material to prime the project pumps and get the information flow going. We also have a very large balance of tablets and fragments that have not yet been cleaned and conserved, recorded, nor, in some cases, even examined closely.

When the tablets came to Chicago in 1936, they were packed in about 2,500 cardboard boxes, each containing between one and twenty-five pieces. Hallock and Bowman removed individual tablets from these boxes as they worked on them, numbering and storing them separately. The two of them, other early team members, and the WPA project photographers examined at least 1,500 of the original boxes. By 1980 the original cardboard boxes had deteriorated seriously, so Chuck Jones led a team that transferred the pieces, box by box, to new plastic boxes of about the same size, making notes of each box as they worked.



Figure 12. Persepolis Fortification Archive Project director Matthew Stolper ponders why his predecessors left such a large and well-preserved Fortification tablet unedited. Photo courtesy of Dan Dry, University of Chicago Magazine

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This outwardly simple task required four years, and the daunting appearance of the boxes explains why. Some hold well-preserved, solid tablets or large, solid fragments with apparently legible texts or beautifully clear seal impressions. Others hold pieces whose surfaces are obscured by dirt and encrustations. Others hold flakes and fragments that will never provide useful information. It takes only a few moments to realize that planning the project necessitates taking an inventory of the boxes, both to identify the items that will reward an immediate investment of time and attention and items that may reward later effort, and to estimate how many pieces of each kind there are and how many there were, the overall shape of the original Archive.

In 2006 I began a rough inventory of the boxes, recording what items had been removed and edited, what kinds of items were left (Elamite, Aramaic, uninscribed), and what condition they were in. I transcribed occasional well-preserved Elamite texts and recorded exceptional items, such as the Old Persian tablet (which looked completely unexceptional as it sat in the box next to other Fortification tablets). I entered the information in OCHRE, along with snapshots of the boxes as a guide for future planning. The first part of this inventory, covering about the quarter of the boxes, was the basis for the paper that Chuck Jones and I gave at the Paris conference, "How Many Fortification Tablets Are There?" Our estimates: 20,000–25,000 tablets and fragments, representing 15,000–18,000 original documents, about 70% Elamite, 20% uninscribed, 5% Aramaic.

Only a few thousand of these are in good enough condition to provide useful texts and seal images immediately. Thousands more need conservation, cleaning, and stabilization of the inscribed and sealed surfaces before they can be usefully recorded, requiring painstaking effort by skilled conservators working under the oversight of the Oriental Institute's chief conservator, Laura D'Alessandro. Monica Hudak has begun work on some of the tablets, giving us some idea of what we can expect, and we have received a one-year emergency grant from the National Geographic Society's Committee for Research and Exploration that allows the project to hire her full-time for a year. NGS-CRE normally makes grants only to support fieldwork, so this award is a signal recognition of the urgency and importance of our task.

We have also received a grant from the PARSA Community Foundation that will allow us to acquire a binocular microscope dedicated to the project and to hire another part-time conservator. This is also a gratifying award, since it is part of the very first funding cycle of this organization, dedicated to Iranian-American interests, including the cultural and historical heritage that the Fortification tablets embody. And thanks especially to the initiative of Laura D'Alessandro, we have also received a grant from the Women's Board of the University of Chicago that allows us to acquire a Compact Phoenix Laser Cleaning System. This is a device that will speed the delicate final part of the cleaning process. It literally blasts away the last fine layers of dirt and concretion over the cuneiform signs and seal impressions without compromising the underlying surface. We expect it to come online in 2008.

Conclusion

To describe our problem, our circumstances, and our work, I gave a talk to a combined audience of the Oriental Institute's Breasted Society and the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations in January 2007, and I gave another version of it as the first Musa Sabi Lecture on Iranian Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, in March. Earlier, in October, *The University of Chicago Magazine* discussed the legal travails of the Fortification tablets (Puma 2006), and when we published the Old Persian tablet online (the first, I hope, in a series of such project bulletins), the University's press office sent out a news release that was picked up by the *Financial Times* and *National Geographic's* online services, among others, and that led to an interview with the

Persian-language service of Voice of America. The best way to keep abreast of developments, to see related news items from many sources and points of view, and also to see some of the past scholarship on the tablets, is to visit the Persepolis Fortification Archive Project blog that Chuck Jones set up at <http://persepolistablets.blogspot.com/>, averaging about thirty visitors a day since it began in Autumn 2006).

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