

## TWO NEW FRAGMENTS OF CUNEIFORM INSCRIPTIONS ON GLAZED BRICKS FROM THE IRANIAN-ITALIAN EXCAVATIONS AT TOL-E AJORI (FARS)

BY

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**Abstract:** Two inscribed brick fragments were found in the collapse layers inside the building of Tol-e Ajori during the 2015 campaign of the Iranian-Italian Archaeological Mission. As in the case of the two inscribed fragments found in the preceding campaigns, the signs, written in a cuneiform script, are painted in white glaze and only one sign per brick fragment is extant. Both fragments bear fitters’ marks on the upper surface. The inscribed surfaces show several formal similarities with the (restored) inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II on the Gate of Ishtar at Babylon. From a palaeographical point of view, comparisons are to be seen in the Achaemenid royal inscriptions in Elamite and Babylonian. The sign KÁ, preserved on the second discovered fragment (TAJ Inv. 144), seems to have a particular significance for the interpretation of the building complex since it is usually attested in Akkadian as a logogram whose meaning is ‘door, gate’.

**Keywords:** Tol-e Ajori, glazed bricks, royal inscriptions, Achaemenid epigraphy

Two inscribed brick fragments (TAJ Inv. 143 and 144) were found in the collapse layers inside the building of Tol-e Ajori during the 2015 campaign of the Iranian-Italian Archaeological Mission directed by Alireza Askari Chaverdi (Shiraz University) and Pierfrancesco Callieri (University of Bologna).<sup>1</sup> Both fragments were found in trench Tr. 11, where a portion

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<sup>1</sup> I am most grateful to both directors for my involvement in the study of inscribed bricks. Emad Matin (University of Bologna; Iranian-Italian Archaeological Mission), and Nabil Ibnoerrida (“L’Orientale” University of Naples; Iranian-Italian Archaeological Mission) have also provided invaluable help on the physical features of the bricks and the archaeological context. I am glad to acknowledge the advice received by Joachim Marzahn on archaeological and epigraphic matters related to the Gate of Ishtar at Babylon. The following Achaemenid royal inscriptions have been collated in the framework of the DARIOSH Project directed by Adriano V. Rossi (“L’Orientale” University, Naples): XPa (with the support of the Parsa-Pasargadae Research Foundation and thanks to Hassan Rahsaz); glazed brick fragment BK 334 in the National Museum of Iran (Tehran; with the collaboration of Sedigheh Piran). The referencing system of the Achaemenid royal inscriptions

of the south-west wall and a part of the inner chamber were brought to light. As in the case of the two inscribed fragments found in the preceding campaigns (2012: TAJ Inv. 45; 2014: TAJ Inv. 101),<sup>2</sup> the signs, written in a cuneiform script, are painted in white glaze and only one sign per brick fragment is extant (Pl. 1). The sign KÁ, preserved on the second discovered fragment (TAJ Inv. 144), seems to have a particular significance for the interpretation of the building complex since it is usually attested in Akkadian as a logogram whose meaning is ‘door, gate’. It provides a further clue to be added to the already striking architectural evidence suggesting that the building was a gate.

### TAJ Inv. 143

The glazed surface of the brick fragment TAJ Inv. 143 (Pl. 2a) is broken on the left.<sup>3</sup> An angular wedge is still partly recognizable,<sup>4</sup> followed by a horizontal wedge stretching over nearly the entire height of the glazed surface (and therefore of the inscribed line). The break cuts the angular wedge; only part of the lower half is clearly visible in glaze. Saving space was not a concern for the specialist who outlined the sign, since the horizontal wedge is not inside the angular one (as is common also in monumental cuneiform writing<sup>5</sup>), but the lower end (the only extant one) of the angular wedge touches the lower tip of the head of the horizontal wedge.

Considering that the extant maximum width of the fragment is ca. 24 cm and that the usual width of a brick is ca. 33 cm, ca. 9 cm of the glazed surface are missing in width to the left. The blank space to the right of the sign is entirely preserved and measures ca. 7.5 in width. If the sign was

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follows Schmitt 2009: 7-32, ‘Liste der Achaimenideninschriften’; after a slash (/), an abbreviation corresponding to the language is added when needed: OP = Old Persian; AE = (Achaemenid) Elamite; AB = (Achaemenid) Babylonian. This article depends on the archaeological report by Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Matin in this volume of *Iranica Antiqua*.

<sup>2</sup> TAJ Inv. 45: Basello in Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Gondet 2013; TAJ Inv. 101: Basello in Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Matin, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Bricks are oriented looking at the glazed surface.

<sup>4</sup> A clear distinction between angular and diagonal wedges results only from stylizations of the cuneiform writing on hard surfaces, engraved (like stone) or painted (like glazed bricks). On clay, both were obtained rotating the stylus of ca. 45° with respect to the position used to impress horizontal and vertical wedges (Basello 2013c: 6 and 30, fig. 2; on the cuneiform stylus, see the exhaustive treatment in Cammarosano 2014 and the useful remarks in Bramanti 2015).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., the form of the Elamite sign NU or the Old Persian sign y in Bisotun inscriptions.

centred on the glazed surface, an area of only ca. 1.5 cm in width could be occupied by the sign to the left of the break. Considering that the head of a vertical wedge (like the one entirely preserved on TAJ Inv. 101) is ca. 3 cm wide, 1.5 cm would just suffice for a vertical wedge with its head written partially above the angular wedge. It is also possible that the sign was not centred on the glazed surface because it was the “typesetting” of the whole line to be relevant, not the position on the single brick, but this seems less likely. Therefore, it seems preferable to consider the sign as complete in its wedge components and formed only by the angular wedge followed by the horizontal wedge.

The glazed surface is chipped away in the middle and upper part of the angular wedge and on the upper tip of the head of the horizontal wedge. The area which was covered by white glaze is still recognizable thanks to the faint traces of underglaze.<sup>6</sup> While the small angular wedges on TAJ Inv. 45 and 144 were filled, resembling triangles, the angular wedge on TAJ Inv. 143 resembles a less-than sign (<'). This could be expected since it is a usual stylization in full line-height angular wedges, as can be seen, e.g., in the glazed bricks bearing Achaemenid royal inscriptions from Shush/Susa and Takht-e Jamshid/Persepolis.<sup>7</sup> These two different stylizations of an angular wedge on glaze corresponded to different pressures of the stylus on a clay tablet, resulting in a smaller or larger slanting wedge.<sup>8</sup>

Considering possible comparisons in the three scripts of the Achaemenid royal inscriptions, the sign could be identified as an Elamite NU.<sup>9</sup> It does not seem to be a Babylonian sign, since usually the angular and horizontal wedges are not in sequence but cross each other (see, e.g., the Babylonian NU).<sup>10</sup> In the less likely hypothesis that the sign was not cen-

<sup>6</sup> For the use of the term ‘underglaze’, see the section on decorated bricks by Emad Matin in the archaeological report in this volume of *Iranica Antiqua*; see also Matin 2014: 12.

<sup>7</sup> Besides the several drawings of glazed inscriptions from Persepolis (e.g. Herzfeld 1938: 39, nos. 12-13, and 40, no. 14) and Susa (e.g. Scheil 1929: 13-56, no. 12; Steve 1987: 65, DSf 8), see the photos in Herzfeld 1938, pl. XV (XPg/OP<sup>a</sup>, in Old Persian from the area of the so-called Apadana at Persepolis) and Curtis & Razmjou in Curtis & Tallis 2005: 91, no. 65 (in Babylonian from the Palace of Darius at Susa).

<sup>8</sup> I prefer to use slanting wedge (i.e. neither horizontal nor vertical) as a term encompassing both the angular (‘Winkelhaken’ in German) and diagonal wedge when referring to cuneiform writing on clay (see footnote 4 above).

<sup>9</sup> Cf., e.g., the sign NU on the unpublished glazed brick fragment BK 334 from Susa (Pl. 4a), kept in the National Museum of Iran and studied in the framework of the DARIOSH Project in collaboration with Shahrokh Razmjou (January 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Unless two angular-horizontal wedge sequences, one in the upper half of the line and one in the lower half, were needed to represent the sign, which is not the case here. A

tred in the glazed surface and therefore that other wedges were painted on the lost part, the extant wedges could represent the right part of an Old Persian y, its vertical wedge being fully lost.<sup>11</sup> Considering that at least two (SAR on TAJ Inv. 45 and KÁ on TAJ Inv. 144) of the four signs found on Tol-e Ajori bricks are clearly Babylonian and one is possibly so (UR on TAJ Inv. 101), I would have been inclined to recognize a Babylonian sign also on TAJ Inv. 143, but it does not seem very likely in this case. Pending further epigraphic discoveries to contextualize the current evidence, the sign on TAJ Inv. 143 seems to be part of an Elamite inscription.

### *Fitters' marks*

On the upper surface of the brick fragment a course mark made up by two adjoining circles is painted in white (Pl. 2b). As well elucidated in the preceding excavation reports,<sup>12</sup> fitters' marks were used to indicate the vertical (course mark, 'Schichtmarke' in German) and horizontal (pairing mark, 'Reihenmarke' in German) position of a brick in the masonry. The same course mark is attested in one of the two glazed brick panels restored by Ernst Herzfeld, where one to five adjoining circles were used to number the first five courses (from top to bottom) of an exemplar of an Old Persian inscription of Xerxes I (reigning 486-465 BCE) from Persepolis (XPg/OP).<sup>13</sup> The underlying courses were marked by one to five circles with a stroke above, then by one to five circles with a stroke protruding from each circle. Unfortunately, on TAJ Inv. 143 the break is tangent to the left circle so that it is hard to tell if one or more circles were adjoining the two extant

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further possibility is represented by the sign PAP (the occurrence in DB/AB:7  $\approx$  DB/OP §6 is entirely damaged in the cuneiform copy in Rawlinson 1870, pl. 39, even if recognizable according to the transliteration in Von Voigtlander 1978: 12), which, however, should be crossed like NU.

<sup>11</sup> An Elamite KIN (Steve 1992: 133, no. 538) seems to be less probable.

<sup>12</sup> Askari Chaverdi & Callieri in Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Gondet 2013: 19 (see also the photos on p. 22, figs. 18-19); Matin in Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Matin, 2014: 239-246, 'The decorated bricks'.

<sup>13</sup> Herzfeld 1938: 39, fig. 13, now in the Oriental Institute Museum (Chicago), A 24112 (see Schweiger 1998, vol. 2: 88, fn. 8; XPg/OP<sup>b</sup>). The other exemplar (Herzfeld 1938: 39, fig. 12, and pl. XV = XPg/OP<sup>a</sup>), is now on display in the National Museum of Iran, no. 2010. Note that the brickwork (stretcher bond) of the two epigraphic fields is symmetrical: XPg<sup>a</sup> starts within a full-size brick while XPg<sup>b</sup> within a half-size brick (a header in the modern stretcher bond) or, if the brick was cut by the modern restorers, the right half of a full-size brick.

ones on the left, increasing the course level number. If the fitters' mark was roughly centred with respect to the right and left sides, as it usually is, no more circles should be expected to the left of the two extant ones. It is remarkable that, at least in Herzfeld's reconstruction, the number increases going down, so that the point of view is that of a reader of the inscription, not of the bricklayer who started laying the bricks from the bottom.

On TAJ Inv. 143, no pairing mark is visible close to the right edge (the only extant one), but the mark might be hidden behind colour drippings from the glazed surface.<sup>14</sup>

If the fitters' mark system known from the exemplars of XPg/OP restored by Herzfeld is also applicable here (and supposing Herzfeld's reconstruction of the system is correct), TAJ Inv. 143 was set in one of the first five lines of a multi-line epigraphic field, excluding the very first line, and probably in the second one. If the inscription followed the usual formulaic patterns of the Achaemenid royal inscriptions, the inscribed sign could be part of the evocation to Auramazda or of the royal titulary (if the inscription started without the divine evocation). In the royal titulary, even in the shortest formularies (like CMa and DPb), NU occurs in the last word, ha-(ak-)ka<sub>4</sub>-man-nu-(iš-)-ši-ia *Akamanišia* 'Achaemenid'.<sup>15</sup>

However, we cannot be sure that the fitters' mark system known from XPg/OP is applicable to the inscribed bricks from Tol-e Ajori. As emerged right from the first excavation campaigns, the fitters' marks were used both on figurative and non-figurative bricks,<sup>16</sup> so that there is no certainty that the presence of a fitters' mark on an inscribed brick points exclusively to a multi-line inscription, even if it was probably so. Moreover, as Joachim Marzahn pointed out to me, there are some perfect matches in the form of the fitters' marks attested at Tol-e Ajori and in the glazed bricks from the facade of the throne room in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar II (reigning 605-562 BCE) at Babylon ('Kasr Südburg').<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> According to Herzfeld's reconstruction, a pairing mark was not put close to the left edge of the first brick and close to the right edge of the last brick in an inscribed line.

<sup>15</sup> With very few exceptions where 'Achaemenid' is not attested (DSc and A<sup>2</sup>Sb; in AmHa it may have been omitted because of the mention of Achaemenes and his genealogical relationship with the king Ariaramnes).

<sup>16</sup> Askari Chaverdi & Callieri in Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Gondet 2013: 19.

<sup>17</sup> Joachim Marzahn, e-mail sent on 2016, February 20. Compare, e.g., the pairing marks visible in Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Gondet 2013: 22, figs. 18-19, and the ones in Andrae 1902: 6, fig. 1, 1st row, columns I and III; 3rd row, column I; 6th row,

## TAJ Inv. 144

The glazed surface of the brick fragment TAJ Inv. 144 (Pl. 3a) is broken on the right. Two long horizontal wedges, one above the other, are preserved in their entirety. Two couples of small angular wedges, one couple above the upper horizontal wedge and one below the lower horizontal one, are also clearly painted. A vertical wedge stands immediately to the right; only the left part of the head is visible, being cut vertically by the break. Around the middle of the break, the left part of the head of another wedge is also recognizable, albeit smaller than the other. Therefore, two vertical wedges were painted one above the other. All these wedges could easily be identified as a KÁ sign, used logographically to write *bābu* ‘door, gate’ in Akkadian. Since KÁ is not attested in Elamite cuneiform, the sign should be part of an inscription in Babylonian. Considering that the inscribed surface is preserved only for a width of ca. 15 cm, it seems reasonable to suppose that another sign was painted on the lost part of the glazed surface (ca. 18 cm wide), to the right of the extant sign, unless only the left half of the brick was inside the epigraphic field.

According to René Labat’s syllabary, in Neo-Babylonian two main forms of KÁ are attested (Pl. 4b):<sup>18</sup> one with the couples of angular wedges in line with the horizontal wedges (in-line form), the other with a couple above the upper horizontal wedge and a couple below the lower horizontal wedge (off-line form). The Tol-e Ajori exemplar complies with the off-line form. Searching for palaeographic and semantic comparisons, the occurrences of KÁ in the Achaemenid royal inscriptions in Babylonian will be briefly reviewed.

The sign KÁ is attested twice in the Bisotun inscription (DB/AB:60 and 63 ≈ DB/OP §§32 and 33). In DB/AB:60, according to the cuneiform copy published by Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (Pl. 4c),<sup>19</sup> KÁ has the same appearance as the exemplar in TAJ Inv. 144 (off-line form). Leonard William King and Reginald Campbell Thompson remarked that the sign is ‘quite clear on the rock’,<sup>20</sup> fixing in their cuneiform Babylonian font (Pl. 4d) the same shape drawn by Rawlinson. The exemplar in DB/AB:63 remains

column IV. Andrae 1902 is cited also by Matin in Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Matin, 2014: 239, fn. 105.

<sup>18</sup> Labat 1988: 96, no. 133.

<sup>19</sup> Rawlinson 1870, pl. 40.

<sup>20</sup> King & Thompson 1907: 182, fn. 3.

in a damaged area and is therefore not drawn in Rawlinson's copy; similarly, King and Thompson put the sign in square parentheses.<sup>21</sup> Michael Jursa has kindly checked both occurrences of KÁ on the rock, reporting that the off-line form drawn by Rawlinson represents the best interpretation of the extant traces on the badly weathered surface. The context is the same in both occurrences:

šu-ú ṣab-tu ku-ul-lu ina KÁ-ia ú-qu gab-bi im-ma-ru-uš

šū ṣabtu kullu ina bābīya uqu gabbi immarūš

He was held in fetters at my gate. All the people could see him.<sup>22</sup>

The actors of the two occurrences are, respectively, the “lying kings” Fravartish and Shitrantakhma. Both proclaimed their kingship in Media; afterwards, they were captured, mutilated, mocked publicly at the gate, and then impaled, the first in Ecbatana, the second in Arbela.

The basic meaning of *bābu* seems to be ‘opening’. From this, the meanings ‘door’ and ‘gate’ are both usually attested.<sup>23</sup> The use of the possessive suffix, if not literary and stereotypic, seems to point to the gate of the royal palace, the king's or governor's residence in the city, rather than to the gates of the city.

As a reference to the place where the inscription was set, KÁ is to be found in the Achaemenid royal inscriptions XPa/AB:10 (Pl. 4e) and XSd/AB:2 (Pl. 4f). XPa is attested in four trilingual exemplars set high on the two sides of the western and eastern monumental doorways of the Gate of Xerxes I at Persepolis.<sup>24</sup> XSd is attested in two trilingual exemplars (and two more fragments) on square column bases in the Gate of Darius I at Susa.<sup>25</sup> In both inscriptions the attested form is off-line, as in TAJ Inv. 144.

A further occurrence of KÁ is on the bigger stone fragment, probably a jamb (side post) of a monumental doorway, from Bardak-e Siah (Borazjan area, south-western Iran).<sup>26</sup> The fragment can be read as -d]a-ar ina muḥ-ḥi

<sup>21</sup> King & Thompson 1907: 183.

<sup>22</sup> Unified transliteration based on Von Voigtlander 1978: 28 and 29. Translation from Von Voigtlander 1978: 57 and 58.

<sup>23</sup> CAD B: 14, s.v. *bābu* A.

<sup>24</sup> The best-preserved exemplar of KÁ is in XPa<sup>a</sup> (western doorway, northern wall).

<sup>25</sup> KÁ is clearly preserved in the column base exemplar A 916 (transliteration and translation: Vallat 1974: 172; photo: Vallat 1974: 256, pl. XL, no. 3; drawing: Vallat 1974: 215, fig. 31).

<sup>26</sup> Drawing in Karimian & al. 2010: 54, fig. 22. On the findspot, see also Yaghmaee 2010: ‘near the southern doorway we found part of a cuneiform inscription’. See Basello,



KÁ a[-. The presence of *ina muḫḫi* ‘(up)on, over, above it’<sup>27</sup> suggests a context similar to the one of DB/AB:60 and 63, even if a reference to the material support is more likely, considering that the inscription should be short and therefore of building or ownership typology. The form of KÁ is in-line (Pl. 4g).

In the Cyrus Cylinder (CB<sup>2</sup>a), KÁ as ‘door, gate’ is restored on line 42, not being preserved in the extant text (new exemplar included).<sup>28</sup> However, the name of Babylon was logographically written as KÁ.DINGIR.MEŠ<sup>ki</sup> (lines 15 and 17) and KÁ.DINGIR.RA<sup>ki</sup> (line 25) in three occurrences. Despite Rawlinson’s cuneiform copy,<sup>29</sup> which is “normalized” and shows the off-line form, the exemplars of KÁ seems to be impressed using a compact in-line form, with very short horizontal wedges. Indeed, on clay the difference between the two forms could not be so evident since the angular wedges are necessarily impressed over the two horizontal wedges in the small vertical space of a line. Therefore, I do not consider this palaeographic evidence on clay significant, since it was stylization on engraved or painted surfaces that required a choice between the in-line and off-line form.

As part of KÁ.DINGIR.RA<sup>ki</sup>, KÁ is attested also in the stone foundation table DSaa/AB, found in the Palace of Darius I at Susa.<sup>30</sup> The off-line form is used (line 21).

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in press, fn. 154, for further details. According to Arfaee 2008: 74, fn. 100, two other inscribed stone fragments were found there. One of these, with just two signs, is written in Elamite on palaeographical grounds. The site of Bardak-e Siah was excavated in 1978 and from 2005 according to Yaghmaee 2010. See Basello, in press, fn. 153, for further references

<sup>27</sup> CDA: 215, s.v. muḫḫu(m).

<sup>28</sup> Transliteration and translation in Schaudig 2001: 550-556, K2.1. Other recent translations: Basello 2013b (Italian), Finkel in Finkel 2013a: 4-7 (English), van der Spek 2014: 261-263 (English). The recently discovered ‘non-joining and widely separated fragments [BM 47134 and BM 47176] from one large tablet’ (Finkel 2013b: 129) representing a further exemplar of the text of the Cyrus Cylinder are published in Finkel 2013b; the reverse of the fragment BM 47134 has ‘unplaced traces’ that ‘could prove to belong to A42 or A43’ (Finkel 2013b: 133, sub B<sub>1</sub>1’; A42-43: lines 42-43 of the Cyrus Cylinder). Note that in Finkel 2013a: 19, caption to fig. 9, the two fragments are inverted: BM 47176 is one-sided, BM 47134 is two-sided. A good photo of the reverse of BM 47134 is in Curtis 2013: 44, no. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Rawlinson 1909, pl. 35.

<sup>30</sup> Transliteration and translation: Vallat 1986: 278-279; photo: Vallat 1986: 286, fig. 3, and Vallat 2010b: 311, fig. 333. The alternative spelling for Babylon(ia), TIN.TIR<sup>ki</sup>, is attested in DB/AB passim, DNa/AB:15, DSe/AB:18, DSf/AB:23 (twice), and XPh/AB:17.



Another possible comparison is to be seen in the inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II on the Gate of Ishtar at Babylon.<sup>31</sup> The inscription, as it is displayed today in the Vorderasiatisches Museum (Berlin), is the result of truly challenging restoration work.<sup>32</sup> The sign KÁ is attested on line 46 as KÁ.KÁ *bābī* ‘doors’ and on lines 26, 31, and 51 in KÁ.GAL, a logographic writing for *abullu* ‘gate (of city or large building)’.<sup>33</sup> It occurs also in the name of Babylon, KÁ.DINGIR.RA, on lines 2, 15, 23, 28, and 58. Two different forms are attested and apparently freely used in the restored epigraphic field of the inscription. Both forms are inspired by monumental Old Babylonian script, as the whole inscription,<sup>34</sup> and are therefore not comparable to the Neo-Babylonian in-line and off-line forms. As remarked in the epigraphic appendix to the report of 2014 campaign,<sup>35</sup> the form of the sign SAR/ŠAR is similar on TAJ Inv. 45 and in Nebuchadnezzar’s inscription on the Gate of Ishtar (line 35). Notwithstanding, in the light of TAJ Inv. 144 palaeographic evidence, this similarity was due to a chance factor (i.e. the substantial stability of the form of the sign SAR/ŠAR from Old Babylonian to Neo-Babylonian script<sup>36</sup>), while the script of Tol-e Ajori inscribed bricks, being quite certainly not archaizing, is more comparable to the Babylonian script of the Achaemenid royal inscriptions.

Usually, palaeography alone should not be used to date a text, unless there is a consistent usage of a form in several dated exemplars. Most of the Achaemenid royal inscriptions can be dated only on the evidence of the name of the king speaking (fictitiously) in the text; finer dating can be advanced only for the Bisotun inscriptions (which were plausibly engraved in the first regnal years of Darius I<sup>37</sup>) or the foundation deposit of the so-called Apadana at Persepolis (thanks to the coins found together with the foundation stone case<sup>38</sup>). Especially in the framework of a corpus which is

<sup>31</sup> Berger 1973: 226, Ištar-Tor-Inschrift I, no. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Cuneiform copy, transliteration, and translation in Meyer 1956: 209. Photo in Marzahn 1992: 29, fig. 14b, and Finkel & Seymour 2008: 85, fig. 63.

<sup>33</sup> CDA: 3, s.v. *abullu(m)*.

<sup>34</sup> On the usage of monumental Old Babylonian script in Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions, see Da Riva 2008: 76-77.

<sup>35</sup> Basello in Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Matin 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Except for the number of angular wedges: nine (three rows of three) in the archaizing script of the inscription on the Gate of Ishtar (in compliance with the Old Babylonian form), six (two rows of three) on TAJ Inv. 45.

<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., Huyse 1999: 56 and 57, fig. 5.

<sup>38</sup> See, recently, Nimchuck 2005.

homogeneous in contents like the Achaemenid royal inscriptions, a palaeographic difference can be better explained as resulting from locally different scribal schools, different stylizations on different material supports, or different hands. By now, it is hard to tell if the off-line form of KÁ attested at Tol-e Ajori has any chronological significance. The off-line form is shared by the inscriptions of Darius I and Xerxes I, but the sample of occurrences is too limited. The off-line module is also attested in other signs sharing the wedge group composed by two horizontal and four angular wedges, like the sign SIG<sub>4</sub> in DSf/AB:21.<sup>39</sup> The contrastive in-line form, which is attested only on the Bardak-e Siah fragment, remains isolated to our present knowledge, but this isolation is not significant since the fragment, like the Tol-e Ajori bricks, does not preserve the name of a king, and therefore could not be dated.<sup>40</sup>

The usage of KÁ both as a logogram for ‘door, gate’ and in a logographic writing for ‘Babylon’ leave a certain ambiguity regarding its semantics on TAJ Inv. 144. The second meaning is attested in an annalistic inscription like Bisotun (DB) and in a structured inscription having a thematic section related to the construction process of a building like DSaa/AB. Considering that making an inscription on glazed bricks is a demanding task and also that so few inscribed bricks have so far been found, one would expect at Tol-e Ajori a short building inscription like XSd, possibly preceded by the royal titulary. In this context, no mention of Babylon was needed. Therefore, it seems more plausible to consider KÁ as a reference to the building where the inscription was placed to celebrate the king who had the gate built.

### *Fitters’ marks*

As in the case of TAJ Inv. 143, a course mark is painted on the upper surface, even if disturbed by colour drippings from the glazed surface (Pl. 3b). A circle, slightly cut by the break, is clearly visible. To its right, the break makes it impossible to verify if there were other circles. To its left, another circle seems to be recognizable. Above this circle there is a horizontal

<sup>39</sup> DSf/AB 006 = Scheil 1929, pl. II (between pp. 8 and 9), fragment I, reverse (see also the composite drawing in Steve 1987: 75, fig. 64).

<sup>40</sup> Similarly, our knowledge of the palace (often called ‘pavilion’) at Bardak-e Siah is still inadequate. A dating to the reign of Cyrus the Great (reigning ca. 559-530 BCE) is reported in Boucharlat 2005: 236, following A.A. Sarfaraz, the archaeologist who led the first excavations at the site.

stroke of the same thickness as the circles, which confirms that the stroke was part of the fitters' mark. This course mark can be found in the same restored exemplar of XPg/OP, where the course mark of TAJ Inv. 143 is attested.<sup>41</sup> There the circle with a stroke above is used in the second series of course marks, numbering the rows from six to ten of the epigraphic field. In TAJ Inv. 144, the stroke does not seem to be prolonged above the entire width of the right circle. This suggests that the course mark consisted of only two circles, even though two more circles should be expected in the lost part of the upper surface if the mark was centred. No pairing mark seems to be recognizable close to the left edge (the only extant one).

In the two exemplars of XPg/OP restored by Herzfeld, each epigraphic field has a different series of course marks. Therefore the use of circles as course marks both in TAJ Inv. 143 and 144 may contradict the conclusion that TAJ Inv. 143 is written in Elamite, i.e. in a different script (probably set in an autonomous epigraphic field) with respect to TAJ Inv. 144. Again, if Herzfeld's restoration of the fitters' mark system was correct, and if the system known from the exemplars of XPg/OP can be applied also at Tol-e Ajori, TAJ Inv. 143 was set in the masonry between five and eight courses above TAJ Inv. 144.<sup>42</sup> The correlation of TAJ Inv. 143 and 144 to one and the same epigraphic field (or at least to two close, possibly smaller, epigraphic fields) is also borne out by their findspot, in the same area of the inner chamber and in two stratigraphic units (SU1123 and SU1124) which, probably, were related to the same collapse event.<sup>43</sup>

### Overview of the inscribed evidence from Tol-e Ajori (2012-2015)

As shown in the previous excavation report, the inner section of the Gate of Ishtar at Babylon constitutes appropriate comparison for the building of Tol-e Ajori.<sup>44</sup> Besides the general plan and the glazed brick decoration,<sup>45</sup> the

<sup>41</sup> Herzfeld 1938: 39, fig. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Considering that the original number of circles in each of the two bricks can range between two and five (even if it is unlikely that the circles came to four or five on TAJ Inv. 143).

<sup>43</sup> See Pl. 8a in the archaeological report by Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Matin in this volume of *Iranica Antiqua*.

<sup>44</sup> Askari Chaverdi & Callieri in Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Matin 2014: 236-237, 'Comparative study' and *passim*.

<sup>45</sup> Matin in Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Matin 2014: 239-246, 'The decorated bricks'. See also Matin 2014: 121-125.

Gate of Ishtar offers interesting comparison also for the inscribed fragments, as already suggested in the epigraphic appendix to the 2014 campaign report.<sup>46</sup> Summing up, the epigraphic details linking Tol-e Ajori inscribed bricks to the inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II on the Gate of Ishtar instead of other Achaemenid royal inscriptions are:

- the lack of a horizontal rule running along the upper edge of the glazed surface to separate the lines of text;
- the spaced “typesetting”, resulting in a limited number of signs per brick, generally one (centred in the brick unless only half the brick was part of the epigraphic field) or two;
- the stylization of wedges on glaze, e.g. the lack of the head in some orthogonal wedges and the small angular wedges represented as filled triangles;
- to the above-listed similarities, the formal appearance of the fitters’ marks in the glazed bricks from Tol-e Ajori and the Kasr Südburg of Babylon could be added.

All these epigraphic details are of a formal type, i.e. they are related to the appearance of the inscription. However, if it is correct to generalize the evidence provided by the form of KÁ on TAJ Inv. 144, the non-archaizing form of the signs at Tol-e Ajori constitutes a significant difference with respect to Nebuchadnezzar’s inscription. This, however, does not contradict the many similarities, since Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions in Neo-Babylonian script are also known.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II on the Gate of Ishtar, as it is restored and known today, was only a part of a more complex programme of inscriptions, as attested by the many inscribed fragments not used in the restored inscription and still preserved in crates in the storerooms of the Vorderasiatisches Museum.<sup>48</sup>

All the inscribed bricks so far found at Tol-e Ajori came from collapse layers. Their findspots are somehow in relation to the inner chamber of the building. TAJ Inv. 45, from trench Tr. 5, was found a little to the north of the chamber. TAJ Inv. 101, from trench Tr. 9, was found in the western entrance corridor or monumental doorway, very close to the chamber. Finally, TAJ Inv. 143 and 144, from trench Tr. 11, were found inside the

<sup>46</sup> Basello in Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Matin 2014: 248-249.

<sup>47</sup> Da Riva 2008: 76-77.

<sup>48</sup> Joachim Marzahn, e-mail sent on 2016, February 20.

chamber, not far from the southern wall. Unfortunately, the archaeological context of the building has been disturbed by the spoliations of the wall-robbers who, in the process, removed and displaced many bricks,<sup>49</sup> also depriving the inscribed brick findspots of particular value for reconstruction of the original position of the inscription(s). Only the collapse layers of TAJ Inv. 143 and 144 seem to be homogeneous and therefore connected to a single collapse event which was not disturbed by later pillage episodes. Entrances and doors were focal points of a building and it was usual to place royal inscriptions in them. Several Achaemenid royal inscriptions were set high on the sidewalls of monumental doorways in Persepolis, starting from XPa in the Gate of Xerxes to DPa in the so-called Palace of Darius and XPe in the so-called Palace of Xerxes. In Babylon, unfortunately, nothing is known about the original setting of Nebuchadnezzar's inscription(s).<sup>50</sup> The restored epigraphic field is big (60 lines) and the total area of the inscribed space must have been even larger considering the number of inscribed fragments left aside.

The architectural remains and the meaning of the logogram KÁ strongly suggest that the building of Tol-e Ajori was a gate. As such, it could be expected that one or more royal inscriptions were set within it to celebrate the king.

The fitters' marks on TAJ Inv. 143 and 144 confirm that the inscribed bricks were part of the decorative programme of the building. It is likely that the inscription was set out on some lines (like XPg/OP), even though the mere presence of course marks does not constitute conclusive evidence. In the previously found inscribed brick fragments (TAJ Inv. 45 and 101), no fitters' mark had been detected (as on many other bricks<sup>51</sup>), suggesting that they were not systematically needed.

The similarities with the Gate of Ishtar point to the existence of Babylonian workmanship at the service of the king who ordained the building of the gate of Tol-e Ajori. This would be in agreement with the textual

<sup>49</sup> Askari Chaverdi & Callieri in Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Gondet 2013: 23, §4.5; Askari Chaverdi & Callieri in Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Matin 2014: 224.

<sup>50</sup> According to Joachim Marzahn (e-mail sent on 2016, February 20), 'there is a very small chance to find more when somebody will look more carefully through the field journals' of Robert Koldewey. Probably, a further obstacle to the recording of the findspot of an inscribed fragment was represented by the fact that it was only when the glaze was cleaned that the cuneiform signs became visible.

<sup>51</sup> Matin 2014: 14-15, 'Fitters' Marks'.

evidence of the Achaemenid royal inscription DSf (and the related inscription DSz) where, as we know, it is stated that the bricks used in the palace of Susa were made by Babylonians;<sup>52</sup> however, this is not a specific reference to glazed bricks. A Babylonian presence in the Persepolis plain around 500 BCE had already been proved by the textual evidence of the Babylonian tablets related to the town of Humadeshu<sup>53</sup> and the Persepolis Fortification tablets.<sup>54</sup> To the material evidence, a small mark attested on two or three bricks from the Kasr area in Babylon and on a knob in blue composition from Persepolis should be added.<sup>55</sup>

The resemblance to the Gate of Ishtar also represents persuasive evidence for a dating of the inscription(s) (and therefore of the gate) to the early Achaemenid period, as already suggested by archaeological, architectural, and ornamental evidence, which is so peculiar with respect to the developments known to us above all from Persepolis.<sup>56</sup> Apparently, another chronological clue is provided by the lack of written evidence in Old Persian. This would prove relevant assuming that the Old Persian script was not used in monumental inscriptions before the reign of Darius I.<sup>57</sup> However, the written evidence from Tol-e Ajori is still too meagre: further epigraphic discoveries will contradict many of the conclusions reached in this paper, even if they appear to be the most likely in the light of our present knowledge. The analysis presented above is justified, I believe, by the growing impact of Tol-e Ajori discoveries on the study of Achaemenid history, Achaemenid presence in Fars, Achaemenid architecture and art, Achaemenid-prompted migration of technical knowledge, Achaemenid ideology and display of power, and, lastly, Achaemenid royal epigraphy.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>52</sup> DSf/OP:29-30 §8 (transliteration and translation in Schmitt 2009: 131) ≈ DSf/AE:25-26 (transliteration and translation in Vallat 1972) ≈ DSf/AB:21 (where Akkad, in the damaged syntagm [LÚ.ÉRIN.HÁ šá ak-ka-d]i-i, is used as ethnic label instead of Babylon(ia); transliteration and translation in Steve 1987: 74-76); DSz/AE:25-26 (transliteration and translation in Vallat 1972).

<sup>53</sup> Zadok 1976: 67-78; Stolper 1984: 306-308.

<sup>54</sup> Giovinazzo 1989; Henkelman & Stolper 2009, especially pp. 282-283, with references; Henkelman & Kleber 2007.

<sup>55</sup> Basello 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Askari Chaverdi & Callieri in Askari, Callieri & Matin 2014: 237-238, 'Chronology'.

<sup>57</sup> See, e.g., Stronach 1997a and 1997b. Cf. Vallat 2010a: 58-63, and 2011: 277-279, §6.

<sup>58</sup> 'Achaemenid' here is to be understood in a strictly dynastic sense (see Basello 2013a: 37-40, also 66-68).

INVENTORY RECORD  
(IRANIAN-ITALIAN JOINT ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSION)

**TAJ Inv. 143**

Glazed brick fragment with glazed decoration showing an Elamite syllable NU. On upper surface, part of a fitters' mark. On upper and right surfaces, white drippings.

Pink terracotta; green (?) underglaze and white glaze.

Context: TAJ- Tr. 11, SU1123-GB001773.

Th. 7.4 cm, max. w. 23.7 cm, max. l. 18 cm.

Broken on two sides. Glaze and underglaze partly preserved. On upper and lower surfaces, traces of bitumen mortar.

**TAJ Inv. 144**

Glazed brick fragment with glazed decoration showing the Babylonian logogram KÁ, meaning "gate". On upper surface, part of a fitters' mark. On upper, left and lower surfaces, white drippings. On upper surface, mat impression.

Pink terracotta; green (?) underglaze and white glaze.

Context: TAJ- Tr. 11, SU1124-GB001772.

Th. 7.8-8 cm, max. w. 14.8 cm, max. l. 18.6 cm.

**Abbreviations**

CAD: *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, Chicago, 1956-2010 (available online at <<https://oi.uchicago.edu/research/pubs/catalog/cad/>>). Vol. 2 (B), 1965.

CDA: BLACK, J., GEORGE, A. & POSTGATE, N. (eds.), 2000. *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (SANTAG 5), 2nd (corrected) printing, Wiesbaden.

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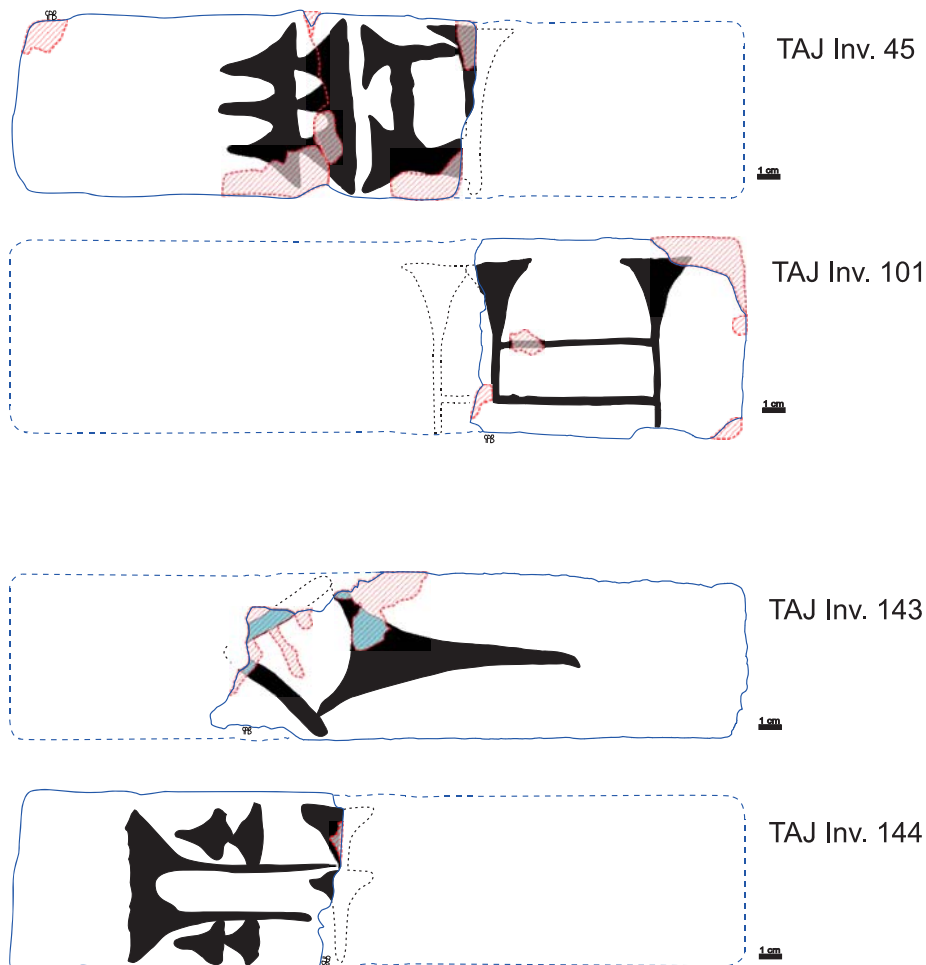


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Pl. 1. The four inscribed glazed brick fragments found at Tol-e Ajori from 2012 to 2015, to scale (computer-aided design based on photos: G.P. Basello). Blue line = extant margin of the glazed surface; black fill = white glaze; cyan fill = white underglaze; diagonal pattern = effaced surface; black dashed line = restored wedge; blue dashed line = restored margin of the glazed surface according to a standard brick size.



Pl. 2a. Glazed surface of TAJ Inv. 143 (©Iranian-Italian Archaeological Mission).



Pl. 2b. Upper surface of TAJ Inv. 143 with fitters' mark (©Iranian-Italian Archaeological Mission).  
The glazed surface is towards the bottom.



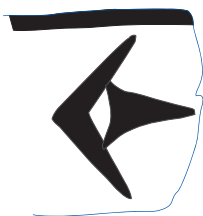


Pl. 3a. Glazed surface of TAJ Inv. 144  
(©Iranian-Italian Archaeological Mission).



Pl. 3b. Upper surface of TAJ Inv. 144 with fitters' mark  
(©Iranian-Italian Archaeological Mission). The glazed surface is towards the bottom.

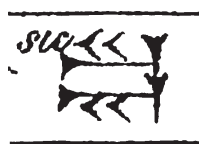




Pl. 4a. The right part of the glazed surface of the brick fragment BK 334 with the Elamite sign NU and the horizontal rule above (computer-aided design: G.P. Basello; courtesy DARIOSH Project and National Museum of Iran, Tehran).



b.



c.



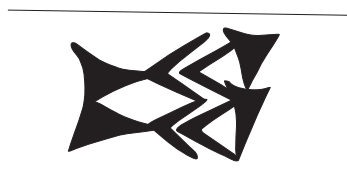
d.



e.



f.



g.

Pl. 4b. Neo-Babylonian forms of the sign KÁ (Labat 1988: 96, no. 133).

Pl. 4c. The sign KÁ in DB/AB:60 according to the cuneiform copy of Rawlinson (1870, pl. 40).

Pl. 4d. The sign KÁ in the cuneiform font used to print the text of DB/AB in the edition of King & Thompson (1907: 183).

Pl. 4e. The sign KÁ in XPa<sup>a</sup>/AB:10 on the northern wall of the western doorway of the Gate of Xerxes I at Persepolis (photo: G.P. Basello; courtesy DARIOSH Project and Parsa-Pasargadae Research Foundation).

Pl. 4f. The sign KÁ in XSd/AB:2 on the column base A 916 from the Gate of Darius I at Susa (Vallat 1974: 215, fig. 31).

Pl. 4g. The sign KÁ on the bigger stone fragment from Bardak-e Siah (computer-aided design: G.P. Basello).