

I. Introduction

In this article, I offer *editiones principes* of six Middle Persian ostraca from the site Chāl Ṭarkhān- 'Eshqābād, just south of Rayy and modern Tehran, which were excavated in 1936 by ERICH SCHMIDT'S Rayy Expedition.¹ Some thirty-six ostraca were found at Chāl Ṭarkhān- 'Eshqābād, which, along with the other materials found there (most notably, many carved stuccoes), are now dispersed across several museum collections, including the University of Pennsylvania's Penn Museum, the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute Museum, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Harvard's Fogg Museum, and Tehran's National Museum of Iran.² In an intriguing development, ostraca in both Arabic and Middle Persian are among the finds, although without more precise information about their findspots and the site's overall stratigraphy, it is difficult to say whether this constitutes rare material evidence for the co-occurrence, or at least close chronological proximity, of documentary production in Middle

* I would like to thank the editors, Maria Macuch and Arash Zeini, for the opportunity to contribute to this Festschrift. I would also like to thank Eugenio Garosi for bringing these important materials to my attention, and for all his assistance and insights as we have tried to locate them, and discussed these materials' contents and importance. Many people have gone out of their way to help Eugenio and me to locate these ostraca, and secure high-quality images of them. Among these people I would like to single out Katherine Blanchard (Penn Museum, University of Pennsylvania) and Helen McDonald (Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago) for special thanks, for working assiduously to locate these ostraca, and to provide us with the clear photographs without which this article would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Richard Payne, Theo van den Hout, and Jean Evans for helping to connect us to the right people at the University of Chicago; and Susan Allison, Servane Wetzel, and Lena Bull for their help with administrative matters. And I am grateful to Arezou Azad for her willingness to incorporate these "miserable scraps of pottery" into her Invisible East research program, which has supported my work here. This article is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 851607).

¹ The site was referred to as Chāl Ṭarkhān in SCHMIDT and his team's initial publications (e.g., MILES 1938, p. ix), and continues to be referred to as such (in, e.g., HOLOD 2019). THOMPSON (1976, p. 1) in my view sensibly, refers to the site as Chāl Ṭarkhān- 'Eshqābād due to the site's proximity to the modern village of 'Eshqābād; the village of Chāl Ṭarkhān, though also close to the site, lies substantially further away than 'Eshqābād.

² The stuccoes are comprehensively covered in THOMPSON 1976. The current locations of the finds are briefly and broadly discussed in THOMPSON 1965, p. 1.

Persian and in Arabic.³ RENATA HOLOD informs me that she and others at the Penn Museum are currently working on a publication based on SCHMIDT'S unpublished excavation notes, which promises to be highly revealing on this score and otherwise; they could also inform us about where the ostraca were found with respect to Chāl Tarkhān-ʿEshqābād's three major components: a "citadel mound," and two buildings, both with a considerable amount of stucco decorations, which SCHMIDT and, following him, THOMPSON refer to as the "main palace" and the "subsidiary palace."⁴ THOMPSON has posited that these buildings' origins by and large lie in the very late Sasanian era, with important elaborations in the first century or so of Islamic rule; a late Sasanian or early Islamic date can accordingly be posited for the Middle Persian ostraca presented here as well, although one hopes for more clarity and specificity as work on their contents and context proceeds.⁵

I learned about the Chāl Tarkhān-Eshqābād ostraca and their significance from Eugenio Garosi in May 2021, and since then the two of us have been working to establish their whereabouts. Although the plates in THOMPSON 1976 include images of twenty-nine distinct ostrakon-surfaces, comprising some twenty-five items (several of which have writing on both sides), the locations of some of these ostraca continue to prove elusive, while our efforts have turned up several ostraca found at Chāl Tarkhān-Eshqābād that do not appear in THOMPSON'S

³ As discussed in GAROSI 2021, pp. 98-99. GAROSI (2021, p. 99, n. 388) notes that one of these ostraca, CT-162/2 (THOMPSON 1976, pl. xxxvi, fig. 3), may be bilingual, containing Arabic text in addition to what is clearly Middle Persian. We have been unable to determine this ostrakon's present whereabouts, and a better image may well clarify matters. Thanks to the clear images supplied by Katherine Blanchard at the Penn Museum, THOMPSON'S (1976, pl. xxvi, fig. 1; pl. xxxvi, fig. 1) initial identification of CT-40's (PM 37-33-32) text as Arabic can be confirmed. As Eugenio Garosi has suggested, this is almost certainly a writing exercise, focused on the numerals 11-19 which present special difficulties in Arabic; the subsequent reidentifications of the text as Sogdian (RECK and SUNDERMANN *apud* WEBER 2003, p. 176) and a New Persian poem (HOLOD 2019, pp. 136-7), can accordingly be abandoned.

⁴ THOMPSON 1976, p. 1; see also KRÖGER, "Čāl Tarḵān," *Elr*. The precise function of each structure continues to be debated; HARPER (1977) suggests the two buildings "perhaps had different functions," while HOLOD (2019, p. 335) calls SCHMIDT/THOMPSON'S "main palace" and "subsidiary palace" a "vaulted reception hall" and "square fortified domestic building," respectively.

⁵ THOMPSON 1976.

book. GAROSI has put together a concordance which details the current state of knowledge about these ostraca and their current locations, which is included as an appendix to this article. The ostraca published here include three now housed at the Penn Museum, images of which do appear in THOMPSON 1976 (CT-135/2 [PM 37-33-52], CT-135/5 [PM 37-33-21], and CT-135/4 [PM 37-33-50]); two from the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute Museum, which do not appear in THOMPSON's book (CT-205/1 [OIM A154067], CT-205/3b [OIM A154070]); and one more which does appear in THOMPSON, but whose whereabouts we have been unable to ascertain (CT-133/4). For uniformity's sake I have listed and ordered them under their field numbers (those beginning with CT-).

As DIETER WEBER's work has clarified for us, Middle Persian ostraca typically have to do with rather humble transactions: often, as is apparently the case with the six ostraca presented here, dealing with the distribution of bread rations.⁶ Despite the small scale of the business they attest to, they provide a vantage point on life on the western Iranian plateau, either shortly before or (more likely) just after the transition to Islamic rule, which is rare and precious. In this case, we have six ostraca dealing with the distribution of bread that apparently involve the same man: a certain Windādag, who is being ordered to allocate certain amounts of bread to various parties.⁷ Further advances in reading through the Chāl Tarkhān-ʿEshqābād ostraca, and integrating them with the other relevant material, archaeological, and literary evidence, promise to yield major contributions to the linguistic, social, economic, and administrative history of Sasanian and early

⁶ WEBER 2009 is an exhaustive discussion of bread rations in ostraca; and see also the updated readings in WEBER 2022.

⁷ The correct reading for the final verb in each of these ostraca, "give" as opposed to "was given" or "[he] gave," is established in WEBER 2022. These six ostraca seem to follow the typical structure of a Middle Persian "check," according to which the person who is meant to distribute the given amount of bread (or another good) is named first, which has likewise been outlined in WEBER 2022, p. 515. Although I have been unable to find any other attestations of the name Windādag, Windād is relatively common, both as a freestanding name and as an element in compound names (GIGNOUX 1986, p. 184; JUSTI 1895, pp. 369-70; and, e.g., WEBER 2019); and *-ag* is a familiar hypocoristic suffix, frequently encountered in personal names (on this see, e.g., GIGNOUX 2011, p. 353).

Islamic Iran. It will be particularly important to undertake further comparisons between the Chāl Tarkhān-‘Eshqābād set and the much larger group of Middle Persian ostraca (190 items) discovered in 1925 and subsequently donated to the British Library by ERNST HERZFELD, which stem from a similar context—the Warāmīn Plain, south of Rayy and modern Tehran, and probably found in a late Sasanian structure—although their precise findspot remains unknown.⁸

DIETER WEBER was the first to publish a reading of any Middle Persian ostrakon, and what FRANÇOIS DE BLOIS noted in 1993 remains so today: “it is perfectly clear that any scholar who might in future venture to struggle with these miserable scraps of pottery... will take Weber’s meticulous work as his point of departure.”⁹ WEBER’S work on Middle Persian ostraca spans nearly five decades, from his pioneering 1974 contribution to JEAN DE MENASCE’S *Festschrift*, through his pathbreaking 1992 volume, to the important article “On the Formal Structure of Checks in Pahlavi Documents,” published in summer 2022; and although the six ostraca presented here have hitherto remained unpublished, whatever progress on them I have made would not have been possible without frequent recourse to WEBER’S work—on the Chāl Tarkhān-‘Eshqābād material and other ostraca, as well as on other kinds of Middle Persian documents.¹⁰ I am accordingly honored to contribute to this volume, and I very much look forward to hearing DR. WEBER’S thoughts (and, I would imagine, corrections) on the readings I have offered here.

II. Editions and Translations

⁸ For HERZFELD’S description of the ostraca and the circumstances of their discovery, see HERZFELD 1926, p. 283, which is reproduced with helpful elaborations in DE MENASCE 1957 and WEBER 1974. WEBER 1992 discusses each of these ostraca individually, along with several others, and offers editions and translations of the vast majority of them, many of which have been updated in subsequent publications (e.g., WEBER 2005, WEBER 2022).

⁹ DE BLOIS 1993, p. 377.

¹⁰ WEBER 1974, WEBER 1992, and WEBER 2022 are the works I have directly cited here. WEBER’S other important publications on ostraca include WEBER 2003, the first publication to offer readings of any Chāl Tarkhān-‘Eshqābād ostrakon, as well as WEBER 2005 and WEBER 2009.

CT-133/4

Transliteration

1. wn[d]’ṭk’ YWM
2. ... LHMA [?]
3. ...
4. ...**K** #-I
5. lwn [?]... YHBWN

Transcription

1. Win[d]ādāg rōz [?]
2. ... nān
3. ...
4. ... k[abīz]-1
5. rōn [?] ... dah

Translation

Windādāg, on the day... give 1 *kabīz* of bread...

Commentary

As our only access to this object is a single black-and-white photograph in THOMPSON 1976, the reading is exceptionally uncertain; the text has largely been pieced together on the basis of its structural resemblance to the other ostraca in the Chāl Ṭarkhān-‘Eshqābād set published here.

Line 5: It is fairly clear that the first word here begins with <l>, and then we have at least three of the characters that resemble a vertical line: most probably some combination of <w> and <n>although <k> or <ṭ> are also possibilities, as is the word-final stroke <’>. It is likely that the word extends beyond the four or so characters visible in the photograph, as there is a substantial amount of space between the last visible character and the closing <YHBWN>, *dah*, “give.”



Fig. 1. Field no. CT-133/4. Location unknown. THOMPSON 1974, pl. xxvi, fig. 2 [upside down].

CT-135/2 (PM 37-33-52)

Transliteration

1. wn[d' tk'] [YWM]
2. 'rtw[hšt'] LHMA
3. **K** #-I OL ... Y [?]
4. mtr... [YH]BWN

Transcription

1. Win[dādāg] rōz
2. Ardwahišt nān
3. k[abīz]-1 ō ... ī [?]
4. Mihr... dah

Translation

Windādāg, on the day Ardwahišt give 1 *kabīz* of bread to ... of [?] Mihr...

Commentary

In l. 4 we seem to have the beginning of a personal name whose first element is the common Mihr. The *kabīz* of bread's intended recipient is most likely someone regarded as belonging to this Mihr; another possibility would be that in this Mihr... we have a patronymic.



Fig. 2. Field no. CT-135/2. Housed at the Penn Museum, Philadelphia. PM 37-33-52. THOMPSON 1974, pl. xxxiii, fig. 3. Courtesy of the Near East Section, Penn Museum.

CT-135/4 (PM 37-33-50)

Transliteration

1. wnd'ṭk' YWM
2. mṭr' ... LHMA
3. K #-III II [?] OL ... 'n
4. ...
5. ... YHBWN

Transcription

1. Windādag rōz
2. Mihr ... nān
3. k[abīz]-5 ō ... ān
4. ...
5. ... dah

Translation

Windādag, on the day Mihr ... give five *kabīz* of bread to the ...s.

Commentary

Line 2: it is unclear whether there is a word between the day-name Mihr and *nān*, “bread”; this conceivably could be a long space as well.

Line 3: I have been unable to make out the final word in the line, although the ending seems to be the animate plural marker <- 'n>, *-ān*.



Fig. 3. Field no. CT-135/4. Housed at the Penn Museum, Philadelphia. PM 37-33-50. THOMPSON 1974, pl. xxxiii, fig. 2. Courtesy of the Near East Section, Penn Museum.

CT-135/5 (PM 37-33-21)

Transliteration

Recto

1. wnd'ṭk' YWM
2. sp̄n[drmt'] LHMA
3. K #-II OL gwlsk' [?] [or <xwlšn'>?] Y
4. blc'ṭwr [?] YHBWN

Verso

1. k'1 Y YWM 'mwrđt d'n
2. ...
3. ...
4. ...

Transcription

Recto

1. Windādag rōz
2. Spandarmad nān
3. k[abīz]-2 ō gursag [?] [or “xwarišn”?] ī
4. Burzādur [?] dah

Verso

1. kār ī rōz Amurdād dān
2. ...
3. ...
4. ...

Translation

Recto

Windādag on the day Spandarmad give 2 *kabīz* of bread to the hungry one [?] [or “for the food”?] of Burzādur.

Verso

[For?] the work of the day Amurdād grain...

Commentary

It is somewhat unusual for a Middle Persian ostrakon to have writing on both sides, as has happened here, although several more instances of the phenomenon are recorded in WEBER 1992 and later publications; there are, for instance, O. 115 and O. 114, each of which have a continuous text running from one side to the other (WEBER 2022, pp. 519-520, 528-9). The

extent to which all the writing here fits into a single coherent document is not clear, given the uncertainties that remain in the reading, and it is possible, given the separation we have between the first and second two lines on the verso side, that we have as many as three distinct texts. At least one distinct calendar day seems to be mentioned on each side, Spandarmad (recto) and Amurdād (verso), although it is perhaps notable that these days are close to one another—the fifth and seventh day in the month, respectively.

Recto, line 3: I have been unable to find a satisfactory reading for the penultimate word here, despite the high likelihood that its third letter is the easily identifiable <l>.

Verso, line 4: the elongated <d> in <d'n>, *dān* resembles that in O. 110, l. 2 (WEBER 2022, p. 528).

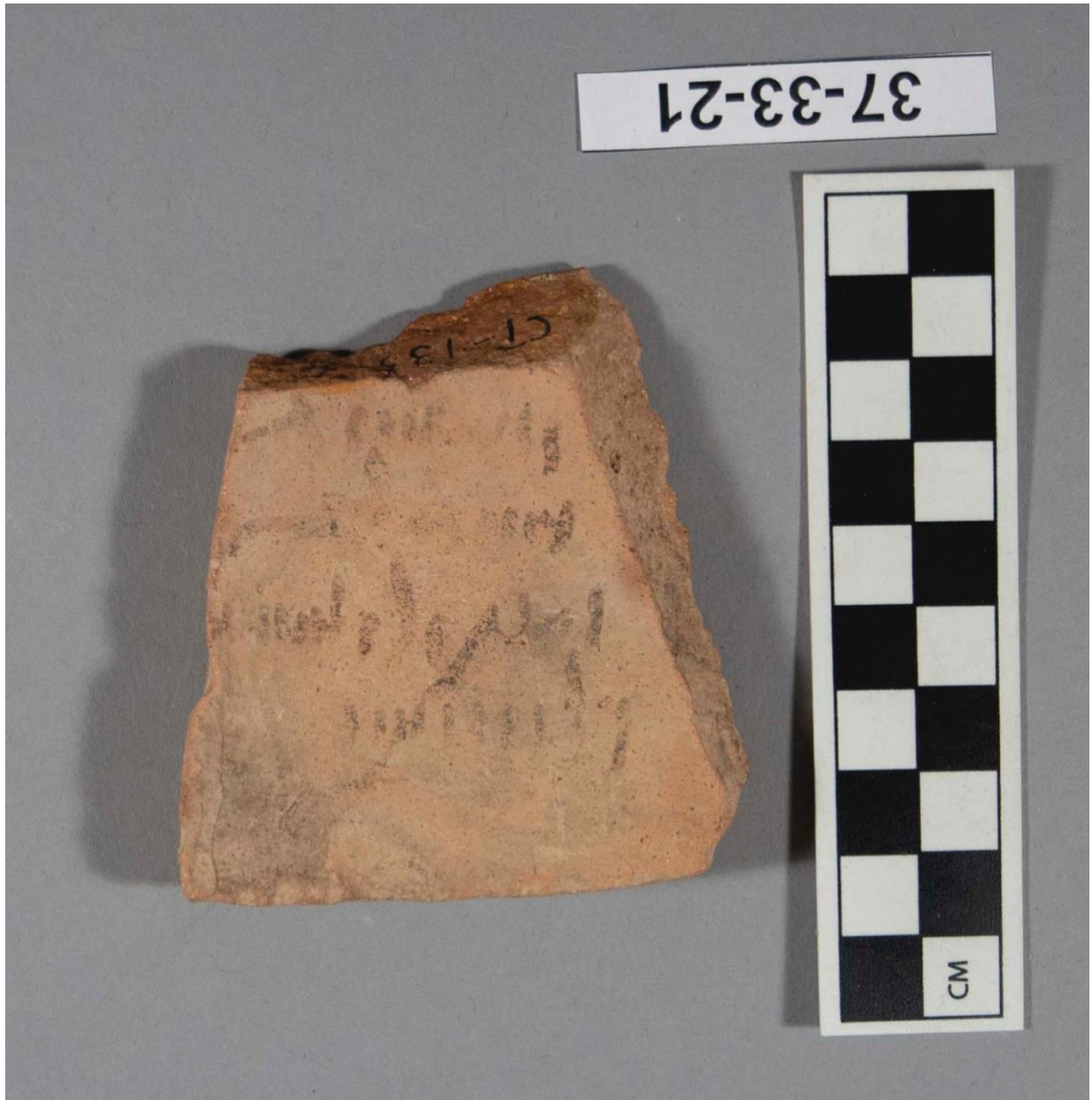


Fig. 4. Field no. CT-135/5 (r). Housed at the Penn Museum, Philadelphia. PM 37-33-21. THOMPSON 1974, pl. xxix, fig. 3. Courtesy of the Near East Section, Penn Museum.

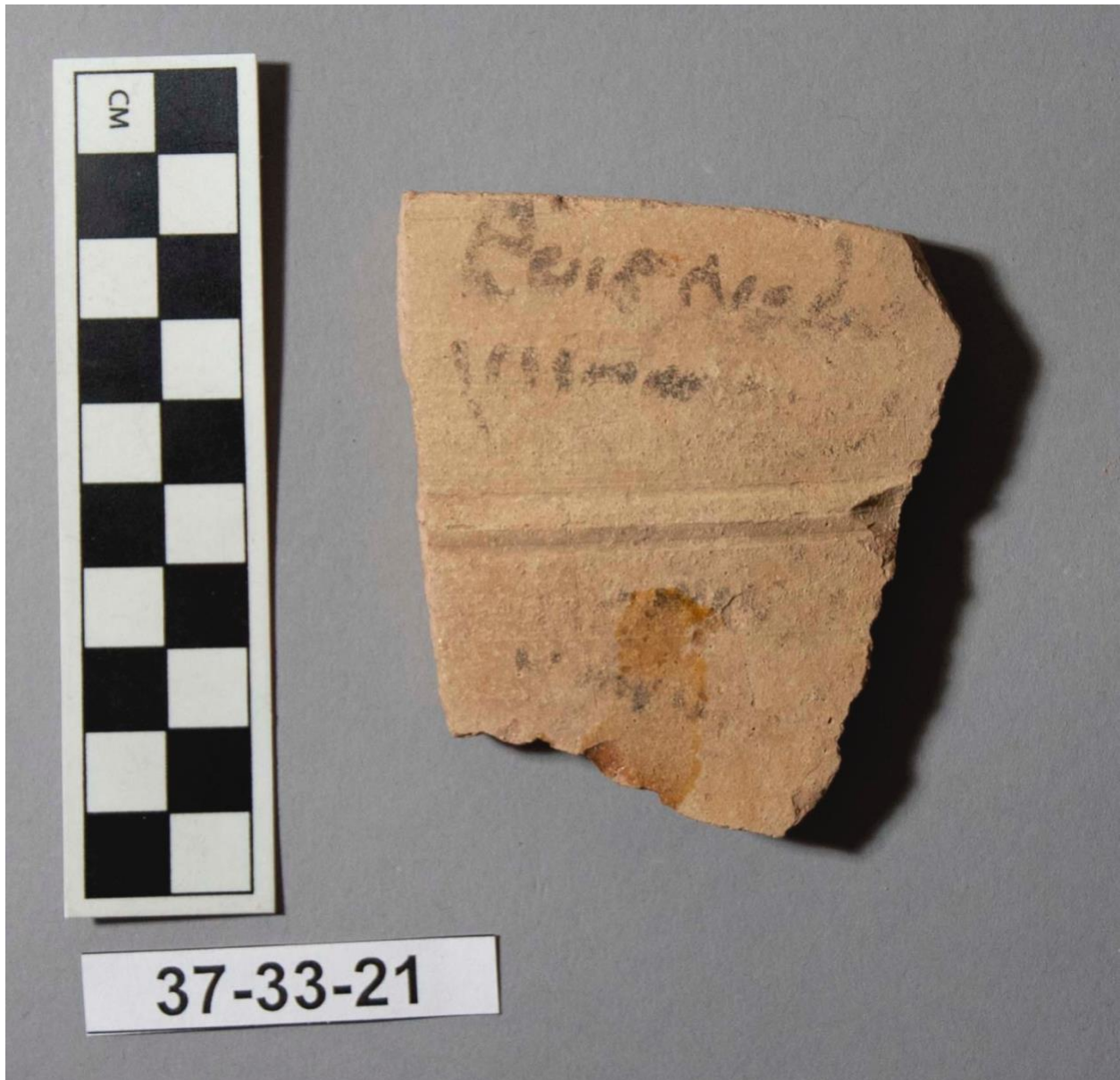


Fig. 5. Field no. CT-135/4. Housed at the Penn Museum, Philadelphia. PM 37-33-21. THOMPSON 1974, pl. xxxi, fig. 1. Courtesy of the Near East Section, Penn Museum.

CT 205/1 (OIM A154067)

Transliteration

1. wnd'ṭk' Y[W]M ddw[' PWN] mṭr'
2. LHMA [K-] ... [O]L lsyk'n
3. LWṬE ... 'n
4. YHBWN

Transcription

1. Windādag rōz Day [pad] Mihr
2. nān k[abīz]-... ō rahīgān
3. abāg ... ān
4. dah

Translation

Windādag on the day Day [pad] Mihr, give ... *kabīz* of bread to the servants with the ...s.

Commentary

A servant is otherwise attested as the recipient of a certain measure of bread in another ostrakon from Chāl Ṭarkhān-ʿEshqābād, CT-133/1 (WEBER 2022, pp. 529-530).

Line 3: As in CT-135/4, l. 3, I have been unable to make out any part of the final word aside from the animate plural ending *-ān*.

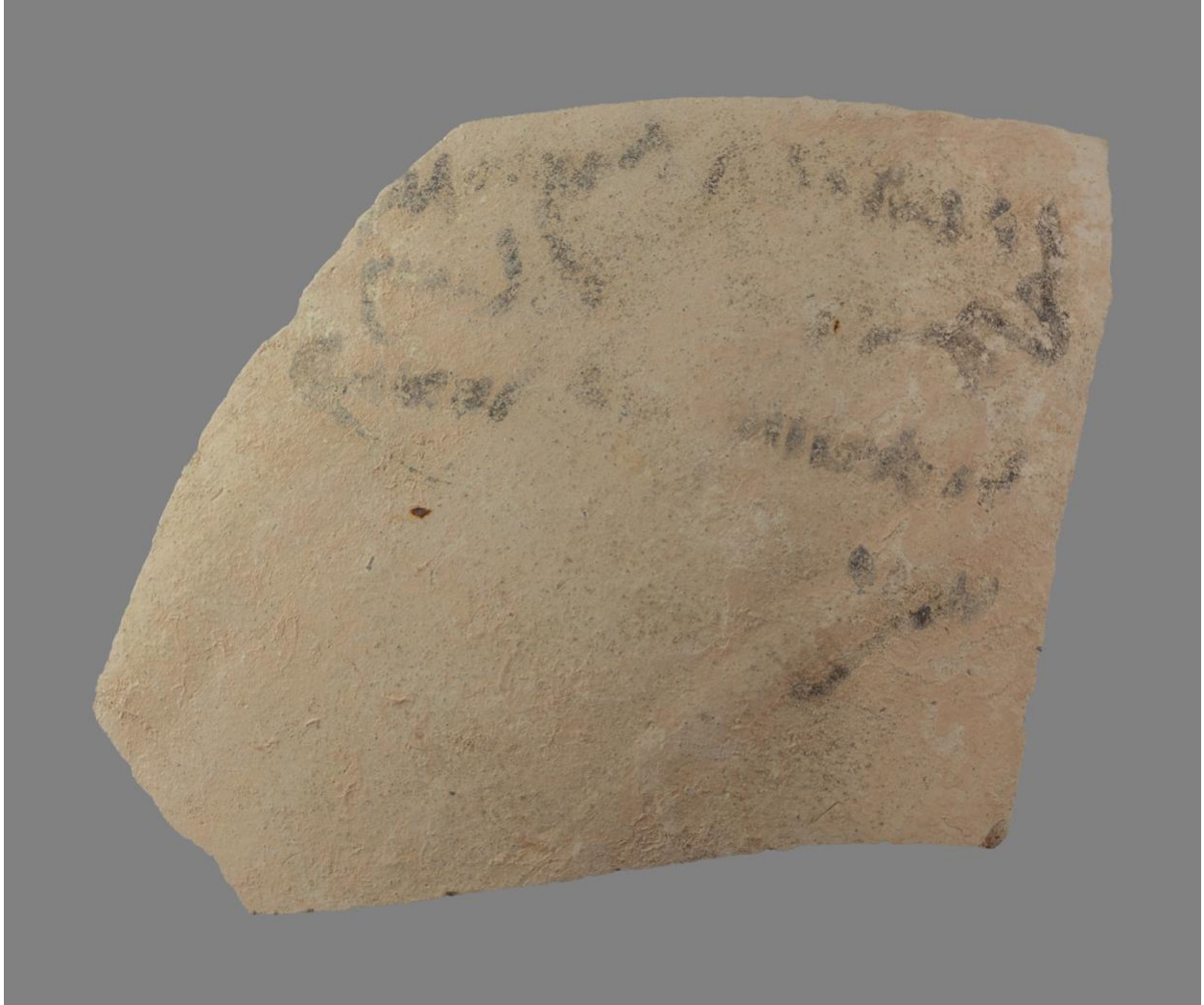


Fig. 6. Field no. CT-205/1. Housed at the Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago. OIM A154067. Does not appear in THOMPSON 1974. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum.

CT 205/3b (OIM A154070)

Transliteration

1. wnd'tk' YWM 'twr'
2. LHMA K #-III [?] OL lsyk'n
3. Y ... YHBWN
4. [l'st] [?]

Transcription

1. Windādag rōz Ādur
2. nān k[abīz]-4 [?] ō rahīgān
3. ī ... dah
4. ...

Translation

Windādag on the day Ādur give 4 [?] *kabīz* of bread to the servants of...

Commentary

There is an indistinct word or mark on the final line here; it may be a kind of scribal mark to show that the assigned task has been taken care of.

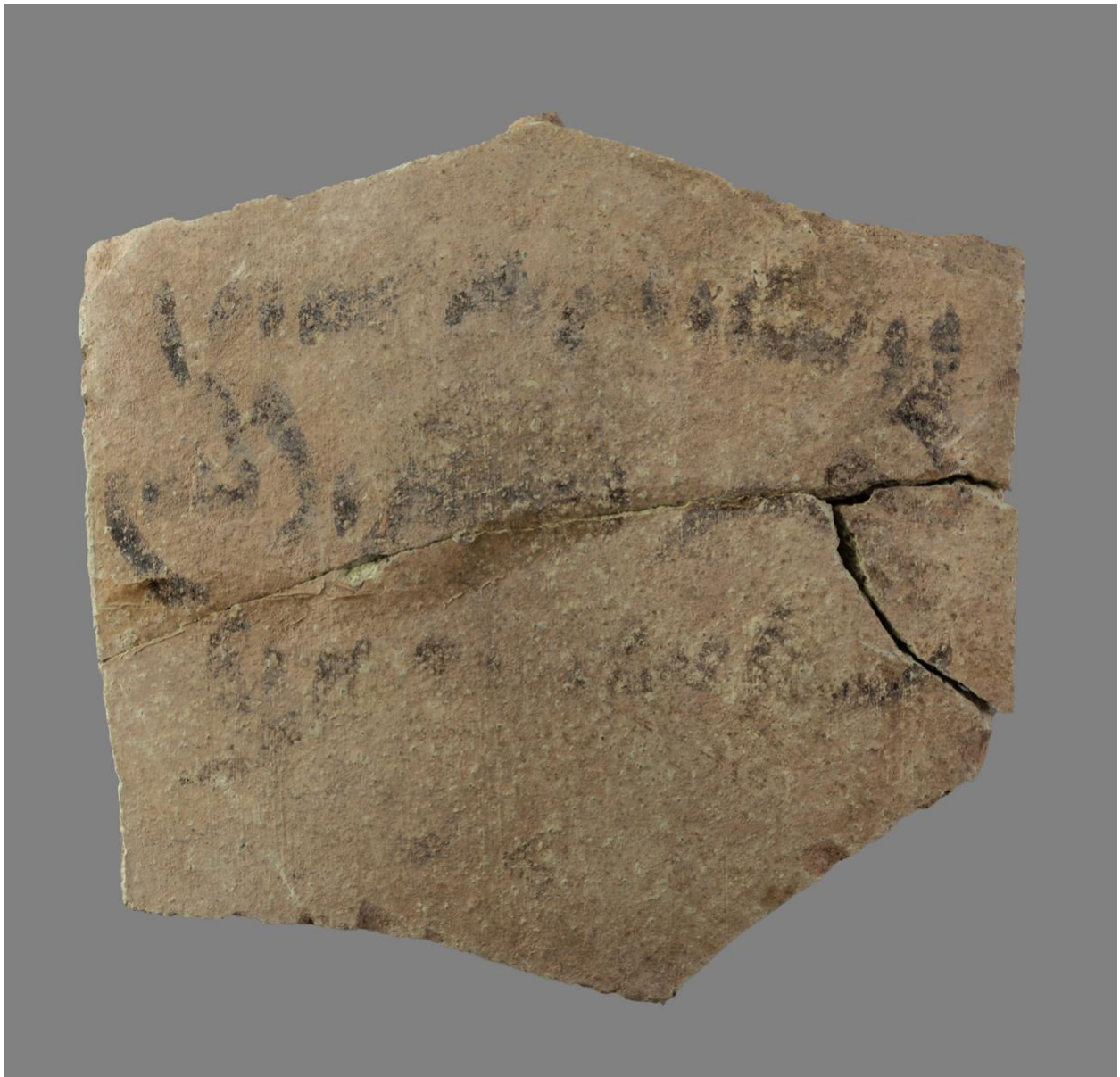


Fig. 7. Field no. CT-205/3b. Housed at the Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago. OIM A154070. Does not appear in THOMPSON 1974. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum.

Appendix. Concordance of Chāl Tarkhān-‘Esqhābād Ostraca by Eugenio Garosi with Minor Additions by Thomas Benfey

Text	Field no.	Language	THOMPSON 1976	WEBER Publications	Location
1	CT-40 r	Arabic	pl. xxvii, fig. 1		PM (37-33-23 r)
2	CT-40 v	Arabic	pl. xxxvi, fig. 1		PM (37-33-22 v)
3	CT-42/2	Middle Persian	n.d.		PM (37-33-56)
4	CT-75	Middle Persian	pl. xxvi, fig. 3		?
5	CT-85/1 r	Middle Persian	pl. xxvii, fig. 2		PM (37-33-20 r)
6	CT-85/1 v	Middle Persian	n.d.		PM (37-33-20 v)
7	CT-85/2 r	Middle Persian	pl. xxix, fig. 4		?
8	CT-85/2 v	Middle Persian	pl. xxxi, fig. 2		?
9	CT-92/1	Arabic?	pl. xxviii, fig. 1		?
10	CT-92/2	Middle Persian	n.d.		PM (37-33-46)
11	CT-94	Middle Persian	pl. xxxiv, fig. 1		?
12	CT-97	Middle Persian	pl. xxx, fig. 1	2003 (n. 3)	?
13	CT-101	Middle Persian	pl. xxxiii, fig. 1		?
14	CT-102	Middle Persian	pl. xxxvi, fig. 2		?
15	CT-110	Middle Persian	pl. xxxv, fig. 2		?
16	CT-123	Arabic	pl. xxxv, fig. 1		?
17	CT-133/1	Middle Persian	pl. xxx, fig. 2	2003 (n. 2); 2005, 2009, 2022 (n. 9)	?
18	CT-133/2	Middle Persian	pl. xxxiii, fig. 5	2003 (n. 1); 2005, 2009 (n. 10)	PM (37-33-45)
19	CT-133/3	Middle Persian	pl. xxvi, fig. 1		PM (37-33-51)
20	CT-133/4	Middle Persian	pl. xxvi, fig. 2		?
21	CT-134	Uncertain	pl. xxix, fig. 1 (bottom)		?
22	CT-135/1	Middle Persian	n.d.		PM (37-33-54)
23	CT-135/2	Middle Persian	pl. xxxiii, fig. 3		PM (37-33-52)
24	CT-135/4	Middle Persian	pl. xxxiii, fig. 2		PM (37-33-50)
25	CT-135/5 r	Middle Persian	pl. xxix, fig. 3		PM (37-33-21 r)
26	CT-135/5 v	Middle Persian	pl. xxxi, fig. 1		PM (37-33-21 v)
27	CT-135/6	Middle Persian	n.d.		PM (37-33-42)
28	CT-139 r	Middle Persian	pl. xxviii, fig. 2		?
29	CT-139 v	Uncertain	pl. xxix, fig. 1 (top)		?
30	CT-140/1	Middle Persian	pl. xxvi, fig. 4		?
31	CT-140/2	Middle Persian	n.d.		PM (37-33-53)
32	CT-143	Middle Persian	n.d.		PM (37-33-47)

33	CT-162/2	Bilingual?	pl. xxxvi, fig. 3	?
34	CT-195	Arabic	pl. xxxiii, fig. 4	?
35	CT-205/1	Middle Persian	n.d.	OIM (A154067)
36	CT-205/3a	Middle Persian	n.d.	OIM (A154069)
37	CT-205/3b	Middle Persian	n.d.	OIM (A154070)
38	CT-205/4	Middle Persian	n.d.	OIM (A154068)
39	n.d.	Arabic	pl. xxxii, fig. 1	?
40	n.d.	Middle Persian	pl. xxxii, fig. 2	?
41	n.d.	Middle Persian	n.d.	PM (37-33-9)
42	n.d.	Middle Persian?	n.d.	PM (37-33-48 r)
43	n.d.	Middle Persian?	n.d.	PM (37-33-48 v)

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