

## M346 Sign of Sheep or Livestock? Examining Livestock Texts in the Proto-Elamite Writing Based on the Collection of Flower Inscriptions of the National Museum of Iran

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### Abstract

Southwest Asia, in the second half of the fourth millennia BC, was going through social transformations, which in turn led to the emergence of writing. During this transformation, the pseudo-Elamite script in the south of Mesopotamia and proto-Elamite in the Iranian plateau progressed rapidly, to such an extent that the Proto-Elamite script was soon spread across the Iranian plateau. These writing systems were adopted mainly for administrative and accounting purposes, and despite their differences, there are still significant similarities between the two; similarities such as adding systems, the same numerical signs, and some shared ideograms. Given the fact that the pseudo-Elamite script into the Acadian script, it is now evident for the researchers to detect the texts, however despite discovering the proto-Elamite tablets in exploring the Susa classics a century ago, it is still not entirely deciphered to this day. In this study, it is attempted to present a description and analysis of Susa husbandry texts, particularly M346, using the descriptive-analytical method and gathering the information through documentary and library methods. A significant section of the proto-Elamite texts is related to the livestock and the livestock calculations, which is one of the most recurring livestock signs in M346. This sign, according to the researchers, is taken to be a sign for goats to this day, which is written as UDU in the pseudo-Cuneiform script, however, some texts from the Iranian national museum refer to this sign as goats, and in some cases as livestock or a set of livestock animals, pointing out the double-function of sign in Elamite script depending on the context.

**Key Words:** Emersion of writing, Proto-Elamite, Susa, Livestock tablets, Animal texts

### Introduction:

There are different views regarding the emergence of writing in Iran and the Middle East, some are of the belief that with the advance of agriculture and the rapid pace of the economy, due to a distrust of memory and without sufficient heeding to this facet in relation to the fatality rate, some of the commercial and accounting information will fade away (Seyed Sajadi, 183, 2008). In our view, the emergence of writing is a matter of high importance, because its inception is one of the fundamental characteristics of our culture. In the beginning, it was only confined to a few individuals who were capable of managing warehouses and reservoirs, but in time, it brought forward the importance of writing with its ubiquitous presence in all aspects. About 5000 years ago, the mark of success was not yet evident for this invention, and thus, it was not viewed as an important revolution (Desset, 2016:68). The best

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information about accounting, records, and management documents can be sought around Susa area in the southwestern part of Iran, and Tappeh Sofalin in the central part of the Iranian plateau for the Proto-Elamite era (Hessari, 2020:6). The term refers to an era, in which a writing system was used in the plain of Khuzestan and the Iranian plateau (Alden, 1982).

*Necessity and objective of the study:* Studying and re-reading the Proto-Elamite tablets give out plenty of information from trade to social complexities, systems of management and the variety of professions, and the wealth of the people in the fourth millennium B.C. studying the tablets belonged to the Proto-Elamite era, particularly the husbandry texts, enables us to develop a deeper grasp about the social life of the people in the aforementioned era, which is of high significance in the field of social archaeology.

*Question and theory of the study:* In the present study, we endeavor to find a satisfactory response to the following questions; what information could we obtain by assessing the Proto-Elamite signs? What is the significance of the texts on Susa husbandry in relation to reconstructing the southwestern social societies at the end of the fourth millennium B.C? How could we find out about the significance of the sign of M346, the most recurring livestock sign in Proto-Elamite script?

Theory: there is plenty of information to be obtained from the resulting texts belonging to Susa about storing grain, the magnitude of the livestock, and the prevalence of the types of domesticated animals, which is very important if the information were to be accompanied by posing fitting questions. For example, considering the frequency of the M346 sign, we can deduce that goat was a very prevalent specie at the time. In some texts, there are accounts of large herds in the area, but this sign is not only limited to describing goats, and with reviewing texts from Proto-Elamite era in the Iran's national museum, there is some evidence for using this sign as a reference to gathering the varieties of domesticated animals.

### **Identified Traces:**

*Reviewing livestock texts in the Proto-Elamite era:* The main section of the tablets from Proto-Elamite texts is about livestock, with some of the clauses discussing trade in livestock, accounting, payments related to counting the livestock, and other affairs, with M346 being the most recurrent sign in the livestock texts, that some were of the convictions earlier that this sign refers to an adult Ewe (picture 9).

The two Proto-Elamite tablets of MDP. 26:437 and MDP 26:176 which have a very simple and easy textual structure, records M346 with a double function. According to the text, MDP.17:437 begins with a starting sign or possession and proceeds with a male goat, followed then by recording Number 1 and the M346 sign, the adult ewe, and then illustrating Number 1, the sign for the third case is deemed unreadable due to the physical damage, with number 1 in the front and then the sign of the adult male goat, and finally two signs, which are probably phonetic, records number 1. The total of the 5 cases in the text is 6, and although we understand that there is an immature male goat and a mature goat next to the mature ewe in the back of the tablet, with the same sign of M346, but M346 alone is recorded for totaling the whole sum. Tablet MDP. 26:176 with a very brief and short text and four entries in the national museum is a good sample for better understanding the variable structure of M346 sign. The tablets begin with a possession sign, followed by M346 sign along with M105, which probably denotes a certain breed of ewes, with number 1 in front of it and then an unknown and undeciphered sign with number 1 and another unknown sign along with number 1 again, concluding with the sign of goat with number 1. Given the signs of M346 and M363, we understand that it discusses two sheep and one female goat, and since the other two signs are unknown and the back of the tablet is totaled by the number 4, it is probable that the other

two signs are also two species from the livestock, because each of the four entries is totaled by M346 sign, which could be taken as a signifier for the livestock.

**Conclusion:**

A significant part of the texts from Proto-Elamite Susa is about receipts, records, census, and trading the livestock which in some texts is said to be around hundreds or above thousand livestock. The illustrative signs for the livestock are in different forms, mostly consisting of eight signs of: the mature male goat, the immature male goat, the mature female goat, the immature female goat, the mature ewe, the immature ewe, the mature ram, and the immature ram. The remaining signs for the livestock are not used often, out of which, the M346 sign, the sign of the male goat, is of special significance due to its frequency in the Proto-Elamite tablets for its vital role in yielding livestock products, more than any other recorded signs. To the authors, this sign can have different meanings depending on the part it was inscribed on the tablet; for instance: the tablets of MDP. 26:176 and MDP 26:437 have two places in which the aforementioned sign was inscribed in two sections, each with a different connotation, and after enumerating a different number of the livestock by M346 sign, which previously was surmised to be a sign for the male goat, it is now taken to be a reference to the livestock.

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