

EPIGRAPHIC FINDINGS AT PAIKULI (2018-2019). A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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This paper presents the most significant evidence of the new epigraphic findings recovered at Paikuli (Iraqi Kurdistan) in the 2018 and 2019 campaigns, for a total of 9 blocks and fragments (8 MP and 2 Pa). Other epigraphic findings will be included in the final publication on the monument and its inscription, forthcoming in 2023.

Keywords: Paikuli monument and inscription; Sasanian Empire; Middle Persian; Parthian; King Narseh

1. INTRODUCTION

Built by the Sasanian King Narseh (r. 293-302 AD), the commemorative monument at Paikuli (Kurdistan region, Iraq) included an extensive bilingual inscription in Middle Persian and Parthian, representing a paramount source on the early history of the Sasanian Empire. Through its manifold constituents, the monument itself conveyed a refined dynastic message which was effectively expressed in the royal inscription. The text is a sophisticated example of scribal technique entailing multifaceted compositive structures, narrative devices, and rhetorical formulas. A synoptic reading of the existent passages of the Middle Persian and Parthian versions allows us to recover a good deal of the text, which describes Narseh's disputed ascent to the throne and the political ties between the newly acclaimed sovereign and the aristocratic faction supporting his legitimacy. Since 2006 a team of Kurdish and Italian experts has cooperated in studying the Paikuli monument.¹ In 2018, when the Italian Archaeological Mission in Iraqi Kurdistan (MAIKI) became one of Sapienza's flagship projects (Grande Scavo), we undertook a series of field campaigns at the Paikuli site (June 2018; November 2018; June 2019) with the aim of completing the documentation of the moulded blocks that originally formed the external façade of Narseh's monument. Field activities included photographic aerial documentation of the area and the documentation of individual finds.² Interestingly, a significant number of inscribed blocks and fragments came

¹ On recent activities and new discoveries see Cereti 2021; 2022; Cereti - Colliva 2016; Cereti - Colliva - Terribili 2019; Cereti *et al.* 2020. On earlier studies see Cereti - Terribili 2012. For prior epigraphic findings see Cereti - Terribili 2014; for aspects related to the monument sculptural project and royal ideology see Colliva - Terribili 2017. All activities were carried out in synergy with Kurdish institutions, and we extend our special thanks to Kaifi Mustafa Ali (General Director of General Directorate of Antiquities KRG), Kamal Rashid Raheem (Director of the Department of Antiquity of Sulaimaniyah), Shkur Muhammad Haydar (former Director of the Department of Antiquity of Garmian) and Salah Mohammed (current Director of the Department of Antiquity of Garmian), Hashim Hama Abdullah (Director of the Slemani Museum), and the archaeologists who participated in the 2018 - 2019 campaigns at Paikuli, Zana Abdulkarim Qadir (Sulaimaniyah) and Mohammad Ali Karim (Garmian).

² In June and November 2018, UAV surveys covered the entire hill and its surrounding area allowing us to divide the entire site into squared sections and start a systematic identification and documentation of the material on the ground.

to light.³ Thanks to the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) and of Sapienza University of Rome, the photogrammetric survey (June 2019) of the new evidence and subsequent 3D renderings have been achieved in collaboration with Sven Stefano Tilia (Studio 3R). In anticipation of the comprehensive publication of MAIKI's work at Paikuli and the new edition of Narseh's inscription, this paper offers the public a first philological analysis of the most significant epigraphic evidence found during our 2018 and 2019 campaigns.

2. FRAGMENTS PB350 AND PB351, AND HERZFELD'S DOCUMENTATION

Two inscribed fragments (fig. 1), one in Middle Persian - PB350 [G6] - and one in Parthian -PB351 [g2] -, had already been documented and published by the German archaeologist E. Herzfeld at the beginning of the 20th century.⁴ Both of them were found during the June 2018 campaign.⁵ The comparison with older photographs reveals the poor condition in which this material reached us, showing that in the last century the site was the object of intense anthropic activities which had a huge impact on the monument. The Paikuli site was harmed by looting and damaged by military operations during the repressive campaign carried out by Saddam Hussain in the 1980s. We believe that the damage was caused by looters in their attempt to cut the inscribed surfaces off the main body of the blocks to make them easier to carry and more palatable on the antiquity market. According to the reports of local inhabitants, during the 1990s foreigners made several depredations attempt at Paikuli. This would also explain why many blocks recorded by Herzfeld are still missing. The blocks documented by the German scholar should have been easily detectable and accessible on the top of the hill. What remains today of the once complete blocks PB350 and PB351 is the bottom right corner and the bottom left part respectively. The few letters preserved allowed us to identify these pieces as Middle Persian G6 (fragment of lines 5 and 6) and Parthian g2 (fragment of lines 3-6).⁶

	PB350 [G6]		PB351 [g2]
01	-HTn KZYnky BYN tw-	01	y'ztn prksywt HWYt
02	g'sy wndlšny HWE	02	W 'z' tn W ktkhwtwyn

³ The epigraphic material found in the 2018 - 2019 campaigns, now stored and displayed at the Slemani Museum, was documented by photogrammetry in May 2019. The epigraphic material includes the following pieces: PB161; PB229; PB269; PB273; PB278; PB279; PB282; PB330; PB341; PB350; PB351; PB352; PB457; PB462; PB539; PB546; PB601; PB631; PB653; PB688. Three finds (PB352; PB462; PB688) were casually discovered by the site's guardian (Mr. Nawzad Barkali) while our team was not on site. PB352 was in the left bank of the dry stream (*wādī*) at the foot of the monument hill (NE side). PB462 and PB688 were discovered among ruined masonries in the village of Barkal.

⁴ Herzfeld (1924) recorded the two, at-that-time whole, blocks as Pársik G6 and Pahlavik G1. The current numbering of the Middle Persian and Parthian blocks follows the philological reconstruction of the texts by Humbach - Skjærvø (1983a; 1983b). For block G6 see also Durkin-Meisterernst 2014, 406 (§ 855.822) and 423 (§ 891.906), both discussing the corresponding Parthian and not the Middle Persian version; for g2 see Durkin-Meisterernst 2014, 404 (§ 853.809) and 445 (§ 952.1023) on the Parthian text itself, and 350 (§ 742.572) on the parallel Middle Persian version.

⁵ PB350 was brought (10/06/2018) to us by native inhabitants and its original position remains unknown. PB351 instead was found (09/06/2018) at the bottom of the north slope of the monument hill.

⁶ See the following table with the preserved letters in bold.

03	-ky HWE štry d'-	03	W hštrdrn W BRBYTAn
04	LKWM ORHYAn ptg'm	04	ALHYN nywng W ny'pktr
05	yzd'n l'sty kltk'n	05	W hwrzmn MLKA W z'm-
06	[N]PŠE ALŠA W pth-	06	[...]dyn nppt[y]
07	[yzd]'n W t[...]	07	[...]

3. NEW EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

Notwithstanding Herzfeld's surveys and our own earlier work, the site still provided new epigraphic material. The impressive number of new finds, including those documented in our 2009 photogrammetry campaign at Slemani Museum,⁷ highlights the fact that due to very tough conditions and a lack of time and means Ernst Herzfeld was unable to lead an exhaustive archaeological documentation despite his three campaigns at Paikuli.

3.1. PB282 [A2]

This complete and well-preserved block (fig.1) was found on 20 June 2018 in the bed of the *wādī* skirting the northern slope of the monument's hillock. PB282 has five textual lines in Middle Persian, the first of which is seriously damaged. The identification places it at the beginning of the Middle Persian version. Like other inscribed blocks found in this area of the site it belonged to the right side of the monument's eastern wall,⁸ indicating that the blocks at the NE edge of the monument slipped downward into the NNE area of the slope.

01	(nlsh)[y]
02	-m'n AMT LNE
03	(h)lgwpt W LBAn
04	(H)DTA dstkrty
05	[hn]gwn ZY 'twky

3.1.1. NPi text

§ 1.

MP ^{A1,01} [ANE mzdysn bgy] ^{A2,01} **nlshy** [MLKAn] ^{A3,01} MLKA 'yr'n

Pa _{a1-a3} [ANE mzdysn ALHA nrysw MLKYN MLKA 'ry'n]

«I am the Mazdaean Majesty **Narseh** King of Kings of Ērān ...».

The find confirms Skjærvø's reconstruction of the opening line of the inscription. In MP inscriptions *bay* can be written as **bgy** or **ORHYA**; here in our restoration of missing words we follow the hypothesis put forward by Skjærvø in the Commentary against what was found in his reconstruction of the text, where all occurrences of **ORHYA** in the first paragraph are reconstructed.⁹

⁷ Cereti - Terribili 2014.

⁸ See below especially PB 269, PB 273, and PB 352.

⁹ Humbach - Skjærvø 1983a, 17; 1983b, 19-20 respectively.

§ 2-3.

MP^{A17,01} AYK LNE^{A1,02} [ca. 10 ll. z^{A2,02}]m'n AMT LNE^{A3,02} 'lmm'n MLKA^{A4,02}
HWYTNm

Pa [----- a_{17,01-a3,02} missing -----]

«[Thus We ...-](at) **the time when We** were King of the Armenians».

Here [z]m'n AMT “(at) the time when...” should probably be restored, otherwise, one may read [ʷ]zm'n “condemnation, punishment”,¹⁰ but possibly also “Qual, Anfechtung, Bosheit”,¹¹ for which compare §20 (B14,04-B15,04) where ʷwzm'n (Pa ʷwzmn) occurs in the verbal phrase pyšydy ʷwzm'n HWYTNt “had been punished before”.¹²

§ 5.

MP^{A1,03} [W BLBYTAn W]^{A2,03} hlgwpt W LBA^{A3,03} W 'z't'n W p'l^{A4,03} s'n W
plswb'n 'pwlsty

Pa^{a15,02} [W BRBYTAn W 'rkpty]^{a16,02} W RBAⁿ W 'z'tn^{a17,02} p'rs'n W prtwn' [...] ...]

«[the Princes and] **the Hargbed and Grandees** and Nobles and Persians and Parthians were informed».

Several such lists are found in Narseh's inscription, but the one found here is the most complete. Among Sasanian royal inscriptions only Šābuhr's at Hajjabad (ŠH) presents a similar sequence of notables.¹³ Compare the list found in § 17. (B4,03-B603 / b5,01-b6,01)¹⁴ where reference to the delegation of dignitaries asking for Narseh's intervention is made. The *hargbed* mentioned here may be *Šābuhr*, one of Narseh's main supporters mentioned in § 16. and § 32.¹⁵

§ 8.

MP^{A16,03} [...] A^{17,03} twmy W glmykc'n^{A1,04} [ca. 8-10 ll.] A^{2,04} HDTA dstkrty^{A3,04}
OBYDWNn

Pa^{a11,03} W MN NPŠE^{a12,03} twhm W grmykšn RBA^{a13,03} W 'z't HDT^{a14,03} dstkrty
OBDWn

«and I shall make **new appointees** of (both) my own family and the Grandees and Nobles of Garameans».

¹⁰ Durkin-Meisterernst 2014, 77.

¹¹ Sundermann 1981, 154.

¹² Humbach - Skjærvø 1983a with a different translation; 1938b, 55 and especially 159, where Skjærvø, basing himself on the Manichaean evidence, suggests “Anfechtung” to be the fittest meaning.

¹³ Humbach - Skjærvø 1983b, 45-46.

¹⁴ Within formulas also in § 36. (D8,02-D10,02 / c9,05-c10,05) [but with an inverted order], § 63. (F6,01-F9,01 / e10,03), and § 74. (f4,04-f6,04) [more articulated]. See also below PB 330 = A12,03.

¹⁵ Humbach - Skjærvø 1983a, 33, 41-42.

The occurrence in A2,04 confirms our reading of the new Parthian block a13, line 3.¹⁶ The arameogram **HDTA** was previously unattested in Middle Persian but matches the Parthian form **HDT** (*nōg*: “new”), which is also found in the documents from Nisa where it is associated with wine supplies.¹⁷ On **dstkrty** see the recent and detailed discussion.¹⁸

§ 11.

MP^{A17,04} sk'n MLKA^{A1,05} [ca. 8-10 ll.]^{A2,05} [hn]gwn ZY 'twky^{A3,05} HWE p'ls'n^{A4,05}
k'ly plm'tny W [^{A5-A6} missing ca. 20 ll.]

Pa [----- a8-a10 missing -----] a11,04 HWYt p'rsn k'ry
prm_{a12,04}yt n W dwšmryn ptyshw_{a13,04} YNTNtn W LA [...]

«... the King of Sakas [...] **similarly that (?) he be able** to govern the affairs of the Persians and to give an answer to the enemies and not ...».

Here again the paragraph matches a passage whose reading was already improved by the new Parthian blocks a12 and a13.¹⁹ The text seems here to include a formula connected with the legitimate sovereign's qualities and finds analogies with NPi §.73.²⁰ Despite the lacunas affecting both passages, the locutions “be able to govern the affairs of the Persians and to give an answer to the enemies” follow the same rhetoric pattern. Two restorations are possible for **-gwn** either **hngwn** “similarly” or **wgwn** “thus”. Considering the marks on the stone and since the word is immediately followed by **ZY**, we have chosen the former.

3.2. PB330 [A12]

The block (fig.2) was found on 25 June 2018 on the SE slope of the monument hill. It originally contained five textual lines in Middle Persian, however the line at the bottom is scarcely readable.

01 (Z)NE py[lwc] 'n(hy)[t]
02 (w)lhl'n ZY sk'n MLK
03 [..]šty AYK hl(g)w(p)
04 -(y) W AHRN (MN)W 'swr-
05 [h.....m.....]

3.2.1. NPi text

§ 2.

MP^{A11,01} plky^{A12,01} **ZNE py[lwc] 'nhyt**^{A13,01} [nrs]hy

Pa_{a11,01} plk_{a12,01} prgwz 'nhtyE nryshw

«**This** (is) the monument **Pērōz-Anāhīd**-Narseh».

¹⁶ Cereti - Terribili 2014, 355, n. 31.

¹⁷ Gignoux 1972, 52; Diakonov - Livshits 2001, 191.

¹⁸ Panaino 2022, 216.

¹⁹ Cereti - Terribili 2014, 360.

²⁰ On NPi § 73 see Cereti - Terribili 2014, 353, 379, integrating the evidence provided by the two new MP blocks G14/15.

The evidence corroborates our reading of the Parthian block a12.²¹ The new finds show that the name of the monument is *Pērōz-Anāhīd-Narseh*, confirming the important role played by the goddess Anāhīd in Sasanian royal ideology.²² Narseh used this name to enhance his political claims by emphasizing the connection with Anāhīd and sacral legitimation deriving from it. A. Gaspari recently discussed the term **plky** connecting it with Akk. *parakku*.²³

§ 4.

MP^{A7,02} W whwn' m^{A8,02} ZY ttlws' n [A9-A10 ----- pwšty?] A11,02 ZY ' hlmny W ŠYDAn^{A12,02} **wlhl' n ZY sk' n MLKA** A13,02 dydymy OSLWN
Pa^{a6,02} whyn' m ME ttrwsn^{a7,02} [pty] NPŠE drwznypy W [----- a8-a10 missing -----] a11,02 ASRt
«And Wahnām son of Tatus [through] his own falsehood and [with the support?] of Ahreman and the devils, conferred the Diadem to **Warahrān King of Sakas**».

The finding validates the reconstruction suggested by Humbach and Skjærvø. Considering the context, *Warahrān ī sagānšāh dēhēm bandēd* lit. “tied the Diadem on Warahrān King of the Sakas” can only be understood as an idiomatic phrase “conferred the diadem to...”. While here **OSLWN** should likely be understood as an historical present of the verb *bastan*, *band-*, the Pa form **ASRt** can only be the past participle.²⁴

§ 7.

MP^{A11,03} W QDM HNA 'tw^{A12,03} [ky kw]šty **AYK hlgrp[t]** A13,03 W LBA n W 'z't'n YK-^{A14,03} TLWNn
Pa^{a7,03} W 'pr ZK [----- a8-a10 missing -----]
«And I am capable in this respect **of killing** (to the extent) **that** I shall kill **the Hargbed** and the Grandees and the Nobles».

On the idiomatic use of **QDM HNA 'twky** we have accepted Skjærvø's suggestion. In the context the most probable reconstruction of the infinitive governed by *ādūg* is **kwšty**: *abar ēd ādūg kušt*. In this inscription 'twky is regularly constructed with the infinitive (e.g., § 68 33) 'twky d'štny **W plm' tny** “able to keep (...) and to govern”, while in Manichaean texts it is constructed both with the infinitive (auxiliary + inf.) and with *kū* + subjunctive.²⁵

²¹ Cereti - Terribili 2014, 355.

²² For the previously published passages see Cereti - Terribili 2014, 357-359; on the name of the monument see further Terribili in Colliva - Terribili 2017, 182-184. On the role played by Anāhīd in the Paikuli inscription and the western regions of Iran see Cereti 2021a, 71-84. On *Anāhīd* on Kushano-Sasanian coinage and her political relevance see Sinisi 2015, *passim*. See further Cereti 2021, 320; Cereti - Colliva - Terribili 2019, 7-8.

²³ Gaspari 2022.

²⁴ Humbach - Skjærvø. 1983a, 29; 1983b, 26-27.

²⁵ See further Humbach - Skjærvø 1983b, 30.

§ 10.

MP ^{A11,04} W p'lsy W pl[sw^{A12,04}b]y W AHRN MNW 'swr[s^{A13,04}t]n PWN p'hky
HWYTN

Pa [----- a4,04 – a5,04 missing -----] a6,04 'swrstn pty phrk a7,04 [...]
«And the Persians and Parthians **and others who** were at the border watch-post of
Asōrestān».

The fourth line of this block agrees with the textual reconstruction proposed by Humbach and Skjærvø.²⁶

The bottom line on the surface of the block is rather damaged and only two letters are still visible: **h** at the right edge and **m** in the middle.

3.3. *PB273 [B1]*

This semi-column inscribed in Middle Persian (fig.2) was found on 20 June 2018; like PB269 (H1) it lay at the bottom of the NNE slope of the monument hill. The orientation of the text proves that the piece was placed at the right corner of the eastern wall, marking the beginning of one of the tiers of the MP version. More specifically the shape of the block excludes tiers F, G, and H, while the philological analysis - though hampered by the poor condition of the epigraph - demonstrates that this piece was the first of tier B.²⁷

01 [...]
02 (Z)[Y] [s]p('h)[p]-
03 (W) AMT LN[E]
04 (W) dlwcn
05 W (')p[y](k) š-
06 [...]

3.3.1. *NPi text*§ 16.

MP ^{B16,01} W lhšy ^{B1,02} ZY sp'hp^{B2,02}t W

Pa a6,06 rhš spdpty W
«and Raxš **the General** and ...».²⁸

Although the first line is entirely missing, the sparse data from line 2 is compatible with the Parthian version and the interpretation of the text given by Skjærvø.²⁹

²⁶ Humbach - Skjærvø 1983a, 31.

²⁷ Along with PB352, this block proves that the Middle Persian textual lines began from the semi-column pieces placed at the right corner of the wall. On this feature, see below (PB352) for further discussions.

²⁸ Narseh's inscription contains two lists of great dignitaries, the first in § 16, the second in § 32. In the first list *Raxš* the *Spāhbed* comes before *Ardašīr Surēn* in the Middle Persian version, while the latter precedes the former in the Parthian version. In the second list *Raxš* is mentioned far behind, after several dignitaries and members of the great families (Humbach - Skjærvø 1983b, 38-39).

²⁹ Humbach - Skjærvø 1983a, 33.

§ 17.MP^{B1,03} **W AMT LNE**^{B2,03} PWN klpkyhyPa^{b2,01} **W AMT LN** pty krp[kpy]«**And when We**, in a state of benevolence ...».

The third line of PB273 smoothly fits the known Parthian text of § 17.

§ 18.MP^{B16,03} [MN ?] SLYA^{B1,04} **W dlwcn**^{B2,04} ANŠWTA 'ywPa [-----^{b16,01-b1,02} missing -----]«[from] evil **and liar** men may [...]».

The new evidence shows that this fragmentary section requires a revision of its textual content which is apparently somewhat shorter than Skjærvø expected it to be.³⁰ The passage occurs in a very significant part of the text describing the dignitaries' plea to Narseh and their request to re-establish the dynastic order. In this occurrence, as in other passages, the connotation of the political adversaries is portrayed through a language that has immediate analogies with both Zoroastrian tradition and Achaemenid legacy.³¹

§§ 20-21.MP^{B16,04} OL 'y[r'n]štry^{B1,05} **W 'pl[y]k š**^{B2,05}try W gyw'kPa [-----^{b13,02-b14,02} missing -----]«...to Ērānšahr **and the other** lands and places ...».

The proposed reading, supported by the reconstruction of the previous lines, suggests that PB273 was contiguous to block B2.

3.4. *PB161 [E7]*

This Middle Persian block (fig.2) was found on the north-eastern slope of the Paikuli hill on 14 June 2018. The line at the bottom is completely abraded, while the first five lines are fully readable and match the interpretation of the blocks E6 and E8 given by Cereti and Terribili.³² Moreover, the resulting textual lines are a good match with the corresponding Parthian text.

01 nyw'k'n MNW
 02 -BWNm W sk'n M-
 03 OL LNE YHB-
 04 -WN ZY čygwn w-
 05 -TYW W bgšhpw-
 06 [.....]

³⁰ Humbach - Skjærvø 1983a, 34.

³¹ See, among many others, Cereti 2002.

³² Cereti - Terribili 2014, 351, 369-375.

3.4.1. NPi text§ 48.

MP ^{E6,01} [-----] ^{E7,01} **nyw'k'n MNW** ^{E8,01} LK 'p[y]ny[d'pk] [... YTY]^{E9,01} BWNst
HWE

Pa [_{d2,04} -----] _{d3,04} ny'kn MNW ANT 'pyny'pk [_{d4,04} -----]

«[that throne of your father and] **ancestors which** you have in an unfitting way sat upon».

The use of **MNW** /*kē*/ with *inanimata* is attested in Zoroastrian and Manichaean Middle Persian. This occurrence, when correctly reconstructed, shows that it should not be considered a late characteristic.³³

§§ 50-51.

MP ^{E4,02} ... pr'c OL 'swrstn [^{E5,02} -----] ^{E6,02} -ry štrdstn YTY^{E7,02} **BWNm**
W sk'n M^{E8,02} LKA AYK [... ...]

Pa _{d13,04} ... prhš _{d14,04} OL 'swrstn OL _{d15,04} wryhrmšhypwyr [----- _{d16-d17,04} -----]

«forth to Asōrestān, **We settled** in the city of Warahrām-Šābuhr and when the **King of Sakas** ...».

The evidence confirms the verbal heterogram that we tentatively identified as **YTYBWN-**, *nišāstan, nišān*- “sit, establish, settle”, in 2014.³⁴ Interestingly, block E7 also provides the 1st plural indicative desinence (**-m**) proving that the agent of this action is Narseh himself who, after having met his supporters at Paikuli, moved to the presumably nearby city of Warahrām-Šābuhr in Asōrestān.³⁵

§ 53.

MP ^{E6,03} štry-hwt' dyhy ^{E7,03} **OL LNE YHB**^{E8,03} BWN W YDOYT(N)t [...]

Pa _{d13,05} W hštr-_{d14,05} hwtwypy OL LN _{d15,05} YNTNt W YDOEt AYK

«and the rulership over the land **had been given to Us**, then he knew that: ...».

§ 56.

MP [^{E5,04} ----] ^{E6,04} -l W dšny LA YHW^{E7,04} **WN ZY čygnw w**^{E8,04} hwn'm
OBY(DWN)t [...]

Pa [----- _{d12,06-d13,06} -----] _{d14,06} HWEnt šwgnw _{d15,06} whwn'm OBDWd LBRA

«and there was no agreement, **about how Wahnām** did..., out ...».

³³ Humbach - Skjærvø 1983a, 31, with reference to Boyce 1964, 31 and Brunner 1977, 86. See further Durkin-Meisterernst 2014, 215-219 and Gignoux 1972, 29 for other occurrences in IMP.

³⁴ Cereti - Terribili 2014, 369.

³⁵ The toponym *Warahrām-Šābuhr* is attested here and possibly in another passage of Narseh's inscription Humbach - Skjærvø 1983b, 83. The text makes it clear that Narseh chose this town as his temporary residence while in Asōrestān, but we do not have sufficient evidence to identify it with known historical settlements. According to Gyselen 2019, 224 it may have been founded by Šābuhr I and later have been given another name, and therefore is not attested in administrative glyptic evidence.

The evidence helps to restore the text of this challenging passage even if the precise meaning still eludes us. It might refer to the lack of agreement between Narseh and the opposite faction, stressing the negative role of Wahnām. As a matter of fact, the subsequent paragraphs of the inscription (§ 57-58) describe the surrender of Wahrām III's followers and the capture of Wahnām. On *dašn* [dšny] “agreement” (lit. “right hand”) see Skjærvø and compare among many others the examples of δεξιῶσις found in Anthiocus I of Commagene's iconographic program.³⁶

§ 58.

MP [E5,05 -----]E6,05 OL BBA ZY LNE E7,05 [HY]TYW W bgšhpwE8,05hry št[rd'ly][...]
Pa e12,01 [W]š ASRt OLYN T[ROA] e13,01 [HYT]YW W bgš[hypwhr] [e14,01 -----]
«and **bring** him bound to Our Court. And **Bayšābuhr** the Landholder ...».

E7,05 shows the imperative form of the verb *ānīdan*, *ānay-*, “to bring, lead”, here represented by a bare heterogram without desinences. **št[rd'ly]** the reconstruction is hypothetical, a reading **štrp** “satrap” would also be possible. Here we have translated *šahrdār* as “landholder” as done by Humbach and Skjærvø for other occurrences in Narseh's inscription.³⁷ However, here the meaning is probably more in the range of “governor”.³⁸

3.5. PB352 [F1-f16]

The block is a bell-shaped semi-column base (fig.3) and was found in August 2018 by the guardian of the site, Nawzad Barkali, and then recovered by the Representative of the Directorate of Sulaimaniyah Antiquities, Zana Abdulkarim Qadir. The piece was lodged into the left bank of the *wādī* at the foot of the northern slope of the Paikuli hillock. The finding is extremely important to understand two aspects concerning the display of the two inscriptions on the monument. For one, PB352 is - up to now - the only piece bearing two inscribed surfaces, one in Middle-Persian and the other in Parthian. This feature demonstrates the contiguity of the walls on which the two epigraphs were written, therefore radically changing a consolidated *communis opinio* based on Herzfeld's work, who believed the texts to have been engraved on two opposite sides of the monument (namely, east-west).³⁹ In fact, the Middle Persian incipit of the text started - similarly to the Parthian one - from the semi-column pieces forming the right edge of the corresponding wall. The two blocks are the first of their genre to be discovered for the Middle Persian version. The same can be said for the Parthian side because PB352 (f16) is the only evidence attesting that in the Parthian version the lines also

³⁶ On δεξιῶσις in Commagene see i.a. Facella 2006, 289-291, 475, fig. 37; on giving someone the right hand in the Mediterranean and Iranian context see Panaino 2022, 228; on the ties between Commagene and the Iranian world see i.a. Shayegan 2016.

³⁷ Humbach - Skjærvø 1983a, 126.

³⁸ Gignoux 1972, 34.

³⁹ For a summary see Humbach - Skjærvø 1983b, 7-9; Kozad 2011; Cereti - Terribili 2012.

⁴⁰ See above.

ended on the semi-column pieces at the left corner of the corresponding wall.⁴¹ The new blocks therefore refute premature conjectures on the span of the two inscriptions based on previously available data.⁴²

The finding offers an architectural counterpart to the bell-shaped semi-column published in 2014 bearing the beginning of the Parthian tier f and constituting the right corner of the carved wall (block f1a).⁴³ Both pieces rested on the protruding podium at the base of the monument and hosted the sixth tier of the respective inscription (i.e., MP F; Pa f). A further feature that PB352 (i.e., F1-f16) shares with the bell-shaped semi-column f1a concerns the number of inscribed lines on these two blocks. For the Parthian version both contain only five textual lines instead of the expected six as the other blocks of the Pa tier f indicate. A similar situation pertains to the MP part of PB352 (i.e., F1) where only four textual lines out of the five expected in MP tier F are found. Evidently the physical features of the two pieces resulted in this epigraphical oddity.

Middle Persian Text		Parthian Text
_____	01	_____
p ... y	02	W T[N](E)
Y(H)[W](WN)	03	(W ?) [ws]pn ? (G ?)
[wcy]ly (?)	04	(B?) twhm
ME L(N)E	05	[.] t [.]
_____	06	[LK]M ALH(YN/A)

3.5.1. Middle Persian text

§ 64.

MP^{F16,01} (...) W^{F17,01} LNE MNW L^{F18,01} [KWM ...]^{F1,02} P[WN] [k]y^{F2,02} rpkhyh

Pa [----- e1-2,04 missing -----]

«and We whom thanks to your **grace/good deeds**».

This part of the text is placed after the barely readable first line of tier F and corresponds to the end of an extensive lacuna in the Parthian text. The reading adopted above shows a hitherto unknown spelling in IMP: **kyrpkhyh** instead of **krpkhyh** or **klpkhyh** as the word *kirbagīh*, “beneficence, grace, pietas” is usually rendered in IMP.⁴⁴ The resulting spelling would be closer to MMP **kyrbgy(y)**, **qyrbgy(h)**, **qyrbgy(y)**,⁴⁵ marking the presence of a front high vowel in the first syllable. A second possible interpretation of the data would be to consider the particle PWN as belonging to the previous and damaged block (i.e., F18,01), therefore reconstructing a longer phrase **W LNE MNW LKWM PWN pwšty W kyrpkhyh** (*ud amā kē ašmāh pad pōšt ud kirbagīh*), «and We whom thanks to your protection and

⁴¹ This feature is repeatedly attested for the Middle Persian version, where different semi-column pieces bear the end of textual lines.

⁴² See Terribili 2016, 154-158.

⁴³ See Cereti - Terribili 2014, 356, pl. 10, 412. For some improvements in the readings see Terribili 2016.

⁴⁴ Gignoux 1972, 25.

⁴⁵ Durkin-Meisterernst 2004, 220.

grace». This latter hypothesis would also fit the available space in F1,02 and the scarcely visible traces on the surface.

§ 65.

MP^{F17,02} MLKA m[sy^{F18,02} W Š]PY[R LA]^{F1,03} YHWWN

Pa [-----_{e15-16,04} missing -----]

«no King **was** greater and better».

As in the case of the second line of block F18,⁴⁶ and though barely readable, the evidence found in F1,03 broadly confirms Skjærvø's reconstruction.⁴⁷

§ 67.

MP^{F18,03} A[Pšn^{F1,04(03)} **wcyly**]^{F2,04} HNA-'wgn krt

Pa_{e12,05} Wšn wyšry ZK-_{e13,05}znk OBDT

«and they took the following **decision** ...».

Since only the two last letters of this term are clearly visible, the reconstruction of *wizīr* [**wcyly**], “decision, judgement”, is highly hypothetical and mostly based on the comparison with the corresponding Parthian version. Nonetheless, it fits well with the contents of F18,03 published in 2014.⁴⁸

§ 69.

MP^{F18,04} ()yw YM(LLW)Nt^{F1,05(04)} **ME LNE**^{F2,05} KN YCBEt

Pa_{e12,06} hyp (...) _{e13,06} ME LN k' mywt

«...Let him say (so)! **Because we** wish that ...».

The line follows on F18,04 published in 2014⁴⁹ and is a good match with the Parthian version.

3.5.2. Parthian text

§ 72.

MP [-----_{G3,02 - G5,02} missing -----] _{G6,02} g'sy wndlšny HWE

Pa_{f14,02} B hštr [_{f15,02} -----] _{f16,02} **W TNE** _{f1,03} gtw [-----]

«in the reign ... **and here** may be the establishment of a throne».

As a matter of fact, the extension of the gap between the blocks presently numbered f14 and f16 is not easy to assess. One block may be missing but it is also possible that neither of them are lost, f14 and f16 being contiguous. The discovery in 2009 of the initial bell-shaped semi-column and the arguable presence of a further additional block immediately following

⁴⁶ Cereti - Terribili 2014, 376.

⁴⁷ Humbach - Skjærvø 1983a, 57.

⁴⁸ Cereti - Terribili 2014, 376.

⁴⁹ Cereti - Terribili 2014, 377.

the semi-column (i.e., f1b) and placed before f2 suggest that the numbering of the Parthian tier f should be reconsidered.⁵⁰ Since a large lacuna affects the corresponding textual line in the MP version it is hard to establish the correct progression of blocks and text. **TNE**: considering that the present condition of the surface does not allow us to correctly read the sign in the mid, the heterogram **TME** (Pa $\delta\delta$), “there” should also be considered as a possible reading.

§ 73.

MP [----- G3,03 - G5,03 missing -----
 'tw]^{G6,03}ky HWE štry d'^{G7,03}[štny]
 Pa f14,03 AYK hštr W ptykws [f15,03 -----] f16,03 **W(?) wspn (?) g (?)** f1,04 wypryd
 [f1b,04 -----] f2,04 HWYt hštr HHSNtn f3,04 W prmytn
 «so that the realm and the districts [...] **and all** [...] will increase [the one who] is
 able to »

As stated above, the textual sequence f16-f1a poses severe interpretation problems which will be dealt with in the forthcoming edition of the Paikuli inscription.⁵¹

§ 76.

MP ^{G2,04}HTtn [omitted] MN KZYnky [----- G3,04-G5,04 missing -----
 --]
 Pa f13,04 'k LKM f14,04 ALHYN MN hsynk PNE_{f15,04}[-rwn ...] f16,04 **(B) twhm** f1,05
 [..]ng[..
 «If Your Majesty from the side of the ancestors [...] **in the family**».

The new evidence suggests a revision of f1,05 though the overall sense of the passage is maintained.⁵² Thus it reads **B** /andar/, also attested in the same sequence in f1a,02.⁵³ The alternative reading **TW]B** /did/ seems semantically less probable. The MP version apparently omits **ORHYA** attested by Pa **ALHYN**.

§ 78.

MP [^{G16,04} ----] ^{G1,05}-štry ADYN drwdstly [W N]^{G2,05}TLWNtwmy YKOYMWnt
 Pa f13,05 W 'ry 'n-hštr f14,05 'dyn drwyštstr W NTR_{f15-16,05}[s]t[r] (?) f1,06 HQAYMWd
 «And *Ērānšahr* will then stay healthier and more protected».

According to the comparison with the Middle Persian text, the amount of text between f14,05 and f1,06 should be very limited if any at all.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ See further Terribili 2016.

⁵¹ For this passage and f1,04 see further Terribili 2016, 151, 159-160.

⁵² See further Terribili 2016, 161.

⁵³ Terribili 2016, 149-150.

⁵⁴ See further Terribili 2016, 152-155. For the new evidence provided by a fragment of G1 see Cereti - Terribili 2014, 353, 380.

§ 81.

MP ^{G14,05} 'yny'tn AYŠ hmgwnky [----- ^{G15,05-G1,06} missing -----
-----]

Pa ^{f13,06} AHRNtn ^{f14,06} AYŠ hmygwnk LA YHWt ^{f16,06} [LK]M ALHA [^{g1,01} -----] ^{g2,01}
y'ztn prksywt HWYt

«No one else was like **You, (Your) Majesty** ... the gods have favoured».

Here the evidence shows the reverential form to address the sovereign. The locution is often used in Paikuli, and specifically in this section reproducing the formulaic expressions of Sasanian royal crowning.⁵⁵

3.6. *PB462 [F8]*

This Middle Persian block (fig.3) was discovered in a wall of an abandoned house in the village of Barkal by the guardian of the site, Nawzad Barkali in January 2019. As in the case of the bell-shaped base f1a, discovered in 2006 in a sheep pen in the same village, the finding demonstrates that in recent times material taken from the Paikuli monument was reused by inhabitants of the area. The inscribed surface is well preserved, and its content helps to clarify some passages pertaining to Narseh's ascension to the throne.

01 BLBYTA W LBAn W ' -
02 'rthštr MLK[An]
03 -WWN HWEnd ZYšn
04 LNE AHRN AYŠ AY-
05 (n) ZY yzd'n hwnbwl

3.6.1. NPi text§ 63.

MP ^{F6,01} W hlgwpt [W] ^{F7,01} [štrd'l'n W] ^{F8,01} BLBYTA W LBAn W ^{'F9,01} [z't']n W
Pa [----- ^{e8,03-e9,03} missing -----] ^{e10,03} RBAn W 'z'tn W
«and the Hargbed [and the Landholders] and the **Princes and the Grandees** and the
Nobles and ...».

F8,01 restores part of a formulaic enumeration of dignitaries, which occurs frequently, though with some variations, in Narseh's inscription. The content of this line largely confirms the reconstruction and translation proposed by Skjærvø.⁵⁶

§ 65.

MP ^{F6,02} W HT 'yw-b'ly [^{F7,02} -----] ^{F8,02} 'rthštr MLKAn ^{F9,03} MLKA [PWN]
pwšty Z[Y ^{F10,02} yzd'n]

⁵⁵ On the coronation ceremonial in the early Sasanian period and on Narseh's crowning see further Shenkar 2018, 120-133 which deserves to be further discussed.

⁵⁶ Humbach - Skjærvø 1983a, 56.

Pa_{e6,04} W 'k HD-y' wr LHwyn ALHYN [----- e7,04-e9,04 missing -----
 ---]
 «And if once His Majesty **Ardaxšīr**, the King **of Kings**, with the help (of the gods)».

In this case, F8 remarkably fills a lacuna in the text restoring the name of the founder of the Sasanian dynasty. The comparison with the fourth line of the Parthian block e6, published in 2014,⁵⁷ suggests that the missing F7,02 must have included the MP locution **OLEšn ORHYAn** (*awēšān bayān*), lit. “Their Majesties”, used as *pluralis maiestatis*. The evocative reference to Ardašīr I in F8,02, at the beginning of Narseh’s crowning speech, stresses the role of this pivotal figure in the context of royal legitimation, as is clear from the following lines. In light of the new findings and of those published in 2014, the rhetorical use of the names of the first two Sasanian kings, Ardašīr and Šābuhr, emerges clearly.

§ 65-66.

MP^{F5,03} ORHYA 'rthštr^{F6,03} MLKAn MLKA 'wgnw d[^{F7,03} ----- YH]^{F8,03} **WWN**
HWEnd ZY-šn^{F9,03} HT 'yw-b'ly šhp[^{F10,03} -----]^{F11,03} psd'lyk krtý
 Pa [e2,05 -----]^{e3,05} MLKYN MLKA [...] ^{e4,05} W QLYW hrtw YHWt
 HWYnt^{e5,05} LHwyn 'k HD-y' wr ^{e6,05} šhypwhr MLKYN MLKA [e7,05 -----]
 «...Majesty Ardašīr King of Kings in such a way [...] **they have been, that** if once **they** had made Šābuhr King of Kings a guardian....».

The new find confirms that Skjærvø’s suggested reading of the Parthian block e4, based on Rawlinson’s faulty sketch, is probably the correct one. The verbal form is likely governed by the syntagm found in the previous section - namely MP **HT 'yw-b'ly** (*agar ēw bār*), / Pa **'k HD-y' wr** (*agar ēw yāwar*) “if once” - which introduces a hypothetical phrase. In both cases the conditional sentences contain the name of a prestigious royal ancestor, respectively the first and the second dynast of the Sasanians.⁵⁸ Pa **QLYW hrtw** has not been translated and may here represent a compound adjective used adverbially, the second member possibly being *xrad* “wisdom, counsel”.⁵⁹

§ 68.

MP^{F6,04} (...) BRA MNW YD[OYTN] [^{F7,04} -----]^{f8,04} **LNE AHRN AYŠ AY**^{f9,04} [T]Y
 ZY MN šhpwhry
 Pa [----- e1,06-e2,06 missing -----]^{e3,06} AYŠ AYTY MNW MN^{e4,06}
 šhypwhr MLKA r'šts^{e4,06}tr
 «...but whoever may know [...] **us, there is anybody else** (who is) more righteous than King Šābuhr...».

⁵⁷ Cereti - Terribili 2014, 356, 375.

⁵⁸ On the ceremonial tune characterizing the language of this long section see Terribili 2016, 159-162 with references. On conditional phrases in Middle Persian and Parthian see Durkin-Meisterernst 2014, 444-452.

⁵⁹ See further Humbach - Skjærvø 1983b, 103.

The personal pronoun of first pl. (**LNE**, *amā*, “we, us”) occurring at the beginning of the fourth line of this block seems to belong to a phrase preceding the one beginning with **AHRN**, *any* “other”.

§ 69.

MP ^{F6,05} MNW yzd'n nsthy [^{F7,05} -----] ^{F8,05} -n **ZY yzd'n hwnbwt**[^{F9,05}]y
YBLWNt

Pa _{f2,01} MNW y'ztn n[y]sh[t] HWE d _{f3,01} [W kr]tkny M[E] y'ztn [_{f4,01} -----]
-----]

«the one who the gods may have prepared and (who) may carry out the **hwnbwt**[..]
of the gods».

The hapax legomenon (?) **hwnbwt**[..]y, can hardly be reconstructed in its wholeness because of the loss of one or two graphemes lying between the two blocks. The form seems to be a compound with the root *burd-*, also giving the verb *burdan*, *bar-* “carry, bear, take, endure”. The first part, **hwn-** can either be read *xōn-* “blood” or *xwan-* (cf. MMP **xwn-** “to be heard, sound” and **xwndg** “invoked, created”)⁶⁰ the latter possibly a defective spelling for transitive *xwān-* “to call, invoke”.⁶¹ For a possible compound *xōn-burdan* compare NP *xun az piš burdan* “to shed blood with impunity” and *xun bar āvardan* “to let blood”.⁶² The context apparently requires some sort of ritual or service of the Gods, either a ritual of invocation, if read *xwān-burd*^o or a ritual implying the shedding of blood, if read *xōn-burd*^o. Less probable are forms implying a first member connected with *hunīdan*, *hun-* and *hunišn* “to press”, “extract”, one is tempted to connect the first part with the well-known prefix *hu-*, “good, well” but the **-n-** is difficult to explain.⁶³

3.7. PB269 [H1]

The block was found at the bottom of the NNE slope of the monument hillock on 20 June 2018. It is a corner block with two smoothed surfaces (fig.3). On the shorter one, three textual lines in Middle Persian are still recognizable, while the first two lines are missing due to damage to the block’s upper part. According to the shape of this piece and the orientation of the writing, PB269 was part of the protruding podium at the base of the monument. It marked the beginning of a Middle Persian tier, being placed at the right edge of this inscribed wall. Only two tiers of this version were engraved on the podium base, namely G and H. Two elements suggest that PB269 was the first block of tier H: a) the empty space below the last textual line, which is a feature shared by the other blocks of tier H. On the contrary tier G

⁶⁰ Durkin-Meisterernst 2004, 368.

⁶¹ For defective spellings of **xw'n-** in MMP see Durkin-Meisterernst 2004, 365.

⁶² Steingass 1892, 488.

⁶³ F8,05 is damaged at the end, and one or two letters are likely to be missing. Therefore, the chances are that the forms are either infinitives *xōn-burdan* or *xwān-burdan* or else agent nouns, either *xōn-burdār* or *xwān-burdār*. In IMP *xōn* is found only once, written heterographically ***DMYA**, (ŠKZ §8, cf. Huyse 1999a, 27; 1999b, 51). However, in MP the phonetic form is also well attested, and in compounds it is commonly written **hwn-** (see, i.a. Moazami 2014, 552 for occurrences in the *Pahlavi Widēwdād*). A compound such as *xwān-burd*^o would likely refer to an invocation ritual, for which one may compare *xwāndār*, “invoker”, in the Middle Persian *zand* of Yasna 31.4 (Malandra - Ichaporia 2010, 179).

contained 7 textual lines that filled the entire face of the block; and b) the longer surface of PB269 doesn't bare any trace of carving; on the contrary, if it had been placed in correspondence to the Parthian tier g, it could have probably contained the last and missing words of the Parthian version, which actually ends with the tier g.⁶⁴ The inscribed surface is much abraded and only a few letters are still visible.⁶⁵

01 [... .. .]
 02 [... .. .]
 03 [...] (l) 'n [...]
 04 M(LKA pkw)[ry]
 05 g' nč' n

3.7.1. NPi text

§ 92.

MP ^{H1,03} [...] **(l) 'n** [...] ^{H2,03} 'spnydy W hwlzm 'n MLKA
 Pa [----- _{g17,04-g1,05} missing -----] W hwrzmn MLKA
 «[...] **rān** [...] Aspny and the King of Xwārizm».

The evidence is too fragmentary to attempt any kind of interpretation; it may be part of the proper name or epithet associated with the likewise problematic Aspny.

§ 92-93.

MP ^{H18,03} (...) 'mr ^{H1,04} [w -----] **M[L](KA pkw)[ry]** ^{H2,04} ZY dhydkn nhwpty
 Pa _{g16,05} 'mrw 'pgrn 'n [_{g1,06} -----] _{g2,06} -r [...] dyn nppty
 «Amru **king** of the Abgars (?) (and) **Pakur** Nāhbed of Dahestān».

Since H1 is badly preserved, the reading is highly hypothetical. The line seems to provide the status of the Amru mentioned in the Parthian version (g16,05), then followed by the proper name of the ruler of Dahestān, Pakur, carried by many kings in the Iranian, and especially Arsacid, tradition.⁶⁶

§ 93.

MP ^{H1,05} 'nč' n ^{H2,05} MROHY
 Pa _{g15,06} hrtywd l'k[n] _{g16,06} hwtywy
 «(Xradjōy) Lord of **Lāk/Anzān** (?)».

Though the Middle Persian and Parthian versions here appear not to match one another, it must be taken in account that the reading in g15,06 is not certain due to a fracture of the

⁶⁴ On the contiguity of the two inscribed walls see above.

⁶⁵ The block belongs to the last section of the inscription, in which several minor dynasts are mentioned, see further Humbach - Skjærvø 1983b, 129; Frye 1956, 324, n.2; Henning, 1952, 511; Chaumont 1975.

⁶⁶ Cf. with the royal name Pacorus/Πακορος occurring in Latin and Greek sources (Justi 1895, 238-240). See further Gignoux 1986, II/144, n.741. On the title *Nāh(u)bed*, Arm. *Nahapet*, see further Humbach - Skjærvø 1983b, 126-127.

stone. Moreover, in this section the two versions do not necessarily agree on the order of the dignitaries mentioned. The first letter is not unequivocal, and the reading **gnč'n** /*ganzān*/ cannot be ruled out.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Despite these texts' limited extension and problematic interpretation, their material discloses many points to ponder. Two of the 2018-2019 findings (PB350; PB351) indicate the degree of decay suffered by the epigraphic evidence in the last century. Others (PB282; PB330; PB161; PB462) confirm or add appreciable details regarding Sasanian royal ideology and language. Moreover, three pieces (PB273 PB352; PB269) reveal outstanding data on the arrangement of the two texts upon the monument's wall. Most importantly, the material emphasizes the worth of working on the field, conducting systematic investigations and innovative documentation. This aspect finds further corroboration in the outcomes of the last campaign at Paikuli (April - May 2022), when new epigraphic evidence has been brought to light.⁶⁷ The material, now moved to the Slemani Museum for safekeeping, will soon be the object of photogrammetric survey and philological analysis. Alongside the unedited blocks published in Cereti - Terribili 2014 and in the present paper, the 2022 findings at Paikuli again highlight the urgent need to undertake a new and comprehensive edition of this extraordinary epigraphic source.

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⁶⁷ We extend our heartfelt thanks to Dr. Barbara Faticoni, who led the field activities at Paikuli, and to the Department of Antiquity of Sulaimaniyah and the Department of Antiquity of Garmian for their unwavering support.

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Fig. 1 - PB350, PB351, and PB282 3D Renderings. Images processed by Studio 3R and MAIKI.



PB161 [E7]



PB330 [A12]



PB273[B1]

Fig. 2 - PB161, PB330, and PB273 3D Renderings. Images processed by Studio 3R and MAIKI.

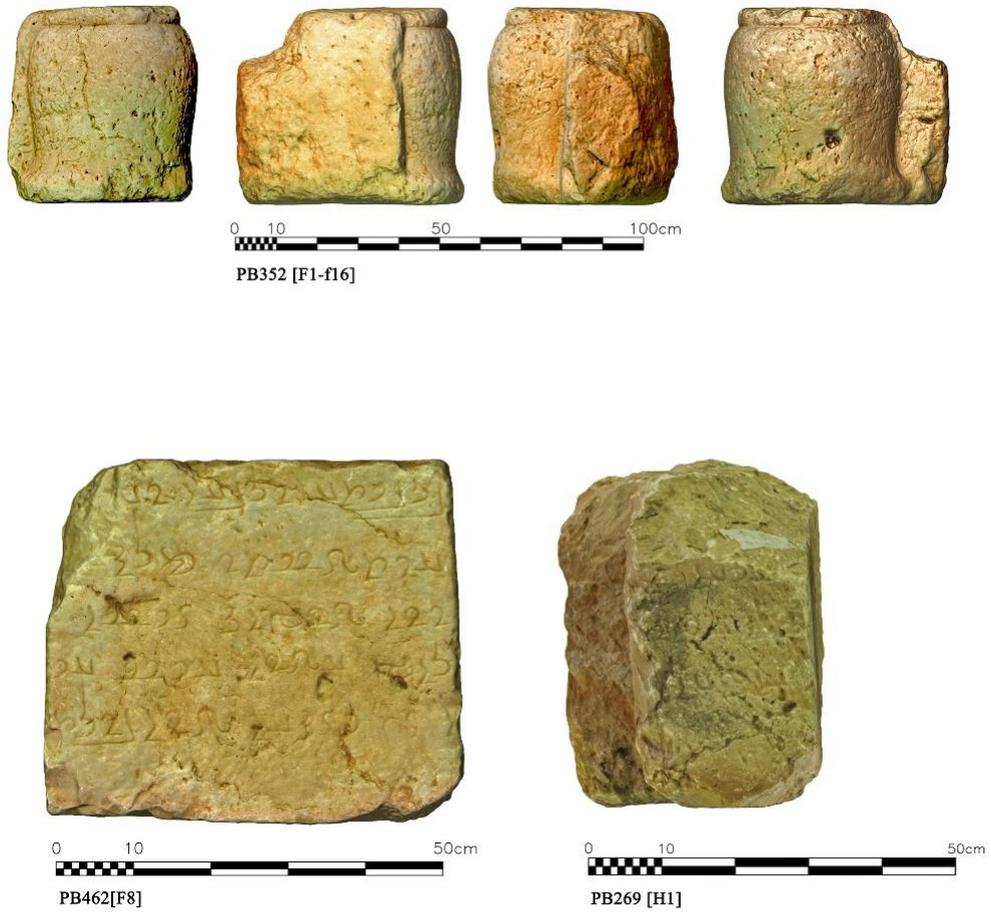


Fig. 3 - PB352, PB462, and PB269 3D Renderings. Images processed by Studio 3R and MAIKI.