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## Rural and Agricultural Activities Landscape in the Center of Achaemenid Empire based on Persepolis Administrative Tablets

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### ABSTRACT

Village and agriculture in the Achaemenid Empire has not been a case of research, so some aspects of rural and agricultural economy in this period remain relatively unclear. Classical sources provide scattered but important information about Village and rural settlements in the Achaemenid Empire, but it is not possible to make a comprehensive analysis of structures and mechanisms of agricultural, husbandry, and ranch activities based on them. The archaeological studies do not provide much information about villages. While, tens of thousands documents belonging to the Achaemenid administrative archives provide valuable information about this topic directly and indirectly. The Persepolis Fortification Archive, dating the reign of Darius I (486-522 BC) is an important one. Archive texts are related to the management of production, storage, distribution, and redistribution of agricultural and commodities products in Persia. The present study will examine the status of villages and agricultural activities in the center of Achaemenid Empire in Fars based on the analysis of the Persepolis Fortification archive. The results of this study show that there was a systematic and interconnected organization in the management of agricultural affairs in Fars, which was controlled by the central administration in Persepolis. The approximately 5,000 inscriptions that have been read so far, on the one hand, shed light on the issue of ownership of villages, agricultural lands, and Paradises, which had been previously addressed by Greek historians. On the other hand, they show the complexity of the management cycle and circulation of agricultural products and their by-products.

**Keywords:** Achaemenids, Persepolis Fortification Archive, Clay tablets, Villages and rural settlements, Agriculture.

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## **Introduction**

The Persepolis Fortification archive tablets provide valuable information about administrative system which manage center of Achaemenid Empire in the Fars and eastern Khuzestan in the reign of Darius I (486-522 BC). The tablets are related to management of production, distribution and re-distribution of commodities such as: grains, wine and beer, meat and fruits and matters related to the use of these products for matters as: the table of the king and courtiers, the workers' wages and officials, the food rations for religious ceremonies, and rations of travelers and animals. The aim of this research is to present a landscape of rural and agricultural settlements in the center of the Achaemenid Empire based on the Fortification archive.

## **Materials & Method**

Therefore, the article examines the issue of villages and agricultural activities in Fars and its relationship with the administration in Persepolis. For this, we will study and analyze the Fortification archive texts to examine those parts of the texts that mention villages and the cycle of agricultural products to gain a better understanding of the state of agriculture and its management in the center of empire.

## **Discussion**

**Villages in the Persepolis Fortification Archive:** As mentioned above, the main activities of the Fortification archive are related to the management of the administrative affairs of Achaemenid imperial center in the field of food, that is, agricultural and livestock products which were used for various purposes. The archival texts provide valuable information directly and indirectly about villages and agriculture in the center of the Achaemenid Empire in Fars, and by putting them together can achieved a better understanding of rural settlement situation and agriculture in this region. Direct information is related to the issue of ownership of villages, and indirect evidence is actually the amount and type of circulation of agricultural and garden products in the Fars region, which indicates the situation of rural settlement and agriculture.

1 .Ownership of villages: In the Persepolis Fortification archive several toponyms are clearly called villages. In most of the texts that this word identified, it is Elamite word of *humanuš* or *umanuš* (Hallock, 1969: 698; Henkelman, 2010: 727; Hintz & Koch, 1987: 694). While in Old Persian, according to linguists, the word *kantiya* means village. In the Fortification archive, in a few cases, such as the PF 1988, it is mentioned as *kantia* (Tavernier, 2007: 225). Based on what the tablets provides, with possibility of

some overlapping, the villages of the imperial center can be divided into three groups:

- The first is independent villages where small farmer's work and part of their products was received by the Persepolis administration in the form of baziš or tax.

- The second group is villages belonging to the king and the courtiers

- The third, villages that were probably placed in the lands called Irmatam and their management was handed over to high-ranking officials.

2. Procedures of flow and distribution of agricultural products: A large amount of agricultural commodities and their products, along with livestock, are recorded in the Persepolis tablets as various activities that clearly show the dynamics of the agricultural economy of the region. Although, these documents do not directly provide us with information about the methods and stages of work, due to their administrative nature, they appear scattered and report-like texts, but putting their information together is very important in reconstructing the management of rural and agricultural affairs of the imperial center.

The texts were classified into two groups, namely "texts related to planting agricultural products" and "texts related to storing and allocating products", each one is divided into smaller groups according to the activities they support.

Texts related to planting and gardening: These tablets can be classified into two categories: "setting aside grains for seed" and "tree planting."

Texts related to storing and allocating products: The issue of the flow of agricultural products and activities related to them covers a wide range of texts.

The activities carried out can be classified into several groups, including:

- Storing various grains and fruits

- Setting aside grains for fodder

- Setting aside grains and fruits for the annual balance of accounts

- Setting aside grains and fruits and sending them to the table of the king and courtiers

- Setting aside grains and fruits for provisions and paying salaries to employees and workers

- Sending grains and agricultural products to produce products such as flour, bread, beer, wine.

## **Results and Conclusion**

A main part of information recorded in the Fortification archive is directly and indirectly related to agricultural and livestock matters. These texts show that numerous infrastructures, including local, regional and royal storehouse, were built and operated for storing commodities. Undoubtedly, to produce this high volume of agricultural products mentioned in the texts, there were vast arable

lands under cultivation of various cereals and orchards with various fruit trees in the region. Same applies to the maintenance of large herds of cattle. The information recorded in the tablets does not directly refer to how agricultural products were planted and harvested. Some texts recorded the movement of workers between large farms or the payment of wages to them, which indicates that these workers were engaged in activities related to agriculture. What is mainly recorded in the archive texts is the process of storing grains and fruits in various storehouses. The issue of storehouses and storage in the Persepolis Fortification archive is another matter, but the amount and high volume of commodities stored in these storehouses confirm the extensive agricultural activities in the region. The extensive measures taken by Achaemenids in developing irrigation infrastructure and managing water resources, such as the construction and dredging of water channels, aqueducts, bridges and dams, which are attested to by both historical sources and administrative documents as well as archaeological evidence, should be mentioned, which expresses the Achaemenids' will to make the agricultural economy as dynamic as possible. The process of flow of commodities in the archive, the amount of seeds that were set aside for cultivation each year, and the high volume of agricultural products and fruits stored in various storehouses indicate that this amount of harvest cannot be the result of a local rural economy; rather, there must have been extensive management and organization in various aspects. The Fortification archive tablets reveal part of this complex bureaucratic administrative structure. In future studies these documents should also be compared with the Babylonian and Egyptian archives of Achaemenid period in order to achieve a broader and more comprehensive view of how villages and the agricultural economy practiced and were managed in the Empire.

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