

NABU 1996-50 Enrique Quintana

ELAM = halhatamti = high land — It is known that in Sumerian the name of Elam is designated with the sign NIM, which means « high ». In akkadian it is normally written with the expression KUR *elammatum* = land of Elam. In spite of the transcription with « e », we have been aware for a long time that this ought to be with « a », (cf. E. Sollberger, *TCS* 1 p. 115 where is found the Sumerian writing dumu nim in the envelope and in the tablet, but dumu a-la-ma in the seal), therefore it might be more correct a writing Alam or rather better Yalamt/Ailamt, in agreement with the Elamite phonetic, (in Elamite one can interchange ya/a/e/i, cf. *ELW* passim). On the way such a transcription should explain the different Akkadian spellings to name the Elamites (cf. LU₂ e-la-ma-a-a *ABL* 478 : Rs.11, LU₂ i-la-mu-u₂ F.M.T.. Böhl, *Nieuw-Babylonische Oorkonden* [1936] 49, 787 : 2-3 and e-la-mu-u₂ *AHW* p. 196 [= yalamu/ailamu] = Elamite).

This serve as introduction to the akkadian term *ala'itum* (*a-la-i-tum*), employed in a Mari prophecy to refer to Elam, the interpretation of which according to J.-M. Durand (*AEM* 1/1 p. 438 n. a) is *elitum* (high, upper). This excellent suggestion agrees with the Sumerian denomination and permits to speculate that the Elamite term *halhatamti* is nothing but a syncope of the Akkadian expression *ala'itum mātum* (high land), since in Elamite language the « h » is voiceless or announces a diphthong ; thus instead of *halhatamti*, a transcription *alaitamti* (= *ala'itum mātum*) could clarify things.

In this manner, the indigenous (?) name of Elam, whose earliest attestation corresponds to my knowledge to the inscriptions of Siwepalarhupak, should be a loanword from Akkadian. A correspondance with this could be the fact that in the first millenium, the Elamite word *hal* (land), appears in writing followed by the sign MEŠ (cf. EK1 74 4, 13, 14 ; EK1 79 7 ; and EK1 80 2, 3), which in Elamite is used, among other things, to indicate that the previous word has been taken from a foreign language, in this case Akkadian (the list of Elamite loanwords from foreign languages has at least thirty members).

So we could establish the following equation : $NIM^{ki} = ala'itum\ m\dot{a}tum/elam-tum = halhatamti = \text{high land} = \text{Elam}$.

It remains the question of the origin of the qualification term « high », inasmuch as we don't know in the third millenium, the Elamite word to designate the land of Elam, although the Sumerian and Akkadian expressions assume a clear reference to the geographical conditions of the Elamite country, owing to the fact of its situation in an upland in connection with Mesopotamia.

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