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Three Middle Persian documents from Fārs dating to the reigns of Xusrō II and Ohrmāz IV

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2026

Abstract

In 2024, images of three previously unknown Middle Persian documents on leather became available, reportedly originating from an undisclosed location in Fārs province, Iran. All three documents are formal letters. In this article, we propose that the documents originate from the same site, Tang-e Bolāgi, as seven other documents which became known beginning in 2023. Based on an analysis of the opening sections of these three new documents, we argue that two date to the reign of Xusrō II (r. 590–628 CE), while the third is attributable to the reign of his father, Ohrmāz IV (r. 579–590 CE). We furthermore consider the evidence for the titlature of the Sasanian kings at the end of the 6th and beginning of the 7th centuries CE.

I Introduction

This article reviews the corpus of Middle Persian (Pahlavi) documents discovered at the site of Tang-e Bolāgi in Fārs province, Iran. These are now held partly in a private collection and partly housed at the Jondishapour Museum of Trade History (JMTH) in Shiraz, Iran. Weber (2023) published one of these documents in full and briefly mentioned the existence of three others. The present study aims to clarify the precise number and chronological range of these materials. It further offers information about three hitherto unknown documents which likely were part of the same original find and presents a preliminary reading of their opening sections. These sections preserve essential information, including the names of the writers and recipients, the dates of composition, and the titlature of the reigning monarchs. We then present evidence supporting the hypothesis that these three documents originate from the same

*We wish to acknowledge Khosro Roodani, the owner of the Tang-e Bolāgi documents housed in the Jondishapour Museum of Trade History (JMTH) in Shiraz, and Sahar Foroozanpour, manager of the JMTH, for preserving these important historical documents and for sharing photographs and information with Dieter Weber and Rika Gyselen, which ultimately contributed to the preparation of previous publications. This paper was prepared as part of the project *RFD21: Studying the Middle Persian/Pahlavi Documents from the Late Sasanian and Early Islamic Periods* (2025), conducted at the Center for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC), University of Hamburg, under Germany's Excellence Strategy – EXC 2176 “Understanding Written Artefacts: Material, Interaction and Transmission in Manuscript Cultures.”

findspot—Tang-e Bolāgi—as those previously studied by Weber. Finally, through comparative palaeographic and titlature analysis of the Tang-e Bolāgi documents and the document Berk. 129+212 belonging to the Pahlavi Archive of Hastijan (also known as the Pahlavi Archive)¹, we argue that this latter document, which Weber dated to the reign of Ohrmazd V (r. 630–632 CE), should instead be dated to Ohrmazd IV (r. 579–590 CE).

2 Numbering and Classification of the Documents

The Tang-e Bolāgi documents (henceforth TB) comprise a small but significant corpus of Middle Persian texts. Following their discovery by looters and subsequent attempts by Mohammed Tavakolian to preserve the documents and involve scholars in their study, Weber (2023) announced their existence in an article in which he edited one document (TB₁), by that time acquired by the Jondishapour Museum of Trade History, and mentioned three other documents. However, Weber (2023:177) stated that the documents were discovered at the site of Tang-e Borāq in 2019. The documents were in fact discovered in 2011 in a cave at Tang-e Bolāgi, a corrective provided by Tavakolian.² Yet since Weber's publication and subsequent study of some of the bullae associated with the documents by Gyselen (2024), the precise overall number and classification of the documents have remained unclear, as well as which bullae are attached to which documents. In this section, we aim to establish the total number of documents, distinguish their chronological and palaeographic features, and provide a systematic classification based on authorship, content, and provenance.

In addition to his edition of TB₁, Weber (2023:179) briefly discusses the other three documents. According to him, TB₂, dating to year 21, is not a letter, unlike the other three documents; TB₃, from year 20, is a lengthy letter addressed to a Mardweh; and TB₄ is a letter addressed to a Zurwāndād, written in year 17.

Document TB₁ is known to be housed in the JMTH in Shiraz. However, as Gyselen (2024) has noted, the other three documents mentioned by Weber do not belong to this museum. Gyselen (2024:105) observes:

Reste à savoir si cette archive du Fārs comportait uniquement ce coffret avec quelques documents. Weber mentionne quatre documents (TB₁ inclus). L'inventaire du musée indique également quatre parchemins (dont

¹This corpus has typically been known as the Pahlavi Archive since its discovery (see Azarpay 2003; Zeini 2018). In recent years, Asefi has proposed that the Hastijan Cave, where further related documents have now been found, was the original discovery site referring to the larger corpus as the Pahlavi Archive of Hastijan (see Asefi 2023, 2024a,b as well as Asefi & Mirfakhraie 2024:144–147).

²Mohammad (Mazdak) Tavakolian (PhD student at Isfahan University) was the first researcher to become aware of the discovery of these documents by looters. It was through his persistent efforts that four of the documents were acquired by the JMTH. Tavakolian also obtained photographs of the other documents and sent them to Dieter Weber in 2019 along with information about the actual find-site; Weber mentioned neither his name nor the correct find-site in his 2023 publication. We are deeply grateful to Tavakolian both for his tireless efforts and for providing us with valuable information and images of these documents. It should be noted that Tang-e Bolāgi is in a protected site and the documents therefore must have been illegally excavated.



Figure 1: TB₅, housed at the JMTH (inv. no. 83). Photo from Gyselen (2024:111).

TB₁). Des quatre documents mentionnés par Weber, seul TB₁ semble être conservé au musée sous le n° d'inv.jsh-c-05-85. Les trois autres documents sont très probablement sur le marché des antiquités. C'est de toute manière le cas de celui dont la bulle est illustrée Fig. 4. Il n'est donc pas exclu que ce coffret comportait au moins sept documents, sinon plus. Mais comme pour beaucoup de trouvailles faites hors tout contexte archéologique, on ne saura probablement jamais avec certitude quel était le contenu du petit coffret en bois et si à l'origine il faisait partie de cette archive.

In fact, in addition to TB₁, the JMTH holds another sealed document that has recently been opened (henceforth TB₅); an image of the document in a partially-opened state was published by Gyselen (2024) and is reproduced here as Figure 1. The JMTH also preserves two additional documents, seemingly in a fragmentary state (henceforth TB₆ and TB₇). Furthermore, the JMTH collection includes four bullae: two attached to documents and two separate, three of which were published and analyzed by Gyselen (2024). Based on the available information, we can now identify a total of seven documents known until now:

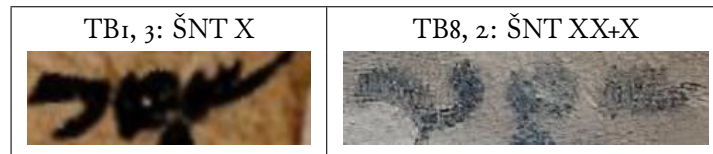
- TB₁ held by the JMTH (edition published by Weber 2023).
- TB₂, TB₃, & TB₄ held in a private collection (mentioned by Weber 2023).
- TB₅ held by the JMTH (photo published by Gyselen 2024).
- TB₆ & TB₇ held by the JMTH; in fragmentary condition.

3 TB₁

The document in question (Figure 2), designated by Weber as TB₁, is a letter. According to Weber's reading, it was written in the twentieth year of Xusrō II's reign, in the

month of Ardwašīšt (the second month).³

While Weber's identification of the month is entirely accurate, the regnal year should be read as 10 rather than 20. This interpretation is supported by a comparative analysis of numerical forms found in one of the newly identified documents (TB8) introduced later in this article, in which the years 20 plus 10 (totaling 30) are clearly distinguished:



Additionally, this numeral may be compared with parallels from the Tabarestān documents:⁴



³See also Khosravi (2024:107). The present research was completed by early 2025. In the winter of 2025, Khosravi (2024) published an article that independently presented some conclusions similar to ours. These include two corrections to Weber's readings: *nēk* to *nēw*, and a revision of the date from 20 to 10. More significantly, both studies attribute Berk. 129+212 to Ohrmazd IV rather than Ohrmazd V. Our correction of the date of the TB1 document and the attribution of Berk. 129+212 to Ohrmazd IV are grounded in three newly identified documents, introduced here for the first time, supported thorough palaeographic analysis of the Fārs documents and Berk. 129+212.

⁴See also further examples from the Pahlavi Archive of Hastijan in the commentary to TB4.

⁵Gignoux (2014:46) reads this as 97; see also Weber (2017:177).

⁶Gignoux (2012:68) and Weber (2012:141).

⁷Gignoux (2014:38) reads this as 93; see also Weber (2017:133).

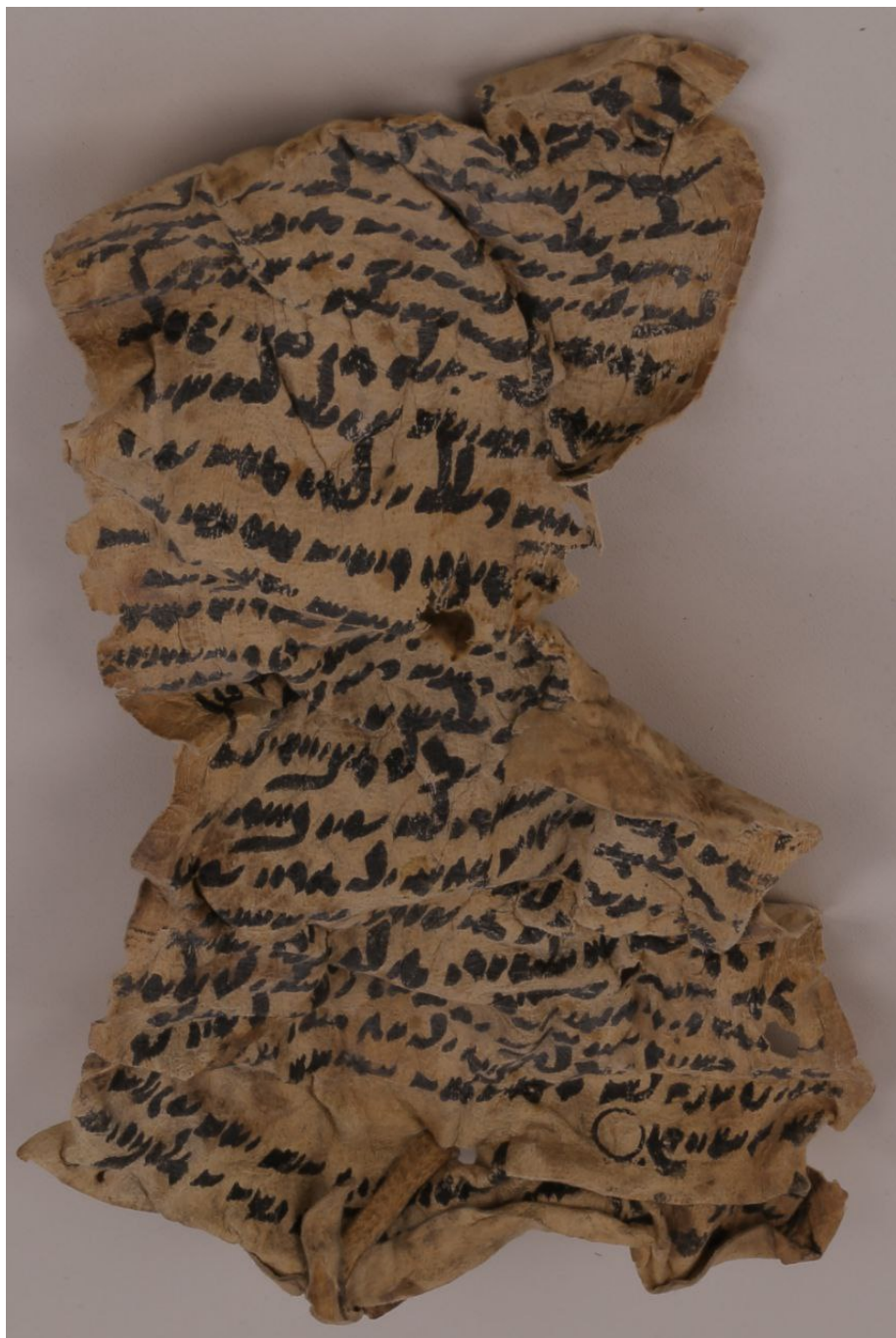


Figure 2: TB1, housed at the JMTH (inv. no. jsh-c-05-85). Photo from Weber (2023:181).

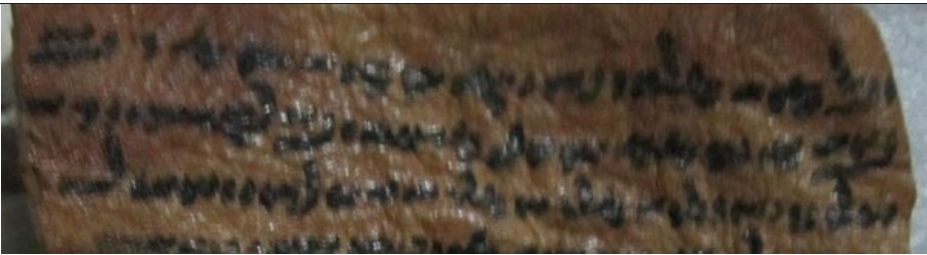
4 TB₂, TB₃, and TB₄

Previously, Mohammad Tavakolian had provided several images of three documents originating from Fārs. Upon examination, it became evident that these are the same three documents discussed by Weber—designated TB₂, TB₃, and TB₄, currently in the possession of an unknown individual in Iran. For purposes of this study, concentrating on the opening parts of the documents, we provide only partial images of each document. Our objective here is to verify the names and dates, thereby confirming that these are indeed the documents he referenced, since establishing their identity is crucial for accurately determining the total number of Tang-e Bolāgi documents.

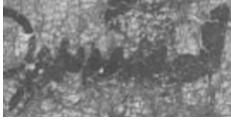
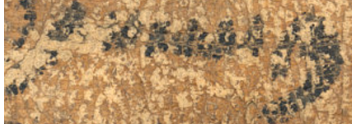
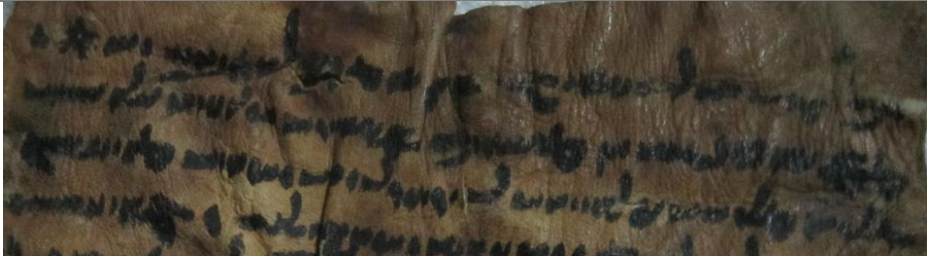
As Weber notes, TB₂ is a document rather than a letter, dating to year 21 of the reign of *šāhānšāh* Xusrō II (590–628 CE). The opening of the document presented below contains the same information:

TB ₂	
	
Transliteration	Transcription
1 LZNH BYRH 'rtwhšt' QDM ŠNT XX I ... l'mštr	1 <i>im māh Ardwaššt abar sāl 21 ...</i> <i>rāmšahr</i>
2 kd 'plwyc hwslwḫ MLK'n MLK' ...	2 <i>kay abarwēz Xusrō šāhānšāh ...</i>

As noted by Weber, TB₃ is a letter written in year 20 of the reign of *šāhānšāh* Xusrō II and addressed to Mardweh. The opening of the document presented below contains the same information:

TB ₃	
	
Transliteration	Transcription
1 'L MRH mltwyh nc ⁸ ... ŠRM KBD	1 <i>ō xwadāy Mardweh namāz ... drōd</i> <i>was</i>
2 BYRH 'mwrđt QDM ŠNT XX mzdysn bg l'mštr' kd	2 <i>māh Amurdād abar sāl 20 mazdēs</i> <i>bay rāmšahr kay</i>
3 'plwyc' hwslwḫ MLK'n MLK' ...	3 <i>abarwēz Xusrō šāhānšāh ...</i>

According to Weber, TB₄ is a letter written in year 17 of the reign of *šāhānšāh* Xusrō II and addressed to Zurwāndād. The opening of the document presented below contains again the same information; however, Weber's reading of the regnal year as 17 should be corrected to 27. In addition to the shape of the numeral in question, it is noteworthy that in Pahlavi script, the number 10 cannot be connected with a following 7, whereas the number 20 must be written connected to 7 (XX+IIII+III). The numeral in question may be compared with the following examples from the Pahlavi Archive of Hastijan:⁹

TB ₄ , 2 : XX+IIII+III		
		
Berk. 57, 3 XX+IIII+III (27)	Berk. 62, 12 XX+IIII+III (27)	Berk. 232, 6 X+IIII+III (17)
		
TB ₄		
		
Transliteration		Transcription
1 'L MRḤ zwlw'nd't nc ... ŠRM KBD LZṆḤ BYRḤ whwmn'		1 <i>ō xwadāy Zurwāndād namāz ... drōd was im māh Wabman</i>
2 QDM ŠNT XX IIII-III mzdysn bg l'mštr' kd 'plwyc' hwsłwb MLK'n MLK'		2 <i>abar sāl 27 mazdēsn bay rāmšahr kay abarwēz Xusrō šāhānšāh</i>

Thus far, we have surveyed the seven known documents, four of which are housed in the JMTH; of these, only TB₁ has been published by Weber. The remaining three, held in a private collection and labeled by Weber as TB₂, TB₃, and TB₄, have not been previously published. However, these seven may not be the entirety of the documents originating from Tang-e Bolāgi in Fārs.

⁸Zeini (2015) has previously argued that the papyri contain a simplified phonetic spelling of the term *namāz*. In this practice, the word is represented by an initial n- and a final -c, with a horizontal stroke through the final -c representing a simplified -m'. The TB documents seem to prefer the same style of simplification. If so, these documents agree with the scribal practice attested in the Middle Persian papyri from the Sasanian occupation of Egypt (619–629 CE).

⁹For Berk. 57, 3 and Berk. 62, 12, see Weber (2012:85) and Weber (2010:51), respectively. Berk. 232 is unpublished.

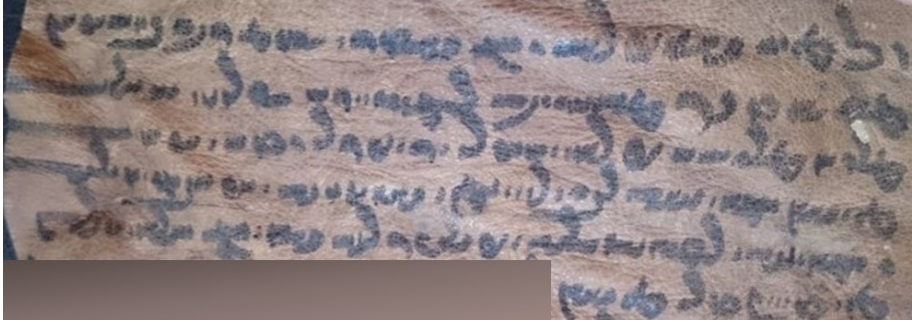
5 The New Documents: TB8, TB9, and TB10

In 2024, an individual provided us with a series of images of three previously unknown Middle Persian documents written on leather, which he reported had been discovered somewhere in Fārs province. This individual refused to identify themselves, claiming only that the documents had been acquired by their father, and did not want to be acknowledged by name in a scientific publication. We only know that they are apparently in private possession in Shiraz.

5.1 TB8

The first of these (henceforth TB8) is a letter dated to year 30 of Xusrō II (619 CE). The letter, consisting of 24 lines, appears to be addressed to a recipient likely named Dādfrāy, while the scribe or author is possibly named Dādag. The text preserves the formal titulature of Xusrō II and is accompanied by a bulla, indicating its official character.

Although the provenance of TB8 remains uncertain, its palaeographic and linguistic features are consistent with other documents attributed to the Tang-e Bolāgi corpus. TB8 is a formal loan contract, providing valuable insight into the bureaucratic practices of Xusrō II's reign. In the following, only the portion of the letter corresponding to the opening of the document, from lines 1 to 6, is presented:

TB8	
	
1	'L MRḤ d'tpl'd nc d'tk' ŠRM KBD BYRḤ 'p'n <i>ō xwadāy Dādfrāy namāz Dādag drōd was māb Ābān</i>
2	QDM ŠNT XX-X mzdyst bg l'mštr' kd 'plwyc' ¹⁰ hwslwb <i>abar sāl 30 mazdēšn bay rāmšabr kay abarwēz Xusrō</i>
3	MLK'n MLK' Y plhw' W hw'pl W krpk l W TB W 'pdgwnd <i>šābānšāh ī farrox ud xwābar ud kirbakkar ud nēw ud abdgund</i>
4	MN yzd'n hm'k wyhyh' ¹¹ W LB' wlc' W GDH W dhywptyh W 'pyybymklt'lyh <i>kē yazdān hamāg-wehib ud wuzurg warz ud xwarrah ud dabibedib ud abēbīmcardārib</i>
5	W 'm'wndyh W l'mšnd't'lyh W pylwcklyh d't' BYN ¹² 'yl'n W 'nyl'n <i>ud amāwandib ud rāmišndādārib ud pērōzgarib dād andar Ērān ud Anērān</i>
6	MNW tn' W ctl MN yzd'n ... <i>kē tan ud čibr az yazdān ...</i>

Translation: 1) To sir Dādfrāy reverence, (from) Dādag abundant greetings! Month Ābān, 2) in the year 30 of the Mazdean majesty, the Kay whose realm is in peace,¹³ the triumphant Xusrō, 3) King of Kings, who is fortunate and benevolent and beneficent and brave and (having) a wondrous army, 4) whom the gods gave all-goodness and great miracle and splendour and rulership and activity without fear 5) and strength and maintenance of peace and victory in Ērān and Anērān, 6) whose body and seed are from the gods ...

The titles used in TB₁ and this letter are identical, if one includes corrections to Weber’s editio princeps: *hamdrustib* to *hamāgwebih*, *rad* to *warz*, and *nēk* to *nēw*.¹⁴ In addition, contrary to Weber, we prefer to read *mazdēsn* rather than *māzdēsn*.¹⁵

5.2 TB₉

The second document (henceforth TB₉) is a letter of 20 lines, with the sender likely being named Mihrbandag. In the available image, the year appears directly beneath the photographer’s finger; however, the final digit, likely a 2, is visible, suggesting a date of year 32 or 12(?). The first five lines read as follows:

¹⁰Gyselen (2023:182) refers to document TB₁ in support of the attribution of a seal impression to Xusrō I rather than Xusrō II. She points out that the honorific *abarwēz* was consistently associated with the name of Xusrō II, and that the absence of this title on the seal constitutes a strong argument against assigning it to Xusrō II. Confirming Gyselen’s observation, the present article further demonstrates that, in addition to TB₁, four other documents (TB₃, TB₄, TB₈, and TB₉) attest that the name of Xusrō II is never mentioned without the title *abarwēz*. This title also appears in the titulature of his grandson, Yazdgird III (see Khosravi 2024; Azarnouche & Gasparini Forthcoming).

¹¹Weber (2023) reads the titulature as *hmdrwstyh* (*hamdrustib*) in TB₁. Khosravi (2024) has read the same word on textiles as *hmyw-w’hš* (*hamēw-waxš*). Our tentative suggestion is *hamāgwebih*.

¹²Weber read the same word in TB₁ as *d’t’ BYN dād andar*, while Khosravi (2024) proposed a revision to *YH(B)WN-t dād*. However, new evidence from documents TB₂, TB₃, TB₄, TB₈, TB₉, and TB₁₀ confirms that Weber’s reading is correct. However, the verb *dād*, unlike in the TB evidence, appears in the heterogram form *YHBNW-t*, and *BYN andar* does not occur in Berk. 129 (for this document, see the next section of the present article).

¹³Nyberg (1974:166): “(ruler) whose realm is peace, who maintains peace in his realm”; Daryaei (2002:94): “who maintains peace in (his) dominion”; Gyselen (2024:117): “dont l’empire est en paix”. See also Schindel (2004:320), Jalilian (2024) and Matloubkari (2024a:169–174).

¹⁴Khosravi (2024:108) also reads *warz*. Weber (2023:182) correctly reads TB translating “brave”, but transcribes *nēk* rather than *nēw*.

¹⁵For a detailed discussion of the distinction between these two terms and the reasons for choosing *mazdēsn*, see Alam, Blet-Lemarquand & Skjærvø (2007). Moreover, some of the documents examined here attest an ending that resembles a final -t. As a result, we must allow for the possibility of variation between *mzdysn* and *mzdyst*. On final <-t> in *mazdēsn*, which is widely attested in Book Pahlavi, see Zeini (2020:185–186).

TB₉

- 1 [‘L MRḤ ...] ... hwplkb’n(?) *nc mtlbndk’ ŠRM KBD BYRḤ*
[*ō xwadāy ...*] ... (?) *namāz Mibrbandag drōd was māh*
- 2 [... QDM ŠNT ...] ...+II mzdysn bg l’mštr’ kd ’plwyc’ hwsłwḫ MLK’n MLK’
[... *abar sāl ...*] ...+2 *mazdēsñ bay rāmšabr kay abarwēz Xusrō šāhānšāh*
- 3 [Y plhw’ W hw’pl W] krpkl W TB W ’pdgwnd MNW yzd’n hm’k wyhyh LB’
wlc’ W GDH
[*ī farrox ud xwābar ud*] *kirbakkar nēw ud abdgund kē yazdān hamāg-wehīh wuzurg warz ud xwarrah*
- 4 [W dhywptyh] W ’pyybymkt’lyh W ’m’wndyh W l’mšnd’t’lyh W pylwcklyh
d’t’ BYN
[*ud dahibedih*] *ud abēbīmkardārih ud amāwandih ud rāmišndādārih ud pērōzgarīh dād andar*
- 5 [yl’n W ’n]yl’n MNW tn’ W ctl MN yzd’n
[*Ērān ud An*] *ērān kē tan ud čīr az yazdān*

The titlature in this document (TB₉) is identical to that in TB₁ and TB₈, also featuring *abarwēz Xusrō*. With the exception of the addressee, the year, and some losses and gaps, the text quoted here is otherwise identical to the previous documents and is therefore left untranslated. Like TB₈ and TB₁, TB₉ also bears an attached bulla.

5.3 TB₁₀

The final document (henceforth TB₁₀) is a 28-line letter dated to year 8. This document clearly differs from the previous six documents (TB_{1,2,3,4,7}, and 8). Notably, the name of the king is not Xusrō. Unfortunately, the available image quality, combined with its incomplete right margin, makes reading the text difficult. Nevertheless, the only king who reigned for eight years after Xusrō II is Yazdgird III (r. 632-651). Although the right margin of the document is cropped and the image quality limits legibility, it is evident that the king referenced is not Yazdgird. Given the year 8 and the discrepancy in the spelling of the king’s name, we can conclude that this document must be dated to a king prior to Xusrō II. The king’s name in TB₁₀ closely resembles Ohrmazd, suggesting that it most likely refers to Ohrmazd IV. Its spelling may be compared with that of Ohrmazd in Berk. 129 and Berlin 30a:

TB10, 3 [...]hrmzd	Berlin 30a, 1 'whrmzd	Berk. 129, 13 ¹⁶ 'whrmzd
		

The opening five lines of TB10 read as follows:

TB10

1 'L MRḤ plc'n... 'n nc 'whrmzd(?) ŠRM KBD <i>ō x^wadāy (?) namāz Ohrmazd(?) drōd was</i> 2 BYRḤ 'p'n QDM ŠNT IIII-IIII mzdysn bg l'mštr' kd <i>māh Ābān abar sāl 8 mazdēsn bay rāmšahr kay</i> 3 ['w]hrmzd Y plhw' W hw'pl W krpkl MNW yzd'n <i>[Oh]rmazd ī farrox ud xwābar ud kirbakkar kē yazdān</i> 4 [LB'] GDH W dhywptyh d't' BYN 'yl'n W 'nyl'n MNW ctl <i>[wuzurg] xwarrah ud dabibedih dād andar Ērān ud Anērān kē čīhr</i> 5 [MN y]zd'n <i>[az ya]zdān</i>

Translation: 1) To sir ... reverence, (from) Ohrmazd(?) abundant greetings! 2) Month Ābān, in the year 8 of the Mazdean majesty, the Kay whose realm is in peace, 3) Ohrmazd, who is fortunate and benevolent and beneficent, whom the gods 4) gave great splendour and rulership in Ērān and Anērān, whose seed 5) is from the gods ...

There are notable differences in the royal titulature used for Ohrmazd IV in this document compared with that attested for Xusrō II. In fact, this document employs only a limited range of titles, and most significantly, the title *šāhānšāh* is absent. Based on this document, it is evident that Ohrmazd IV did not use the following ten titles:

1. *abarwēz*
2. *nēw*
3. *abdgund*
4. *hamāg-wehīh*

¹⁶Weber (2006).

5. *warz*
6. *abēbim-kardārīh*
7. *amāwandīh*
8. *rāmēšndādārīh*
9. *pērōzgarīh*
10. *tan* (in the phrase *tan ud čīhr az Yazdān*)

As noted above, the earliest attestation of Xusro II's titulature appears in TB1, dated to 600 CE, while the latest known evidence, TB8, belongs to 620 CE. This evidence also indicates, contrary to Matloubkari (2024b:153), that the title *abdgund* did not emerge in the context of the campaigns against Byzantium. Furthermore, the available evidence suggests that certain titles, most notably *rāmēšndādārīh*, continued to be employed and were not abandoned, even following the outbreak of the war with Byzantium, as suggested by Khosravi (2024:107).

6 Reassessing the Attribution of Berk. 129+212 to Ohrmazd V

Berk. 129+212¹⁷, a document held at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, belonging to the Hastijan Archive, refers to the second year of the reign of *šāhānšāh* Ohrmazd. Weber has identified this monarch as Ohrmazd V (630–632 CE); however, our evidence indicates that this identification is not tenable.

With the help of the Tang-e Bolāgi document pertaining to *šāhānšāh* Ohrmazd IV (579–590 CE), we can now confirm that the ten titles discussed above were not in use prior to Xusrō II. Furthermore, garments bearing the name and titulature of Yazdgird III demonstrate that at least five of these titles—*abarwēz*, *warz*, *abēbim-kardārīh*, *hamāg-wehīh*, and *pērōzgarīh*—continued to be used after the reign of Xusrō II (see Khosravi 2024).

The absence of the ten titles in Berk. 129+212 strongly suggests that the document predates the reign of Xusrō II and should therefore be attributed to Ohrmazd IV. Conversely, if some of these titles were attested, this would indicate that the document postdates the reign of Xusrō II and should therefore be attributed to Ohrmazd V. In fact, none of the ten titles are present in the Berkeley document, and the titulature it does contain corresponds precisely with those found in the newly discovered Fārs document TB10. This close agreement provides strong evidence for attributing Berk. 129+212 to the reign of Ohrmazd IV.

However, to confirm this attribution, a detailed palaeographic analysis is required to determine whether the script can substantiate this hypothesis. In order to analyze the palaeographic features of Berk. 129+212 from the Hastijan Archive and establish whether the ruler in question is Ohrmazd IV or Ohrmazd V, it is essential to compare the document with examples from both the late Sasanian period and the first post-

¹⁷See Weber (2006). It was Šafi'i (2023) who discovered that the two fragments, edited separately by Weber, must be part of the same original document. See also Khosravi (2024).

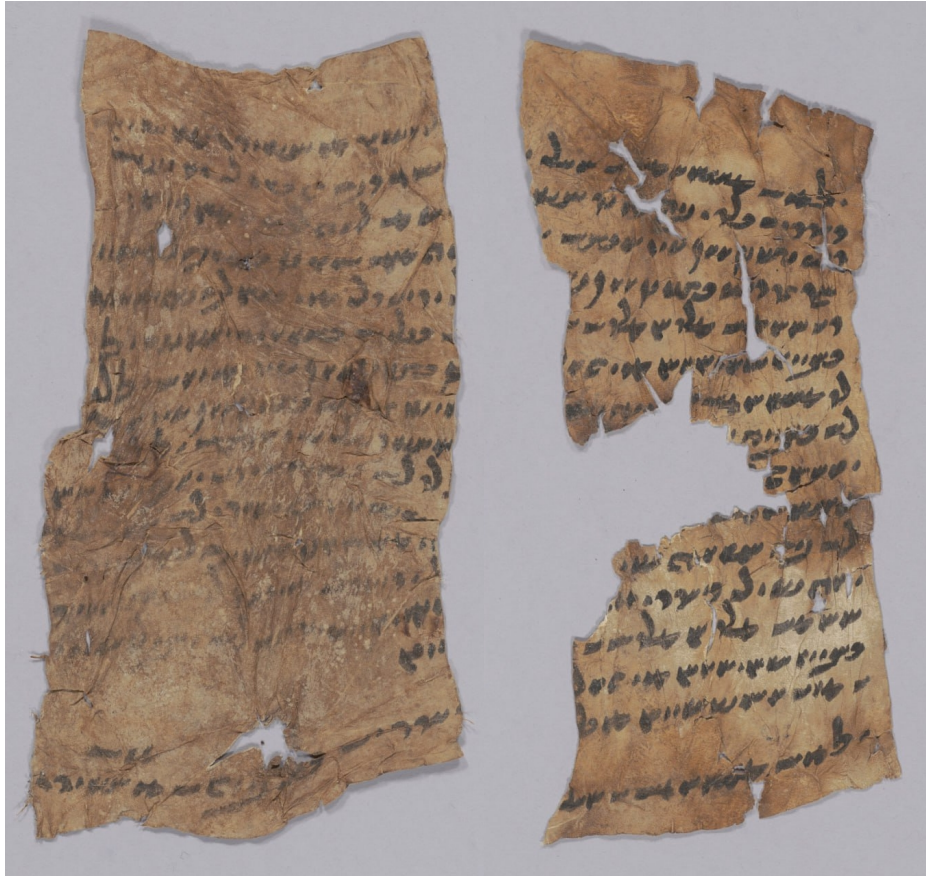
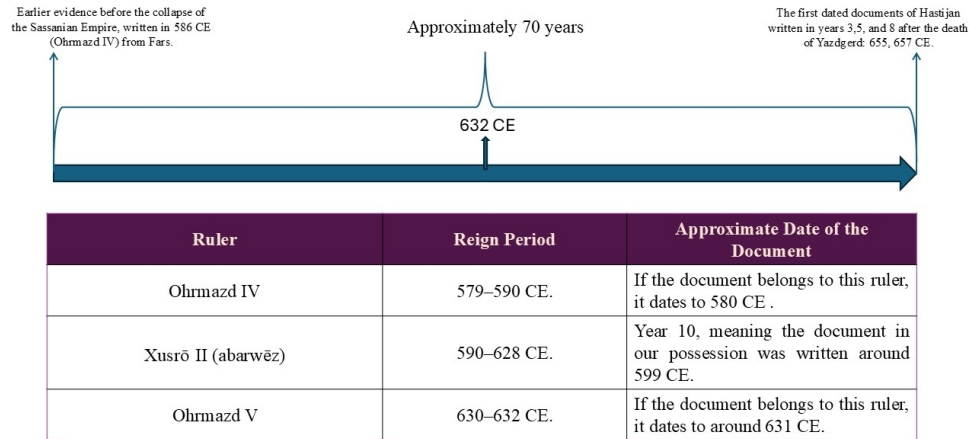


Figure 3: Berk. 129 (r) and Berk. 212 (l). Photographs courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Sasanian decade. Such a comparison is crucial for assessing which period the script characteristics most likely reflect.

In our study, TB10, from the reign of Ohrmazd IV (587 CE), is the earliest dated document. This is followed by TB1 (599 CE), TB3 (609 CE), TB2 (610 CE), TB4 (616 CE), and TB8 (619 CE). In addition, the early post-Sasanian Hastijan documents are: Berk. 138 and 242, 3 years after the death of Yazdgird III (655 CE); Berk. 90, 5 PY (657 CE); and H2A.101.1004, 8 PY (660 CE). Consequently, the interval between the earliest dated document, which predates the fall of the Sasanian Empire, and the first dated documents following the death of Yazdgird III is approximately seventy years.

If Berk. 129+212 from Hastijan were to belong to Ohrmazd V, it would date to 632 CE, situating it chronologically near the midpoint of the corpus under consideration. Consequently, its script should reflect this intermediate position: the palaeographical features ought neither to appear significantly older than those of TB10 (Ohrmazd IV) and TB1 (Xusrō II, year 10), nor to exhibit characteristics suggesting a date later than Berk. 138, 242, and 90 (dated three and five years after the death of Yazdgird III).



We conducted a detailed, word-by-word examination of the documents, with careful attention to palaeographic features (see Appendix A). The analysis reveals that the script corresponds closely to that of TB₁₀ (Ohrmazd IV) and TB₁ (Xusrō II, year 10). This close affinity lends strong support to our hypothesis that Berk. 129+212 should be attributed to Ohrmazd IV rather than Ohrmazd V. This conclusion, grounded in both titulary and palaeographic evidence, indicates that Berk. 129+212, dating to the second year of Ohrmazd IV's reign, constitutes the earliest, dated Middle Persian document.

7 Bullae of TB₃, TB₄ and TB₉

7.1 Image Comparison

Gyselen (2024:115) has published a seal impression (Figure 4) and offered the following commentary:

On avait précisé que le sceau de Tahmgōn figurait aussi sur une bulle (voir Fig. 4) encore attachée à un parchemin qui ne fait pas partie de la collection conservée au 'Jondishapour Museum of Trade History' de Shirāz (sous : Parchemin (non identifié) et bulle). Début mars 2024, d'autres photos de cette même bulle nous sont parvenues ainsi que celles d'une autre bulle qui, à première vue, ne porte que l'empreinte d'un sceau de mage.

Gyselen (2024:116), reading the seal's inscription as m'h Y mgw Y w'l'n'n / *māh ī mow ī wārānān* "Māh, magus, son of Wārān", explained some important features of this seal impression in this way:

En revanche, plusieurs remarques peuvent déjà être formulées à propos du sceau principal qui figure sur cette bulle. Par son iconographie et son inscription ce sceau se différencie des autres sceaux de cette archive de Tang-i Bolaghi. L'animal — un cheval ailé — est représenté ici de profil à gauche, ce qui est relativement rare, et l'inscription est disposée dans le sens d'une montre. Il se lit donc à partir de l'extérieur — alors que dans la sigillographie sassanide la très grande majorité des inscriptions est



Figure 4: The bulla attached to TB₃, Private collection, Fārs. Adapted from Gyselen (2024:115).

disposée dans le sens inverse des aiguilles d'une montre et se lit à partir de l'intérieur [...]. Mais là ne s'arrêtent pas les caractéristiques exceptionnelles de ce sceau. Si, malheureusement, il est impossible de décrire les traces qu'on perçoit dans le champ vers 2h et qui l n'est pas clair si un croissant figure au-dessus de la tête du cheval, on distingue parfaitement les pattes enrubannées du cheval ailé.

The images made available to us by Mohammad (Mazdak) Tavakolian (Figures 5 and 6) show that the bulla mentioned by Gyselen (Figure 4) in fact belongs to the document that Weber referred to as TB₃. A comparison between this bulla and the one from TB₄ clearly demonstrates that they are identical, even though the documents themselves differ.



Figure 5: The bulla attached to TB₃. Private collection, Fārs; photo by Mohammad Tavakolian.

A comparison of the two bullae attached to TB₃ and TB₄ with the bulla accompanying TB₉ clearly shows that all three seal impressions are identical in their inscriptions and in all features described by Gyselen, despite the documents themselves being different.



Figure 6: The bulla attached to TB4. Private collection, Fārs; photo by Mohammad Tavakolian.



Figure 7: The bulla attached to TB9. Private collection, Shiraz.

7.2 Comparison of the Legends

We now turn to a comparison of the name on this bulla (*māh ī mow ī wārānān*) with the name that appears in the three documents TB3, TB4, and TB9. Since these texts are contracts, it is useful first to note several observations by Shaki (1992) on the praxis of drafting and sealing of contracts, as discussed in the Pahlavi legal compendium *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān*:

The execution of contracts was administered by *mowbeds* “priests,” *dād-wars* “judges,” or *dastwars* “episcopal authorities, legal representatives,” with distinct jurisdictions (*ēwārīh*), some of which are mentioned in a chapter of the *Mādayān* (pt. 2, pp. 25–28) entitled “On the jurisdiction of functionaries” (*dar ī ēwārīh ī kārdārān*). In the *Mādayān* a whole chapter is devoted to the duties of the *dastwar* (pt. 1, p. 5), to the drawing up (*nib-ištan*) of the documents, the signing and sealing (*āwištan*), and associated aspects (pt. 2, p. 30). ... In Sasanian juridical literature two kinds of seals are mentioned, personal seals (*muhr ī x^w ēš*) and seals of office (*muhr ī pad kār-framān Mādayān*, pt. 1, p. 32), of which there were actually three categories, apparently of unequal legal force: *muhr ī ēwar* “trustworthy

seal,” *muhr ī wizurd* “authentic seal,” and *muhr ī wābarīgān* “credible seal.” From the *Mādayān* (pt. 1, p. 32) it follows that the *muhr ī ēwar* had greater evidential validity than the *muhr ī wizurd*, even when the latter predated the former. The *muhr ī wābarīgān* was admissible only when it was verified by a witness and thus seems to have offered less credibility (pt. 1, p. 93).

We may now examine the lower section of these three documents, where a phrase indicates that the document was sealed by a witness. The name and title of this witness correspond exactly to what is found on the bullae. The three phrases from TB3, TB4, and TB9 read as follows:

TB3

w'pryk'nyh l'd m'h Y mgw Y (?) 'l'n'n mwdl QDM ḤNḤTWNt wābarīgānīh rāy māh ī mow ī (?) ārānān muhr abar nihād “Māh, the Mow, ... sealed (it), on account of trustworthiness”
TB4

w'pryk'nyh l'd [m']h Y mgw Y (?) 'n'n mwdl QDM ḤNḤTWNt wābarīgānīh rāy [mā]h ī mow ī (?) ānān muhr abar nihād
TB9

w'pryk'nyh l'd m'h ... QDM ḤNḤTWNt wābarīgānīh rāy māh ... abar nihād

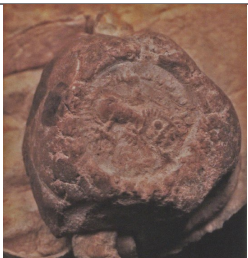
Although the handwriting of the scribes differs and the available photographs are of limited quality, it can be stated with confidence that the name written in all three documents is the same as that on the bullae. This suggests that the same individual sealed all three documents. Commenting on the date of the bulla, Gyselen (2024:116) stated: “Si ce document scellé fait partie de l’archive de Tang-i Bolaghi, il a peut-être aussi été rédigé sous le règne de Husraw II, dans les années 607-610, et est l’un des trois documents mentionnés par Weber.” As noted above, the exact date of TB3 (610 CE) and TB4 (617 CE) is in agreement with Gyselen’s conjecture, while the date of TB9 remains for now uncertain.

Finally, it is important to stress that, based on TB3, TB4, and the bulla of TB9, the first letter of the word read as w'l'n'n by Gyselen cannot be w-.

Bulla attached to TB9	TB3	TB4
		

However, in order to establish an accurate reading, high-quality images are required. Until such materials become available, we must rely on Gyselen's transcription.

The eight known bullae accompanying or attached to the Fārs documents, that is, TB1–10 excepting TB6–7, are as follows:

TB1 (=TB2) <i>tabmgōn ī mow ō ādur-obrmazdān</i> ¹⁸	TB2 (=TB1) <i>tabmgōn ī mow ō ādur-obrmazdān</i>	TB3 (=TB4 & 9) <i>māh ī mow ī wārānān</i>
		

TB4 (=TB3 & 9) <i>māh ī mow ī wārānān</i>	TB5 <i>wālāy/wālīy ī mow ī burzgušnāspān</i> ¹⁹	TB8
		

TB9 (=TB3 & 4) <i>māh ī mow ī wārānān</i>	TB10
	

¹⁸See Gyselen (2024:111).

¹⁹See Gyselen (2024:112).

On the basis of the evidence presented above, these newly discovered documents (TB8, TB9, and TB10) can be regarded as part of the same collection from Tang-e Bolāgi as the previously-known TB1–TB7. In conclusion, ten documents discovered—illegally, and likely quite recently—in Tang-e Bolāgi are currently known. Of these, six date to the reign of Xusrō II, while one dates to the reign of his father, Ohrmazd IV. To provide a clear overview, the documents are presented below in chronological order:

No.	Document	Date	Collection
1	TB10	Year 8 of Ohrmazd IV, 586 CE	Private collection, Shiraz
2	TB1	Year 10 of Xusrō II, 599 CE	JMTH (Shiraz)
3	TB3	Year 20 of Xusrō II, 609 CE	Private collection, Fārs
4	TB2	Year 21 of Xusrō II, 610 CE	Private collection, Fārs
5	TB4	Year 27 of Xusrō II, 616 CE	Private collection, Fārs
6	TB8	Year 30 of Xusrō II, 619 CE	Private collection, Shiraz
7	TB9	Year (?) + 2 of Xusrō II	Private collection, Shiraz
8	TB5	–	JMTH (Shiraz)
9	TB6	Fragmentary	JMTH (Shiraz)
10	TB7	Fragmentary	JMTH (Shiraz)

A Comparison of Palaeographical Characteristics

For the study of the palaeographical characteristics of the late cursive Pahlavi writing style, several features must be examined:

1. **Omission of prongs:** Letters such as <’>, <h>, and <š> frequently exhibit the omission of prongs, a phenomenon often described as scribal simplification. This practice also appears in ligatures, where multiple single-prong letters are combined. The omission of prongs can obscure the intended form of a letter, making accurate identification more difficult and highlighting the variability in individual scribes’ practices.
2. **Ambiguity between <p> and <t>:** The letters <p> and <t> are sometimes rendered in forms that are visually similar, which complicates their distinction. This ambiguity extends to combinations such as <hw>, <yw>, <dw>, and <gw>, where subtle differences in stroke or angle must be interpreted carefully. Such variability underscores the challenges of transcribing late cursive Pahlavi accurately and the potential for misreading without careful analysis.
3. **Forms of <t>:** The letter <t> occasionally assumes a shape that is nearly identical to the symbols used for <n>, <w>, or <r>. This convergence of forms demonstrates how individual letter shapes can be context-dependent, influenced by ligature formation, scribe habits, or writing speed, and requires careful palaeographical judgment to avoid misinterpretation.
4. **Rendering of <k>:** The letter <k> is sometimes written in a form that is indistinguishable from <n>, <w>, or <r>. This creates additional challenges, particularly when identifying proper names or technical terms, where a single misread letter can significantly alter meaning. Recognizing these patterns is essential for establishing reliable readings of late cursive Pahlavi texts.
5. **<w> in ligatures:** In ligatured contexts, the letter <w> may resemble <t>, creating potential confusion in interpreting sequences of letters. Such similarities illustrate the importance of considering the broader context of the word or phrase, as well as comparing multiple documents, to ensure accurate transcription.

When examining these changes, it is crucial to carefully consider the factors such as the type of pen, ink, and the writing support material—whether parchment, leather, or textile—as well as individual scribal idiosyncrasies that do not necessarily reflect a broader change in the writing style.

These features highlight the complexity of late cursive Pahlavi script and the potential for ambiguity in distinguishing certain letters. It is therefore evident that palaeographical analysis is both highly significant and inherently challenging. In the following section, we focus specifically on comparisons related to the omission of prongs:

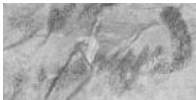
A.1 ŠRM (*drōd*)

TB _I	TB ₈	TB ₉	TB ₁₀	Berk.129 & 212
				

A.2 ŠNT (*sāl*)

TB _I	TB ₈	TB ₁₀	Berk.129 & 212
			

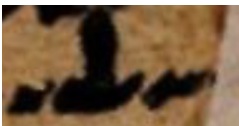
A.3 ʾmštr' (*rāmšahr*)

TB _I	TB ₈	TB ₉	TB ₁₀
			
Berk. 129 & 212			
			

A.4 ʾplwyc (*abarwēz*)

TB _I	TB ₈	TB ₉
		

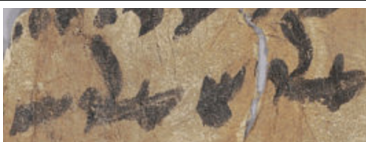
A.5 hwslwb (*Xusrō*)

TB _I	TB ₈	TB ₉
		

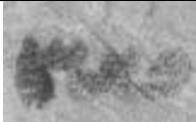
A.6 ʾwhrmzd (Ohrmazd)

TB10	Berk. 129 & 212	
		

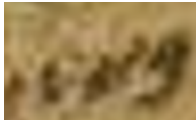
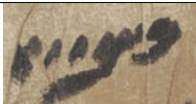
A.7 MLKʾn MLKʾ (*šāhānšāh*)

TB1	TB9	TB10
		
Berk. 129 & 212		
		

A.8 yzdʾn (*yazdān*)

TB1	TB8	TB9	TB10
			
Berk. 129 & 212			
			

A.9 dʾtʾ / YHBWN-t (*dād*)

TB1	TB8	TB9	TB10
dʾtʾ			
			
Berk. 129 & 212 YHBWN-t			
			

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