

# Sar-e Pol-e Zahab relief (Anubanini)

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The Sar-e Pol-e Zahab relief of Anubanini is a rock relief situated in the Iranian province of Kermanshah, in the neighborhood of the modern town of Sar-e Pol-e Zahab, about 120 kilometers to the west of Kermanshah itself and close to the Iran–Iraq border. The town, which in the Middle Ages was called Hulwan, lies on the Rud-e Alvand River.

In total, five reliefs are still visible on both banks of the Rud-e Alvand: on the right bank are reliefs I and IV, while on the left bank are the remains of reliefs II and III. In addition, a Parthian relief was also carved in the rocks on the left bank of the river.

Relief I, from the Old Babylonian period, can be found at a height of 25 meters above the river and faces the ancient city. It depicts a ruler (1.27 m high), in a pose like that of the Old Akkadian king Naram-Sin on his Victory Stela, with an enemy lying under his left foot. It is accompanied by an inscription which unfortunately is incomplete (RIME 4 E4.19.1.4; cf. also Hrouda and Trümpelmann 1976: pl. 6a), probably of Iddin-Sin, king of Simurru (a city-state likely located on the Diyala River in the Zagros; cf. Frayne 2009–11) or his son Zabazuna. A divine symbol, composed of a sun and moon, hovers in front of the ruler.

Relief II is the most famous of the reliefs and is the one discussed here. It is situated in the rock at a height of 25 meters and, like relief I, faces toward the ancient city.

Relief III, dated to the Isin-Larsa period, the most damaged of all the reliefs of Sar-e Pol-e Zahab, looks to the north, as does relief IV. It was engraved at a height of 18 meters above the river and represents a ruler whose left foot is resting on a fallen enemy. In front of the ruler stands the goddess Inanna/Ishtar. Between the

ruler and the divinity hovers the sun–moon symbol.

Relief IV has the same image: a ruler stepping on a fallen enemy, the divinity Inanna/Ishtar in front of him, and the divine sun–moon symbol between them. The heavily eroded relief can be dated to the late Old Babylonian period. Reliefs III and IV do not have an inscription.

Finally, the highly weathered Parthian relief was engraved 6 meters above the river, to the left of and below relief II. It is relatively large: the horse is 2.39 meters long and its tallest part is 1.53 meters high. Two thirds of the relief is occupied by a ruler with diadem on his horse. An inscription identifying the ruler as king Gotarzes (first century CE) accompanies the image.

## DISCOVERY AND RESEARCH HISTORY

In an 1839 article the famous British major Henry Creswicke Rawlinson described for the first time the relief of Anubanini. Comparing it with the Behistun (Bisotun) and Persepolis reliefs, Rawlinson dated it to the reign of the Achaemenid king Darius I, who reigned from 521 to 486 BCE (Rawlinson 1839: 37–8). In all likelihood, Rawlinson also made a drawing of the relief, but that sketch was only published by his brother George in 1865 (Rawlinson 1865: 436).

A more detailed study, accompanied by the first copy of the main inscription, was conducted in 1891 by the French scholars Jacques de Morgan and Jean-Vincent Scheil (de Morgan and Scheil 1893). Scheil's study revealed for the first time the name of the king who made this monument: Anubanini.

Since then the relief has been a popular research topic: other scholars conducting studies on the relief, especially on its date, were François Thureau-Dangin, Eduard Meyer, Georg Hüsing, Ernst Herzfeld, Franz Weißbach, Neilson Debevoise, James Pritchard, Wolfram Nagel, Horst Klengel, George Cameron, Edith Porada, Louis Vanden

Berghe, Peter Calmeyer, Johannes Boese, and Dietz-Otto Edzard (who re-edited the inscription in 1973). The most recent thorough study was published by Hrouda and Trümpelmann in 1976. More recently, Behzad Mofidi-Nasrabadi (2004) has added some readings to the main inscription and published two captions on two of the enemies.

A detailed bibliography on the inscription is provided by Douglas Frayne (1990: 704–6, E4.18.1.1).

## DATE

The use of the construct state *be-el* (of *bēl*), as well as some other philological aspects in the inscription accompanying the relief, point to a date in the early Isin-Larsa period (ca. 1900 BCE).

## DESCRIPTION

Despite the fact that the scenery and composition of the Anubanini relief, executed in Mesopotamian style, is similar to the other Old Babylonian reliefs of Sar-e Pol-e Zahab, the relief discussed here is more elaborate and artistically better executed than the other ones (a feature already observed by Rawlinson 1839 and de Morgan and Scheil 1893). A major difference is that it is the only one that has a two-level scenery: one principal scene in the upper part of the relief and one lower scene. Both scenes are separated by a curved bar, which, however, does not mark a contextual break between the scenes.

The upper scene depicts king Anubanini (left), who steps with his left foot upon an enemy who is lying on the ground. The enemy raises his right hand, probably in order to beg for mercy. In his right hand king Anubanini holds a kind of club, in his left a bow and arrows. A dagger can be seen in his belt. In front of the bare-chested king one can see the slightly smaller goddess, who holds two captives by a rope that is tied to rings attached

to their noses. In her other hand she holds a ring. The goddess is dressed in a long garment, which leaves her left shoulder naked. She wears the typical Mesopotamian divine horned headgear. Weapons (a sword and two clubs) “grow” from her shoulders: clearly, Ishtar is here represented as a warrior. Between both main figures a divine moon–sun symbol is hovering.

The lower scene shows six more shackled captives to the left, and the inscription occupies the right half. The captives’ arms are bound behind their backs and they are clearly being led by their chief or king.

## THE INSCRIPTIONS

An Akkadian inscription accompanies the relief. The use of a language by a people that did not have Akkadian as their mother tongue points to a Lullubite acculturation to the Mesopotamian world. The same can be said of the Kassites, who completely adopted the Mesopotamian culture.

Another proof of this acculturation is the name of Anubanini himself. In fact, Anubanini is an Akkadian name with an Elamite twist. The anthroponym *Anu-bani* belongs to a common name type in Akkadian onomastics and means “Anu is the creator.” The Elamite twist can be seen in the reduplication of the last syllable *-ni*. Such reduplications are very common in the formation of Elamite hypocoristics.

The relief has three inscriptions. The main inscription, drafted in Akkadian, is composed of two parts. The first part (i 1–9) tells that Anubanini set up a statue of himself and one of Ishtar at Mount Batir. The second part (i 10–iii 17) is a curse formula.

The main text goes as follows (based on Frayne and Mofidi-Nasrabadi):

Anubanini, mighty king, king of Lullubum, had an image of himself and an image of the goddess Ishtar set up on the mount Batir. He who removes these two images and inscription, may the gods Anum and Antum, Enlil and Ninlil, Adad and Ishtar, Sin and Shamash [...]. May the gods



**Figure 1** The relief of Anubanini. Source: wikimedia commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Anubanini\\_rock\\_relief#/media/File:Anubanini\\_\(3936968576\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Anubanini_rock_relief#/media/File:Anubanini_(3936968576).jpg)

Nergal and Ereshkigal [...], En[...] and [...] the lord of the [...] x [...], the great gods and [...] inflict on him an evil curse. May they destroy his seed. The Upper and Lower Sea [...] and these [...]. May [...] May it not [...]. May it be difficult for his troops.

Furthermore, the prone enemy and the leader of the captives (bearing a crown) are identified by captions on their upper arms (Mofidi-Nasrabadi 2004). Their names are [x]-bashimti (lying enemy) and Imishu (enemy leader).

SEE ALSO: Kurangun relief; Kul-e Farah reliefs.

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