

Rawlinson published a full interpretation of the Persian column of the great Behistun inscription. On the assumption that the second column (Elamite), and the third column (Babylonian) had the same meaning as the first, the three columns were compared and by 1851 a good start had been made in the interpretation of the Babylonian part of the Behistun inscription.

It was found that often a number of characters in the Persian inscription would be parallel to only one character in the Babylonian, and the conclusion was reached that often one Babylonian sign would represent an entire word. It was determined on further study that there were also signs that represented vowels but none that represented a consonant alone. However, there were many signs that represented a consonant followed or preceded by a vowel, and others that would represent a combination of consonant-vowel-consonant. Often the same sign would be required by the context to be read in different ways in different combinations. As the Behistun inscription and other inscriptions were studied, scholars came to the decision that one particular sign could represent the syllables *kal*, *rib*, *lab*, or *dan*, depending on the context. Another sign could represent the word limu, "thousand," the syllable shi or the syllable lim. If this particular sign should occur twice in succession, it might stand for shi-shi, for lim-lim, for shi-lim, or for lim-shi, or the combination might indicate the word abiktu, "overthrow." The appalling complexity of the system led many to doubt that the key to its interpretation had actually been found. In 1856 four outstanding students of cuneiform happened to be in London at the same time. The trustees of the British Museum gave each of them a copy of a new inscription of the Assyrian conqueror, Tiglath-Pileser (2 Kings 16.7-10), which had not yet been published. Each of the four men worked on it individually, and then presented his conclusions, indicating