

Julien Monerie, *D’Alexandre à Zoilos. Dictionnaire prosopographique des porteurs de nom grec dans les sources cunéiformes (Oriens et Occidens 23)*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2014, 225 pp., b/w ill., ISBN 978-3-515-10956-7

For most scholars interested in the history of Babylonia in the Hellenistic and Parthian periods, up till the 1980s the most important source of knowledge on it was the information to be found on the pages of the works of ancient authors – which, of course, are neither particularly abundant nor very detailed – as well as archaeological data. Few referred to the information contained in other types of evidence – the documents in cuneiform writing. Although such documents referring to both the periods have been published since the second half of the 19th century, owing to the fact that their publication did not come with translation into contemporary languages and that there are relatively few of them, they were not observed beyond the circles of Assyriologists. The situation gradually began to change in the 1930s, when for the first time some types of these documents became the object of research. Only then did the historical information they contained attract the attention of scholars dealing with the Hellenistic period.¹

Large numbers of scholars became aware of the huge significance of cuneiform documents in research on the history of Hellenistic and Parthian Babylonia only after the Austrian Academy of Sciences’ multi-volume publication of Babylonian astronomical diaries. The first volume was published in 1988,² followed by the next two in 1989 and 1996.³ Each of them includes a transcription of the original text and a translation into English furnished with a concise commentary. The oldest of these diaries was produced in 652 BCE, and the entries dated latest come from the first half of the first century BCE. They are unique as they contain, in addition to the results of daily astronomical observations, a number of economic and historical notes. Most entries derive from the period between the Battle of Gaugamela (333 BCE) and the first half of the first century BCE, when the diaries were discontinued. Although the vast majority allude to local events,

¹ Cf. A. Aymard, Une ville de Babylonie séleucide d’après les contrats cunéiformes, *REA* 40, 1938, 5–42.

² A. J. Sachs, H. Hunger, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia*, vol. 1: *Diaries from 652 B.C. to 262 B.C.*, Wien 1988.

³ A. J. Sachs, H. Hunger, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia*, vol. 2: *Diaries from 261 B.C. to 165 B.C.*, Wien 1989; vol. 3: *Diaries from 164 B.C. to 61 B.C.*, Wien 1996.

the details they contain are significant for better understanding of the social, political and economic situation of Babylonia under Seleucid and Arsacid rule.⁴

Apart from the diaries, very significant for gaining a profound understanding of local affairs are the administrative and legal documents recorded in cuneiform writing and found during archaeological work in various cities of southern Mesopotamia. These provide exceptional valuable testimony of the local residents' diverse activities. Julien Monerie's recently published book demonstrates how important they are for comprehending the cultural and social realities of Hellenistic and Parthian Babylonia.

One should note right away that this book's title does not fully match its content, as it suggests a collection of biographical information referring to the figures mentioned in various types of cuneiform texts. The prosopographical section does indeed occupy a large amount of space in the book ("Répertoire prosopographique," pp. 109–176), yet it is not crucial to its form and values.

The importance of the other problems analysed in the book is what makes it valuable. The "Introduction" (pp. 15–29) is very concise, but packs a large amount of content into its outline of the historical and methodological issues of interest to the author. This includes a brief history of studies on cuneiform texts referring to the Hellenistic and Parthian era; an overview of the political history of Babylonia at this time; a discussion of the issues related to interpretation of cuneiform texts; a classification of the cuneiform documents accompanied by a succinct description of each type and comments on the limitations of this kind of documents and the peculiarities of their origin. Most of these documents are from Babylon, Uruk and Borsippa, while from other Babylonian cities we know of sets of just a few or a dozen or more documents. The author sets himself two research objectives in analysing his selected types of cuneiform documents: 1) to understand the way of transcribing Greek names and official terms in the cuneiform writing employed in Babylonian clerical practice, and 2) to trace the manifestations of Hellenisation of local elites and cultural evolution of Babylonia under the rule of the Greeks and Parthians (p. 29). It is owing to the significance of these issues that the book's prosopographic profile as signalled in the title does not match its true nature.

Monerie devotes much space to the description and analysis of linguistic phenomena present in cuneiform texts ("Du grec au cunéiforme: essai d'analyse linguistique," pp. 31–63). The discussion of them encompasses a broad range of grammatical and phonetic phenomena. Their specialist nature means that many of these phenomena are comprehensible exclusively to philologists. Yet some of the conclusions will also be of interest to non-philologists.

The differences in the orthography of Greek and Akkadian used for cuneiform writing was a difficulty with which Babylonian scribes tried to cope in various ways, since the documents were official and it was important to strive to render Greek names and official terms as faithfully as possible. One of the most common techniques was to use cuneiform symbols to transcribe the phonetic sounds. This phonetic transcription means that the cuneiform writing in the documents can vary widely even for just one name

⁴ See also G. F. Del Monte, *Testi dalla Babilonia Ellenistica*, vol. 1: *Testi cronografici*, Pisa – Roma 1997; B. Böck, in U. Hackl – B. Jacobs – D. Weber (eds.), *Quellen zur Geschichte des Partherreiches*, vol. 3: *Keilschriftliche Texte, Aramäische Texte, Armenische Texte, Arabische Texte, Chinesische Texte*, Göttingen – Oakville, CT 2010, 1–174.

(cf. pp. 203–204). Using this form of cuneiform writing meant that Babylonian scribes did not develop any universal system of transcription of Greek words and names. The author also points out one further important factor which had a major impact on the way in which Greek words were noted: the scribes used Aramaic in their daily lives. As a result, the linguistic phenomena characteristic of this language pervaded cuneiform writings, and through its symbols the pronunciation of Greek words and names and their transcription in cuneiform writing were determined. A visible result of the lack of a generally used transcription system for Greek was Babylonian writers' custom of using epithets alongside official names in documents. This allows us to trace the fortunes of two, or sometimes even three, generations of some families (pp. 62–63).

The problems related to the Hellenisation of the local elites and Babylonia's social history are presented in the section titled "Hommes et société en Babylonie hellénistique et parthe" (pp. 65–107). The author's observations and conclusions are worthy of note, but he admits more than once that his interpretations cannot be treated as definitive. His reason for these caveats is that the figures who appear in cuneiform documents represent only some groups of Babylonian society, and somewhat randomly, as the documents do not represent all regions of Babylonia equally. Moreover, one cannot treat the picture of Babylon's society from which the largest number of documents come as a point of reference, if only because in this city a strong presence of the Greek element was very much visible, which was reflected to a far lesser extent in documents from other cities of southern Mesopotamia. The author also notes the difficulties with interpreting the Greek onomastics of the figures mentioned in the sources. It is hard to determine categorically whether the use of a Greek name is proof of Hellenisation, or solely a result of mimicry dictated by the social strategy of the owner of the name. It is also not easy to identify the reasons for which some inhabitants of Babylonia used two names, a Greek and a local one. Although much has been said about this topic already, Monerie once again discusses this and similar issues (pp. 72–86). He also examines at length the transformations that took place in Babylonian society under Greek and Parthian rule. He considers the reasons for these changes to have been not only the influence of Greek civilisation, which led to the formation of a new cultural identity of the population living in southern Mesopotamia, but also the intensive urbanisation initiated by the Seleucids (pp. 87–107). Yet the author is aware that the discovery of new documents might result in the need for revision of his conclusions and findings in future.

The prosopography that concludes the book includes biographical information on almost 250 people with Greek names, and can be treated as a valuable supplement to the author's conclusions on the changes that took place in Babylonian society. It can also be treated entirely separately – as an exceptionally useful tool for scholars dealing with not only the social history, but also the political history of Babylonia in the Hellenistic and Parthian period. It is particularly valuable as among the almost 250 figures a large number are rulers of the Seleucid dynasty and members of their family as well as royal officials. The individual entries include their names, year of birth and death, information on any family connections, forms in which the name was transcribed in sources, chronological data concerning the documents in which they are mentioned, and bibliography. This structure means that they contain much more information about the activity of the kings from the Seleucid dynasty and their representatives as well as officials with Greek

names in the services of the Arsacids in Babylonia than any other known prosopographies, whose authors failed to include data from cuneiform sources.

At the end of Monerie's book come seven annexes which add to its value. These are: a list of loans from Greek attested in cuneiform documents, containing a table of transcribed Greek names of functions and officials (pp. 197–198); a list of Greek toponyms attested in cuneiform texts (pp. 199–200); tables of simplified rules for transcription of Greek in cuneiform documents (p. 201); a list of symbols of cuneiform writing allowing identification of Greek names (p. 202); an example list of diverse transcriptions of the name of King Demetrius I figuring in documents from Uruk (pp. 203–204); a list of the rulers from the Seleucid dynasty who governed Babylonia (p. 205); and a list of royal officials in Babylonia in the Hellenistic and Parthian period (pp. 206–208).

Julien Monerie's book is without any doubt an important contribution to studies on the Hellenistic and Parthian period in the history of Babylonia. Yet it should not be confined to scholars interested in the past of this land. It can also be recommended to philologists and linguists as well as historians of ancient culture.

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