

reverse



#### Notes

1. Here published by kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum; photos by the author.
  2. However, remnants of a chapter entitled BALAĜ *šikinšu* have survived on K.4206+, rev. 1-9, see S. Mirelman, “Birds, BalaĜs, and Snakes (K.4206+)”, *JCS* 67 (2015), 169-186. As Mirelman has convincingly shown that in this section of text BALAĜ is used as a cryptograph for MUŠEN = *iššuru*, it could be argued that the pertinent lines represent another part of the presumed composition *Iššuru šikinšu*. On the fragmentary evidence we have it cannot be told if the so-called Bird Call Text (W. Lambert, “The Bird Call Text”, *AnSt.* 20 [1970], 111-117) might have belonged to *Iššuru šikinšu*; at any rate, apart from systematically associating birds with gods the first line of one of its sections (STT 341, 1) closely mirrors the pattern of our text: *āribānū [iššūr] Marduk āmiršu išarri (...)* “The *āribānū*-bird is the bird of Marduk; whoever sees it will be rich (...)”.
  3. K.4206+, rev. 10-28 represents all that is positively known of *Šerru šikinšu*. The incipit DIŠ MUŠ GAR<sup>2</sup>-IŠU<sup>17</sup> is found in Ni.2909, 1', Tablet Inventory 2 as edited (p. 32) by I. Finkel, “On Three Tablet Inventories”, in U. Steinert (Ed.), *Assyrian and Babylonian Scholarly Text Catalogues*, BAM 9 (2018), 25-41.
  4. As far as these parallels are concerned the present author is grateful for having had full access to the editions stored at the Electronic Babylonian Literature Project (LMU, München), which are based on numerous newly found joins and duplicates, in large measure established by Zs. Földi.
  5. For DIŠ in this function see Gehlken's remarks *OLZ* 114 (2015), 289.
  6. Compare A. Schuster-Brandis, *Steine als Schutz- und Heilmittel*, AOAT 46 (2008), 17-24.
  7. For an introduction to Ancient Near Eastern ornithomancy see N. De Zorzi, “Bird Divination in Mesopotamia – New Evidence from BM 108874”, *KASKAL* 6 (2009), 85-135. Note that in the quote there from K.4001+ obv. 29 (p. 88, fn. 21) *zi-bi* represents a misspelt ZI.BI = *napištišu* “its throat”, an interpretation rejected by the present author in favour of *zi-bi* = *zībi* “vulture”.
- The chapter *Muršu/Simmu šikinšu* –roughly coextensive with tablet 33 of the Handbook of Nosomancy (*Sakikkû*)– is a composition sui generis; see now E. Schmidtchen, *Mesopotamische Diagnostik (...)*, BAM 13 (2021), 41-43.182-189.

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**118) Cyaxares in Assyria** — The recent excellent publication of a remarkable Late Assyrian land sale document in the Hasankeyf Museum stresses the abnormal form of the date: ‘Unusually, the document does not have an eponym date, but is instead dated with the phrase “9th year of the chief cupbearer Lâbašî”’ (Toptaş & Akyüz 2021: 77, hereafter references to this article are given in square brackets, e.g. [p. 77]).<sup>1)</sup> The authors also drew attention to another exceptional feature, namely that, before the dating formula proper and after a horizontally ruled line, a personal name is inserted (Figs. 1 and 2). Since in other respects

this text is a typical Neo-Assyrian real estate contract (Postgate 1976, Tushingham 2019), it is certainly curious that it was not dated using the traditional Neo-Assyrian *limmu* dating system.

49 <sup>m</sup>ú-ba-ki-is-te-ri <sup>lú</sup>mat-a-a  
 50 <sup>i</sup>íZÍZ UD.10 KÁM MU.AN.NA 9 <sup>m</sup>la-ba-si  
 51 <sup>lú</sup>GAL-KAŠ.LUL

Ubaki-isteri, Median. Month Shebat (XI), 10th day, 9th year Lâbaši, chief cupbearer.

Fig. 1. Transcription and translation of lines 49 to 51 according to Toptaş & Akyüz (2021: 81-82).

The person named in line 49 is described as a Mede. If, as Toptaş & Akyüz propose, the contract may date to “the final stage of the Neo-Assyrian period” [p. 77], it is possible that he might be the only Mede, who was both active at that time and whose name is known to us, namely the Median king Cyaxares, whose armies together with those of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, brought an end to the Assyrian Empire.

Enrique Jiménez has kindly informed me that the sign following the name offers additional support for this proposal, since, instead of being the sign LÚ, it is the sign LUGAL. This is confirmed when it is compared to the LUGAL sign in line 45 and the LÚ signs in lines 52 and 53 (Fig. 2). Thus this individual is described not merely as a Mede but as the Median king.



Fig. 2. Photograph of lines 45 to 53, with examples of the signs LUGAL and LÚ marked (courtesy of Koray Toptaş and Faruk Akyüz)

Cyaxares was known to Herodotus as Κυαξάρης. His name appears in the Bisitun inscription as that of a supposed ancestor of two of the rebel kings. It is written in Old Persian as u-v-x-š-t-r-, in Babylonian as <sup>m</sup>ú-ma-ku-iš-tar, and in Elamite as <sup>HAL</sup>ma-ak-iš-tar-ra (Tavernier 2007: 21). He is also mentioned in the Babylonian *Fall of Nineveh Chronicle* as <sup>m</sup>ú-ma-kiš-tar and [<sup>m</sup>ú-ma-ki-i]š-tar (Glassner 2004: 220 lines 38 and 30). The writing on the tablet <sup>m</sup>ú-ba-ki-is-te-ri is not dissimilar to the Babylonian forms. The different endings are probably not significant. The sign BA on the tablet is clearly legible and is not a poorly written MA. In the Babylonian spellings of this name, m represents the semivowel w, as is shown by comparison with the Old Persian form of the name. As Enrique Jiménez has suggested to me, the use of the sign BA instead of MA may be explained by the fact that occasionally in Assyrian the semivowel w is represented by b (von Soden 1995: §21b and d on pp. 25-26).

Three other individuals with similar names have been identified in Assyrian texts (Baker & Schmitt 2011: 3153-3154 *sub* Uaksatar): one was a Median ruler in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, another (possibly the same person) may have been from Media in the reign of Sargon II, and the third perhaps dating to c. 672-669 BC is possibly associated with the Cimmerians. The dates of these individuals, who were not given the title of king, do not seem to be compatible with the date of the Hasankeyf Tablet [pp.83-84]. We can therefore be certain that the king mentioned on the tablet is Cyaxares himself.

Cyaxares' name, being written immediately after the horizontal line and immediately before the dating formula, surely indicates that he was the ruler when the document was written and we may wonder why the sale was not dated by his regnal year, calculated either from the time of his accession to the throne in Media or from the time of his acquisition of previously Assyrian territory.

Although the name of the Median king is inserted at the beginning of the date formula, the actual date on the Hasankeyf Tablet is given as the 9th year of Labasi, the *rab šāqê*, an office often translated as that of the chief cupbearer.<sup>2)</sup> This unusual dating system is, as far as I am aware, unparalleled in Assyria, where occasionally documents were dated by the regnal year of the king but until now never by the years of service of officials. Toptaş & Akyüz [p. 83] discussed double dating on Assyrian texts in which the *limmu* date was supplemented by the regnal year of the king. Additional information is given by Millard (1994: 70-71), who also listed instances where the phrase “in the time” (*ina tarši*) of a particular king was appended to the name of the *limmu*. In all these instances, however, the king's name is placed after the name of the *limmu*.

This exceptional method of dating suggests that the document was composed in exceptional circumstances as is already evident from the inclusion of the name of the Median king. Clearly there are problems and no easy solutions in establishing the historical situation in which an “Assyrian” sale document was drawn up in a place that was under the rule of the Median king Cyaxares, especially since the time and the place are themselves subject to considerable uncertainty. Despite or perhaps because of the uncertainties, the Hasankeyf Tablet has opened an intriguing new field for historical speculation.

#### Notes

1. I am very grateful to Koray Toptaş and Faruk Akyüz for discussing this important text with me and for their valuable suggestions which have greatly improved this short note. In addition I am indebted to them for permission to publish the photograph shown in Fig. 2. I also thank Poppy Tushingham for helpful discussion of the text as well as Heather Baker, Enrique Jiménez, and Antigoni Zournatzi for their useful comments. I am particularly appreciative of Karen Radner's insightful criticism of an early draft of this note. She tells me that she had independently recognised the name of the Median king and will discuss this fascinating text in a future article.

2. Faruk Akyüz has drawn my attention to the doctoral thesis of Miklós Kerekes (2021) in which the Hasankeyf Tablet is discussed. I am grateful to Dr. Kerekes for sharing with me his suggestion that, after the death of the Assyrian king, the *rab šāqê* established a local administration within the Median sphere of influence. He will publish further details of his proposal in the near future.

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