

Heller, André: *Das Babylonien der Spätzeit (7.-4. Jh.) in den klassischen und keilschriftlichen Quellen*. Berlin: Verlag Antike 2010. ISBN: 978-3-938032-38-1; 557 S.

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Before the decipherment of cuneiform writing around the middle of the nineteenth century the academic world relied exclusively on biblical writings and classical authors to reconstruct the history and culture of Mesopotamia. These sources mainly deal with Mesopotamia during the first millennium BC. The Greek writers were in the first place interested in the Persian Empire as their famous adversary and sometimes they treated the Neo-Babylonian kings as the immediate predecessors of the Achaemenid dynasty. In biblical writings the focus was placed on the Neo-Babylonian Empire as destroyer of the first temple in Jerusalem and cause for the so-called Babylonian captivity and on the last phase of the Babylonian Empire culminating in the destruction of the city of Babylon by the Persians. The decipherment of cuneiform and the discovery of all sorts of cuneiform texts in Mesopotamian soil furnished the academic community first-hand documentation on Mesopotamian history and culture that greatly modified and adjusted the prevailing views. In addition, the influx of new source material allowed the study of much earlier (third and second millennium BC) cultures in Mesopotamia, previously only known from mythological narratives by classical authors.

The sheer mass of cuneiform documents and the completely different writing system soon established Assyriology as a separate study and research specialization apart from Classics and West-Semitic Studies. Trained Assyriologists did not have a background in Classics and/or West-Semitic languages anymore and the publication habits (often only in autograph copy without transliteration or translation) made the new information impossible or very hard to consult for ancient historians dealing with the same period and region from a classical perspective. A view from both the classical and cuneiform source material with a good knowledge of the possi-

bilities, strengths and weaknesses of the different sources and a training in the ways research is done in both specializations is today a *conditio sine qua non* to further the study of Mesopotamia during the first millennium BC.

With the book under review the author firmly places himself in this tradition. Already in the first chapter, dealing with the sources (pp. 18–97) he gives a clear overview of the archaeological remains, the classical authors and the cuneiform tablets. For both the classical and cuneiform tradition quite some attention was spent on the historical value of the different sources and their different *modi operandi*. After a general chapter on Babylonian temple and society (pp. 98–139; including contributions on the image of Babylonia in Greek tradition and in how far this corresponds with what we know from the Babylonian sources), a chronological survey of Babylonia in the late period starts with the end of the Assyrian rule and the Neo-Babylonian period (pp. 140–236), beginning with a contribution on the Assyrians from the perspective of the classical sources. The author examines then the Achaemenid period (pp. 237–354) and, finally, the reign of Alexander the Great (pp. 355–443); here also Alexander's arrival in Babylon is treated first on the basis of the information found in the writings of the Alexander historians and then on the basis of the cuneiform sources. I can only agree with the approach to present an overview of the history of Babylonia from the seventh until fourth century BC and Heller's book is a meaningful and welcome addition to academic research. The following remarks only concern a few details and are by no means a depreciation of the book's value.

The conclusion (p. 93) that it was the scribe only who decided to choose which ruler he named in the date formula is in my opinion an overstatement. It is true that the early Hellenistic period was from a political, military and calendrical point of view quite confused – not only for us researchers, but probably also for the Babylonian scribes. But this does not mean that no regulation at all was issued by the administration regarding date formulas. The change from the official Argead king Alexander IV to the name of the effective ruler and *strategos* Antigonos Monophthalmus is

an innovation that can hardly have been initiated by the writers themselves. In addition, the same change is attested in the date formulas of the Aramaic ostraca in Idumaea. Finally, if BCHP 3: Rev. 3'-4' is accepted, we might have here a proclamation of change in date formulas by the administration.¹

The suggestion (p. 307) that the appearance of two dates, the last year of a king together with the accession year of the following king, in one date formula was caused by the usurpation by Darius II in Babylonia during the lifetime of Artaxerxes II is unfounded. The classical sources give another story for the course of events (as told by the author) and if Darius II revolted against his father and ruled Babylonia there was no reason for him to allow the name of his father in the date formulas together with his own accession year. In addition, BE X 4 and BE VIII/1 127 are by no means exceptional date formulas. We have similar examples for other kings where there is (also) no indication that an usurpation started before the death of the old king. In SpTU 5 307 the 21st year of Xerxes is identified with the accession year of Artaxerxes I (465/64 BC). Also two Aramaic texts show the same dating method: 21st year of Xerxes = accession year of Artaxerxes I in TAD B2.2² and the second year of Arsēs/Artaxerxes IV = accession year of Darius III (336/5 BC) in DJD 28 WDSP 1.³

The date of Alexander's death is fixed on 13 June 323 BC (p. 406) or 10 June 323 BC (p. 442). Both dates have indeed been proposed, but the astronomical diary AD 1 -322B: 'Obv.' 8' now makes clear that 11 June 323 BC is to be preferred.⁴ For the problematic 'royal journals' or *Ephemerides* dealing with the last days of Alexander in Babylon before his death, the author returns to a theory by Samuel that it was based on the historical notes of the cuneiform astronomical diaries. Apart from the news of Alexander's death, no other passages with historical notes are preserved from the end of Alexander's reign. The notes that are preserved in the astronomical diaries from the end of the fourth century BC make, however, clear that they are much shorter than the stories that the Alexander historiographers make of it. The question of the 'royal journals' can in our view not be solved

by looking for a cuneiform source.⁵

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¹ See the online edition of the *Diadochi Chronicle* with text, translation and commentary by Bert van der Spek, <http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp-diadochi/diadochi_01.html> (visited 2011/28/03).

² Bezalel Porten / Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, Vol. 2: Contracts, Winona Lake 1989.

³ Douglas M. Gropp, *Wadi Daliyeh II. The Samaria Papyri from Wadi Daliyeh (= Discoveries from the Judean Desert 28)*, Oxford 2001.

⁴ As is clear from the literature the author refers to, especially Leo Depuydt, *The Time of Death of Alexander the Great: 11 June 323 B.C. (-322), ca. 4:00-5:00*, in: *Welt des Orients* 28 (1997), pp. 117-135.

⁵ A small bibliographical correction: Waerzegger's article on the Babylonian revolts against Xerxes (p. 504) was published in AfO (Archiv für Orientforschung) instead of AoF (Altorientalische Forschungen).