

105) “An Aramean (or Israelite) in the Service of the Crown Prince Amēl-Marduk” —

The cuneiform tablets in the possession of the Detroit Institute of Arts have recently been uploaded on the CDLI Web Site. One of the tablets is of particular interest in that it names an individual serving in the household of the crown prince in the 42nd year of Nebuchadnezzar II. The museum number of the tablet is DIA 19.024.23 and the CDLI number is P461521 (thus accessible at <<http://cdli.ucla.edu/P461521>>). The digital images are very clear and permit a full transliteration and translation of the document, which is published here with the kind permission of the Institute. I wish to thank Lina Meerchayad, Collection Research Associate at the Detroit Institute of Arts, for her help.

The Detroit Institute of Arts (Gift of Henry G. Stevens, 19.24.23)

Obverse

1. 54 ½ MA.NA 'KÙ.BABBAR¹
2. šá^{ld} NÀ-ŠEŠ.MEŠ-GI
3. *ina pa-ni^{ld} ba-ti-DINGIR.MEŠ-šu-ru*
4. šá É^{ld} DUMU-LUGAL *a-na dul-lu*
5. *ina ŠÀ-bi 11 MA.NA 1/3 GÍN*
6. *gam-mar^{ld} NÀ-ŠEŠ.MEŠ-GI*
7. IGI-‘u’¹

Reverse

8. ITI DU₆ UD 25-KAM
9. MU 42-KAM
10. ^dPA-NÍG.DU-ÛRI
11. LUGAL TIN.TIR^{ki}

“54 ½ minas of silver belonging to Nabû-aḥḫē-šullim at the disposal of Baytil-šūr, (officer) of the household of the crown prince, for work; from it 11 minas and 1/3 shekel have been received (as) complete (installment) by Nabû-aḥḫē-šullim; month of Tašrītu, 25th day, 42nd year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.”

The tablet contains too little information to be assigned to a specific archival context. For the same reason, the nature and circumstances of the transaction it records cannot be ascertained. The name Baytil-šūr is Aramean and means “the god Baytil is a protective wall” (PEARCE, WUNSCH 2014: 48). The same name carried by other individuals appears with various spellings in the recently published texts from Al Yahudu and other localities (PEARCE, WUNSCH 2014: 268): ^{ld}É-DINGIR-šu-ru, ^{ld}É-DINGIR-šu-ú-ur, and ^{ld}É-DINGIR-šu-ru. Syllabic spellings of the theophoric element Baytil are attested in other Neo-Babylonian documents (ZADOK 1977: 61): some fully preserve the diphthong (e.g. ^{ld}ba-i-ti-DINGIR-<...>; ^{ld}ba-’i-it-DINGIR-da-la-a₄) while others seem to denote it with the sign BA alone, although this could also indicate contraction (e.g. ^{ld}ba-ti-il-ḫa-ra and ^{ld}ba-ti-il-še-zib). While the name Baytil-šūr is linguistically Aramean, the matter of the ethnicity of its bearer remains open. The god Baytil, better known as Bethel according to its Biblical form, was worshipped over a wide area in Syria and the southern Levant (RÖLLIG 1999; DALGLISH 1992). It also appears in the Bible, notably in the name of the important cultic center Bethel (GOMES 2006). Jeremiah 48:13 suggests that the god Bethel occupied a prominent place in the

religion of the northern kingdom of Israel, his status being comparable with that of the god Chemosh in Moab. The evidence from Elephantine shows that Bethel was worshiped there by Jews under the names Ešem-Bethel and Anath-Bethel alongside Yahweh and that Bethel was seen probably as another name for the god of Israel, although opinions are divided on the significance of this data.

Although Bethel appears as theophoric element in names that are linguistically Aramean, it cannot be excluded that some of these names belonged to Jews; the exilic onomasticon of Israelites and Judeans shows many interferences, religious and linguistic, with the people among whom they lived, and this already quite early after their deportation (ZADOK 2015). Thus, although the name Baytil-šūr in our document could be that of an Aramean, it could alternatively belong to an Israelite who lived in Judea and was then deported to Babylonia; a name with Bethel seems indeed more likely to have been borne by someone originating from the northern kingdom given the importance of that god there, and many Israelites moved to the kingdom of Judah after the fall of Samaria. The rise of deported Judeans to official positions is also documented by a family of royal merchants attested under Nabonidus and Cyrus (JURSA 2007). We may also note in this connection that according to the *Hofkalender* of Nebuchadnezzar the Chief of the Royal Merchants (*rab tamkāri ša šarri*) in his seventh year, the year of the first campaign against Judah, bore the name Hanunu, very probably Phoenician (DA RIVA 2013: 203).

The Detroit tablet is dated to the penultimate year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and the crown prince is therefore almost certainly Amēl-Marduk, the Evil-Merodach of the Bible who released Jehoiachin from captivity (II Kings 25: 27-30):

“In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, King Evil-Merodach of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released King Jehoiachin of Judah from prison; he spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the other seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes. Every day of his life he dined regularly in the king’s presence. For his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, a portion every day, as long as he lived.”

According to the Book of Kings Jehoiachin was released by Amēl-Marduk “in the year that he began to reign”. The expression seems to refer to his accession year, which fell in the 43rd year of his father Nebuchadnezzar II. His reign started at the end of the month of Ulūlu of that year (early October 562), therefore about a year after the Detroit tablet was written. However, the Book of Kings claims that Jehoiachin’s release took place on XII/27 in the 37th year of his exile, which seems slightly at variance with a date in the accession year of Amēl-Marduk if the computation started precisely at the first capture of Jerusalem in 597. If we rely on the Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle, Jerusalem fell on the second day of Addaru in the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar, which is March 16, 597 in the Julian calendar (GRAYSON 2000: 100):

“The seventh year: In the month Kislimu the king of Akkad mustered his army and marched to Hattu. He encamped against the city of Judah and on the second day of the month Addaru he captured the city (and) seized (its) king. A king of his own choice he appointed in the city (and) taking the vast tribute he brought it into Babylon.”

This should mark the beginning of Jehoiachin’s exile, but counting thirty-seven years from that date brings us to the first full regnal year of Amēl-Marduk (561-560). Thus the Book of Kings may in fact refer to the first year rather than the accession year. At any rate, Amēl-Marduk succumbed to a palace coup later in that year. We know for certain that Jehoiachin was held captive in Babylon because among administrative texts from the Southern Palace dated 595-570 (year 10 to 35 of Nebuchadnezzar) we find him listed as recipient of foodstuffs together with members of his retinue (COGAN 2013: 141-143). The importance of the Detroit tablet lies in the fact that it provides evidence that a man of Aramean (or perhaps Israelite) origin occupied an official position in the household of the crown prince Amēl-Marduk shortly before

he succeeded his father Nebuchadnezzar. The presence of a Westerner among his household's staff might explain his leniency toward the captive Judean king, who could finally be released from captivity now that his conqueror had passed away.

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