

35) The date of death of Itti-Marduk-balātu of the Egibi family* — The large number of documents in the archive of the Egibi family may lead to the conclusion that at least the basic data about the head of each generation (especially concerning the beginning and end of their activity, i.e. their death), are already well known. Therefore, I was greatly surprised when I noted that the death date for Itti-Marduk-balaṭu, head of the third generation, is uncertain and that one document has been omitted in the discussion.

Let me present a few opinions on this subject:

“Itti-Marduk-balātu [IMB] führte die Geschäfte in den dritten Generation bis zum Ende von Cambyses’ (529-522) Regierung, ihm folgte Marduk-nāšir-apli [MNA] zur Zeit Darius (521-486)” (Wunsch 1999, 349).

“Als IMB relative früh und wohl recht unerwartet im Jahr 8 Cam starb, trat sein älterer Sohn Marduk-nāšir-apli als Oberhaupt der vierten Generation sein Nachfolge an” (Wunsch 2000, 15).

“When his [MNA] father [i.e. IMB] suddenly died in 522/521 (= 8 Camb) (...) MNA assumed control over family business” (Abraham 2004, 14; evidently influenced by Wunsch 2000).

The next opinion is less precise, but shifts the death of IMB by at least ten months:¹⁾

“He [IMB] seems to have died suddenly at the beginning of Darius reign...” (Wunsch 2007, 233).

As we see the opinion of Cornelia Wunsch is that IMB died in the eight year of Cambyses (522 BC) and that family business was taken over by MNA at the beginning of Darius’ reign. The beginning of Darius’ reign may be understood either as his Accession Year (522/21 BC) or his first year (521/20 BC). However, as the last document mentioning Cambyses is Cam 409, dated to the 23rd day of Nisannu, and IMB is mentioned in a few documents of Nebuchadnezzar III from Babylon,²⁾ it is certain that IMB lived a few months longer than Cambyses, at least till the month Tašrītu 552/1 BC (Nbk 10). The basis for prolonging the life of IMB “to the beginning of Darius reign” is not explained by Wunsch.

In this context the document Dar 275, dated to the 18th day of the **tenth year** of Darius, needs to be mentioned and discussed.³⁾ According to it in that year IMB, son of Nabū-aḥḥē-iddin, acting by his proxy, Šamaš-iddin, his slave, rented his house (located in *mūtaq ša-Nergal-ša-ḥadē* in Kašir, the district of Babylon, and near other houses of IMB) to Ša-Bēl-bani, slave of Nidintu, son of Iddiya, for 2 *qū* of bread daily. No typical obligations are mentioned, but it is said that the tenant *maššartu ša sūti inaššar*, i.e. that the tenant will take care of the *sūtu*. I do not know any other text in which the term *sūtu* is used instead of *idu* in any house rental text, and the sense of this obligation is therefore unclear. The tenth year of Darius date for this transaction is evidently wrong, as there is no doubt that IMB had already been dead for about ten years. For this reason in my *Rental of Houses*, p. 36, I suggested dating the text to the first year of Darius, but, while writing chapter 2.2.10 a few months later, I dated it –following Strassmaier’s copy– to the tenth year (pp. 76, 85). Then, during my short stay in the British Museum in November 2019, I collated the tablet to resolve my doubts. To my surprise Strassmaier’s copy of the year number is accurate and it is beyond doubt that the tablet is dated to the tenth year. Since –as is remarked above– there is no doubt that IMB had been dead from about ten years, the question is raised how to explain the dating in Dar 275. At least two different possibilities have to be taken into account:

1. The scribe who wrote the document mistakenly dated it to tenth year while it was written in fact in the first year. Although such a possibility cannot be excluded, the second alternative seems more probable to me, that

2. Dar 275 is not an original document, but a later copy, written in or after the tenth year and the copyist misread one vertical wedge as a Winkelhaken u (10) given that the vertical wedge (diš) is sometimes slanting.⁴⁾

3. I took also into account the third possibility that the slaves were still named according to the dead owner until the division of inheritance between IMB’s sons in the fourteenth year of Darius (Dar 379). This explanation, however, is not acceptable as can be demonstrated by the case of Madānu-bēl-ušur.⁵⁾ He was first slave of Iddin-Marduk, son of Iqīša, descendant of Nūr-Sin, i.e. father-in-law of IMB. In the fourth year of Cambyses he is described as slave of IMB, i.e. Iddin-Marduk had sold Madānu-bēl-ušur to IMB after the twenty-fourth day of Šabaṭu, third year when he is still slave of Iddin-Marduk (Cam 218) and before the tenth day of Tebētu, fourth year of Cambyses, by which time he is already slave of IMB (Cam 257). Madānu-bēl-ušur occurs as slave of IMB until the eighth year of Cambyses (Cam 409), but in Dar 177 (written in the fifth year of Darius), although he is not named slave of MNA, he is active under his supervision. Also later, although Madānu-bēl-ušur fulfilled the orders of MNA, he is not called slave.⁶⁾ This speaks against the idea that document in question was written in the tenth year of Darius.

It seems to me that the best explanation is that Dar 275 is really a later copy by an apprentice scribe who made a number of errors:

1. The first sign in the name of NAI, father of IMB, was written badly as ^{md}en, but next the scribe added two short horizontal wedges such as are typical for the sign ag (the wedges are perfectly copied by Strassmaier). The reading ag is certain because at the beginning of the second line we must read [a ^{me-gi-b}]i since the partly preserved sign is not 30 (as suggested by Strassmaier's copy and accepted by Joannès in <http://www.achemenet.com/en/item/?/textual-sources/texts-by-regions/babylonia/babylon/1658177-regions/>), but rather [b]i (one u sign and below only part of one slanting line (rest of the second u)).
2. The second part of line 5 and whole of line 6 were intentionally erased although they are still visible, and were copied perfectly by Strassmaier, who, however, did not count line 6 in his numbering of lines. This is the right decision as the erased lines repeat what was written above and are unnecessary.
3. In line 11 there is é ina igi-šú-nu but there is only one tenant involved, i.e. it should be é ina igi-šú; cf. *id-din* at the end of line 9.
4. The scribe made error(s) in the name in line 18 and it is not clear what he wanted to write. Joannès in his transliteration in www.achemenet.com suggests reading ^{mu-lib}12-ši {ina igi šá}, but he is right that the second sign is hardly *lib* (it looks like *lu*) and there are three unnecessary characters.
5. In the last line the scribe repeated lugal tin.tir^{ki} lugal tin.tir^{ki} instead of writing either lugal tin.tir^{ki} lugal kur.kur or lugal kur.kur.meš.

The errors, some very simple, make it very probable that the tablet is a copy by a young scribe, who copied diš (1) as u (10). Given that neither Šamaš-iddin,⁷ slave of IMB acting as his proxy, nor the tenant Bēl-bāni, slave of Iddiya, Iddin-Nabū, the scribe, son of Arad-Bēl of the Marduku family occurs – according to the best of my knowledge – in any other document, the argument presented above is the only plausible way of dating the tablet. If this interpretation is acceptable it leads to the conclusion that IMB was still alive on eighteenth day of Ulūlu, the first year of Darius.

There is however, another, earlier document Dar 15 (BM 41447), dated to an unknown day of month Simānu, first year of Darius. According to lines 1-6 MNA borrowed 5 minas of silver from a certain Nabū-mukin-zēri (father's and family names broken off) promising to give back silver in month Aiaru, obviously next year. Important are, however, lines 7-10, suggesting that the debt of IMB is now paid (or to be paid) by MNA:

⁷ *ri-iḫ-tu, ú-il-ti šá 10²* [ma²-na² kù.babbar]

⁸ *x x x x x¹ šá^{md}ag-d[u-numun]*

⁹ *šá ina muḫ-ḫi^{mk}-amar.utu-[tin]*

¹⁰ *ina šuⁱⁱmdamar.utu-na-šir-[ibila...]*

“The remaining debt of 10² [minas? of silver] ¹x x x x x¹ belonging to Nabū-mu[kin-zēri], owed by IMB, [will be/was received?] from MNA.”⁸)

The quoted fragment suggests that IMB was already dead and that his son MNA promised to regulate the debt. It might have been concluded that at that time, i.e. Simānu (III) first year of Darius, IMB was already dead, which contradicts the proposed date of his death in Ulūlu (VI) this year. However, there are serious doubt on the reading of the month and the year in this tablet as, according to collation by Jürgen Lorenz,⁹ is “das von Strassmaier kopierte Zeichen SIG₄ bei der Schreibung des Monatsnamens möglich. Allerdings ist davon heute kaum mehr als ein Winkelhaken erhalten. Obwohl 1 die wahrscheinliche Lesung für die Jahreszahl ist, konnte sie auch höher gewesen sein.”¹⁰) In light of Jürgen Lorenz' observation it is more probable that Dar 15 was written later, probably in the second year of Darius.¹¹)

The first text which might be interpreted as written after the death of IMB is Dar 26 = CM 20B, no. 177 dated to the eighth day of Addaru, first year of Darius. It concerns the purchase of a palm garden outside the city wall and an unbuilt place (*kišubbū*) in Litamu, in the province of Babylon, by MNA from Kalbā, son of Sillā of the Nabaya family for the large sum of 8 ½ minas of silver. In lines 30-31 the following remark occurs:

mimma ina kaspi rašūtu ša IMB abi/ša MNA ina šīmi eqli šuāti ul manā,

“None of the silver owed to IMB, the father of MNA, is counted in the price of that field.”¹²)

It follows from this statement that MNA paid for the purchased plot(s) using his own silver, despite the fact that Kalbā owed some sum to IMB. It seems to me that the declaration was added on request of MNA, who wished to avoid any suspicion about his brothers (or maybe also his uncle, Nergal-ētir, as IMB managed his share also till the death) that he bought the plot(s) using the sum owed by Kalbā to IMB, which belonged to the inheritance to be divided between the successors (this time MNA and his brothers and maybe, their uncle).¹³)

The idea that IMB died in the first year of Darius is supported by the documents from the second year of Darius when MNA concluded transactions together with his brothers (Dar 35 = CM 20B, no. 103, rental of a field dated to the 28th day of Du'ūzu and Dar 45, loan of silver dated to the 17th day of Tašritu); in the third year his share (*zittu*) and shares of his brothers (Dar 79 = CM 20B, no. 100, receipt for dates) are mentioned;¹⁴)

in Dar 80 = CM 20B, no. 12A (cf. the sketch of this document, CM 20B, no. 11) the share of Nergal-ētir, brother of IMB, is separated from the share of MNA and his brothers. In the following years MNA acted many times also in the name of his brothers as they used the fields, fruit garden and palm groves undivided.¹⁵⁾ Note, however, that MNA more often concluded transactions regarding only his own fields or garden or, as in CM 20B, no. 239 (dated to the 14th year) and Dar 426 = CM 20B, no. 162 (dated to the 16th year of Darius) regarding only his share in the palm garden belonging to him and his brothers,¹⁶⁾ loaned or borrowed silver, purchased fields, palm garden and houses and loaned them, etc. It should be stressed that the subjects of inheritance division made in the 14th year of Darius (Dar 379) were slaves and houses only. But already before the death of IMB not only MNA, but also his younger brothers had assets making them possible to conclude transactions independently from their father (see Cam 341, sixth year of Cambyses, transaction of MNA with his brothers). It seems probable that the division of silver (presumably a very large amount) left by their late father was divided quite early. This is suggested by the fact that only in Dar 45, dated to the 17th day of Tašrītu, second year of Darius, MNA loaned 1 mina 50 shekels of silver in his own and his brothers' names. Almost all later contracts for the loan of silver are concluded only in the name of MNA, and only extremely seldom with one of his brothers (Abraham 2004, no. 73), in which we have to recognize voluntary agreement between them. However, already according to Dar 70, dated to the second day of Abu, third year of Darius, MNA regulated the debt of his father, suggesting that the division of silver left by IMB had taken place prior to this date, but all sums due from their late father diminished the silver to be divided, and regulation of these debts was on MNA.

In light of the above discussion the following conclusions are offered:

1. IMB died after the 18th day of Ulūlu but before the eighth day of Addaru, first year of Darius.
2. If we accept that the original version of Dar 275 was written in first year of Darius, it means that the document was drafted when the capital city recognized Nebuchadnezzar IV (Araḥa, son of Ḫaldita) as king of Babylon.¹⁷⁾ By such dating of his text IMB declared himself as follower of Persian against "native" (in fact also "fremd" because of his Urartian origin) ruler, supported by part at least of the Babylonian elite. The sudden death of IMB might reflect a punishment imposed by Nebuchadnezzar IV and/or his followers. Certainly IMB, who had very good relations with earlier Persian kings (Cyrus and Cambyses),¹⁸⁾ can have had no interest to enter into conflict with the future Persian king, whoever that would be. The sudden death of IMB had no negative influence on activity of the Egibi family at the time of MNA, who had very good relations without any disturbances with the Persian administration in Babylonia, also at the beginning of Darius' rule.¹⁹⁾

If the original tablet from which Dar 275 was copied should be dated to the first year of Darius, it must be excluded from my discussion of rental of houses in the tenth year of Darius and it would be the first document from the first year of Darius, where, in the turmoil in Babylonia between Nebuchadnezzar IV and Darius, IMB decided to conclude the contract obliging his tenant to pay rent not in silver neither in two instalments yearly, nor monthly, but in the form of daily payment in bread. This would be another case of the direct influence of a political situation on house rent contracts discussed in my book.

Notes

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1. The last surely dated document of Cambyses is Cam 409 dated to the end of the first month (Nisannu), 8th year of Cambyses, while the earliest document of Darius, dated to the beginning of the tenth month (Ṭebētu), his Accession Year (WVDOG 4, Taf.15, 3: 1-2), i.e. both within the same 522/1 BC.

2. The earliest is Nbk 3 (dated to the 17th day of Tašrītu; the last is Nbk 10 dated to the 21st day of the month Kislīmu).

3. The date has not been questioned by scholars, see Dandamayev 1984, 342; Joannès, www.achemenet.com/en/item/?/textual-sources/texts-by-regions/babylonia/babylon/1658177.

4. See Zawadzki 1990, where I presented arguments for the idea that, contrary to the copy of the Babylonian Chronicle BM 25127, Nebuchadnezzar ascended to the throne on the tenth day (sign u) of Ulūlu, while the copyist understood it to have taken place on the first day of this month and thus drew one vertical wedge (diš) denoting numeral 1. In Dar 275 the situation is opposite, i.e. that scribe wrote wedge u (10 as numeral) while in the original tablet was diš sign for numeral 1. That such mistakes are possible is unambiguously demonstrated in the case of BM 56353 where Stevenson 1902, no. 31 copied the year as 10 (u), while in fact it is year 1 (diš; courtesy of M. Sandowicz).

5. See the detailed description in Dandamayev 1984, 345-364.

6. The first document in which Madānu-bēl-ušur is named as slave of MNA is Dar 308, dated to the 26th day of Tašrītu, 11th year of Darius, i.e. about three years before the division of inheritance between MNA and his brothers. Only after the division of inheritance is Madānu-bēl-ušur regularly named as slave of MNA.

7. Out of this name only tiny parts of mu and the following lú (one wedge from each character) are preserved but the reading is certain. The space between m[u and l]ú is so small, that any additional sign is excluded. It seems to me that the condition of the tablet, especially the inside part, still looks as it did when Strassmaier made his copy.

8. It seems that line 11 opens a list of witnesses. (suggestion approved by Irving L. Finkel).

9. In my article Zawadzki 1994 all data are based on cuneiform copies accessible at that time, or on the data from catalogues published by Leichty 1986, Leichty and Grayson 1987 and Leichty, Finkelstein and Walker 1988; in the case of unpublished tablets, as before I have had no possibility to read or collate.

10. Lorenz 2008, 22, note 9. The tablet was kindly collated again by Irving L. Finkel, who is “inclined to read year 1 from the size of the vertical and the spacing”. However, as sometimes the vertical wedges are written tightly I prefer to date the tablet to the second year as only with this date we avoid the contradiction between this tablet and suggested date of Dar 275.

11. If such an interpretation of Dar 15 is acceptable, it should be deleted from the table in Bloch 2015, 12.

12. Cf. CAD R 214 and Wunsch, CM 20B, no. 177.

13. See C. Wunsch, CM 20B, p. 212, a commentary to line 30.

14. Note that such a formula is far from clear. It might be understood either as proof that the given plot was undivided, although MNA recognized the right of his brothers to their share in the inheritance from his father, or quite the opposite, that the plot was already divided, but they decided to manage it together. Only in such a document as CM 20B, no. 239 (14th year of Darius), Dar 426 = CM 20B, no. 162 (16th year of Darius) which concerns only the share of IMB in palm garden rented to other persons, or Dar 488 = CM 20B, no. 216 (19th year of Darius) in which Nabû-aḥḫē-bullitī, brother of MNA sold his share, is it certain that a given plot was divided and each brother disposed of it alone and could – as in the last case – sell it.

15. For detailed discussion of these texts, see Wunsch in CM 20A.

16. The latest text showing that the inherited fields were undivided or managed undivided is Dar 503 = CM 20B, no. 214 dated to the 20th year of Darius.

17. Bloch 2015, 13.

18. Concerning his relation with Persia, see Tolini 2011, 193-230 with earlier literature.

19. A comprehensive and excellent analysis of these relations is given by Abraham 2004, 17-142 with summary, 134-42 and 178-183.

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