33) On the etymology of shekel fractions in the Hellenistic period – In 1973 A.L. Oppenheim called attention to a hitherto unknown subdivision of the shekel (aram. māʾāh, written <ma(-ḥat)> on which see below) in a group of administrative texts from Late Hellenistic Babylon (notes of income and expenditure). This text group is now commonly referred to as the Rahimesu archive. He concluded that at the time these texts were drafted two systems of subdividing the shekel seem to have been operating: “an older one, and a new one, using from one to five m. (= māʾāh) in combination with [the fraction] ½.” A few years later W. R. Mayer identified two additional subdivisions of the shekel (ḥi “one half of a māʾāh”

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3 See the discussion in Oppenheim, *Or*. 42, 325 and 327. Also note that for example in CT 49, 156 the scribe employs <4-ṭū> (in line 11) alongside <3 ma> (in line 13) to designate one fourth of a shekel.

and ra “one fourth of a māʿāh”) which occur in the very same text group but had previously been overlooked by Oppenheim. Based on his findings Mayer was able to account for the arithmetical discrepancies Oppenheim had encountered when calculating the accounts recorded in the Rahimesu notes CT 49, 154, 156 and 158 (see Mayer, Or. 54, 207-209).

In addition to metrology, both scholars also studied the etymology of the terms denoting the various shekel fractions. On the basis of unpublished epigraphic material the present note aims to re-evaluate the lexicographical suggestions given by Mayer and to provide new information on the correct rendering of the full forms of ūḫ and ra (Mayer, Or. 54, passim). Note that māʿāh “one twelfth of a shekel” is excluded from the following discussion, as the Aramaic origin proposed in Oppenheim, Or. 42, 327 is generally accepted.

ūḫ Mayer proposed to interpret ūḫ as the short form of West Semitic ḥi/esi “one half”. In addition to the semantic meaning which corresponds well to the metrological value of the ūḫ, Mayer based his suggestion on Nabatean coins which give ḫṣ kṣp to designate a half mʿh kṣp “one silver obolus” (Mayer, Or. 54, 207). In view of plene writings in AB 245 (McEwan, Iraq 43, 139, line 4), BM 33009 (CT 49, 156, line 13) and 41780 (Kessler 2000, no. 10, line 5), however, R.J. van der Spek, the editor of the Rahimesu archive, did not endorse Mayer’s interpretation. According to him, the full form of ūḫ is to be read ūḫ-tū(UD) in the instances cited above (van der Spek, Rahimesu, 211; on the reading ūḫ-tu see below). Van der Spek, however, did not take into account that the GIŠ sign (two horizontals followed by a single vertical) often resembles the UD sign (two obliques followed by a single vertical), especially when written cursively (a common feature of cuneiform texts from the Hellenistic period). If we thus assume that the sign is rather GIŠ (with the phonological value ʿiṣ) than UD (tū), we might argue for the reading ūḫ-ṣī. In fact, collation of the BM tablets (CT 49, 156 and Kessler 2000, no. 10; on McEwan, Iraq 43, 139 (AB 245) see note 5 shows that in each case the rendering of the sign following the ūḫ clearly differs from the numerous attestations of the UD sign throughout the texts. In addition, there is yet another text supporting the reading ūḫ-ṣī. Unlike CT 49, 156 and Kessler 2000, no. 10, the unpublished receipt BM 40161 (81-3-24, 26; SE 92, no placename) features comparatively large signs and a barely slanting ductus. This is indicative of a non-professional scribe who apparently completed

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5 Both BM 40161 and 41582 will be edited in full in my forthcoming dissertation on Late Achaemenid and Hellenistic archival texts from northern Babylonia.

6 This has already been suggested by Mayer for AB 245 (McEwan, Iraq 43, 139). However, the absence of GIŠ signs in this text renders comparison impossible (see Mayer, Or. 54, 2056). In CT 49, 156 (line 13) Mayer apparently interpreted the sign following the ūḫ as an incomplete erasure (ibid. 207); Kessler 2000, no. 10 was not available to him.
his scribal education at a relatively low level (note that the scribe is a party to the contract which is also indicated by the phrase ina qāṭišu “in his own hand” at the reverse). Hence, the ductus allows for a clear differentiation between the GIŠ (two horizontals) and UD (two obliques) signs. The first two lines of the obverse read:

\[
\begin{align*}
3 \frac{1}{2} \text{gin } ma-ḥat \ ḥi-ṣ(GIŠ) \\
\text{kù.babbar(UD) ši-’ mi zú.lum.ma’}
\end{align*}
\]

Van der Spek not only based his rendering of the half māʿāh (viz. ḫi-tū) rather than ḫi-iṣ) on paleographic grounds but also on what he interpreted as an alternative spelling of */ḥit(u)/. According to him (van der Spek, Rahimesu, 211), the sequence <ma ḫi tu₄>, attested in two very similar texts from Late Hellenistic Uruk (MLC 2193 (= YOS 20, 100): 4 and TCL 13, 228: 3; both are notations of disbursement of money paid as wages(?)) to a group of individuals, see L.T. Dót, Cuneiform Archives from Hellenistic Uruk (PhD thesis, Yale University 1977), 116-118) is to be read *<ma ḫi-tu₄> (viz. “one and a half māʿāh”). However, there is no reason to assume that two different units of weight are employed here (the figures in the following lines are given without units of weight, implying the use of a single unit only; neither text gives a balance). In addition to the evidence presented above, one is thus inclined to interpret the sequence <ma ḫi tu₄> as an alternative spelling of <ma-ḥat> without a CVC sign indifferent to the vowel.

**ra**

In the absence of a full form of the second subdivision of the shekel Mayer tentatively suggested a derivative of the West Semitic root *rub* “one fourth” (not only because of the first consonant being *r* (<ra>), but also on metrological grounds: the ra amounts to a fourth of a māʿāh; see Mayer, Or. 54, 212).

Mayer’s assumption is now confirmed by an unpublished text in the holdings of the British Museum. In line 8 the promissory note BM 41582 (81-6-25, 196; SE 116, Babylon) reads:

\[
^\# \hspace{1em} (... \ 1 \text{gin } 2-ta \ ma-ḥat \ u \ ra-bu-ʼ ḫu’ \ kù.babbar \ (...)
\]

The cuneiform text gives the expected orthographic realization of West Semitic */r/ in word final position: ḫu (also <r> or Ø; see W. von Soden, “Aramäische Wörter in neuassyrischen und neu- und spätbabylonischen Texten. Ein Vorbericht. III,” Or. 46 (1977),

Note that the attestations of the shekel fractions presented here are considerably older (SE 92 and 116 respectively) than those collected by Mayer, Or. 54, 214 (all of which date to the Arsacid period; TBER 85 (MNB 1891) and Mayer, Or. 54, 206 (BM 33900) give no date).

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