

An Unidentified Document from Xerxes' Reign and the Ebabbara Temple –

S. Dalley has published a number of Achaemenid legal documents in her book *A Catalogue of the Akkadian Cuneiform Tablets in the Collections of the Royal Scottish Museum* (Edinburg, 1979). The text no. 72 of the Catalogue is described by her as a « receipt of linseed and another commodity » drafted in the 2nd regnal year of Artaxerxes (i.e., 463 B.C., if Artaxerxes I is meant). The text is reported to have come from Sippar (p. 4). The body of the document is much damaged but the rest of it is well preserved. Its date is the 2nd year of *Ah-šú-hu-šú LUGAL Par-su Ma-da-a-a LUGAL E.KI u KUR.KUR* (lines 16-18), i.e., « A., King of Persia, Media, King of Babylon and the Lands ». Such a titlature is not attested at all for Artaxerxes but frequently occurs in documents dated in the reign of Xerxes (see Joannès, NABU 1989, p. 25, no. 37 ; he bears the same titlature also in three recently published texts : MacGinnis, AfO 38/39, 1991-92, p. 81, no. 2, 24f. – Sippar, year 2 ; Stolper, RA 85, 1991, p. 52, 22-24 ; p.61f., rev. 13 – Kutha, years 16 and 14 respectively). In Babylonian texts, the name of Xerxes is spelled *Ah-ši-ia-ar-šú*, *Ak-ši-ia-ar-ši*, *Hi-ši-a-ar-ši*, etc. (cf. the spelling of Artaxerxes' name : *Ak-tak-šat-su*, *Ar-tak-šá-as-su*, *Ar-tah-šat-su*, etc.).

A certain Nidintu-Bēl, son of Šamaš-iddin, is listed among the witnesses of the document (line 12). A bearer of the same name and patronymic also appears as a witness of a promissory note which comes from Sippar and is dated in the 29th year of Darius I, i.e. 493 B.C. (see Böhl in : M. David et al., eds., *Symbolae ... J.C. van Oven dedicatae*, Leiden, 1946, p. 64, 7). They were apparently one and the same person. For all these reasons, the text under consideration should be assigned to Xerxes (thus, it was composed in 484 B.C.) and added to the collection of his legal documents published by Graziani (*I testi Mesopotamici datati al regno di Serse*, Roma, 1986).

Three volumes of *Catalogue of the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*, VI-VIII (London, 1986-88) by Leichty contain 67 legal documents dated in Xerxes' reign of which only 8 have so far been published. 9 texts were composed in Sippar during his accession, first and second years and 7 of them come from the Ebabbara temple archives, while other 7 were drafted in Babylon

and 1 in Borsippa. 13 texts are private documents such as slave sales, field sales, marriage contracts, etc. The same *Catalogue* lists 114 documents (among them, at least, 22 private ones) from Artaxerxes' reign (probably, Artaxerxes I) of which only 5 have been published. 6 texts were drafted in Babylon (at least, 2 of them come from the Esagila temple archives). A few documents come from Borsippa, Kutha and Dilbat.

It has already been noted that there are no documents from the Ebabbara archives drafted after the second year of Xerxes. Oelsner contends that all tablets of the Sippar Collection composed after Xerxes' second year were not drafted in Sippar but brought there sometime later from Babylon and its vicinity (JNES 51, 1992, p. 145). I have attempted to check this assumption by way of prosopographical evidence but the results of the study are fruitless or rather collateral. It is impossible to trace any activities of the Ebabbara temple after Xerxes' second year in published or catalogued documents of the Sippar Collection, although there has been preserved a private contract from Sippar dated in the 6th year of Xerxes (Durand, TBER, pl. 1, AO 1729). Neither there are any prosopographical links in order to assign to Sippar any documents of the *Catalogue* from later years of Xerxes or from Artaxerxes' reign.

It is customarily assumed that Sippar and the Ebabbara temple were destroyed when the Babylonians revolted against Xerxes in his second year. At present, however, it is difficult to decide whether this opinion is correct. There could have been other reasons for the lack of evidence from the Ebabbara archives. First, only a small number of documents of the Sippar Collection has so far been published. Second, in contrast to early Achaemenid times characterized by an exceptional abundance of legal documents, there are only seven texts from the Ebabbara archives dated in the early years of Xerxes, i.e. before the supposed destruction of the Ebabbara. Therefore the lack of cuneiform documents from the Ebabbara archives does not mean *per se* that this temple was destroyed by Xerxes and did not function any more. It could be a matter of chance reflecting the documents currently at our disposal. It is also apparent that the decline of documentary evidence had already started by the time when Xerxes became king. In Mesopotamian history, there were periods thoroughly documented by written sources and periods of scanty evidence which itself does not mean that economic life was disorganized. Finally, it is possible that the Ebabbara scribes started to keep a substantial number of their documents on wooden boards which have not survived.

Thus, there is no reliable evidence that Xerxes destroyed the Ebabbara temple. Perhaps future discoveries and publication of all legal documents of the Sippar Collection from the reigns of Xerxes and Artaxerxes will provide some definite evidence on Xerxes' policy in relation to the Ebabbara temple.

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