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**An astronomical diary concerning
Artaxerxes II (year 42 = 363-2 BC):
Military Operations in Babylonia¹**

Introduction - The document discussed here is a small piece of an astronomical diary in the collection of the British Museum. It is part of the corpus of texts published by Hermann Hunger in three volumes containing the dated astronomical diaries from Babylonia (Sachs & Hunger 1988; 1989; 1996). The document studied here was not included in the corpus since it previously could not be dated. Now, however, we are confident that we have established its date. The historical part of the tablet was studied, transliterated and translated in London in December 2005 by Van der Spek, with the help of Irving Finkel; the astronomical part has subsequently been the subject of a renewed study by Hunger. Following the convention of the edition of the diaries, this

¹ AD no. -362; BM 36742 (= 80-6-17, 475) + 37478 (= 80-6-17, 1235).



diary can be added to Volume I (1988) under No. -362. We thank the Trustees of the British Museum for the possibility to study the text and present it in an on-line publication.

Description of the tablet - The fragment as it is preserved is the upper part of a larger tablet and consists of two pieces, joined by the late Abraham Sachs in 1957. The obverse contains astronomical observations; the preserved part of the reverse contains historical information. The text ends with a colophon on the upper edge.

The text of the obverse is written both on BM 37478 (left part) and BM 36742 (right part). The height of the obverse is 8.5 cm. Since a reconstruction of lines 1 and r.9'-10' is possible, we can calculate the lost part of the beginning of the tablet. The loss at the right end side is more difficult to gauge, but comparison with, e.g., AD I, p. 142, no. -346 indicates that *c.* 15 signs are lost at the right end side of line 1. Of the reverse only BM 36742 contains writing. The length of line r. 7' is 4.8 cm; the dividing line on the lower edge is 4 cm. The height of the tablet from the upper part up to and including line 7' is 4 cm.²

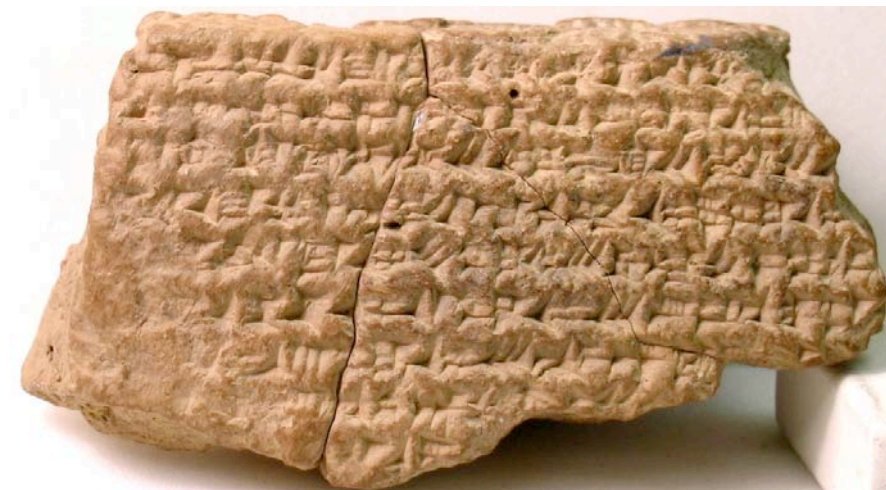
² The photographs presented below were taken by Van der Spek; the British Museum is not responsible for their quality.



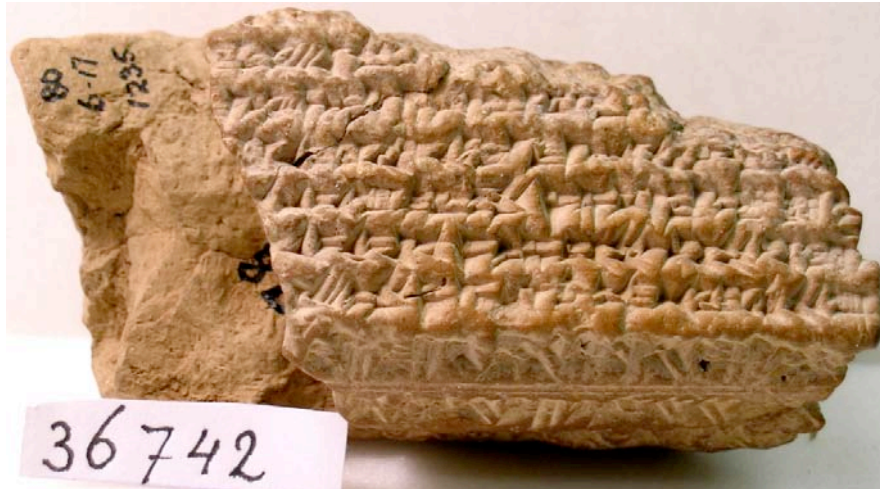
Transliteration

obverse

1. [MU 42 KAM ^mÁr-š]ú šá ^mÁr-tak-šat-su LUGAL KUR.KUR
MU-šú na-bu-^rú¹ [GAN]
2. [.. ..] GE₆ 2 DIR AN ZA 2 *ina* KIN-SIG šamáš TÙR
NÍGIN GE₆ 3 [.....]
3. [.. ..] ^rx¹ *ni-di šar-pi ina* IGI šamáš ù *ár-ki šamáš id*
KUR *u* [.....]
4. [.. ..] ^rx¹ DUL TIR-AN *id* SI GIB GE₆ 7 SAG GE₆
[.....]
5. [.. ..] *ana* NIM DIB GE₆ 9 SAG GE₆ *šin* SIG MÚL KUR
ša DUR [*nu-nu*]
6. [.. ..] 10 ŠÚ-ŠÚ GE₆ 11 SAG GE₆ *šin* TÙR NU KÁD
NÍGIN [.....]
7. [.. ..] GE₆ 13 SAG GE₆ *šin ina* IGI šur GIGIR šá
^rULÚ²1 [.....]
8. [.. ..] ^rx¹ DIR NU PAP AN *še-ni* DUH [.....]
9. [.. ..] ^rx¹ ^rx¹ [.....]



BM 36742 obverse



BM 36742 reverse

reverse

- 1' [.....] x x [.....]
2' [..... D]UMU.MEŠ-šú^{lú} x [.....]
3' [.....] x *ina* ITI APIN *a-na* URU UD.KIB.N[UN.KI
.....]
4' [.....] x UGU IM ù^l *šu-pal* IM ŠUB.MEŠ
[.....]
5' [.....]x TI-ú DUMU LUGAL šá *a-na ma-aš-šar-*
t[ú].....
6' [.....]x BAD₅.BAD₅-šú^{nu} GAR-un *hu-bu-*
«hu-»us-su-n[u ih-tab-ta].....
7' [.....^{lú}ERÍN[?]].MEŠLUGAL šá *a-na šal-tum ina muh-*
hi KUR-ú [.....]
8' [.....]x ŠU^{II}-su-nu *ik-ta-šad* URU
GAZ[.MEŠ[?].....]
9' [MU 42 KAM ^mÁr-šú šá] ^mÁr-tak-šat-su LUGAL KUR.KUR
^rMU.šú[?] [na-bu-ú]



- 10' [EN.NUN šá gi-né-e šá T]A GAN EN TIL ŠE «...»²¹ 'MU'
40[+2 KAM]
- 11' [ŠU^{II} mG]I²-^dEN DUMUxšá 'mMU.^dEN DUMU m«^{lú?}»¹ Mu-še-
zi-b[u]



BM 36742 lower reverse and upper edge (with colophon)

Translation

obverse

- 1 [Year 42 of Ars]es, who is called Artaxerxes, king of the
lands. [Month IX (29 Nov. – 28 Dec. 363 BC).....]
- 2 [.. .. .] Night of the 2nd, clouds were in the sky. The



- 2nd, in the afternoon, the sun was surrounded by a halo.
 Night of the 3rd, [.....]
- 3 [.. .. .] a dark cloud in front of the sun and behind the sun, on the east side and [.....]
- 4 [.. .. .] x DUL; a rainbow stretched on the north side.
 Night of the 7th, beginning of the night, [.....]
- 5 [.. .. .] having passed [...] to the east. Night of the 9th, beginning of the night, the moon was [...] below Eta Piscium [.....]
- 6 [.. .. .] The 10th, very overcast. Night of the 11th, beginning of the night, the moon was surrounded by a halo, which was not closed. [.....]
- 7 [.. .. .] Night of the 13th, beginning of the night, the moon was [...] in front of Zeta Tauri [.....]
- 8 [.. .. .] .. clouds; I did not watch; rain so that the sandal was removed [.....]
- 9 [.. .. .] x x [.....]

reverse

- 1' [.. .. .] x x [.....]
- 2' [.. .. .] his sons, the x[...] person[s[?].....]
- 3' [.. .. .] x in the month Arachsamna (VIII = 31 Oct. – 28 Nov. 363 BC) to the city of Sipp[ar]
- 4' [.. .. .] x upstream and downstream they encamped [.....]
- 5' [.. .. .] x they took. The son of the king, who for the protecti[on of]
- 6' [.. .. .] x inflicted^{sg} a defeat upon them, [he plundered] booty from them [.....]



- 7' [... ..] *The troop*s of the king, who for doing battle over the mountains² [had come,]
- 8' [... ..] x got hold [of him/the city²]. [They²] conquered the city. [.....]
-
- 9' [Year 42 of Arses, who is called] 'by the name of Artaxerxes, king of the lands.
- 10' [Regular observations fr]om Kislīmu (IX) until the end of Addaru (XII), year 40[+2]
- 11' [Hand of Mušal]lim(?) - Bēl, son of Iddin-Bēl, descendant of Mushezib[u (.....)]

Commentary

The date - This diary must belong to the later years of Artaxerxes II. Year number 40 is just preserved on line r.10', the remainder is broken off. The name Artaxerxes is clearly written on lines 1 and r. 9'. Hence Artaxerxes I and II, who both reigned more than 40 years, come into account. Because a faint trace of the Winkelhaken of the sign *šú* is preserved on line 1, we can be pretty sure that the king in question was the Artaxerxes whose personal name was Arshu (^m*Ár-šú*), as we know from several other astronomical diaries. In addition, the colophon shows great similarity to diary AD I, p. 138, no. -361, r.1'-3' (Year 43 Artaxerxes II). Unfortunately the scribe of that tablet (Uballissu-Bēl, son of Bēl-apla- [...]) is not the same person as the scribe of this diary.



The astronomical observations concern the months IX-XII, Kislīmu to Addaru. Since there seems to be no question of an intercalary Addaru, the observation will concern years 41, 42, 44 or 46 of Artaxerxes' II reign, if the list of Parker and Dubberstein (1956) is correct. The astronomical information on the obverse helps us to establish a precise date. It is reported that the moon was below Eta Piscium on the 9th of Kislīmu. Since only years 41, 42, 44 and 46 are possible, the moon's position in these years is relevant:

41 IX 9 = -363 (= 364 BC) Dec 17	7.1
42 IX 9 = -362 Dec 6	353.9
44 IX 9 = -360 Dec 14	18.6
46 IX 9 = -358 Dec 23	39.9

The numbers to the right are ecliptic longitudes at 7 p.m. Year 42 fits nicely, because Eta Piscium has a longitude of ca. 353 at this time.

Historical relevance - The historical section yields new historical information. Certain people ("his sons?") encamped around the city of Sippar on the Euphrates in November 363 BC. Afterwards "they took" the city. Some time later (possibly the same month, or perhaps month XII [27 Febr. – 27 March 262 BC]; the information comes from the end of the tablet), the son of the king set out to defend the city, inflicted a defeat on the attackers. Then, "[troop]s of the king" arrived to do battle and got hold of someone or something. Were these additional troops sent to bring about the capture of Sippar?



We should like to know who the “son of the king” was. Artaxerxes II had three sons who were possible successors. At first Artaxerxes appointed Darius as his heir (Plut. *Art.* 26.4-5), but he rebelled against his father. The conspiracy was discovered and Darius was put to death. Another candidate is Arsames, but Briant points out that Ochos, later to be enthroned as Artaxerxes III, was the destined successor. During the lifetime of his father, he was the head of a campaign against Tachôs of Egypt (Syncellus, p.486, 20) and, according to Diodorus XV.93.1, Artaxerxes III succeeded without any major problem to his father’s throne after the latter’s death (cf. Briant 2002: 681).

The enemies are even more difficult to determine. One might think of governors, or also to “sons,” hence brothers of the son of the king just mentioned. In the case of “governors” one might think of satraps who revolted in the so-called “Great Satraps’ revolt,” in the case of “sons” of the king, one might think of the struggle for the position of crown prince described above. It might as well have been a mountain tribe.

Let us first consider the so-called “Great Satraps’ Revolt.” According to Diodorus XV.93.1, “the inhabitants of the Asiatic coast revolted from Persia, and some of the satraps and generals rising in insurrection made war on Artaxerxes. At the same time Tachôs, the Egyptian king, decided to fight the Persians and prepared ships and gathered infantry forces.” The king had to fight at the same time against “the Egyptian king, the Greek cities of Asia, the Lacedaemonians and the allies of these: satraps and generals who ruled the coastal districts and had agreed upon making common cause (*koinopragia*).”



Diodorus mentions the following rebels in person: Ariobarzanes, satrap of Phrygia, Mausolos, overlord of Caria, Orontes, satrap of Mysia, and Autophradates, satrap of Lydia. In addition: “Apart from the Ionians were Lycians, Pisidians, Pamphylians, and Cilicians, likewise Syrians, Phoenicians, and practically all the coastal peoples (*ethnē*)”.

The summary (*prologus*) of book X of the histories of Pompeius Trogus has it that the Great King “pursued his dignitaries (*purpurati*) who had defected (*defectores*) in Asia: first of all Datames, satrap (*praefectus*) of [Paphlagonia] – the origin of the Paphlagonians is presented – then the satrap of the Hellespont, Ariobarzanes; and next in Syria the satrap of Armenia, Orontes; how he conquered them all and died, leaving the throne to his son Ochus.”

Other sources of importance are the life of Datames by Cornelius Nepos and some “Stratagems” by Polyaeus concerning Datames (Polyaeus VII.21.1-7), Orontes (VII.14.2-4), Ariobarzanes (VII.26) and Autophradates (VII.27.1-3). It is striking that Plutarch does not find the affair interesting enough to include it in his life of Artaxerxes.

Is it possible to link the information of this diary to what we know about the Great Satrap’s Revolt (366-360 BC)? This revolt has been the subject of an extensive discussion on its chronology and its nature. Our sources are meagre and contradictory, and our knowledge of the chronology is practically nil. Moreover, the main interest of the Greek and Roman historians is in the western parts of Asia. Diodorus explicitly says that the revolt concerned western satrapies and “all the coastal peoples.” Babylonia is not mentioned. The rebels operating



most closely to Babylonia are Datames, who is said to have invaded Mesopotamia (Polyaenus VII.21.3), and Orontes, satrap of Armenia, is finally defeated in Syria (Pomp.Trog. *Prol.* X). Orontes *may* have attacked Mesopotamia as well.

In an earlier discussion of the other astronomical diaries concerning Artaxerxes II Van der Spek (1998: 253) defended the idea that this invasion was recorded in AD I, p. 130, no. -366 A Col. II: 2-5 (diary concerning month II, year 38 Artaxerxes II = 20 May – 19 June 367 BC). This idea was criticized by Pierre Briant (Briant 2000: 93-4). We must indeed admit that it is possible to combine this information of Polyaenus with this new diary, assuming that Datames may have reached Sippar. A similar reconstruction is possible as regards Orontes. Hence the more prudent position is not to make connections with the satrap's revolt at all costs.

The revolt (or revolts) has been the subject of a great number of publications, thoroughly discussed by Pierre Briant (1996: 695-694 = 2002: 656-675; 1997: 57-61; 2000: 92-97). The debate has centred about the question whether the revolt was a concerted action or a more or less contiguous number of uprisings. Concomitant to this issue is the question of how serious the revolt was. Was the revolt a clear sign of the decadence of the Achaemenid empire which brought the monarchy to the brink of downfall, or was it simply a normal feature of large empires which have on occasion to deal with revolts? The traditional view has been simply to follow Diodorus and consider the events as the near collapse of the empire. Weiskopf (1989) tried to reduce the importance of the events and stressed the lack of coordination, followed in



this by Briant. Debord (1999: 302-74) seems to return to the traditional view. Can this diary help us any further in this discussion?

Let us start with the negative answers. It gives no answer to the question whether or not the revolt was a coordinated action. It gives no clear indication who the attackers were. No name of a rebel or satrap or whoever is preserved. The only hints we have is the phrase “his sons” and the determinative LÚ, followed by traces of two horizontal wedges and one vertical wedge indicating the name of a people or tribe or a certain category of people (e.g. officials). Any connection with Datames or Orontes is therefore speculative.

What we do learn is that unrest was not restricted to the coastal area of the Persian empire. An attack on Sippar was serious enough to send an army under the leadership of the son of the king. It cannot have happened in the year that the son of the king launched an attack on Tachôs, the king of Egypt. What we also learn is that the attack was abortive and in this the story is in line with the reports about the other revolts: in all cases the king (in this case the son of the king) was successful. So, on the one hand there is evidence that the revolts were more widespread than assumed before; on the other hand, it is not evidence for a downfall of the monarchy: order was restored. It is to be noted that the diaries cannot be interpreted as pro-Persian propaganda, rather as a fairly detached data base of facts. The report also gives evidence of the lack of interest of Greek and Roman historians of events that happened in the centre of the Persian empire.



The second option is to disregard the Great Satrap's Revolt altogether and to focus on the struggle for the succession of the old king Artaxerxes II. The diary may report an insurrection of some sons or officials of the king who got hold of Sippar. The "son of the king," the designated crown prince, is able to re-capture the city. The role of the "[troop]s of the king" is unclear: they may have arrived in order to help the son of the king, but it cannot be excluded that he was the victim of their action. The lacunae are tantalizing indeed.

Textual notes

obverse

- 1., r.9' Artaxerxes has the title "king of the lands," a title often used in the Achaemenid and early Hellenistic period. In fact, this is the only diary of Artaxerxes II that mentions the title. Other diaries have no title at all, or lugal, "king," only.

reverse

- 2' D]UMU.MEŠ-šú^{lú}x [..., "his [s]ons, the x-persons"
 Few traces are preserved: two vertical wedges (the upper one a bit longer), and a vertical one. It is difficult to suggest what it is to be read here; ^{lú}GAL.UKKIN, "satrap," seems impossible.
- 3' ITI APIN, "the month Arachsamna (VIII)"
 It is curious to note that reference is made to month VIII, while the diary concerns months IX-XII. We assume that reference is made to an attack in month VIII, which led to a



campaign in month IX-XII = 29 Nov. 363 – 27 March 262.

- 4' Cf. Nabonidus Chronicle (ABC 7), III.11 *šá* UGU IM *u* KI.TA IM, lit. “who were above the wind and below the wind.” Glassner (CM no. 26, p.236/7) translates: “upstream and downstream from Isin (?)” Cf. CAD Š^{III}, p.316, s.v. *šupālu* 2d). Note that Glassner’s addition “from Isin” is incomprehensible.

ŠUB = *nadû*, “to pitch camp”

For *nadû* in the chronicles, cf. Grayson, ABC, no. 1 III.40 (with commentary). Cf. CAD N^I 84, s.v. *nadû* 2b 4'. The expression is often, but not always, used with the connotation of aggression.

- 7' ^{lu}ERÍN'].MEŠ LUGAL

At first sight one would expect ^{lu}ERÍN'].MEŠLUGAL, “the troop[s] of the king.” Other options should be considered as well, like “sons of the king.”

KUR-*ú*

This may be derived from KUR, *šadû*, “mountain; open country, steppe land” or from KUR, *kašādu*, “to arrive.” In view of the phonetic complement *ú*, a derivation from *šadû* is more likely. It may refer to royal troops who had come from Persepolis over the Zagros mountains.

- 8' ŠU^{II}-*su-nu ik-ta-šad*, “their hand caught”

Cf. CAD K 276 s.v. *kašādu* 2a, “to conquer a country, a city” with *qātu* as subject; p.277 2b, “to defeat an enemy, to be



victorious;” p.277-8, 2c, “to capture an enemy, to arrest a fugitive, a criminal.” The subject “their hand” is technically singular, hence the verb, *iktašad*, is singular. Nevertheless, the subject concerns more people and is plural *ad sensum* (“their”). The object is unknown; it may be a country, city (Sippar?) or person (the son of the king; a rebel?).

- 9'-11' Similar phrasing in AD I, p. 138, no. -361, r.1'-3' (year 43 Artaxerxes II). Note that this diary (BM 37073 = 80-6-17,818) entered the inventory of the British Museum on the same day as our diary, 17 June 1880.
- 11' The astronomer in question belongs to the Mushezibu family. This family was a well known family of astronomers which still practised their scholarship in the Hellenistic and Parthian periods. Cf., e.g., Bel-apla-iddin, son of Mushallim-Bel, descendant of Mushezibu in 322 BC (AD I, p. 228-9, no. -321 ‘rev. 27’) and the collection of judicial documents of the Parthian period (c. 120 BC) on the assignment of salaries to members of this family (Van der Spek 1985: 548-56). See also Oelsner 2000: 802-11, who discusses the family in the Hellenistic period.

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