

## HELLENISTIC BABYLONIA: THE EVIDENCE FROM URUK

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Though Babylonia was incorporated into the empire of the Seleucides, the documentary evidence bearing on this impact is rather scanty. This is surprising if we take into consideration the well-known determination of Alexander the Great to make Babylon the centre of his vast empire and to choose this city for one of his residences. But what followed — and this is a historical fact — is that the Seleucid kings took up residence in Syria — far from the traditional centres of the empires of Assyria and Babylonia, but rather in regions affording ready access to Egypt and the Syrian-Palestinian territories.

On the other hand, it is established knowledge that a steady flow of information, including scientific knowledge and other cultural influences, reached the Hellenistic world from sources in Babylonia. The name of Berossos, the famous Babylonian priest, who lived around 340-275 B.C., has come down to us and he will not have been an isolated phenomenon<sup>1</sup>.

If we look at the source material available today, we find it is centred on at least four sites: Babylon, Kutha, Larsa, Uruk (modern Warka). As a result of excavation activities having been mainly concentrated on Uruk rather than on the other cities, our knowledge about the Hellenising process there is much more extensive than for the other places<sup>2</sup>. This place has therefore come

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1. For Berossos see P. Schnabel, *Berosos und die babylonisch-hellenistische Literatur*, Leipzig 1923. Recently St. Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossos*, Malibu 1978 = SANE 1/5.

2. The last comprehensive book (with bibliography) is: B. Funck, *Uruk zur Seleukidenzeit. Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients 16* (Berlin 1984). Further on cf. G.J.P. McEwan, *Priest and Temple in Hellenistic Babylonia*. Freiburger Altorientalische Studien 4 (Wiesbaden 1981); R. J. van der Spek, *The Babylonian Temple during the Macedonian and Parthian Domination*, BiOr. 42 (1985) 541-562.

his father Anu-balāṭṣu-iqbi, who is additionally known as *paqdu ša bīt ilāni*<sup>9</sup>. I shall come back to these titles later.

The second personage, Anu'uballit Nikarchos, belongs to the same family. The forefather of both is named Aḥu'utu, which means we have to recognize the existence of a strong clan structure in Seleucid Uruk — a fact which applies to earlier periods in Babylonia too.

2. It will be useful in this connection to take a look at the administration of the city of Uruk. Some scholars, —especially Sarkisian— have tried to detect Greek influence in the organization of this community<sup>10</sup>. If this can be substantiated, it would indeed be a strong argument in favor of a pronounced Hellenisation of this famous city in southern Babylonia. We know of an institution called *puḥru*, or “assembly”, which acted as a juridical body dealing only with affairs directly affecting the temple<sup>11</sup>. It is true that membership of this assembly was restricted to the free men of the city only. But there is no reason to compare this kind of organization with the celebrated Greek polis, where we know of two population groups: citizens with their right of self-government and the semi-dependent and dependent classes. On the contrary, it is well established that the *puḥru* in Babylonia had a long tradition reaching back to the Early Dynastic period and was surely not a freshly imported institution<sup>12</sup>. It certainly might be the case that this institution was interpreted by the Greek citizens as a local equivalent of their own familiar Hellenistic practice, but there is no proof for this assumption. At Uruk one Greek title of an official has been found: *di-i-ki-te-e-su*, meaning dioiketes “controller, financial officer”<sup>13</sup>. It may indeed be no mere chance that this profession is given as a foreign title. We may suppose that the official bearing this title was delegated to the city of Uruk by the court to collect taxes there. This seems clear enough from the text, where it is stated that this official acts “in the

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9. See G. Kh. Sarkisian, *Zum Problem des Herrschertitels in Uruk der Seleukidenzeit. Societies and Languages of the Near East. Studies... I.* M. Diakonoff (1982) 333; but in the contrary R.J. van der Spek, *BiOr.* 42 (1985) 545.

10. G. Kh. Sarkisian, *Das Problem der Hellenisation von Babylonien.* VII. Congrès de la Fédération Internat. des Associations d'Etudes Classiques. Budapest 1979.

11. L. T. Doty, *Cuneiform Archives from Hellenistic Uruk* (1977) 150-160; G.J.P. McEwan, *Priest and Temple* (1981) 154 ff.; 189 f.; B. Funck, *Uruk zur Seleucidzeit* (1984) 278 ff.; but see R.J. van der Spek, *BiOr.* 42 (1985) 545.

12. Cf. the review of McEwan's book from the hand of M. A. Dandamaev in *OLZ* 79 (1984) 144 f.

13. *BRM* 2, 31, 8, see O. Krückmann, *Babylonische Rechts- und Verwaltungsurkunden aus der Zeit Alexanders...* (1931) 80 note 7; L. T. Doty, *An Official Seal of the Seleucid Period*, *JNES* 38 (1979) 196 f.; B. Funck, *Uruk zur Seleucidzeit* (1984) 285 ff.

house of writing” and that the transaction, which bears on the deputat of a certain Anu-aba-ušur, takes place at the treasury of the god Anu within the precincts of the temple to the gods of Uruk<sup>14</sup>. But it should be stressed that we are unable to go into detail at this point because of the lack of further, more specific information about this official.

The situation is better for other officials named in cuneiform texts. It should first be noted that at Uruk — contrary to the situation with the evidence from Kutha and Babylon — the office of the *šatammu*, or “head of the administration”, has not so far been attested in the archival texts<sup>15</sup>. We simply do not know whether this is due to gaps in the text material available to us or whether this official did not exist at all in Seleucid Uruk. This fact seems remarkable when we consider the Neo-Babylonian evidence, which clearly shows that the *šatammu Eanna* was one of the highest officials at this time<sup>16</sup>.

In Seleucid Uruk the highest officials are:

*rab ša rēš āli*, “the high official at the head of the city” or “the city governor”. A type of title unknown elsewhere and therefore assumed to represent the Greek title *epistates*<sup>17</sup>. But in this case too, we lack proof for this identification and it must accordingly be set aside.

The people holding this office are:<sup>18</sup>

Anu-balātsu-iqbi, son of Anu-aḥa-ittannu and grandson of Aḥu’tu, in the year 91 of the Seleucid Era.

Anu-uballit-Kephalon, son of the former, years 110 until ca. 126 S.E.  
xx - son of Labaši, grandson of Ḥunzu, year 163 S.E.

These officials are well known to us from other sources, too, and represent the upper class of Hellenistic Uruk.

Otherwise the title *paqdu ša Uruk* is used<sup>19</sup> and once again we find named as officials with this title:

Anu-balātsu-iqbi in the year 91 S.E.,

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14. For a modern transcription of this part of BRM 2, 31 see G.J.P. McEwan, l.c. 150.

15. L. T. Dory, *Cuneiform Archives...* (1977) 154; McEwan, l.c. 26.

16. See H. M. Kümmel, *Familie, Beruf und Amt im spätbabylonischen Uruk* (1979) 137 ff.

17. G.J.P. McEwan, l.c. 26. but cf. G. Kh. Sarkisian, which equates this title with the *paqdu* in: *City land in Seleucid Babylonia*. Ancient Mesopotamia, ed. I. M. Diakonoff (Moskau 1969) 313; id., *Social'naja rol klinopisnoi notarialno pravovoi sistemy v ellenisticeskoi Vavilonii*. Symbolae R. Taubenschlag II (1956) 29 ff.; the same B. Funck, l.c. 281; but equated with the *saknu* by L. T. Doty, *Cuneiform Archives 154*; R.J. van der Spek, *BiOr*, 42 (1985) 545. — It should be noticed that the Greek title *epistates* never appears in cuneiform sources!

18. References see McEwan, l.c. 27.

19. See McEwan, l.c. 26.

Anu-bēlšunu, son of Anu-balāṭsu-iqbi, year 126(?) S.E. and Kidin-Anu, son of Ṭāb-Anu, year 153 S.E.

The question arises: do both titles point to the same office, held at first by Anu-balāṭsu-iqbi in the year 91, then by his son Anu-uballīṭ-Kephalon until 126(?) S.E., then by his brother Anu-bēlšunu in the year 126 S.E., then followed by Kidin-Anu in 153 S.E. and the otherwise unknown man in 163 S.E.? The scarce evidence available does not allow the matter to be resolved at the moment. But the documents do demonstrate that these people did make decisions, "either together with or in place of the assembly (*puḥru*), and were responsible for imposing fines on persons who failed to meet their obligations with regard to temple allotments"<sup>20</sup>. This is in accordance with the practice of the temple administration of Uruk in Neo-Babylonian times and can not be claimed as a Hellenistic innovation in this city.

3. But there is another sphere of public life which may shed more light on developments within the thinking and feeling of the Babylonians in a changing world: the sphere of religion.

It is surprising to note that in the last centuries of a flourishing city life two big temple complexes were erected: the Rēš and the Irigal<sup>21</sup>. Through these building activities the Uruk-people demonstrated that their religious awareness had changed considerably since the periods before.

It is well known that Uruk was an outstanding centre of the cultic life of Babylonia. Right from the beginning of urban life there we have—contrary to most of the other Sumerian cities—two main gods at Uruk, the god of heaven named An and the goddess of love and fertility named Inanna. To the honour of both these gods two big temples were built, each on the top of a ziqqurrat. Hence within the city we find from the very beginning two holy precincts. It may very well be—as has been suggested by A. Falkenstein—that originally there existed two different sites, one named Kyllab and the other named Unug, and that the later Uruk was in reality a twin-city, though in historical times we know of *one* place with *two* cultic centres.

But the significance of the temples or cultic institutions did change considerably in the course of time. Very early on Inanna, later called Ištar, was worshipped and as the daughter of An came to play a more and more a prominent role. This ascendancy of Inana/Ištar continues over into the following centuries and millenia, though the goddess then comes to be named Ištar or Nanā or Bēlet-Uruk. I will not descend into the details of the differences between all these manifestations of the long-revered goddess.

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20. Cf. L. T. Doty, l.c. 154.

21. Cf. L. T. Doty, l.c. 27-29.

It is a well known fact that, side by side with this cult, veneration of the god of heaven, An/Anu, declined progressively — as both the official cult, on the one hand and the popular religion on the other moved away from favouring this god. It has been said by several modern scholars that he came to be felt to be *deus otiosus*, taking a back seat within the divine order. In Sumerian times his role was commanded by the god of Nippur, Enlil, who thereafter assumed the mantle of foremost among the gods; later on the *enlilûtu*, or “enlilship”, passed to Marduk, the city god of Babylon.

Given this development of long standing, it is surprising to observe to what an extent the veneration of Anu and his wife Antum is reported from hellenistic times. First of all, we know of a huge building in the centre of the city, bearing the Babylonian —not Sumerian— name Rēš “Main-(temple)”, covering a territory of 167 m × 213 m and occupying the site of an archaic temple and ziqurrat dedicated to Anu. This ancient temple-terrace, too, was itself been rebuilt. Besides this temple the Irigal, a big temple complex of Innin-Nanâ measuring approximately 87 m × 104 m, was also rebuilt, demonstrating that the Rēš-building exceeded all the other sanctuaries in size<sup>22</sup>.

We may suppose as well that the cult of its god Anu surpassed that of all other gods venerated in Uruk. As evidence we have the testimony of the rituals performed in the temple, which show a surprising activity in these latter days of Babylonian culture. On top of this, the personal names of the period attest to the veneration accorded this god.

It is a fair supposition that personal piety found its adequate expression more in the names given to children than in prayers, hymns or rituals. If we cast a glance at the names used in Uruk in Neo-Babylonian times —and we know a vast number of such names— we can recognize that for the most part the Babylonian gods are equally represented. It is true, though, that a certain predilection can be found for the goddess Ištar/Nanâ/Bēletša-Uruk, but we also find Nabû and Marduk/Bēl, Šamaš and Nergal. If we look into the texts from Seleucid Uruk, it is surprising to note that a huge number of the personal names from this period are composed with the theophorous element Anu<sup>23</sup>. I do not have any statistics on this phenomenon at hand, but it will be intuitively evident that a change in religious feeling and preference is at work here<sup>24</sup>.

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22. A. Falkenstein, *Topographie von Uruk I* (1941); E. Heinrich, *Die Tempel und Heiligümer im Alten Mesopotamien* (1982) 327 ff.

23. The rising of Anu begins as early as Archaemenid times see R.J. van der Spek, *BiOr*, 42 (1985) 545 note 20.

24. Cf. J. Oelsner, *Kontinuität und Wandel in Gesellschaft und Kultur Babyloniens in hellenistischer Zeit*, *Klio* 60 (1978) 103.

But this phenomenon is not only confined to the private sphere, which is where I would settle the personal names, but rather it corresponds to an official religious policy. As Otto Schroeder showed many years ago<sup>25</sup>, the god lists provided in connection with legal contracts demonstrate a hierarchy of the gods once again headed by the pair of gods Anu and Antum and followed by the major deities Enli, Ea, Sin, Šamaš, Adad etc., which matches the traditional configuration of Babylonian gods.

If we ask after the relevance of this reordering of the hierarchy of worship, we can offer no more than mere speculations. No convincing theological explanation of this preference for the God of Heaven has reached us via the Babylonian priests. But it may be that the well known Greek idea of a supreme god<sup>26</sup> served to stimulate the veneration of Anu, who had also been favoured by the astronomically minded scholars of late Babylonia. It is an established fact that, besides Babylon, it was mainly the school of astronomers from Orchoi that was renowned in the Ancient World. It would not be surprising if this development in Babylonian thinking had an impact on the religious thinking of the citizens of Uruk and thus corresponded to a comparable development in the Hellenistic world.

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25. O. Schroeder, *Das Pantheon der Stadt Uruk in der Seleukidenzeit aufgrund von Götterlisten...* SPAW 49 (1916) 1180-1196.

26. G.J.P. McEwan, *Priest and Temple* p. 187 points on Ouranos or Zeus. Others as Oelsner on Baal-Šmīm or A. Kuhrt on Ahura-Mazda, see R.J. van der Spek, *BiOr.* 42 (1985) 545.

## *Abbreviations*

- AJSL American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures (Baltimore)  
BagM Baghdader Mitteilungen (Berlin)  
BiOr Bibliotheca Orientalis (Leiden)  
BRM Babylonian Records of the Pierpont Morgan Library (New York)  
JNES Journal of the Near Eastern Society (Chicago)  
Klio Klio. Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte (Berlin)  
OECT Oxford Editions of Cuneiform Texts (Oxford)  
OLZ Orientalistische Literaturzeitung (Leipzig/Berlin)  
SANE Sources from the Ancient Near Eastern (Malibu)  
SPAW Sitzungsberichte der königlich-preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse (Berlin)  
VDI Vestnik Drevnež Istorii (Moskau)  
VS Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler (Leipzig/Berlin)  
YBC Yale Babylonian Collection  
ZA Zeitschrift für Assyriologie (Berlin)