Introduction: Debating Xerxes' Rule in Babylonia

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INTRODUCTION: DEBATING XERXES' RULE IN BABYLONIA

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In the course of its two hundred years of existence, the Persian Empire (c. 550–330 BCE) met many forms of resistance from its subject populations.[1] The present collection of essays focuses on a particular moment of violent contestation in the empire and examines mostly, but not exclusively, its textual evidence: the Babylonian revolts against Xerxes in his second regnal year (484 BCE), as seen in cuneiform sources. Which considerations inform the particular focus of this volume?

In certain respects, the revolts of 484 BCE were unremarkable. The Babylonians had revolted against Persian rule before, once in 522 BCE and again shortly later in 521 BCE. These earlier revolts had been part of an empire-wide wave of dissent after the deaths of Cambyses and Bardia, a multi-front challenge that was overcome only with great effort and that led to extensive acts of commemoration widely displayed and received.[2] The revolts of 484 BCE were more limited in scale and more hushed in reception. While also in this case the local rebels (Šamaš-erība and Bēl-šimânni) acted upon dissent elsewhere in the empire,[3] resistance did not spread as widely as it did in the 520s nor was it commemorated as intensively. As far as we know, Xerxes did not explicitly advertise his Babylonian victory in texts or monuments, local chroniclers did not record the events of that year, later generations of Babylonians did not reflect on the revolts in writing, and Greek historians seem to have lacked specific knowledge of what happened in Babylonia in 484 BCE.[4]

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[1] Recent discussions of resistance in the Persian Empire, and of its footprint in archaeological, literary and documentary sources, include Berquist 2008, Ruzicka 2012, Khatchadourian 2012, Kaper 2015, Nielsen 2015, Dusinberre 2016, Lee 2016a, and Waters 2016.

[2] For the Babylonian revolts of 522 and 521 BCE, see Lorenz 2008, Beaulieu 2014, Bloch 2015, Waerzeggers 2016; for the wider crisis that affected the empire at that time, see Briant 2002, 107–138 and Kuhrt 2007, 135–177; for the commemoration of these events at Bisitun and the spread and reception of its message, see Root 2013; Waters 2014, 59–76; Rollinger 2014a, 196–200; Na'aman 2015; Mitchell 2017.

[3] A revolt had taken place in Egypt slightly earlier in 486–485 BCE (Pestman 1984).

[4] The Daiva inscription, with its reference to a rebellion in an unspecified country at the time of Xerxes' accession, is not usually read historiographically anymore (e.g. Rollinger 2014a, 201). Late Achaemenid and Hellenistic cuneiform literature may contain memories of the revolts under

However, the Babylonian revolts of 484 BCE stand out for a number of reasons. First, they were more than a passing interruption of Persian rule: Babylonian society and political institutions changed significantly in their aftermath, which raises questions about the processes through which the Persian state restored its grip on this key region. Second, because the revolts happened at the end of a long stretch of exceptionally well documented local history, they offer a rare occasion for contextualizing an instance of armed resistance within its local community. Too often, such events are afforded only passing reference in documentary evidence or historiographical accounts, with no opportunity to study how power became contested, why, and by whom. Third, in recent decades a discussion has crystallized around the Babylonian revolts against Xerxes that reflects a wider debate in Persian–Achaemenid scholarship between specialists of different disciplinary backgrounds. This renders the topic useful as a prism through which to explore changing scholarly perceptions of the history of the Persian Empire.

How did the debate about Xerxes' Babylonian policy develop? The orthodoxy, most clearly expressed by Cameron (1941) and de Liagre Böhl (1962), held that Xerxes punished Babylon severely after the uprisings of Šamaš-erība and Bēl-šimânni, by taking away the statue of Marduk from its sanctuary, by preventing further celebration of the Akitu (or new year) festival, by destroying the city, by eliminating the element 'King of Babylon' from his official titulature, and by splitting the satrapy of Babylon-and-across-the-River into two smaller units.[5] Other renderings, for instance by Hansjörg Schmid (1981, 132–135; 1995, 78–87), added details of Babylon's supposed destruction, such as the diversion of the Euphrates and the demolition of its ziggurat. Furthermore, the Daiva inscription was used as evidence of Xerxes' supposed policy of intolerance,[6] and the dwindling amounts of Babylonian clay tablets in his reign were presented as proof of decline after his violent suppression of the revolts.[7]

In 1987, Amélie Kuhrt and Susan Sherwin-White argued that Böhl's account "was based on a careless reading of Herodotus combined with incomplete Babylonian evidence and an implicit wish to make very disparate types of material harmonize with a presumed "knowledge" of Xerxes' actions, policies,

Xerxes or their aftermath: the Kedor-Laomer texts, for instance, have been explained as a literary reaction to repression in the later Persian period (Foster 2005, 369). A memory of a Babylonian uprising against Xerxes is preserved in Ctesias (Tuplin 1997, 397; Lenfant 2004, 124; Kuhrt 2014, 167) and echoes may be contained in Herodotus' account of Xerxes' sacrileges in Babylon (1.183; Tolini 2011, 447 'echo déformé') and in the Zopyros episode (Rollinger 1998, 347–348; but see Rollinger 2003, 257). Otherwise, Greek accounts are either oblivious of the revolts or they preserve garbled recollections at best; see Kuhrt 2010 and 2014.

[5] Böhl 1962, 111 and 113.

[6] Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1980, 1–47.

[7] Joannès 1989a, 126; van Driel 1992, 40; Dandamaev 1993, 42.

and character."[8] The supporters of the earlier orthodoxy had misinterpreted several clues: the passage in Herodotus about Xerxes' removal of a statue from the temple of Babylon concerns the statue of a man rather than of Marduk; by Xerxes' time the Akitu festival had long been suspended so that Xerxes could not have been responsible for any change of program; the shortening of his titulature happened gradually, not abruptly; and the element 'King of Babylon' continued to be used occasionally even into the reign of Artaxerxes I.[9]

These insights led to a reconsideration of Xerxes' actions in the 1980s and 1990s, against the backdrop of post-colonialism. In these decades, 'New Achaemenid' historians questioned the cultural stereotypes that informed popular renderings of the Persian Empire as the epitome of Oriental despotism, identifying ancient Greek accounts as the mainspring of such prejudices.[10] They argued that ancient Persia should be evaluated on its own terms by using sources internal to it and weighing external ones with great care. Among the aims of New Achaemenid historians was to 'dehellenise and decolonialise Persian history' (Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1987, 131) and in this context Xerxes' reign took on special relevance. The orthodoxy had evaluated Xerxes particularly negatively in the light of classical texts (and their Orientalist readings), holding him responsible for setting the empire on a downward slope towards decline by reversing the enlightened tolerance that had characterized his predecessors' attitudes towards indigenous cults.[11] New-school historians used ideas about Xerxes' punishment of Babylon to illustrate how shallow and mistaken such negative portrayals had been. In this way, Böhl's account of Xerxes' Babylonian policy came to serve as a sample case where traditional scholarship was put to the test, with implications for the study of the Persian Empire more generally. In the words of John Lee "the much-discussed Babylonian revolts […] are a crux in any assessment of Xerxes" (2016b, 1343).

By the mid-1990s, Xerxes as the destroyer of Babylonian temples had been 'laid to rest.'[12] The image had been deconstructed as a 'chimaera without substance',[13] conjured up by the uncritical acceptance and misreading of classical sources and by the attempt to force Babylonian evidence into these notions. A number of studies re-evaluated the archaeological record and concluded that the sites of Babylonia's major cities do not show evidence of

[8] The quote is from Kuhrt 2014, 166 where she reflects on the 1987 article with Sherwin-White.

[9] See Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1987.

[10] This collective designation has appeared recently in publications looking back on the achievements of a group of scholars associated with the Achaemenid History Workshops of the 1980s and early 1990s (e.g. Harrisson 2010). See McCaskie 2012 and Imanpour 2015 for discussions of the intellectual origins of this school.

[11] Kuhrt 1988, 66–68; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1989; Wiesehöfer 2002, 37.

[12] Kuhrt 1997, 302.

[13] Kuhrt 1988, 68.

destruction under Xerxes, as previously claimed by Schmid and others.[14] Other studies decried the uncertainty, or even misuse, of Babylonian sources in earlier scholarship. Newly published texts revealed that the element 'King of Babylon' had not been removed abruptly from Xerxes' royal titulature: it remained in use, albeit irregularly, in the post-revolt era and even into the reign of Xerxes' successor Artaxerxes I.[15] The continued use of the title, it was argued, did not fit a scenario of instant retribution but rather pointed to gradual cultural change as the empire stabilized into 'an ever more integrated political unit' where the need to emphasise its discrete entities was no longer felt.[16] Similarly, the dearth of clay tablets from Xerxes' reign was seen as caused no longer by oppression but by the interplay of a number of incidental factors, such as the spread of Aramaic, possible changes in the use of writing technologies and record-keeping, and accidents of preservation and publication.[17]

With Babylonian evidence for Xerxes' alleged destructions being revised, some ancient historians questioned whether the revolts had taken place under Xerxes at all. Amélie Kuhrt (1997) and Robert Rollinger (1998, 366–367) both argued that the revolts of Šamaš-erība and Bēl-šimânni could have happened in the late reign of Darius and that Böhl's dating to 484 and 482 (1962, 111–112) was based only on the pervasive image of Xerxes as destroyer of sanctuaries. Pierre Briant (1992) contemplated a date later in the reign of Xerxes. While these suggestions were quickly dismissed by Oelsner for contradicting sound cuneiform evidence (Oelsner 1999/2000, 377), these speculations further increased suspicion that testimony from cuneiform texts had been bent in order to comply with pre-existing notions about Xerxes' alleged reprisals against Babylonia.

In the mid-00s the discussion about Xerxes' Babylonian policy took a new turn. Significant progress in Neo-Babylonian studies since the 1980s allowed better access to the massive text corpus from the long sixth century BCE. Michael Jursa's 2005 guidebook of the Neo-Babylonian legal and administrative documents exemplifies the potential for corpus-wide research presenting itself at the time. In 2004 two independent studies simultaneously argued that traces of repressive measures could be observed in cuneiform records dating to the time of the revolts against Xerxes. Karlheinz Kessler (2004) showed that Babylon-bred families, who had dominated city politics at Uruk for generations, were ousted and replaced by a new local faction under Xerxes, a shift that led to new dynamics in Uruk's social and cultural fabric. In the same year, Caroline Waerzeggers (2003/2004) argued that the widespread abandonment of

[14] Rollinger 1993, 214–226; Rollinger 1998; Wiesehöfer 2002, 39–40; Wiesehöfer 2007.
[15] Stolper 1985, 9; Joannès 1989b; Rollinger 1998 and 1999.
[16] Kuhrt 2002, 490.
[17] Stolper 1985, 9; MacGinnis 1994; Joannès 1995.

archives in 484 BCE should be seen as a by-product of targeted reprisals against supporters of the rebellions in northern and central Babylonian cities.

Since then the discussion develops in two directions. Assyriologists discover more evidence in cuneiform materials that qualifies the year 484 BCE as a turning point in late Babylonian history;[18] ancient historians and archaeologists continue to stress that there is no evidence for destruction of Babylonian cities and temples in the wake of the revolts.[19] While these two positions are not mutually exclusive, a certain tension exists between them. The latter position is defended with tenacity, as can be seen in the number of publications appearing on the subject, often restating opinions multiple times in co-written articles.[20] The intensity of this discussion is due to the fact that it touches upon some of the central tenets of the New Achaemenid History school as outlined above. In this literature there is a tendency to eulogize Xerxes' response to the revolts: he is presented as the 'architect of a stable empire' (Kuhrt 2014, 169), praised for 'successfully' managing the Babylonian crisis with purely administrative measures, in a rational way, as a 'radical reformer of bureaucracy'.[21] Not coincidentally, such qualifications invert the Orientalist image of Xerxes as an 'unstable, unrestrained, hubristic, and revengeful tyrant' (Müller 2016, 178).

Xerxes and Babylonia: the cuneiform evidence

In light of these tensions, most assyriological research on the Babylonian revolts against Xerxes since 2004 has moved away from the specific question of violent retribution, towards other areas of interest that are better suited for a text-based approach.[22] The first area deals with the sequence and nature of

[18] The literature is reviewed below in the next section.

[19] Kuhrt 2010; Kuhrt 2014; Rollinger 2008, 493–497; Rollinger 2014b, 166; Rollinger 2014c, 162–171; Heinsch and Kuntner 2011; Heinsch, Kuntner and Rollinger 2011; Kuntner and Heinsch 2013; Kuntner, Heinsch and Allinger-Csollisch 2011; Allinger-Csollich 2011; Henkelman, Kuhrt, Rollinger, Wiesehöfer 2011.

[20] See the references in the previous footnote. E.g. at the end of their co-authored 2011 article Wouter Henkelman, Amélie Kuhrt, Robert Rollinger, and Josef Wiesehöfer discredit with a shared authoritative voice any future engagement as a return to the prejudiced default: "We have not the slightest doubt that the picture of Xerxes as the destroyer of Babylonian temples, with its supposed repercussions for the cult, for the theologically global position of Babylon, and for the city itself will continue to resurface time and again. The suggestive power of the tradition and the historical image it transmits will ensure so much."

[21] Rollinger 2014b, 166 ("Xerxes' I. erfolgreiche Reaktion auf die Erhebungen"); Rollinger 2014c, 166 ("Das Bild, das sich hier von Xerxes und seinen Maßnahmen darbietet, ist weniger das eines Tempelzerstörers, als vielmehr das eines radikalen Verwaltungsreformers"); Rollinger 2008, 496.

[22] George (2005/2006 and 2010) took up the subject of the alleged destruction of the ziggurrat of Babylon by Xerxes and Waerzeggers 2010 (p. 9) considered possible destructions in Borsippa;

events in the year 484 BCE itself. Joachim Oelsner (2007) and Heather Baker (2008) adduced more evidence for a sudden break in the cuneiform text corpus at that time; both also pointed towards possible traces of disturbance in one of the houses (N12; Baker 2008, 104–105) where an archive was abandoned after the uprisings, an interpretation later dismissed for being too uncertain by Heinsch, Kuntner and Rollinger (2011). Michael Jursa (2011) studied the archival and administrative procedures followed by administrators of the Ebabbar temple when closing off their institution's archive after the revolts. A newly published tablet from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, dated to Šamaš-erība 'King of Babylon and of the lands', supplied a welcome addition to the slim corpus of texts written during the rebellion, extending the duration of Šamaš-erība's revolt with twelve days, well into the eighth month of Xerxes' second regnal year (Spar and Jursa 2014 no. 140).

A second area of interest relates to the nature of Babylonian dissatisfaction with Persian rule. Letters from Borsippa, dated shortly before 484 BCE, reveal a worried, even panicked, atmosphere in the city when priestly families found that the income of their temple offices had been withdrawn by state officials without explanation (Jursa 2013). This unwelcome interference by the imperial authorities may well have ignited anti-Persian sentiments among the priests of Borsippa, who rallied behind the rebels in large numbers (Waerzeggers 2010). It remains to be seen whether the events in Borsippa were part of a larger, nation-wide policy.[23] But certainly there were longer and wider transformations that affected Babylonia's relationship to the Persian state. Jursa has argued that mounting tax pressures and the over-exploitation of Babylonian resources, especially since the reign of Darius I, were among the factors that contributed to dissatisfaction with Persian rule and the outbreak of overt revolt in 484 BCE (Jursa 2007, 90–91 and 2009, 266; Jursa 2015, 96, 103).

A third area of interest concerns the long-term impact of Persian counter-insurgency on Babylonian society, economy, and culture. The on-going exploration of the cuneiform evidence from the later fifth and fourth centuries BCE reveals deep-rooted, structural changes in the post-revolt era. These changes affected different population groups in different ways, so describing these developments as either negative or positive is misleading. The elite shift in Uruk implies a combination of both experiences: the dismissal of old, Babylon-based families allowed new groups to assert themselves in the city and to design and implement their own cultural program (Kessler 2004; Berlejung 2009). The

responses were formulated by Allinger-Csollich 2011; Henkelman, Kuhrt, Rollinger and Wiesehöfer 2011; Henkelman 2010; Rollinger 2014a, 202.

[23] In Sippar, Inbāya's difficulty to secure a stable contract for the performance of her prebends could be indicative of uncertainties surrounding the prebendary system there (Waerzeggers 2014). The occasional shortages of staples in Sippar's temple economy also point to irregularities (Jursa, this volume).

Eanna temple was dismantled in due course and replaced with a new place of worship, based on a local theology entirely different from the Babylon-oriented ideas that had prevailed previously. While this shift inaugurated the ascent of one group, it meant the dramatic end of another (Baker 2014). Such micro-historical studies reveal the real-life impact of Xerxes' counterinsurgency measures. There is also evidence of broader, structural change. Hackl and Pirngruber (2015) explain price volatility on the agricultural market in the fifth and fourth centuries as a result of changes in the institutional framework of agriculture after 484 BCE: the introduction of more direct forms of state control of temple lands, the confiscation of private land in favour of state officials and protégés, and the redirection of agricultural management away from temples and into the hands of entrepreneurs (Jursa 2014). The state's reliance on large-scale agricultural entrepreneurs in the post-484 BCE era "entailed an impoverishment of a larger section of the rural population and a comparative instability of prices for basic goods" (Pirngruber 2017, 66). Other discontinuities are observed in the area of temple management. In Babylonia's principal temple, the Esangila of Babylon, the centuries-old prebend system was abolished after the revolts and replaced with a ration-based system of remuneration — a measure that undermined the autonomy and internal hierarchy of the existing priesthoods (Hackl 2013, 392). Priests formed tight-knit communities based on their prebendary titles; any change in the prebend system would have had effects on the social and economic organization of entire communities (Still 2016). At the same time, rationed astronomers at Esangila booked great advances in science under the new system and continued the long-running project of the Astronomical Diaries (Beaulieu 2006; Ossendrijver, this volume). Qualifying the impact of Xerxes' Babylonian policy requires a contextualized approach in order to prevent levelling out the variety of experiences and outcomes.

This volume

The goal of this volume is to contribute to the debate about Xerxes' reign in Babylonia by further exploring the evidence from contemporary cuneiform sources. In doing so, it answers the familiar call to emancipate our appreciation of the Persian Empire from Greek narratives by studying it from within. The contributions address topics relating to each of the three areas outlined above: the pre-history of the revolts, the revolts themselves, and their short- and long-term impact on Babylonian culture, economy, and society. **Reinhard Pirngruber**, in a critique of current scholarship, seeks to understand Babylonia's malaise with Persian rule from long-term structural developments rather than from Xerxes' particular personality or individual agency. Contrary to the popular narrative about the seamless integration of Babylonia in Cyrus'

emergent empire, Pirngruber argues that the take-over of 539 BCE had immediate and wide-felt repercussions for Babylonia's population. These repercussions are visible in rapidly increasing prices: by the middle of Darius I's reign prices had soared to unprecedented heights and the pressure on people's lives had become palpable. According to Pirngruber, a combination of mutually enforcing factors caused this effect; some of these were directly tied to Persian imperial governance while others were longer in the making. The dislocation of the imperial centre to Iran and its lavish suppliance (from newly built infrastructure to court celebrations) drained state resources from Babylonia's economy, particularly in the reign of Darius I but also already during the reigns of his predecessors. At the same time, a process of increasing bureaucratization since the Neo-Babylonian empire had already started to yield diminishing returns when Cyrus came to power.

Like Pirngruber, **Małgorzata Sandowicz** questions the validity of the traditional narrative of continuity from Nabonidus to the first Persian emperors. Her evidence is taken not from price data but from prosopography, particularly the role of the governor of Babylonia (aka 'satrap') and his personnel in the administration of justice. Based on a study of legal texts dated to the reigns of the first Persian kings (some hitherto unpublished), she argues that while it is correct that the new rulers did not change Babylonia's court system, they did introduce new people — often of non-Babylonian descent — into this system. In this way, Sandowicz demonstrates that the installation of Persian rule brought about perceptible administrative changes already under Cyrus, and that the more radical transformations under Xerxes and his successors should be evaluated against the backdrop of these longer-term developments.

Michael Jursa turns our attention from the long-term to the short-term: which circumstantial factors interacted with structural ones (i.e. economic distress) to trigger the revolts in 484 BCE? Continuing his earlier reflections on this topic (2013), Jursa finds indications in the evidence from the city of Sippar that the state was losing control of the Babylonian temples in the years leading up to the revolts. Positions or activities that had previously been reserved for royal protégés were now being appropriated by members of Babylonia's native priestly families. Such negligence, Jursa argues, was likely a factor in the outbreak of the rebellions shortly after Darius I's death. The prosopography of the position of the *qīpu*, not just in Sippar but also in several other cities, is particularly indicative of the state's inability to maintain its established prerogatives in Babylonian temple administration in the years before the revolts. In the second part of his contribution, Jursa revisits an earlier paper (Jursa 2004) and re-examines the structure of the Ebabbar archive as a testimony of the circumstances surrounding its storage in Xer 2. In contrast to his earlier conclusions, he sees little evidence of an active management taking charge of Ebabbar's archival production in the wake of the revolts. Based on a comparison with the

structure of the Eanna archive, which was stored following an institutional reorganisation in Dar 2, he suggests that the majority of the Ebabbar archive as known to us, had been stored long before the outbreak of the revolts (in c. Dar 20). In Xer 2, a relatively small sample of ephemeral texts were added to this discarded material. Remarkably, a large percentage of these abandoned texts pertain to the sacrificial economy, which invites speculation about the fate of Ebabbar's cult after the revolts.

Karlheinz Kessler invites us to take a closer look at the storage of three tablet assemblages in Uruk as a reflection of counterinsurgency measures in the south of Babylonia: the Eanna archive, the archive of the Egibi family, and the Gimil-Nanāya B archive. Based on available archaeological evidence about the find contexts of the Eanna archive, Kessler speculates that the final abandonment of the Eanna cult complex as well as the disturbances of the Eanna archives may well be due to interventions by the Persian administration under Xerxes, even though there is no evidence for any archival text production at Eanna after Dar 29, the date of the last-recorded transaction known so far. The Egibi and Gimil-Nanāya B archives illustrate the divergent fates that befell Uruk's community around the time of the revolts. The Egibi family was part of the Babylon-based elite which fell victim to the social changes after the revolts. An archive associated with several members of this family, occupying high priestly positions in the Eanna temple, was found near the temple precinct in an area that was to become deserted in the later Achaemenid period. Kessler finds traces of the family's orientation towards Babylon until the very last documented generation, only a few years before the revolts broke out. Spanning until Dar 33, the archive does not survive into the post-revolt era. Kessler suggests that the residents of the entire area west of Eanna left their homes never to return. The Gimil-Nanāya family, by contrast, was able to maintain its archive across the time of unrest. This family lived in a different section of town and also belonged to a different stratum of Uruk's priesthood compared to the Egibis.

Caroline Waerzeggers reflects on the effects of Xerxes' intervention in Babylonia on the shape and structure of the overall text corpus of the long sixth century BCE. Processes of archive production had taken place in a decentralized and organic fashion until 484 BCE but they became politicized and homogenized during the corpus' final moments of formation. By reading the corpus 'backwards', as a residue of the social networks that had formed in Babylonia in the decades prior to the revolts, Waerzeggers shows that the structural features of the corpus can be used to study the social fault lines of (anti-imperial) political action as it unfolded.

Mathieu Ossendrijver takes us into the post-revolt era with a study of the fate of Babylonian scholarship under Xerxes. At first sight, the dearth of scholarly texts dated to his reign could be taken as a sign that Babylon's scholars

suffered the same disruption as other elites in the aftermath of the revolts, but Ossendrijver warns us that the reality was more complex. First of all, evidence from Uruk and Babylon dated in the late Persian and Hellenistic period shows that the astral sciences were continued much in the same way and at the same level as before. The long-running project of the Astronomical Diaries at Babylon's Esangila temple is a good case in point: while no Diaries are known that date to Xerxes' reign, there is ample evidence from his successors that the project continued with the same practices of observation and record-keeping that had been in place long before the advent of the Persian Empire. Second, Ossendrijver shows that Babylon's astronomers were able to create or maintain a beneficial relationship with the imperial authorities in the time after the revolts. This can be seen from the fact that their system of intercalation was adopted for use throughout the empire, probably from Xerxes' tenth regnal year onwards. Moreover, they continued to perform their divinatory practices in the service or at least in reference to the Persian king. This leads to the conclusion that the astronomers did not only survive the time of the uprisings but also found a new modus operandi with the imperial government that led to new opportunities, professionally and socially.

But not all members of Babylon's temple community shared in this fate. Based on a study of the Late Achaemenid and Early Hellenistic Esangila archive **Johannes Hackl** shows that the chief temple of Babylon underwent a thorough restructuring of its top-level as well as of its intermediate management positions. Based on circumstantial evidence, he proposes to date this process of re-organization to the reign of Xerxes' successor at the latest. The most fundamental change at Esangila compared to the pre-revolt period relates, in Hackl's opinion, to the organization of the priesthood. The operation of a ration system with an egalitarian standard of remuneration (based on age, rank and profession) is completely at odds with the principles of the prebend system that had supported the priesthood of northern Babylonian temples in the sixth century and earlier. Hackl finds no evidence whatsoever that the prebend system was still in place in Esangila and Ezida (in Borsippa) in the post-Xerxes period. The fact that the familiar system did survive in Uruk, where a new faction had been allowed to establish a new theology focused on Anu and the Rēš temple, is evidence for the targeted nature of Persia's responses to the revolts.

Paul-Alain Beaulieu studies the developments at Uruk more closely. He adduces new evidence, partly from unpublished texts, which dates the transformation of Uruk's civic religion more closely to the reign of Xerxes than previously possible. By c. 440 BCE, the city's favour had shifted away from Ištar and the pantheon that had been associated with her and the Eanna temple for centuries. Anu now enjoyed the highest favour, not only in the people's hearts (as can be seen in their enthusiastic embrace of Anu-names) but also in the city's institutionalized religion. However, while Anu's ascent can be dated to

the post-revolt era, Beaulieu shows that this deity's popularity had been steadily on the rise already since the reign of Nabonidus, particularly among families with deep local roots such as Ekur-zakir and Hunzû. This leads to the conclusion that Anu's rising popularity may have originated in a counter-movement against the centralizing claims of the Babylonian Empire, which had enforced the cults of its imperial heartland, centred on Marduk and Nabû, in Uruk. After the revolts, such local responses received the support of the Persian authorities who recognized the benefit of promoting local identities over those that could potentially unite larger territories, such as the former Babylonian Empire.

From these studies, the revolts of 484 BCE emerge as a critical moment in the history of Persian Babylonia when local and imperial interests clashed with effects that were both immediate and long-term, widespread and localized. Babylonian culture indeed persisted 'in a vital continuity' (Heinsch, Kuntner and Rollinger 2011, 472) but such optimistic qualifications require the necessary modifications in order to do justice to the variety of experiences and outcomes.

Timeline of the revolts

The sequence of events in 484 BCE can be reconstructed from archival texts written during the revolts.[24] These are accidental testimonies at best, with no or little reference to what was happening on the political stage, but they are useful for establishing a chronology of the rebellions. Babylonian notarial practice required scribes to append to each legal contract the name of the town where the transaction took place, as well as the day, month and year of the reigning king. In this way, we learn on what day and in which city Bēl-šimânni and Šamaš-erība were recognized as highest legal authority in the land. However, because the cuneiform date only refers to the year of a king's reign and not to an absolute point in time, we need to use other data to determine when a reign took place. Because Bēl-šimânni and Šamaš-erība are not included in the known king lists, it took Assyriologists a long time to fix their reigns in absolute terms. The first step in this direction was made by Ungnad (1907, 466–467), who understood that the lifespans of the people mentioned in the contracts provided a rough time indication, suggesting the late reign of Darius I or the early reign of Xerxes. San Nicolò (1934, 336) subsequently fixed the date for the revolt of Bēl-šimânni in the second year of Xerxes, based on information contained in one of the texts dated in his reign. Šamaš-erība's revolt remained unfixed much longer. External evidence was brought to bear on the question: Cameron (1941, 323–324) suggested Xer 4 because of Xerxes' dropping of the element 'King of Babylon' from his royal titulature as (putative)

[24] See Waerzeggers 2003/2004.

symbolic punishment for disobedience. Briant (1992, 13) later suggested that Xer 6 would be a better fit because a Babylonian uprising in that year would explain Persian mismanagement of the Greek front. Waerzeggers (2003/2004) placed Šamaš-erība's revolt in 484 BCE, the same year as Bēl-šimânni's, based partly on internal evidence from previously unpublished cuneiform tablets and partly on the archival context of the contracts dated to Šamaš-erība. This proposal was scrutinized by Oelsner (2007) and has since been accepted in the literature.

With both rebels dated to the same year, the following outline of events presents itself (see Waerzeggers 2003/2004). After the death of Darius I, Xerxes seems to have gained acceptance in Babylonia immediately, despite the unrest that was going on in Egypt at the time. Trouble began in the fourth month of his second year, the summer of 484 BCE, when citizens of Sippar declared Šamaš-erība, a man of uncertain origin, 'King of Babylon' in a first act of open rebellion since Nebuchadnezzar IV's failed attempt to end Persian rule in 521 BCE. The earliest text that recognizes Šamaš-erība as king was written on the 4th day of month V. Ten days later (14/15-V), evidence for a second rebel, Bēl-šimânni, emerges in Borsippa and Dilbat, cities to the south of Sippar. With Šamaš-erība still recognized in Sippar, Babylonia was now caught up in a double-headed revolt: both rebels fought against Persian imperial rule and perhaps also against each other. Šamaš-erība emerged victorious from this conflict and went on to face Xerxes as sole contender. By the second half of the sixth month, he enjoyed support in Sippar, Babylon, Borsippa, Kiš, and presumably also in Dilbat where Bēl-šimânni had previously been active. There is no evidence that the south ever participated directly in the rebellion, but this can be due to poor documentation; Uruk's inhabitants certainly felt the effects of Persia's counter-insurgency (Oelsner 2007, 296; Kessler 2004; and see Kessler and Beaulieu, both in this volume). The last tablet written during Šamaš-erība's rebellion dates to day 11 of the eighth month (Spar and Jursa 2014 no. 140). After this text, the cuneiform documentation from Babylonia suddenly falls silent. The first Xerxes-dated tablet after the revolts dates to day 18 of the tenth month (N18: 29, written in Babylon; see Oelsner 2007, 295). The lack of written sources from the time of the counter-insurgency contributes to the persistent uncertainties about the timing and nature of Xerxes' response.

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