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Fragments of Languages

FROM 'RESTSPRACHEN' TO CONTEMPORARY ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

Daniele Baglioni and Luca Rigobianco

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CHAPTER 2

Fragments of Greek in Babylonian

Paola Corò

1 Introduction

Describing the Greek language as a 'Restsprache' may indeed seem far from appropriate.

Addressing the fragmentariness "only in the sense of 'fragmentarily documented'" (as Baglioni and Rigobianco state in the introduction to the volume), the present contribution deals with fragments of Greek attested in Babylonian sources dating to the very end of the cuneiform culture, namely the Hellenistic and Parthian periods. The analysis will be based on a few quantitatively limited corpora of occurrences of Greek in Babylonian sources, whose characteristics and specific nature will be explored in detail.

Before turning to them, however, a few words are in order on their raison d'être.

The origins, characteristics, and modalities of the contact between Greeks and Babylonians in the 1st millennium BCE have been the subject of an extensive debate over the last fifty years, which is out of the scope of this article to review here.[1] Suffices it here to say that while evidence of contact is at the beginning only sporadic, it more clearly takes on the appearance of 'traces' and becomes increasingly visible in the sources from the time of Cyrus' entry into Babylon in 539 BCE (also demarcating the end of the Babylonian empire's independence), and even more so with the advent of Alexander the Great and then the Seleucids.

Indeed, from that time onwards, the presence of Greeks in Babylonian territory is witnessed by archaeological evidence (such as the gymnasium and the

1 The literature on the topic is extensive; starting with the seminal works by Kuhrt, Sherwin-White (1987; 1993); Briant (2002); Henkelman (2008), followed by Lanfranchi (2000) and Rollinger (2001; 2004; 2007) and Rollinger, Henkelman (2009). A number of recent synthesis (e.g. Graslin 2012, Monerie 2012, Monerie 2014: 18–21 and most recently Graslin-Thomé, Clancier, Monerie 2023) re-trace the lines along which the debate on Greek-Babylonian relationships evolved: the reader is referred to them and the pertinent bibliographies for further details. For more specific contributions on the problems of construction of identity in the later Mesopotamian archives, see the 2023 monographic issue of the Studia Orientalia Electronica journal (StOrE 11(2), 2023).

theatre of Babylon, for example)[2] as well as by some two dozen of inscriptions (on stelae, statues, foundation bricks, weights and amphorae, ostraka) written in the Greek language and script.[3] Irretrievably lost to us, but in all likelihood quite numerous, is that kind of evidence of everyday transactions, recorded on perishable media, whose existence is suggested by the presence of clay bullae and cretulae, which were used to seal parchment documents kept both in the official archives of the Seleucid kings (such as in the city of Seleucia on the Tigris),[4] and in centres with a deep-rooted Babylonian tradition, such as the city of Uruk, in southern Babylonia. Here, in particular, the bullae were stored in the same rooms of the temple of the local god Anu, the so-called Bīt Rēš, where the clay tablet archives written in the Babylonian language, using cuneiform writing, were found.[5]

Whether we include them in the count or not, so far, we are focusing on Greek, but in Babylonia, not in Babylonian sources. Our attention must therefore shift to other types of documents, which can justifiably be defined as 'fragments of Greek in Babylonian'.

As we address this, various scenarios emerge, contingent upon our definition of Greek:

1) Greek refers to the script but not the language. We are dealing here with those examples of typical Babylonian writing mediums, such as clay tablets, which house Greek script used to transliterate either the Sumerian or Akkadian languages: thus languages which are not Greek, that belong to different language families, and on top of it are typically written using a non-alphabetic, cuneiform shaped, script.[6]
2) Greek refers to the language but not the script. We consider here those fragments of the Greek language found in Babylonian sources, written

2 See, among others, Potts (2011); Bergamini (2011); Messina (2012: esp. 8–11); Mitsuma (2022). For the occurrence of the theatre in the cuneiform documentation Van der Spek 2001; on its role and significance Michel (2011), Ristvet (2014) and Horst (2022).

3 A recent short introduction to these documents and their significance is provided by Ruffing (2023), with bibliography. Especially useful for the reader is the full list of the inscriptions provided on pp. 113–114, where amphora stamps and other minor texts (such as those on stamped bullae and inscribed weights) are however excluded.

4 Invernizzi (ed.) (2004).

5 Lindström (2003).

6 While sharing the same writing system, being both written in cuneiform, Akkadian and Sumerian do not belong to the same language family. According to the genetic classification of the Semitic languages, Akkadian represents its East-Semitic branch (for a recent synthesis on the classification of Akkadian, see Hasselbach-Andee 2021). The affiliation of Sumerian is conversely still disputed: generally considered to be a language isolate, it has been recently proposed that it is part of the Uralic language family (Parpola 2010; 2012).

using the non-alphabetic, cuneiform script utilized in the 1st millennium BCE to express the Late-Babylonian variety of the Akkadian language.[7] This includes transliterations, borrowings, and calques, all displaying varying degrees of 'deformation' in their original forms due to their adaptation to a logo-syllabic script not designed for alphabetic representation.[8]

Before delving into a more detailed analysis of the aforementioned categories (§§ 2,3), it's important to note that a comprehensive assessment of the significance of these fragments of Greek in Babylonian is hindered by several factors. First, our understanding of the pronunciation of the Akkadian language in its Late-Babylonian dialect is still incomplete. Second, there are lingering uncertainties regarding the exact pronunciation and grammar of the Greek language stage as evidenced in Babylonian sources. Additionally, the level of literacy and education in the Greek language (as well as in the Babylonian language itself!) among the scribes who compiled the documents under analysis, as well as their identities remain subjects of debate, in a period when cuneiform is probably only written (and the language(s) it vehiculates spoken, if at all) in the temples, and individuals currently used Aramaic (and also Greek) in everyday life.[9] To illustrate this, a closer examination of a specific instance of the appropriation of the Greek language, as reflected in a sub-set of the considered fragments, help us draw conclusions.

2 Fragments of Greek Script for Languages Other Than Greek: The Graeco-Babyloniaca

The corpus known as the Graeco-Babyloniaca comprises a small collection of seventeen tablets, primarily in fragmentary conditions, believed to have originated from the Esagila temple of Babylon or its vicinity.[10] These texts provide

7 For an overview of the Akkadian language the reader is referred to the recent volume edited by Vita (2021).

8 A further scenario is that represented by translations of Greek documents in Akkadian: an example of this category has been recently identified in YOS 20 87, a scholarly tablet that according to Clancier and Monerie (2023) has to be interpreted as an Akkadian translation of Greek official documents dating to the Seleucid period.

9 For a summary of these issues with reference to previous literature, see Hackl (2021a; 2021b). On scribal literacy in this period see also Jursa (2010). On scribes as the 'cuneiform culture last guardians', Clancier (2010).

10 Essential steps in the identification of the corpus are the works by Sollberger (1962), Geller (1983) and (1997), Maul (1991), Westenholz (2007), to which Oelsner (2013) and Stevens

unique evidence of the utilization of the Greek script for writing texts in the Sumerian or Akkadian languages, a practice hitherto unattested. As far as their chronology is concerned, they span from the last two centuries BCE to the 1st century CE, albeit subject to fluctuations according to varying interpretations.[11] It is widely acknowledged that a systematic and meticulous examination of the paleography of the Greek script employed in these tablets may contribute to refining their precise chronology, although one has to bear in mind that contemporary parallels for Greek script inscribed using a pointed stylus on clay may be difficult to find.[12]

Regarding their contents, the texts preserved on the Graeco-Babyloniaca tablets are representative of the Babylonian scholastic tradition: they encompass lexical lists, hymns, incantations, and colophons of literary texts, i.e. the 'classical literature' used in the students' educational process; the presence of mistakes and erasures is also deemed indicative of a pedagogical context.[13]

In terms of script, most tablets feature the cuneiform version of a text on the obverse and its equivalent, still in the Akkadian or Sumerian language but transliterated into Greek characters, on the reverse.[14] Interestingly, the rendition of Akkadian and Sumerian texts with Greek script appears to entail not a direct transliteration, rather an endeavor to capture the pronunciation of the original language.[15] Notably, these tablets deviate from common cuneiform practice by turning along the vertical axis (akin to modern books) in contrast to the customary characteristic of cuneiform tablets of turning like a notepad, being flipped upside-down.

(2019) must be added. In the recent treatment of the Graeco-Babyloniaca by Lang (2023) a useful table summarizing the ID, content, epigraphical aspect of the tablets, proposed dating and on-line accessibility of the texts is provided on pp. 134–135. On their possible original provenance from the Esangila library see Clancier (2009: 247–248). Stevens (2019: 124 n. 109) propends for 'houses or storerooms of priests or other temple personnel' and not for the library of Esagila.

11 Knudsen (1990); Geller (1997); Westenholz (2007); Stevens (2019: 141). We will not consider part of the Graeco-Babyloniaca here what Martin Lang considers part of them in "a wider sense", i.e. "all the material that reflects Sumerian and Akkadian words of the Ancient Babylonian world in the Greek tradition" (2021: 102–103), as they represent precisely the opposite of what constitutes our focus here.

12 Geller (1997: 85); again, Lang (2023: 132). See also the difficulties exemplified by Stevens (2019: 135).

13 Westenholz (2007: 291); Geller (2008: 2).

14 Three exceptions are known, featuring only the Greek transliteration but no cuneiform at all: they are Nos. 14, 15 and 17 according to Geller (1997)'s numbering.

15 Westenholz (2007: 281); see also Oelsner (2013: 158, 161). The Graeco-Babyloniaca are the object of two recent syntheses by Martin Lang: see Lang (2021; 2023).

The Graeco-Babyloniaca undeniably provide evidence of the persistence of Babylonian as a learned language up to the 1st century CE, and potentially indicate that Sumerian and Akkadian "outlived the demise of cuneiform on other media for some time".[16] While there is consensus that their Sitz-im-Leben is the scribal school milieu, the debate remains open regarding the identity of those who drafted them (whether they were Babylonian or Greek students), and their ultimate purpose. A comprehensive review of the various theories proposed thus far exceeds the scope of this study;[17] however it is pertinent to remind that this fragmentary group of texts in Greek alphabetical script, reveal that those who wrote them had a "limited knowledge—but not significantly reduced competence—of Akkadian",[18] indicating their importance for studying Babylonian in later periods. They confirm essential linguistic developments in the language final phase, such as the loss of short vowels in noun case endings and the final vowels of the mode in the verbal forms.[19] For instance, the name of the city of Babylon, written using the logogram KI.MIN, for 'ditto', to reflect the repetition of a previous mention of the name of the city in BM 34789 (= No. 16: 2 et *passim*), is read *Bābilu* (with short *u* for the nominative ending) in Akkadian, and is rendered βαβιλ in Greek script, reflecting a characteristic Late-Babylonian phenomenon. Furthermore, these texts shed light on previously unknown linguistic features of the Babylonian language, such as the pronunciation of the phoneme /o/, which is not attested in the Babylonian cuneiform writing system, in particular situations: for example, the renditions of the god Marduk's name as [μαρ]ʳδ ¹ωκ in Greek characters illustrates this phenomenon.[20]

At the same time, examining the Graeco-Babyloniaca from 'a Greek perspective' reveals the existence of an established set of conventions for the transliteration of Akkadian and Sumerian into Greek script. This transliteration system, tailored to the phonological characteristics of each language, mirrors contemporary practices observed in the transliterations of other Semitic languages.[21] Furthermore, the positioning of the Greek version of these school texts on the reverse side of the tablets suggests that mastering this translit-

16 Hackl (2021a: 1433); Hackl (2021b: 1471–1472).

17 The reader may refer to the synthesis by Stevens (2019: 125–143), with previous literature.

18 Hackl (2021b: 1468).

19 On the characteristics of Late-Babylonian see Hackl (2021a).

20 A full list of the preserved Akkadian words in Greek script occurring in the Graeco-Babyloniaca is now provided by Lang (2021: 107–117), who also sketches the grammar and phonetic orthography of the Akkadian preserved in them (Lang 2021: 118–121).

21 Geller (1997: 64–68) and Westenholz (2007: 281–283); now also Lang (2021: 102–103).

eration process was the 'main learning objective'[22] of these educational exercises. This observation may elucidate the frequent occurrences of errors and erasures in the texts.[23] Whether the writers of the Graeco-Babyloniaca tablets were Babylonian or Greek, they demonstrated a preexisting familiarity with the Greek script, albeit at a rudimentary level.[24] Concurrently, they engaged with cuneiform literature typical of the advanced stages of education.[25] In this context, it seems apt to view these exercises, as proposed by Stevens, as tangible manifestations of education within a 'a bilingual, or rather multilingual society'.[26]

3 Fragments of the Greek Language in Cuneiform Script

It is within the same bilingual and multilingual context that the second group of fragments of Greek in Babylonian forming the focus of our investigation finds its rationale. This group represents a parallel yet contrasting process to that observed in the Graeco-Babyloniaca, namely the representation of Greek in Babylonian sources. Here we specifically examine the rendering of the Greek language using the Babylonian script, a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing various Greek words documented on clay tablets through cuneiform writing. This phenomenon takes many forms, ranging from direct transliterations, to calques, such as the Babylonian term *bīt tāmarti* 'house of the viewing' for *theatron*),[27] as well as borrowings. It encompasses anthroponyms, toponyms, and a plethora of Greek terms (predominantly nouns, and a few adjectives), mainly associated with civic administration and institutions. These aspects will be scrutinized in further detail in the subsequent discussion.

3.1 *Greek Anthroponyms*

Here, we refer to the multiple attestations of:

– names of rulers utilized mainly, and to a large extent, in the dating formulas of everyday documents—essentially contracts—, but also mentioned—

22 Stevens (1997: 123).
23 See above, note 12.
24 Stevens (2019: 131), on the basis of Cribiore (1996: 212).
25 Gesche (2001: 184–185).
26 Steven (2019: 132).
27 See in particular Van der Spek (2001) and Potts (2011). On the theatre of Babylon see also note 2 above.

to a lesser extent—in official inscriptions, celebrative documents and/or astronomical diaries and chronicles. A few queens are also documented (for example, Laodice, as discussed below);
– names of high-ranking officials connected with the royal court attested sporadically but predominantly found in the Astronomical Diaries from Babylon;
– a significant array of names of individuals belonging to the upper echelons of the city elite, who revolved around the temple city of Uruk, in southern Babylonia. These individuals assumed various roles, including witnesses, sellers, buyers, etc. in nearly a thousand Seleucid-era documents.[28] We will not discuss here the reasons and characteristics of the spread of such Greek onomastic heritage in the sources; however, it is noteworthy to mention, in order to provide context to this phenomenon, that Greek anthroponyms often represent the 'second' (or other) name of individuals who bear a Babylonian name alongside the Greek one.[29] Furthermore, as recently emphasized by Verhelst, certain Greek anthroponyms attested in Babylonian sources are exceedingly rare in contemporary Greek sources, and originate from specific geographic areas, thus reflecting localized instances of agency within the context of foreign rule.[30]

3.2 *Greek Toponyms*

Toponyms identify Greek cities (mainly local foundations), such as Antioch on the Orontes, or Seleucia on the Tigris, and locations (e.g. Macedonia, Ionia) and encompass not only transliterations but also calques. Notably, in transliterations, the utilization of semantic classifiers serves to differentiate regions and cities. For instance, Macedonia is transcribed ^{kur}*ma-ak-du-nu* or ^{kur}*ma-ak-ka-da-nu*, emplying the semantic classifier KUR denoting the region, whereas Antioch is rendered as ^{uru}*an-tu-ki-ʾa-a*,[31] employing the semantic classifier

28 For recent synthetic overviews of these sources see Alstola et al. (2023: esp. 14–18). It must be noticed that although our attention is preferentially for the occurrences of Greek names in sources from Uruk, private individuals with Greek names are also attested in the sources from other Babylonian cities, such as Babylon, Nippur and Larsa: for the full list of occurrences, see Monerie (2014).

29 On the use of Greek and Babylonian names see especially Monerie (2014), with previous literature and now also Corò (2024). Questions relating to identity construction in Mesopotamian archives during the 1st millennium BCE are the focus of a recent issue of Studia Orientalia Electronica, where the question of Greek names is dealt with by Pearce & Corò (2023).

30 Verhelst (forthcoming).

31 For more spellings of this anthroponym see Monerie (2014: 199).

reserved for cities. This reflects a level of appropriation not just of the Greek language but also of the geographical context the scribe was writing about, a phenomenon particularly conspicuous in instances of semi-calques for toponyms. The complete appellation of Antioch on the Orontes, retaining its Greek designation for the first segment, as shown above, is subsequently translated into Babylonian with the latter portion commonly identified in cuneiform as *ša ana* UGU I_7 *ma-rat*, lit. 'which is on the sea' (denoting the Orontes river).[32]

3.3 *Greek Lemmas: Words and Adjectives*

Predominantly comprising nouns, the Greek lemmas within this corpus pertain primarily to the domain of city institutions and administration. The comprehensive (yet still somewhat circumscribed) lexicon encompasses terms such as: διάγραμμα, διοικητής, ἐπίσκοπος, γραφή, μέτρον, παράδειξις, πελιγᾶνες, πολίται, πομπὴ, προστάτης, στατῆρες, σύμβολον, θρόνος,[33] along with two adjectives designating ethnicity: ἰώνιος, μακεδών.[34]

Recently, Monerie's scholarly inquiry has offered fresh insights into this corpus, particularly regarding anthroponyms. His examination has not only elucidated the system of phonemic correspondences between the two languages, but also revealed the strategies adopted to address challenges inherent in the cuneiform script. A notable instance pertains to the transliteration in cuneiform of words featuring consonant clusters, due to the absence of cuneiform signs beginning or ending in two consonants, necessitating the division of such clusters into consecutive syllabic values. So, the Greek term θρόνος is rendered as *tu-ru-nu-us* in Akkadian cuneiform, a transliteration that underscores the additional difficulty of representing the vowel, /o/, for which no corresponding cuneiform sign exists.

Moreover, this analysis sheds light on the manner in which Greek was transcribed via cuneiform. Parallel to what we know of the Graeco-Babyloniaca, these transliterations reveal a tendency towards capturing the pronunciation of the Greek language, rather than its written form. Consequently, the sources may present multiple variants for a single term, reflecting individual scribes' idiosyncrasies, choices, and level of familiarity with Greek pronunciation. This variability may also reflect the scribes' evolving proficiency on Greek over the course of their career.

32 For the identification of this toponym see Van der Spek (1997/1998: 173–174).

33 Uncertain is also the occurrence of a lemma τάγματα: see Von Soden (1981: 295) and Jursa (2006: 149–150).

34 See Monerie (2014: 198), for details of their writing in cuneiform.

4 Conclusion: A Particular Case of Appropriation of the Greek Language

Moving towards the conclusion, we will examine a specific case, that illustrates the complexity of the phenomenon of linguistic appropriation evident in these fragments of Greek in Babylonian. Our focus will shift to the spellings of the female name Laodice in cuneiform sources. Babylonian sources record two queens with this name: Laodice the wife of Antiochus II and Laodice the daughter of Antiochus III. Although queens (and their names) are in general underrepresented in cuneiform sources from this period, the wife of Antiochus II stands out in Babylonian sources for her grant of land to the citizens of three Babylonian cities, namely Babylon, Borsippa and Kutha. This donation is recorded in a cuneiform tablet known as the 'Lehmann Text', currently housed in the Metropolitan Museum. According to the tablet, this document is a later copy, in cuneiform script, on a clay tablet, of an official stele (now lost to us), a stone monument (*narû*), publicly displayed in the temple, commemorating the donation. A duplicate of the Lehmann text, also inscribed on a clay tablet and written in cuneiform script, has recently been discovered in the British Museum and is of paramount importance for the topic under discussion here.[35]

The two clay tablets mention the name of Laodice three times in total, each instance exhibiting different spellings: two occurrences are found in the Lehmann text, while the third is in its duplicate (see Table 2.1). Despite being duplicates, the two tablets were produced by different scribes: the London tablet is likely the work of an expert scribe, while[36] the one in the Metropolitan Museum, as explicitly stated in its colophon, is the work of an apprentice scribe. This detail also indicates that the grant document, like other official inscriptions, was copied in a scholastic setting.[37]

As recently demonstrated, the tablet produced by the expert scribe preserves a spelling (^{f}*la-ú-di-qé-e*: CTMMA 148B: iii 1) that more closely reflects the (written) Greek form of the queen's name. This suggests the possibility that either he was able to directly read Laodice's name from the original Greek document to which the *narû* referred (if such a document ever existed and was on display and available to him at the time he produced the tablet) or, if he was writing under dictation or lacked access to the original document, he possessed

35 The tablet in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and its duplicate in the British Museum are published in Spar-Jursa 2012, 213–227, respectively as CTMMA 4, 148, Text A and B.

36 As suggested by its formal execution. See recently Corò (2020).

37 See Van der Spek and Wallenfels in Spar & Jursa (2014: 213–227).

TABLE 2.1 Spellings of Laodice in the Lehmann text and its duplicate

Spelling	Texts	Date BCE
^{f}*la-ú-di-qé-e*	CTMMA 148B: iii 1	lost
^{f}*lu-da-qé-e*	CTMMA 148A: obv. 7 *et passim*	173/172

the correct spelling of the name, enabling him to transcribe it into cuneiform without encountering the typical challenges Babylonian scribes faced when dealing with 'difficult' Greek phonemes.[38]

This example, in addition to those previously investigated, highlights the intricate mechanisms governing the relationships between different languages and writing systems in a multilingual context. It further suggests that a comprehensive understanding and assessment of the significance of this 'corpus of fragments of Greek in Babylonian' can only be achieved by considering multiple interconnected factors. These include the language proficiency of the scribes in the two different languages, and their mastery of the writing systems they employed, their literacy levels as well as the extent of their involvement and participation in the socio-political and cultural milieu of which the texts they produced represented the tangible expression.

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38 Corò (2020), where also the different spellings are recorded and commented. On the representation of women in Hellenistic documents see Corò (2021).

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