

79) A new spelling for the name of Laodice in cuneiform: a matter of literacy? — A large number of Greek names are recorded in cuneiform sources,¹⁾ less than a dozen of which refer to women. Among them is that of Laodice, identifying either the wife of Antiochus II or the daughter of Antiochus III. The fame of the former in Babylonian documents is mainly connected to the endowment of royal land she made for the citizens of Babylon, Borsippa and Kutha, recorded in the so-called Lehmann text.²⁾

While the name of the second Laodice is spelled in cuneiform as ^f*lu-di-qé-e*,³⁾ more variability characterizes the writings of the name of the Laodice married to Antiochus II, who is recorded in documents written between 245 and 140 BC as ^f*lam-ú-di-qé-'e*, ^f*lu-da-qé-e* or ^f*lu-di-qé-e*.⁴⁾

The recent publication of a tablet in the British Museum recording a duplicate copy of the so-called Lehmann text bears witness to the existence of a further spelling of the same name in addition to those collected by Monerie, i.e., ^f*la-ú-di-qé-e*.⁵⁾

A comparison of the different spellings for the name and the sources in which they occur appears in the Table.

spelling	Texts	Date BC	nr of signs
^f <i>lam-ú-di-qé-'e</i>	AD 2 -245B, obv. 5'	245	5
^f <i>la-ú-di-qé-e</i>	CTMMA 148B: iii 1	lost	5
^f <i>lu-da-qé-e</i>	CTMMA 148A: obv. 7 <i>et passim</i>	173/172	4
^f <i>lu-di-qé-e</i>	AD 2 -247B, obv. 4' AD 3 -140A, u.e. 4 AD 2 -181, rev. 7	247 140 181	4

Variability in transcribing Greek names into Babylonian comes as no surprise in cuneiform sources from the Hellenistic period. Writing Greek names in Babylonian, the scribes were confronted with a number of difficulties. First, the Babylonian language was written using a non-alphabetic system, lacking some of the necessary phonemes (e.g., the vowel *o*, which had to be replaced with a different phoneme, usually *u*). Second, at a time when the pronunciation of Greek no longer exactly corresponded to its written form, they apparently relied more frequently on the pronunciation of the name than on reproducing its written form in the original language.⁶⁾ In this process individual preference played a major part, and the scribes could opt for a different subset of signs to render the same sequence of phonemes, according to how they heard them pronounced, which resulted in different outcomes for the same entry. The origins of the scribes may also have played a part in giving prominence to particular phonetic phenomena (such as assimilation),⁷⁾ and different kinds of document might have required of the scribes varying degrees of accuracy, depending on the audience for which the texts were composed.

However, a certain trend towards normalizing the spellings is observable. This applied all the more quickly with more common names, especially those of the kings (which were usually written by the scribes in the date-formulas of the documents they compiled on an everyday basis).⁸⁾

It is difficult to detect a clear process of normalization in the spellings of the name of Laodice. First, because the variability applies to a small number of occurrences, and second, because the different spellings

are distributed over an uneven period of time, and among different kinds of sources. More likely the different spellings show the preference for specific solutions by the scribes who produced them.

Indeed, as one can see in the Table (above) the documents record two different 4-sign writings of the name (^f*lu-di-qé-e* and ^f*lu-da-qé-e*); and two 5-sign writings (^f*la-ú-di-qé-e*; ^f*lam-ú-di-qé-'e*). The second 5-sign spelling (^f*lam-ú-di-qé-'e*), occurring once in the Diary for 245 BC, may reflect the attempt by the scribe to reproduce in Babylonian the Greek pronunciation of the name (with intervocalic *m* for *w*, typical of the Late-Babylonian period, *u* for missing *o*, and the final aleph sign as a device to render the actual pronunciation of the Greek η).⁹⁾ Instead, both the shortest spellings merge the original Greek vowel cluster *ao* in a single vowel *u* (according to the general trend to simplify vowel clusters into one vowel only, but privileging the second vowel instead of the first, which was more common; original *o* is then converted into *u* since no *o* phoneme existed in Babylonian).

All the spellings fully render the long vowel η for the Greek feminine ending either by repeating the vowel *e* in two following syllables (a device frequently used to render the ending of Greek feminine names into Babylonian, as it was facilitated by the similarity of the composition of these names with the Babylonian ones), or using an aleph sign for the purpose.¹⁰⁾

The second syllable of one of the 4-sign forms (^f*lu-da-qé-e*), conversely, features a vowel *a* (*-da-*), instead of *i* (*-di-*), for Greek *ι*. The rendering of Greek *iota* with *i* in Babylonian is usually consistent (as underlined by the fact that Monerie arranges our example of *-da-* instead of *-di-* among the few exceptions to the general rule). That a vowel *i* was expected to express the phoneme seems, on the other hand, confirmed by the use of the syllable *-di* in the same position in all the remaining examples of spellings of the name (^f*lu-di-qé-e*, and ^f*lam-ú-di-qé-'e*, and ^f*la-ú-di-qé-e*).¹¹⁾

The presence of the syllable *-da-* in the Lehmann text (CTMMA 4 148A) looks therefore odd, and the more so if one compares this spelling with that of its duplicate tablet in the British Museum, (CTMMA 4 148B =BM 47926), which conversely exhibits a transliteration of the Greek name into Babylonian perfectly recalling its original written form,¹²⁾ i.e., ^f*la-ú-di-qé-e* for $\Lambda\alpha\omicron\delta\iota\chi\eta$.

According to its colophon, the Lehmann text (CTMMA 4 148A) was apparently copied by an apprentice scribe for the personal collection of an older scribe, according to the Babylonian school tradition:¹³⁾ it is arranged in one column only and is the work of a young scribe; this is especially clear if one compares it to the other copy of the document, CTMMA 148B, whose compiler is unknown but which (as one can argue from what remains of it) was clearly accurately arranged in columns. It would thus be tempting to assign it to the hand of a more advanced scribe than the other.

In light of this, it is possible to interpret the two spellings of the name of Laodice in these documents as clues to different degrees of expertise of the scribes who wrote them. The form ^f*lu-da-qé-e* of CTMMA 148A would represent the inaccuracy of an unexperienced scribe (or of a scribe who was not much familiar with the Greek language);¹⁴⁾ while the spelling ^f*la-ú-di-qé-e*, perfect rendering into Babylonian of the written form of the Greek name, conceivably speaks in favor of the work of an experienced scribe.

We have no idea how the scribes operated in order to produce their documents, *i.e.* if by dictation or reading from the original: it thus remains to be ascertained whether the second scribe was so well versed in Greek (as well as in Babylonian) as to be able to make the most faithful transcription of the Greek name into cuneiform (whatever original form of the name he may have heard) or, conversely, if his expertise consisted in the ability to reproduce (making no mistakes) the 'difficult Greek' name that he found on the master document. In this second case, the form ^f*la-ú-di-qé-e* would have been already in the document the scribe copied from, *i.e.* on the official stele erected to issue/celebrate the endowment, conceivably representing the official spelling of the queen's name (that we might expect derived directly from some original Greek document related to the land grant).

Be that as it may, spelling variation in the name of Laodice is likely to reflect the fact that although the Babylonian scribes had some familiarity with the queen's role in the episode of the royal grant, they did not feel so much at ease with her name as to fully overcome the difficulties of transliterating it into cuneiform. Differently from the king's, the queen's name was not part of the date formulas of the documents and the scribes never became acquainted with the praxis of writing it on an everyday basis, so as to establish

a normalized spelling for it. Instead, they had to resort to their scribal abilities and cultural background in order to solve the riddle of writing this odd name, and this is reflected in the outcomes of their work.

Indeed, the queen's renown in Babylonia apparently did not reach far beyond her connection to the endowment: her name is, for example, absent, to the best of our knowledge, from the onomastic repertoire of Greek female names from Babylonia (i.e., no 'ordinary' woman with a Greek name was called Laodice in cuneiform sources).¹⁵⁾

Notes

1. Monerie 2014.
2. Documented by CTMMA 4, 148A and 148B. See Van der Spek and Wallenfels in Spar – Jursa 2014, pp. 213-227. On the queen and her role in the episode as recorded in cuneiform sources, see Corò, forthcoming.
3. The occurrence appears in AD2 -181: see Monerie 2014, s.v. Laodice², pp. 149-150. On the daughter of Antiochus III and the debated question of her marriages with her brothers, see in particular Rougemont 2012, pp. 64-65.
4. For the occurrences see Monerie 2014, pp. 149-150. See also pp. 47, 53 and 59 for specific observations on the rendering of different Greek letters. The spelling of the name of Laodice in AD2 -245B obv. 5' is recorded by Monerie, in accordance with the editors of the text, as ^llam-ú-dì-qé-'a-a . It is however likely that the last vowel does not belong to the queen's name and the spelling here is ^llam-ú-dì-qé-'e, as already suggested by Del Monte 1997, p. 43, fn. 87, who reads it ^llam-ú-di-ki-'i. I wish to thank Bert Van der Spek for drawing my attention to this point.
5. The tablet in the British Museum is published by Van der Spek and Wallenfels as CTMMA 4, 148B; the publication also includes a re-edition of the Lehmann text (CTMMA IV, 148A). See Spar – Jursa 2014, pp. 213-227.
6. Monerie 2014, p. 36.
7. Monerie 2017, p. 37.
8. Monerie 2014, pp. 37-41.
9. For similar renderings of the vowels of Aramaic in Babylonian see Geller 2006 (I wish to thank M. Jursa for drawing my attention to this reference). According to Monerie 2014: pp. 46-47, the use of intervocalic *m* for *w* betrays here the presence of an original Greek *digamma* between the two vowels, which disappeared from Greek writing back in the 6th century BC.
10. According to Monerie, p. 59.
11. Pace Lehmann 1892: pp. 331-332, who thinks that the use of the syllable *da* instead of *di* in this spelling would demonstrate the shift of short *a* to short *i* in Late Babylonian.
12. On the inconsistencies between these two documents see Van der Spek/Wallenfels in CTMMA fn. 14; in general, on the small differences between duplicate copies of the same documents in Akkadian literature, see Worthington, Principles, pp. 6-19.
13. On the scribe who wrote the text and the context of its composition, see Van der Spek and Wallenfels in Spar-Jursa 2014, pp. 224 and p. 226, fn. 3.
14. If this interpretation is correct, it is also conceivable that the spelling ^mse-lu for ^mse-lu-ku to identify the king in the BM tablet, an abbreviation typical of the Diaries, betrays the high-level scholarly background of the scribe of CTMMA 148B.
15. Royal names (especially Seleucid and Argead) represent about 10% of the Greek names in the onomastic repertoire of Babylonia in the Hellenistic period, and the name of king Antiochus is echoed in that of Antiochis, one of the few women with a Greek name whose deeds have come down to us: Monerie 2014, 75.

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