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Tracing Regime Change during the Transition from the Neo-Babylonian to the Achaemenid Empire at Nippur: Reconstruction of Archives Excavated in 1889

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Abstract. It is generally assumed that the takeover of Babylonia by the Persian king Cyrus II in 539 BC went relatively smoothly. The current study suggests that at Nippur there might have been hitherto overlooked changes among the higher-ranking officials during the transition of 539 BC. A collection of Neo-Babylonian tablets from the ‘Tablet Hill’ at Nippur is analyzed and its original trench of excavation is pinpointed on the map of the site. Focusing on several dossiers of tablets at ‘Tablet Hill’ from the time of transition around 539 BC it can be shown that further insights can be gained from the unpublished archaeological documentation.

Keywords. Nippur, Neo-Babylonian to Achaemenid transition, Tablet Hill, Pennsylvania expedition.

INTRODUCTION

This article deals with the transition from the Neo-Babylonian to the Achaemenid period at Nippur, more precisely with the evidence covering the end of the reign of Nabonidus in the autumn of 539 BC and continuing into the Early Achaemenid period.¹ Through a combination of material

¹ The paper was originally presented at the 12th Melammu workshop, ‘Living under Empires: a View from Below’ in Helsinki, 2020 (due to Covid-19 via Zoom). Furthermore, a more developed presentation was given at the Seminarium of Assyriology, University of Warsaw 2021 (due to Covid-19 via google.meet). *Acknowledgements:* First of all, I want to thank Alex Pezzati (Senior Archivist, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) for his continuous support with archival matters as for e. g. scanning of parts of the archive. Many thanks I owe to Abbas Alizadeh who included me into the team of Nippur Season 21 in November/December 2021 which allowed me to take on-site photos which appear in this article. Additionally, I am indebted to Aage Westenholz and Inger Jentoft (“Nippur Digitized”) for their hospitality as

and written evidence from the Northwestern part of “Tablet Hill” (Mound V)² it is the aim of the paper to put the available information into its proper historical position.

Only rarely, one gets a glimpse through archaeology of the everyday life (and death)³ of those who profited by the new possibilities. The opportunity presented here is an unlikely one. As is known also for other sites the early excavations of Nippur have the nimbus of being badly excavated and documented, or that, besides the physically preserved tablets, its results are entirely lost to science. It will be shown that some information can yet be gained from the unpublished archaeological documentation.

In the historical standard work of the period by Pierre Briant (2002: 71-72) as the seeming proof of a smooth transition from Nabonidus to Cyrus serves, for example, the private cuneiform archive of the Egibi family in Babylon.⁴ This archive ran without interruption from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BC) until early in the reign of Xerxes (486-465 BC). Too often historians accepted the narrative provided by the seemingly ‘native’ chronicles and uncritically adopted the ‘fact’ that the inhabitants of Babylonia received the new overlords with open arms. It is more than likely that these sources were politically influenced (Waerzeggers 2015b). As Caroline Waerzeggers has pointed out elsewhere, it was still one of the biggest turning points in ancient Mesopotamian history (Waerzeggers 2015a: 181-222). The vast Achaemenid Empire stretched from ‘the Saca who are beyond Sogdiana, from there as far as Kush, from the Indus as far as Sardis’ (Darius, *Apadana foundation tablets*) (Waerzeggers 2015a: 185). This gave an opportunity to at least some Babylonians to take part in longer distance business activities (Jursa 2010: 224-225) and to profit from a participation in the land-for-service system, as for Nippur most prominently exemplified by the later Murašû archive, 454-404 BC (Stolper 1985; Jursa 2005: 113-114). It is suggested here that there might have been some upheavals among the high-ranking officials in the course of the transition of 539 BC which, so far, have been overlooked or were underemphasized. The article tries to provide a local perspective for Nippur which properly highlights the existing documentation from this transition.

HISTORY OF EXCAVATIONS AT NIPPUR UNTIL 1889

More than 130 years have passed since the beginning of intensive excavations at Nippur in 1889, without even counting the short explorations around 1850. Therefore, it is necessary to start with an introduction including the history of research as well as on the archival material from the excavations.

After the early explorations by Rawlinson, Layard and Loftus around the 1850ies (Rawlinson 1849/50; Layard 1853; Loftus 1856), only few antiquities from Nippur appeared on the antiquities market until attention was directed to the site again by the so-called “Wolfes Expedition to Babylonia” in 1884/85 (Hilprecht 1903: 290-293). It was a survey conducted by members of the American Oriental Society, connected to the American Institute of Archaeology, in order to choose a valuable site for excavations and to arouse such public interest through follow-up lectures that an American institution would be able to finance such excavations (Hilprecht 1903: 292-293). The expedition was led by William H. Ward and accompanied by John Henry Haynes as photographer, the later Nippur field director. More and more objects kept coming on the antiquities market until 1888 (Hilprecht 1908: 201-204) and it was

well as the ongoing cooperation concerning the documentation in the different archives deriving from the old Nippur excavation. Aage Westenholz read an earlier draft version of this paper and I am thankful for his constructive comments as well as his improvements on the English language. Susanne Paulus (Curator of the Tablet Collection, Oriental Institute, Chicago) provided additional details of the tablets from TA. For sharing literature during the Covid-19 crisis beginning with the first half of 2020 which made the finishing of this article possible in such trying times I want to thank Janine Wende (Leipzig). For sharing their thoughts concerning the two presentations my thanks are due to Heather Baker (at Helsinki), Malgorzata Sandowicz and Stefan Zawadzki (both at Warsaw). Part of the research for this article was financed by the Post-DocTrack Program of the OeAW (Austrian Academy of Sciences), 2020.

² The numbering follows the excavator J. P. Peters (1897) which was chosen in the order of excavations and does not take into consideration the randomly changed version presented by Hilprecht (1903).

³ Schneider forthcoming a.

⁴ To this archive and further bibliographic references see for example Wunsch 1999; Jursa 2005.

around this time that Nippur tablets arrived in different collections (*Ibid.*). During the first campaign led by J. P. Peters, excavations in the Southeastern part of Nippur on Mound V, the triangular mound which became known as ‘Tablet Hill’, were started on 12th February 1889 (Peters 1897: 245-246; Clayden 2016: 1).⁵ Following Peter’s Journal entry ‘work was stopped suddenly’ a bit more than two months later on 15th April ‘on account of the shooting by a ‘zaptiyeh’ (i. e. a gendarme of the Ottoman Empire) of a thieving Arab of the Es-Seid tribe’ in the aftermath of which the camp was set on fire by local Arabs (Peters 1897a). That already during the first campaign finds were stolen (Hilprecht 1908: 279), part of which probably originally were unearthed from ‘Tablet Hill’ can be better understood from the following excerpt of Peters’ Journal (p. 184-185) entry of 15th April 1889, (Westenholz 2020):

Since my return [i. e. since 5th of April] there has been a find of stolen objects, but from what trench we cannot ascertain. One of them was a stamp for bricks, bearing the name of Naram Sin, & the city of Nippur; another was a stone tablet, astronomical, with archaic characters. Several were unbaked tablets of the Hammurabi dynasty, & the remainder small unbaked tablets of the late Babylonian or Persian period. There were 14 objects in all. (Westenholz 2020).

That means already at this time some objects might have reached the antiquities market directly from the excavation trenches. To illustrate how fast antiquities found their way into different collections via the antiquities market may serve the following example from the third campaign led by John H. Haynes. After the excavation of the main part of the Murašû archive at Nippur during the third campaign led by J. H. Haynes from 27th May until 7th June 1893, already in 1894, a few tablets arrived at London which went through the hands of antiquities dealers in Baghdad and finally reached the collection of the British Museum in 1896 as well as several other final destinations (Stolper 1985, 11; Jursa 2005: 113).

BEFORE THE EXCAVATIONS: FROM ‘PALACE HILL’ TO ‘TABLET HILL’ (MOUND V)

To get a better idea of the situation of the site before excavations started on Mound V, later known as ‘Tablet Hill’, it might be of interest to look at the unpublished documentation nowadays preserved in Philadelphia. According to the first preliminary report by Peters from 11th February 1889 the excavators originally named this part of the site ‘Palace Hill’ as obviously a bigger structure was supposed to be hidden in this part of Nippur. This original name could derive from wall structures which were visible on the surface of ‘Tablet Hill’ but which failed to have the characteristics of a palace after closer examination, probably comparable to the corner of a later building (McCown and Haines 1967: Pl. 76) which was identified in TA (‘Tablet Hill’ trench TA). Only after more and more business tablets appeared in the trenches, Mound V was called ‘City of the Living’ already within the following (second) preliminary report by Peters just a week later on 18th February 1889.

STUDIES CONCERNING EXCAVATED NEO-BABYLONIAN CUNEIFORM ARCHIVES FROM NIPPUR

In his study of Neo-Babylonian archives Pedersén (1998: 198 n. 87) left out for Nippur such archives which were reconstructed by Zadok (1986) solely through inscriptional evidence ‘without provenances’ as according to him ‘it is rather questionable if they represent archives found in findgroups and not just dossiers of texts reconstructed by means of prosopography’.⁶ It is therefore also the task of this article to reconstruct the context in which some of these tablets were found.⁷

⁵ Hilprecht (1903: 309-311) gives 11 February as the beginning of excavations of two trenches. This is not confirmed by the existing documentation.

⁶ But see now Waerzeggers 2018: 97.

⁷ In 2019 the burnt fragment of a tablet was found on the surface of the North-slope of ‘Tablet Hill’ by the current director of the

THE STATE OF THE ARCHIVAL MATERIAL FROM THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL DOCUMENTATION

Through the cooperation with Aage Westenholz⁸ and Inger Jentoft of the project ‘Nippur Digitized’ as well as with the help of Alex Pezzati (senior archivist) whose team recently reorganized the Nippur archive at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, it is possible for me to start extracting some degree of information from a, so far, disconnected documentation. A few further insights can be also gained from the massive archive which constitutes the “Schriftlicher Nachlass” of Prof. Hermann V. Hilprecht in Jena of which access was provided to me by Manfred Krebernik and Kai Lämmerhirt in 2014.⁹

During the first campaign of 1889 at least two lists of tablets, which included besides a description (with measurements) of the tablet also the date when it was found, were compiled by the first Assyriologist of the first campaign Robert Francis Harper,¹⁰ who just two years later became professor of Assyriology in Chicago. Therefore, Harper’s lists¹¹ can be helpful to identify single tablets, for example, if one combines the information from the excavation journals with the finding date of the tablets including the description of each tablet. The two preserved lists contained a short description of tablets found throughout the mounds. A number of 185 fairly or well-preserved tablets was documented in this way. This number could not be matched by any of the latter three campaigns including the fourth one with direct involvement, for the first time since his engagement in 1889, by Hilprecht during the last six weeks of the campaign in 1900.¹²

The find numbers of the tablets from the two lists have been referred to partially also by Clay in his publication better known to Assyriologists as BE 8/1 (here Clay 1908) concerning Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian and Persian texts.

DATE RANGE OF TEXTS FROM NORTH-WEST ‘TABLET HILL’

According to Harper’s lists as well as Peter’s reports the earliest datable texts from this part of ‘Tablet Hill’ come from the reign of Hammurabi, with a textual gap in the Middle Babylonian period when this part of the mound seems to have been used as a graveyard. The use of formerly built area as burial ground belongs to a normal cycle within a historically grown core of a city (Baker 2008). Also, the proximity to the temples of Enlil, Ninlil and Inanna might have been a reason to choose this spot.

The most recent texts from the Northwest part of ‘Tablet Hill’ are dated in the reign of Artaxerxes I/II (466–425 BC//404 BC–358 BC) and can only serve as an approximate timeframe for occupation during the later Achaemenid period. The same date range exists for the results from ‘Tablet Hill’ trench A (TA), excavated during the post-World War II expedition, nearly 100 m to the South-East (McCown and Haines 1967: 76).

The focus of this article, the transition from the end of the Neo-Babylonian period until the Early Achaemenid period is covered at TA mainly through contexts with a date range of the main occupation from the reign of Naboni-

Nippur expedition Abbas Alizadeh (Paulus 2021). After a short briefing about the findspot of the tablet (personal communication), I was able to inspect the surroundings of the findspot by myself in November 2021. This tablet comes from the sloping surface of excavation dump of the 1889-1890 expedition led by Peters. It is therefore possible that it will join to an unpublished tablet fragment, probably nowadays in Istanbul, Philadelphia or probably even Jena although a first survey through the tablets (<https://cdli.ucla.edu/>) proved unsuccessful.

⁸ The bigger part of tablet identifications concerning V A were made by Aage Westenholz.

⁹ The digitized archive is now available under <https://hilprecht.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/> (last access on 5 May 2022).

¹⁰ As second (appointed) Assyriologist served Hermann Vollrath Hilprecht. In reality both Assyriologists were given equal status. Hilprecht ‘was asked to examine the pottery, coffins and other objects discovered’ (Hilprecht 1908: 200-201; 278-279).

¹¹ UPMAA Nippur 10.04.

¹² Even the over 730 Murašû tablets were not listed in any comprehensible way (Stolper 1985). The context of them would have been lost without Hilprecht’s efforts of identification in the Museum which began already at Constantinople during the summer of 1894.



Fig. 1: Detail of the original relief plan (red Legrain number “316”) of the excavations of 1889 by Field (measured with help of Hilprecht), with the operations on the Northwest tip of Mound V, following the sketch of 21 March 1889 (Clayden 2016: Fig. 4c) as well as the position of TA/TC (oriented towards North) and TB added by B. Schneider. Compare Peters 1897: opposite 242. About 50 m to the east of Section H lies the Northwest corner of TA (surface = 100 m relative TA-niveau). Photo of plan by B. Schneider, 2008. © University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology archives. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

dus (556-539 BC) onwards until late in the reign of Xerxes (486-465 BC). A later occupation has to be expected also in this part of Nippur as a few stray tablets from the time of Artaxerxes I/II (465-424 BC/404-358 BC) were found, although as it seems in secondary context (Armstrong 1989, 155). This later Achaemenid period is covered more broadly by the evidence on the northern ‘Westmound’ (Mound I) with the Murašû-archive as the most famous example (Stolper 1985, 157-168; Jursa 2005: 113-114).¹³ Just to the North-East of the latter, also the excavations led by McGuire Gibson (1973; Gibson et al. 1978) could trace Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid layers in trench WA (‘Westmound’ trench A). Because of the high degree of erosion on this slope of the mound (see below) the re-examinations in trench TC (‘Tablet Hill’ trench C) immediately to the South-East of trench TA by Armstrong could not further elucidate the dating of the levels later than TA level III, and therefore the timeframe concerned in this article (TA level II-I), as not a single dated tablet was found in this limited sounding (Armstrong 1989).

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF TABLET ARCHIVES VIA THE UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTATION FROM THE EXCAVATIONS OF 1889

Through the help of the unpublished excavation journals from the University of Pennsylvania excavations of 1889 it is possible, for example, to reconstruct a small archive of several texts which can be pinpointed to the trench of excavation (Mound V trench D) (Schneider forthcoming b). One of the texts which could not be iden-

¹³ For a single Murašû-text deriving from the Ekur temple excavations see Schneider 2018a: 348-349.

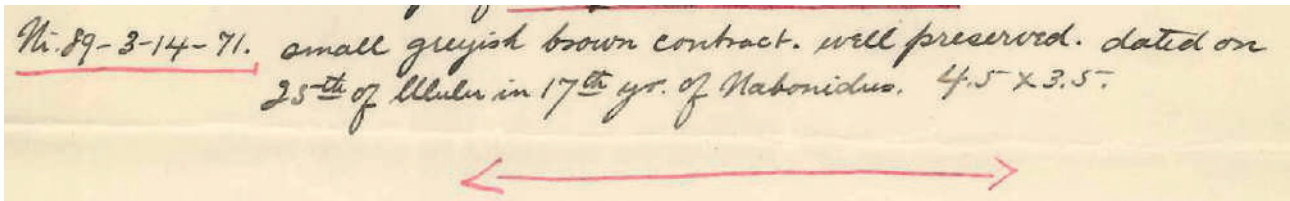


Fig. 2: Detail of entry no. 71 (Hilprecht Istanbul 1894 transcript no. 349) from Harpers 'List II' (Nippur 10.04). © University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology archives. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

tified is of concern here because of the date given by Harper in his list (see below). Some of the texts might have ended up in Istanbul where about half of the excavated material of 1889-1900 stayed after a split of the finds, conducted by John P. Peters and later Hermann V. Hilprecht under the supervision by Hamdi Bey. Other texts found their way into private collections.

1. A late Nabonidus tablet from Mound V trench D (V D),

- Ni. 89-3-14-71: Unidentified, 4.5 x 5.3 cm, is dated on 25th of Ulūlu in the 17th year of Nabonidus (22nd September 539), according to Harper (Fig. 2).

Peters Journal entry of 14th March concerning trench V D (Westenholz 2020):

In this trench were also found a number of tablets, all belonging to the Persian kings, excepting one of Nabonidus. They were found together about 1½ metres below the surface, close to a little hole full of ashes.

Combining the information from the documentation of 1889 an 'archive V D' (Fig. 1) could be separated from the rest of the tablets listed by Harper and identified by me as the archive of the sons of Lišir (Schneider forthcoming b).¹⁴ The earliest tablet from this context dates from the end of the reign of Nabonidus (22nd September 539 BC). The rest of this archive is dating from year 5 of Cyrus until the reign of Darius I (Jursa 2005: 115). Until an identification of this tablet it is not sure if it belongs to the same archive although the finding circumstances make this possibility quite likely (Schneider forthcoming b).

2. A late Nabonidus tablet from V A' (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6):

- Harper (List II) Ni. 89-2-13-10 (5 x 3.8 cm) = Clay 1908: No 55 (3.6 x 5.1 x 2 cm) CBS 3597 is dated on 20th Ulūlu in the 17th year of Nabonidus (17th September 539 BC).

Another tablet (Clay 1908: no. 55) dated towards the end of Nabonidus reign can be provenanced by trench.¹⁵ According to Clay it comes from the first expedition (1908: 77). The CBS catalogue gives the Harper number as: 'Harper Ni 10 -2-13-89' which fits to Harper (List II) Ni. 89-2-13-10 (5 x 3.8 cm) 'small greyish burnt clay frag-

¹⁴ Furthermore, archaeological finds from the environs of this archive can be traced and therefore reconnected with the texts (Schneider forthcoming b). The results concerning Mound V trench D were presented at the workshop in honor of Manfred Krebernik 'Die Hilprecht-Sammlung vorderasiatischer Altertümer und ihre Bedeutung für die Altorientalistik' on 18 March 2022 and will be published in the proceedings in the dubsar series of Zaphon, Münster.

¹⁵ Another tablet from Nippur dated in the last year (17) of Nabonidus exists: FLP 1606 (4.7 x 3.4 cm), 26th Ayyāru (28th May 539 BC) which belongs to the archive of Bēl-eṭēri-Šamaš (Dillard 1975: 19; 183-184; Jursa 2005: 236-237). It found its way into the John Frederick Lewis Collection, donated to the Free Library of Philadelphia in 1930 (Dillard 1975: 3) and as the other tablets from this archive at Yale most probably derives from the antiquities market.



Fig. 3: Overview of the Northwest tip of ‘Tablet Hill’ shot from the ziggurat in November 2021 (view to the North), during Nippur Expedition, Season 21. Photo: B. Schneider. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.



Fig. 4: The remains of the main trench (V A) of 1889 at the Northwest edge of ‘Tablet Hill’ (Mound V) with part of the post-World War II excavation house in the right background in November 2021 (view to the North), during Nippur Expedition, Season 21. Photo: B. Schneider. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

ment of contract’. Also because of the size and date provided by Harper it can be confidently identified with his number 10 (List II, Fig. 6). Even a copy of part of the tablet is preserved in the Nippur archive in Philadelphia (Fig. 5). This tablet belongs to the Arad-Gula dossier of the Ekur archive (see below).

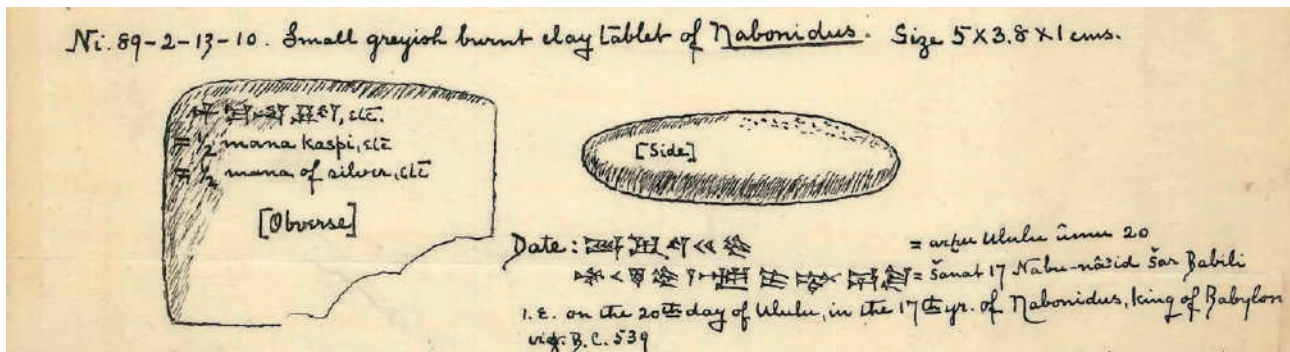


Fig. 5: Detail of copy of part of tablet Ni. 89-2-13-10 from Section A' (Harper: 5 x 3.8 x 1 cm; Clay: 5.1 x 3.6 x 2 cm) from R. F. Harpers 'Report I' of 6th March 1889 (UPMAA Nippur 10.04). © University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology archives. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

According to Peters, *Journal of Excavation* (Westenholz 2020), the provenience can now be defined as the beginning of Trench/Section V A (Fig. 1), situated downhill on the northwest slope of 'Tablet Hill' (see Fig. 4). To distinguish this lower section from trench A, it will be called trench A'. Following the entry of Peters on 14th February (Westenholz 2020) trench V A' was the beginning of a long narrow search trench (A) cutting uphill on a ridge of Mound V to reach the highest part of 'Tablet Hill' (Fig. 2). It therefore derives from the same excavations on the Northwest-tip of 'Tablet Hill' dated on 13th February 1889 and therefore from trench V A' (i. e. the beginning of trench V A, Fig. 1). Section V A', an initial cut along a nose of the northwesternmost part of 'Tablet Hill' was begun on 12 February 1889 alongside another similar cut on the opposite side of the same nose called 'X' by Peters (Clayden 2016: 1).

3. The texts from the Ekur archive including the dossier of Arad-Gula from Section V A'

Two tablets from the Ekur-archive were excavated on 13th February (Clay 1908: nos 69 and 78) and therefore come from Mound V trench A', whereas two more from 16th February (Clay 1908: nos 78 and 88) cannot be securely narrowed down to the trench but the fact that they belong to the same archive makes it quite reasonable to assume a similar provenience (Zadok 1986).

Additionally, at least four of the tablets (Clay 1908: nos 55, 70-71; Hilprecht's Istanbul no. 349) from trench V A', excavated on 13th February, belong to the dossier of Arad-Gula son of Šamaš-iqīša, who's activities mostly belong to the sphere of the so-called 'Ekur archive' as described by Zadok (1986; Jursa 2005: 110-111). According to Jursa, Arad-Gula, at least in one text attested (Clay 1908: no. 87; Jursa 2005: 110-111), acted as an agent, *mār šipri* (Akk.), for Širikti-Ninurta, descendant of the Nippurean family Hanbu whose members are attested as early as during the reign of Sargon II (706 BC) (Jimenez 2022: 20). He is known from several texts as the governor, *šandabakku* (Akk.) of Nippur. Arad-Gula was mainly involved in the administration of agriculture and taxation (Jursa 2005: 110-111).

Preserved on the earliest Arad-Gula tablet identified as coming from Section V A' (Clay 1908: no. 55, see above) was the rest of a sealing, belonging to the native Babylonian style of seals according to Zettler (1979). This dossier will be the focus of the rest of the paper. It is probable that most of the other texts which belonged to the Arad-Gula dossier (Zadok 1986; Jursa 2005) would have derived from the same location. Hopefully, further study of the unpublished archaeological documentation can provide more identifications of tablets belonging to this dossier as well as to others.

After a year of further study, three more tablets can now be identified and shown to belong to the same 'Ekur archive' because of their finddate provided by Harpers lists (Westenholz 2020): a letter sent by Širikti-Ninurta (to a certain Gimillu) CBS 3632 (Harpers list I, Ni. 89-2-13-6, 4.8 x 3 cm) first published by Lutz (1919: No. 89;

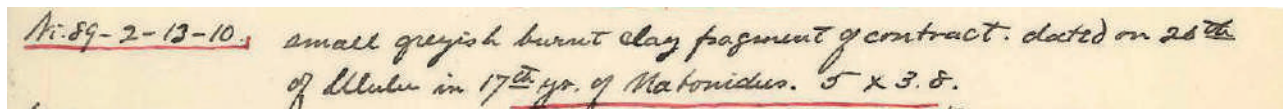


Fig. 6: Detail of entry no. 10 from Harpers 'List II' (Nippur 10.04). © University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology archives. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

Hackl, Jursa, Schmidl 2014: No. 204). CBS 3631 (Harpers List I, Ni. 89-2-13-12, 5 x 3 cm) (Lutz 1919: No. 87; Hackl, Jursa, Schmidl 2014: No. 203) belongs to the same group.

The letter order CBS 3626 (Harper List I, Ni. 89-2-13-4, 4 x 3 x 1.25 cm) published by Lutz (1919: No. 88; Hackl, Jursa, Schmidl 2014: No. 202) which was already identified by Westenholz as coming from V A, can now be shown to belong to the same group from V A'. Herewith, also the tentative assignment of this group to the 'Ekur-archive' by Hackl, Jursa, Schmidl (2014) can be confirmed from an archaeological point of view.

4. An Istanbul text mentioning Arad-Gula, transcribed and collated by Hermann V. Hilprecht from Section V A'

While several tablets transcribed by Hermann V. Hilprecht at Istanbul (then Constantinople) in the summer of 1894 mention Širikti-Ninurta there are also at least two more texts from Nippur mentioning the same Arad-Gula, son of Šamaš-iqīša.¹⁶ One of them, Hilprecht's no. 349 (entry of 2nd August) dated in the reign of Cyrus (year not preserved) 24th Abu (July/August), even carries the Harper number Ni. 14, 2-13-89 and therefore can be positively identified as coming from 'Tablet Hill', trench A'. Nowhere else at Nippur were tablets reported to be excavated on 13 February 1889. The tablet with the questionable 'Artaxerxes (??)' date given by Harper for his Ni. 89-2-13-14 (List I, Fig. 6) does not fit the reading of Hilprecht's no. 349. The reading of the latter was probably only possible after cleaning the tablet at Constantinople in 1894. Harper's description of 19 lines is a hint towards such an identification.

5. Provenances according to Clay (1908)

According to Clay (1908) both nos 55 and 100 were found 'probably' at Mound V. All tablets from the Arad-Gula dossier, with the exception of no. 101 which following Clay (1908) was excavated probably during the 3rd campaign of 1893-96 and no. 89 without any campaign indicated, were excavated during the first campaign in spring 1889 and come therefore from the Northwest part of Mound V. Concerning all the available sources it is quite unlikely that Clay 1908: no. 101 was excavated not during the same excavations in 1889. Everything speaks for a provenance of this tablet from trench A' at Mound V.

THE 'EKUR ARCHIVE' AND THE POSITION OF ARAD-GULA AT NIPPUR

Arad-Gula, son of Šamaš-iqīša is one of the individuals who had business relations with the Enlil Temple of Nippur and was therefore added to the environs of the 'Ekur archive' by Zadok (1986, 282-286). In at least one text he is even entitled as the messenger, *mār šipri* (Akk.) of the *šandabakku* with whom he had close connections according to other texts. It was probably his domestic archive with deep business relations into the Enlil temple, which was found by Peters in 1889 at the Northwest tip of 'Tablet Hill' (Mound V) in trench V A' rather than the

¹⁶ This transcription is nowadays in the Schriftliche Nachlass of the Hilprecht Collection, Jena and was accessed by the author with the kind assistance of Manfred Krebernik and Kai Lämmerhirt in 2014.

actual archive of the Ekur temple itself. Part of such an archive was found within the Ekur complex itself, nearby the Western corner of the ziggurat, on the level of the so-called ‘Ashurbanipal pavement’ of the ziggurat courtyard (Schneider 2018a, 348; Schneider 2018b: 1001-1003). For this purpose, it was for sure useful that the house of this Arad-Gula was situated down the hill near the bank of the Mid-City-Canal, the nowadays dried out Shatt en-Nīl canal, which separates the mounds of Nippur in its two main recognizable parts (Schneider 2022). In a recent study it was stated that this canal was existing for much of the history of Nippur, at least up until the Sasanian period (Altaweel *et al.* 2019).¹⁷

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DOSSIER OF ARAD-GULA FOR THE HISTORY OF NIPPUR IN 539 BC

Clay 1908, no. 55 (CBS 3597) is the earliest tablet (17 September 539 BC) belonging to the archive of Arad-Gula son of Šamaš-iqīša. It includes also the earliest mention of the *šandabakku* Širikti-Ninurta (Joannès 1982: 3).¹⁸ This *šandabakku* is the last person during the Achaemenid period known to occupy the office. He is attested until the beginning of Darius’ reign (521 BC, see below). The durability of his office is often explained with the stability and continuity that the Achaemenids brought, as, for example, stated by Briant (2002: 71-72), giving also the Egibi archive of Babylon as an example.¹⁹ At Nippur it remains at least suspicious that Širikti-Ninurta came into office at the very end of Nabonidus’ reign. Therefore, it will be tried to set into perspective his role in connection to the available historiographic material at a later step in this article.

1. The context of the last tablet (2NT 29) mentioning a *šandabakku* of Achaemenid Nippur from trench TA (‘Tablet Hill’ trench A)

The last tablet mentioning Širikti-Ninurta as *šandabakku* (2NT 29) dated to ‘year 1’ of Darius I (521 BC) according to the final publication of the excavation results was reported to be found in TA level I Locus 20 (McCown and Haines 1967, 76). Following the entry of 22nd November 1949 from an unpublished typescript copy of the original tablet register of Season 2 (1949-50)²⁰ it concerns an ‘Achaemenid contract (promissory note) dated to accession year of Darius.’ Hence tablet 2NT 29 dates to the accession year of Darius I (522/521 BC), and therefore earlier than stated in the publication (McCown and Haines 1967, 76). In the same tablet register it is also stated that the tablet was originally found ‘30 cm. under I.’ Therefore, it predates the construction of this building in TA level I (TA I). Without this knowledge the rest of the dated tablets from within the house in TA I range from Cyrus, year 8 (531/530 BC) until Darius I, year 18 (504/503 BC) a period of nearly a generation could give the wrong impression that they are *in situ*.

Locus TA 20 was a brick paved courtyard within a massive building or rather manor of the ‘Achaemenid’ level TA I of about 400 m² (preserved). It was even extended in a later phase of construction to at least double the documented building to an estimated 800 m². This would make it a perfect candidate for a ‘double courtyard house’ (Baker 2014: 19-20; Baker 2015: 382-385). The original extension of the house can only be estimated because of the extensive erosion on the slope towards trench TC (McCown and Haines 1967: Pl. 76). As this erosion affected already parts of the house within the borders of the trench TA not much was preserved towards Southeast (Armstrong 1989).

Oppenheim provides information about one more text (2NT 93) which mentions a *šandabakku* (Oppenheim 1985: 569 n. 2), although he does not give any information concerning the precise findspot of the tablet. Accord-

¹⁷ It should be noted here that the trench cutting through the supposed bed of the canal (“Trench 2”) might have missed the original canal by position as well as depth and might therefore only have cut the place of the “moat” as indicated by the middle Babylonian city map. This would explain also the uniformity of the deposit.

¹⁸ See also Zadok 1978, 274f; Zadok 1986, 282-283.

¹⁹ For a summary of the Egibi archive see Wunsch 1999.

²⁰ Stored in the archive of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

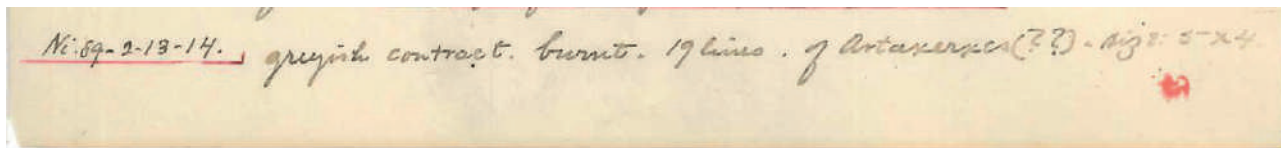


Fig. 7: Detail of entry no. 14 (Hilprecht Istanbul 1894 transcript no. 349) from Harpers ‘List II’ (Nippur 10.04). © University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology archives. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

ing to the tablet register the Achaemenid legal fragment 2NT 93 (3.9 x 3.6 cm, 6&7 lines) derives from TB 34 level B1 and was found on 10th December 1949. Regrettably, the tablets are not published and we don’t know the exact connection of these tablets to the rest of the Ekur archive.

2. Manor in TA level I not the residence of the *šandabakku* of Nippur

That three of the nine tablets within an ‘extensive and important-looking house’ (McCown and Haines 1967: 71) in trench TA level I mention the *šandabakku* of Nippur even led Oppenheim (1985: 569 n. 2) to see in it the residence of the same.

Luckily, in this instance the archaeological evidence provides us with an easy tool to discredit this identification. The findspot of the very last tablet mentioning a *šandabakku* (2NT 29) 30 cm below the foundation of TA level I alone is proof enough that the very same dignitary was not in office anymore when this manor was erected. A second phase of construction even doubled the size of this building which is unsurpassed by any other private building of this period at Nippur. Such a manor situated at the top of ‘Tablet Hill’ (Mound V), with a direct view to the ziggurat (Fig. 3), would suggest that some official could have lived here. Still, a building which was erected at an even later point of time at this spot documents the continued importance of this location (McCown and Haines 1967: Pl. 76).

One could think of an important person inhabiting this spot as for example an official such as the *qīpu*, the commissioner sent by the crown. Another possible identification for the resident of this place would be the *šaknu* (Stolper 1988), although, if he indeed had to take over the tasks of the *šandabakku*, his residence would have to be searched somewhere at the southern part of the ‘Westmound’ (Schneider 2022) as it was there in trench WB (‘Westmound’ trench B, Mound IX) where Cole states that a governors’ (Akk. *šandabakku*) archive from around second half of the 8th century was found in the filling of the pit of a jar grave (Gibson et al. 1978, Figs 52-53; Cole 1996b).²¹ Until further study of the texts an identification of the original inhabitant of this building is not possible.

3. *Širikti-Ninurta*, a pro-Achaemenid-Persian as *šandabakku* of Nippur?

Might the later durability of *Širikti-Ninurta*’s position as *šandabakku* be connected with some sort of collaboration with the upcoming invaders even before the official end of the Neo-Babylonian Empire? The dating formulae of the texts from Nippur don’t give a clue, as there a tablet was dated five days later still according to Nabonidus’ reign (Ni. 89-3-14-71 (List II), 25th Ululu, year 17 of Nabonidus = 22nd September 539 BC). After *Širikti-Ninurta*’s office ended in 522/521 BC, the position of *šandabakku* ceased to exist, only to reappear in later times where it is attested until 73 BC (Zadok 2015: 105). Instead, there were *šaknus* and *paqdus* designated as the highest local

²¹ Beaulieu challenges the identification of this archive as that of a governor because its content is mainly concerning merchants’ activities. It has to be pointed out here that only in the bilingual exercise tablets of the archive the equation is (LÚ.)GÜ.EN.NA= *šandabakku* is given (Cole 1996b: 1 n. 6). Therefore, a person holding the title *šandabakku* is missing within the main core of this archive.



Fig. 8: View from the top of Mound V with the remains of TA ('Tablet Hill' trench A) to the right and the ziggurat in the left background, November 2021 (view towards North), during Nippur Expedition, Season 21. Photo: B. Schneider. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

political offices (Zadok 1978: 275; Stolper 1988; Dandamayev 2006: 376).²² The *šaknu*, unlike the *šandabakku* (Cole 1996a: 45-55), was a short-term position, designated for only a few years and recruited within the local citizens of Nippur which makes it comparable to the chief of a *hatru* (Stolper 1988: 137-139). A *paqdu* could, for example, be the chief/manager of one of the four city quarters of Nippur (Stolper 1988: 129 n. 9) known from the later Murašû texts who sometimes also could serve as '*paqdu* of Nippur' (Stolper 1988: 129 n. 8). These quarters were named after the gate to which they were attached, giving the impression that the *paqdu* might have had his office at the gate which was designated to him.

4. The city quarters of Nippur and the 'Kassite' city map of Nippur

The city quarter in which 'Tablet Hill' was situated would have been the one connected to the 'Ur-facing-gate' (sum. KÁ.GAL IGI.BI.ÚRI.KI.ŠÈ) which is shown on the so-called 'Kassite' city map of Nippur (Oelsner and Stein 2011: 106) and, as its name says, pointing towards the direction of Ur which lies 152.9 km Southeast of Nippur.²³ This quarter is not mentioned in the Murašû texts (Stolper 1988: 129 n. 9) which could be explained by the possibility that the latter only provide names of the four quarters on the 'Westmound' and therefore excluding East Nippur. Instead of the Nergal gate which is depicted on the city map, the Murašû texts mention a gate of Ninurta (sum. KÁ.(GAL) LUGAL.(GU₄).SI.SÁ) which would support an identification of the location of the Ninurta temple at the northern part of 'Westmound' (Oelsner and Stein 2011: 106; Schneider 2022).

²² During Neo-Assyrian times the title *šaknu*, translated as 'prefect' designated either a military official or a provincial governor (Gross 2020: 160). At this earlier period there was even a *šaknu* mentioned in connection with a delegation of Nippureans (Gross 2020: 81). Concerning a Neo-Assyrian *šaknu* at Nippur see Cole (1996b: 76-77: n. 51).

²³ Measured from the point suggested by Oelsner and Stein 2011: 106, Abb. 2 until the outer Northwest limits of Ur on Google Earth Pro (2022).

HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

1. *The Persian takeover of Babylonia according to the Nabonidus Chronicle*

The main Mesopotamian source concerning the events leading to the fall of Babylon is the so-called Nabonidus Chronicle (Waerzeggers 2015b). On 10 October 539 (14 Tašrītu, year 17 of Nabonidus) the Persian takeover of Babylonia began with the battle of Opis, won by Cyrus, according to the *Nabonidus Chronicle* (III.12-13). This was followed by a massacre of the resisting people (III.14). The Chronicle continues with the information that Sippar was taken without a fight and Nabonidus took flight (III.14-15). At some point after this the troops of Cyrus joined forces with Ugbaru, the governor of the district of Gutium (Waerzeggers 2021b: 81). Cyrus eventually entered Babylon without a battle (29 October 539 BC) which only means that whichever magnitude of fighting took place must have happened earlier. When Nabonidus was captured in Babylon the end of the Neo-Babylonian Empire was reality. Considering the evidence at cities like Uruk (see below) it would be not unthinkable that the crown prince Belshazzar was still holding out in the palace, a stream of tradition which is preserved in the Book of Daniel (chapter 5).

It is exactly this aforementioned Ugbaru, governor of the supposedly Babylonian province of Gutium, who probably was, at some point prior to the invasion of the Babylonian heartland, changing the sides to save his skin (Briant 2002: 41-42). Therefore, a key strategy might have been to pursue the political leaders on the provincial and local level to change the side or to support the supplanting of people who favored the Persian cause, a scenario which might have taken place at Nippur and other cities. This would have been nothing unexpected in Achaemenid Persian warfare, thinking of the earlier change of sides of the Median army under Cyaxares to Cyrus which left Ecbatana undefended. The takeover of Babylonia, therefore, might have been more comparable to a tactical victory than is anticipated by the current research.²⁴

When Cyrus took out Media (550-549 BC) (Beaulieu 2018, 240) and with it probably also its neighbors Urartu or Lydia and eventually also Gutium, until then serving as a buffer zone between the two empires, the strategic advantage shifted dramatically in favor of Persia. From that moment on, the possibility of an invasion for Babylonia must have been apparent. It seems also that this was the decisive blow to the defense strategy of Babylonia built on alliances and buffer states.

2. *Further evidence from the Nabonidus Chronicle*

Latest from the start of the campaign led by Cyrus whether against Urartu or Lydia (Rollinger 2008; Rollinger and Kellner 2019) in 547 BC (Nisannu/April 547 BC), during the 9th year of Nabonidus the Persian army crossed the Tigris below Arbela, onwards the Babylonian military forces must have been on highest alert. As a consequence of the fall of Media one has to at least consider a possible Babylonian support of Urartu, Lydia or whoever was the opponent of Cyrus in April/May (Ayyāru) of the same year.²⁵ The king of the invaded country was killed by the Persian king whose army stayed there, and maybe logistically this was the reason why the Persian army then advanced from North via Arbela. This in turn would point also towards an identification of Urartu as the goal of the campaign of 547 BC.

It is noteworthy to point out that according to the chronicle explicitly only the army of Cyrus 'did battle at Opis on the [bank of] the Tigris against the army of Akkad' (Grayson 1975: 109; Glassner 2004: 237-239; Van der Spek 2020: iii.12-14). Eventually, the Persian army unified with the units of Gutium before entering Babylon. Concerning the question of undermining the Neo-Babylonian state it is also interesting that the governor of the province Gutium, Gobryas/Gubaru, is mentioned to have entered Babylon on 16th Tašrītu 539 BC! But what about Southern Babylonia and Nippur?

²⁴ Concerning the Teispid-Achaemenid army see now Manning 2021.

²⁵ Concerning the situation of Media see Lanfranchi, Roaf, Rollinger 2003.

3. *The Southern Babylonian evidence in the Nabonidus Chronicle*

Regrettably, the parts which treat this part of Babylonia are preserved only fragmentarily in the Nabonidus Chronicle. For the entry for the 10th year of Nabonidus (546/545 BC) there are only bits preserved mentioning the district governor of Uruk in connection with possible incursions by troops from the east ('Elamites') in Babylonia ('Akkad').

Here it would have been interesting what the report of the 16th year of Nabonidus (540/539 BC) had to offer. The preserved parts offer much space for speculation. The only thing which is sure is that someone was defeated in combination with the mention of a river and then the immediate mention of Ištar of Uruk with whether Persia or the Sealand probably following in the next line (Grayson 1975: 104-111; Glassner 2004: 232-238; Zawadzki 2012; Van der Spek 2020: iii.1-4).²⁶

4. *Longer resistance in temple strongholds*

The early confrontations with Persia in the South seem to have had little consequences at Uruk itself, where at least until 13th October 539 BC, three days after the defeat of Sippar and one day after the arrival of Ugbaru/Gobriyas at Babylon, the tablets in the Eanna were still dated according to Nabonidus' reign (Waezeggars 2021b: 81). Here the earliest preserved tablet dated to Cyrus reign is dated to 20th January 538 BC (Clay 1925: 43, no. 1). This tells us of an interruption of the usual administrative activities of the temple for nearly three months. At the Ebabbar temple of Sippar the last preserved tablet dated to Nabonidus is dating to 11th October 539 BC (Waezeggars 2021b: 81), a day after the surrender of the city as reported in the Nabonidus Chronicle. At Babylon even the last stronghold of the Esagil temple of Marduk was besieged by the Gutian troops until the end of the month according to the Nabonidus Chronicle (Grayson 1975: 109; Glassner 2004: 237-239; Van der Spek 2020: iii.16-17).

The evidence of Sippar, Uruk as well as Babylon seems to point towards considerable resistance in the well-fortified main temples. But what does this tell us about the situation at Nippur? From the lack of direct written or material evidence to answer how heavy a resistance was, or if the Persian invaders met any resistance at all would be nothing more than speculation. From archaeological point of view there seems to be no noticeable hiatus of occupation in the late levels at 'Tablet Hill' (TA I) as well as on the 'Westmound' (WA II).

CONSEQUENCES OF THE INVASION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Besides the more famous 'Cyrus Cylinder' commemorating the foundation of Imgur-Enlil,²⁷ the inner fortification wall at Babylon, there are only two more Achaemenid building inscriptions preserved in Babylonia: namely stamped bricks from Ur and Uruk.²⁸ One explanation could be that only cities considered as collaborators profited from public building projects in the immediate aftermath of the invasion. For Nippur the picture is not so clear. There were renovations in the ziggurat courtyard of the Ekur which can only be postdated by stamped bricks of Nebuchadnezzar II (Schneider 2018a; Schneider 2018b; Schneider 2023). This construction work could have been continued well into the Achaemenid period with a possible continuation until the late Seleucid period when

²⁶ For further evidence concerning the statue of Ištar of Uruk in Babylon see Sandowicz 2015.

²⁷ The implementation of Enlil as the eponymous deity of the city walls of Babylon and in turn Marduk for the walls of Nippur was already established in the 11th century BC.

²⁸ For two examples of stamped brick with an inscription of Cyrus from Ur see https://cdli.ucla.edu/search/archival_view.php?ObjectID=P269870 and https://cdli.ucla.edu/search/archival_view.php?ObjectID=P269872, for a single example with an inscription of Cambyses from Ur see https://cdli.ucla.edu/search/archival_view.php?ObjectID=P452096 (CDLI entries accessed on 12th May 2022). The latter is stored in the British Museum, BM 118362 with the accession number 1923-11-10, 0231 (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1923-1110-221, accessed on 12th May 2022). See also Mallowan 1972.

Ekur is last mentioned (Van der Spek 1992: 254-256).²⁹ If Dandamayev (1994: 35) would be right in connecting the object (é.kur) of an undated letter sent by the crown prince Belšazzar to the royal commissioner of Eanna in Uruk (553-544 BC) with the Ekur of Nippur, then we would have written evidence for state financed constructions at the religious infrastructure of Nippur during the time immediately preceding the Achaemenid period. The continuation of this work would then probably fall already into the latter period. But in the context of other letters, it seems that rather the repair work on the temple (é.kur) Eanna in Uruk and not the Ekur in Nippur is concerned also within this letter (Kleber 2008: 182). The recent on-site study of the ziggurat clearly shows that the last major reconstruction of the ziggurat clearly post-dates Assurbanipal's rebuilding project (Schneider 2023). This fits well into the picture of Nippur as belonging to the group of profiteers of the invasion.

THE END OF THE ARAD-GULA ARCHIVE AS A CONSEQUENCE OF COLLABORATION WITH BARDIYA/SMERDIS?

1. Excursus: The last tablet dated according to Cambyses reign at Nippur

According to the Behistun inscription Bardiya/Smerdis claimed the throne on 14th Addar (11th March, 522 BC). At Nippur the last text from the reign of Cambyses (Clay 1908: no. 71, CBS 3601)³⁰ belongs to the Arad-Gula dossier within the Ekur archive and is dated to 15th (?) Nisan of year 8 (Clay 1908: 81), 10th April, 522 BC.³¹ According to the recording date (89-2-13) from Harpers list (I) we can tell that it comes from the same context of trench V A' (Mound V, trench A') as the other tablets from the archive of Arad-Gula. This means that nearly a month after the proclamation of Bardiya/Smerdis as king according to the Behistun inscription, in Nippur still the texts were dated according to the reign of Cambyses. Could it really be that for such a long time no one heard any news from Persia? As the Ekur archive has to be considered as an official archive, one could conclude that in Babylonia at least one was careful to pledge allegiance too early. Further data might bring forward different arguments concerning this aspect.³²

Concerning the fate of Arad-Gula, it would be an irony of history, if the reason for the end of his career would be connected with an involvement in the revolt of Bardiya/Smerdis (Vogelsang 1998: 196-197; Schwinghammer 2021), in whose reign (year 1/522 BC)³³ two tablets of the dossier (Clay 1908: nos. 100-101) are dated. Interestingly enough, they are dated to the 13th and 15th of Ulūlu (2nd and 4th September 522 BC) respectively, less than a month before Gaumata, the supposed imposter as Bardiya/Smerdis, was killed on 10th Tašritu (29th September 522 BC) according to the Behistun inscription (Zawadzki 1994: 127; Beaulieu 2014: 17). After the accession year of Darius I (522/521 BC), information concerning both Arad-Gula and the last Achaemenid *šandabakku* of Nippur Širikti-Ninurta are lost in the fog of history.³⁴

That high dignitaries were put out of office during the first year of the reign of Darius I would not be so uncommon as, for example, the legacy of a family which held the position of the 'bishop,' *šatammu*, of the Eanna temple at Uruk, from the last year of Nabonidus (14th Du'uzu, 14th July 539) onwards, ended in the same year (Jur-

²⁹ Furthermore, it has to be pointed out here that the generally assumed 'purposeful neglect' of Nippur by the Neo-Babylonian dynasty as a consequence of its late loyalty to the Neo-Assyrian king Šin-šar-iškun does not find its expression in the archaeological evidence. At least until the interregnum of Bardiya/Smerdis (522 BC) there were still Assyrians (Aššur-nādin-ahhē) at Nippur which would speak against a big cleansing in revenge of Nippur's loyalty (Clay 1908: no. 101).

³⁰ It was identified as Clay 1908: no. 71 by Westenholz (2020) within the framework of the project Nippur Digitized.

³¹ According to the list of tablets by Harper 1889, this text (List I: No. 13) was dated to 13th Nisan of the same year.

³² According to an entry in CDLI (<https://cdli.ucla.edu/P470442> accessed 16th May 2022) the unpublished Princeton text PTS 2350 is dated on 3rd Tašritu of year '18' which might be a mistake for year '8' and would lead to a date of 22nd September 522 BC. Alternately, the year and day could have been written in the wrong order and then it would be from the 3rd year of Cambyses which would make it irrelevant for our discussion.

³³ Zawadzki 1994: 131, n. 25.

³⁴ Only once a son of Širikti-Ninurta is mentioned in a text from Cyrus year 5, 533 (Petschow 1980-83: 557; Hackl 2010: 720).

sa 2007: 79). A year later (521 BC) the *qipu*, *šatammu*, and *bēl piqitti* were removed after the revolt of Nebuchadnezzar IV/Arakha, son of Ḫaldita when Darius I resumed his rule (Beaulieu 2014: 24).

SOME PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING THE DOCUMENTATION OF 1889

The archaeological evidence of the Nippur expeditions by the University of Pennsylvania from the end of the 19th century still enables us to assign single texts to certain trenches and sometimes even to certain layers or horizons.

It is worthwhile to reconstruct the archaeological evidence for the excavated tablets. Even relatively small archives help to focus on chronology and history of the site.

This work-in-progress report which stands at the beginning of the study of the archaeology of the early excavations on ‘Tablet Hill’ of Nippur. The identification of a single tablet in the otherwise not very detailed reports can often elucidate the context of a whole archive. It can be expected that definitely more results can be awaited in focusing on the reconstruction of the context of the tablets from the early excavations at Nippur.

FURTHER HISTORIC CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It seems that it was no accident that exactly a few weeks before the Persian invasion key positions were filled with fresh people, like the *šandabakku* at Nippur. Exactly then also the dossier of Arad-Gula son of Šamaš-iqīša began. In having similar Neo-Assyrian practices in mind (Dubovský 2006; Dubovský 2014), it seems to be reasonable to assume that the invasion was planned ahead and that the Persian army intelligence tried to destabilize the prospected target through espionage³⁵ and probably also sabotage. Another still inconclusive aspect such as the in-advance support of people to get into certain offices who are in favor of establishing a new overlord should be at least kept in mind here.

As could be approved in this article the house in trench TA level I could not have been, as was suggested by Oppenheim, the residence of the *šandabakku* whose last tablet was found clearly below this level. The date of this last tablet mentioning a *šandabakku* under Achaemenid rule from the accession year of Darius I (522/521 BC) might prove one more thing: that the tide changed very fast within such a system of clients. Already Darius I, probably as the effect of an often-assumed reform, tried to prevent the local elite to become too powerful.

I hope this article could dissolve some of the doubts expressed by Pedersén (1998: 198 n. 87), as quoted above. At least for one of the archives (Ekur archive) as reconstructed by Zadok (1986), according to the archaeological evidence both the texts from the Arad Gula dossier as well as its parent archive, the texts considered to belong to the administration of the Ekur, derived from the same part of the trench, downhill the Northwest corner of ‘Tablet Hill’. Although, as it is the suggestion here, the texts from this trench should rather be seen in connection with the position of Arad-Gula as agent/messenger (Akk. *mār šipri*) of the governor (Akk. *šandabakku*) than the actual archive of the Ekur temple. It is hoped that further comparable studies conducted by the author will also help to enlighten the situation of other archives excavated at Nippur.

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³⁵ This is a well-known practice during the Neo-Assyrian period. See for example Dubovský 2006; Dubovský 2014; Dezsö 2014.

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