Mesopotamia and Iran in the Persian Period: Conquest and Imperialism 539-331 BC

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Achaemenid Chronology and the Babylonian Sources

by Christopher Walker

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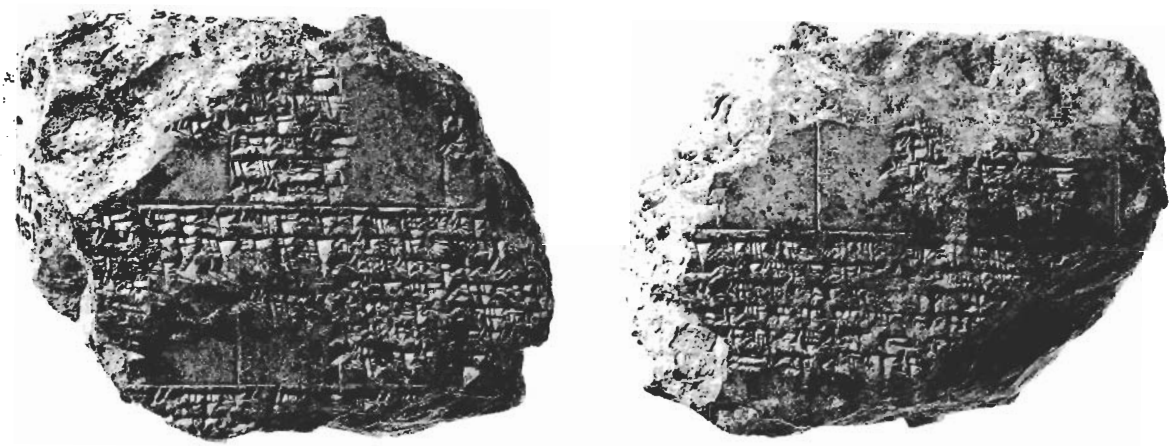

6-7 The lunar eclipse table fragment BM 32234 (Sachs *et al.* 1955: no. 1419). Parts of five columns survive on each side. The numbering of the columns reflects the proposed overall scheme of 24 cycles. The eclipse possibilities are identified by month and year of the Babylonian or Achaemenid king and by day, month and year in the Julian calendar. Each column is eighteen years later than the previous column, and reading down the columns each eclipse possibility is six months later than the previous possibility.

Obverse				
viii	ix	x	xi	xii
[...]	22/iii/591 BC	2/iv/573 BC	13/iv/555 BC	23/iv/537BC
[...]	xii/13 Nebuchadnezzar II	xii/31 Nebuchadnezzar II	i/1 Nabonidus	ii/2 Cyrus
4/ix/609 BC	15/ix/591 BC	25/ix/573 BC	6/x/555 BC	17/x/537 BC
vi/17 Nabopolassar	vi/14 Neb II	vi/32 Neb II	vii/1 Nabonidus	vii/2 Cyrus
[...]	12/iii/590 BC	22/iii/572 BC	3/iv/554 BC	[...]
[...]	xii/14 Neb II	xii/32 Neb II	xiib/1 Nabonidus	[...]
Reverse				
xiii	xiv	xv	xvi	xvii
[...]	[...]	[...]	5/vi/465 BC	[...]
[...]	[...]	[...]	iii/21 Xerxes	[...]
28/x/519 BC	7/xi/501 BC	19/xi/483 BC	29/xi/465 BC	11/xii/447 BC
vii/3 Darius I	viii/21 Darius I	viii/3 Xerxes	viii/21 Xerxes	ix/18 Artaxerxes II

In addition the tablets apparently gave details, at the appropriate points, of the death of the reigning king. Such details are a useful supplement to the deductions which one can make from changes in the dating of contemporary economic texts.[10] Only one such reference is preserved in this series of lunar eclipse tables (but see also below on the solar eclipse text BM 71537), but curiously, apart from a single brief citation (A. Sachs quoted in Parker and Dubberstein 1956: 17),[11] it remains unpublished. It concerns the death of Xerxes, shortly after a partial lunar eclipse which can be dated to 5 June 465 BC (corresponding to the third month of Xerxes' year 21):

BM 32234 (Sachs *et al.* 1955: no. 1419) Rev. col. xvi
(the beginning of the eclipse report is lost)
ina ⌈18?⌉ [...]
40? GAR Í[R *u* ZALÁG] ⌈TÚG⌉ AN ⌈GAR⌉
ina KI 4-ÀM *ár šá* PA *ád* KIN DIR
IZI 1⌈4?⌉ ⌈*ḫi*?- *ši*?⌉-*ár-šú* DUMU-*šú* GAZ-*šú*

'... in 18° [...]; 40° (duration) of onset, to[tality and clearing up], the "garment of the sky" was present; (the moon) was eclipsed in the area of the rear group of four stars of Sagittarius. (There was an) intercalary month Ulul. On the fourteenth(?) day of the month Ab, Xerxes – his son murdered him.'