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**BETWEEN THE ROYAL ADMINISTRATION
AND LOCAL ELITE: THE PĀḤĀTU IN HELLENISTIC
BABYLONIA AS EPISTATES?**

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To rule a city, especially a city that has been used to independence or privileges, has always been a difficult task. The Seleucid rulers had it especially difficult. Their territories included traditional Greek cities, new foundations by Alexander the Great or the first rulers of the new dynasty and Oriental cities with a long tradition. In addition, the international political conditions (fights among Hellenistic rulers, later the advance of Rome) compelled them to favour, use, abuse and fight both the cities within their own empire or region of influence and abroad.

The position and status of a *polis* during the Hellenistic period has regularly been discussed in the past. We do not wish to go into details of this evolution, but a few general remarks concerning this topic are in place. In mainland Greece an important trend was the grouping of several *poleis* into a league or *koinon*.¹ In Asia it was especially the relationship with the Hellenistic empires and the degree of dependence from the Hellenistic rulers that was imperative for the status of a *polis*. Typologies have been proposed to classify the cities as “independent”, “dependant”, “subordinated”, “subject” or something similar depending on their relations with the monarch². These classifications must be

¹ Gehrke 2008, 70–74.

² Ma 1999, 150–172; Capdetrey 2007, 209; Dreyer 2007, 300–320.

regarded as general classes grouping cities with a similar status and not as a legalistic fixed system with the same rights and obligations for cities of one class. The Greek sources give us hints to the status of a city when they deal with the obligation of royal taxation or exemption of taxes, the installation of garrisons and military governors or freedom of royal garrison, the presence of royal interventions by ordinances (*prostagma*) or local autonomy for internal affairs, the use of the “regal formula” (name of the king, dynastic era) in date formulas or a local date formula mentioning city magistrates or a local era, the mintage of own silver coins (either Alexander coins with often a local mark or a local design) or the lack of it. The “free and autonomous” status has been reserved in the past for Greek cities, whereas local towns were considered to be simply part of the “royal land”. It is clear now that there was no rigid system of classification and that also local towns could be awarded some degree of autonomy.

Perhaps even more important for a ruler than a perfect city administration was to have the right (and loyal) person on the right place. Ideally, this person is not only a royal confidant, but he is also a member of the local community or has at least good contact with this community. To be able to control a city and to be sure that it acted according to the king’s interests, the Hellenistic rulers introduced one or more persons into the city to safeguard their ambitions and intentions. When Kassandros included Athens in his sphere of influence in 317 B.C. the democratic regime there was abolished and Demetrios of Phaleron was appointed to look after his interests in Athens.³ In Pergamon the Attalid kings appointed the local *stratego*i for the same reason⁴. The most common term to indicate such a person appointed by a Hellenistic king as his representative in a city within his territory or sphere of influence is “*epistates*” (“one who stands near or by” or “president”, “chairman”, “overseer”, “superintendent”, “governor” or “administrator”). Although the *epistates* normally is the interface between the local community and royal power, the term does not only indicate this function of royal confidant in a city. Sometimes they clearly had a more military function by controlling strategic strongholds.⁵

The exact authority and legal position of an *epistates* in Hellenistic kingdoms is not very well documented. The clearest example comes from the island republic of Rhodes in an inscription found at the end of the nineteenth century (IK 21 9) informing us about the Rhodian *epistatai* during the Hellenistic period, or in the words of the original editor:

³ Demetrius’ exact title is not known, see Habicht 1997, 54 and Dreyer 1999, 161–164; 180–184; concerning the title *nomothet/thesmotet*, see Dreyer 1999, 161 n. 205.

⁴ Hansen 1971, 188–189; Allen 1983, 167–168.

⁵ See Capdetrey 2007, 302–303 on the *epistatai* in Jerusalem and Mount Gerisim.

L'inscription nous apprend d'abord de la façon la plus claire que les ἐπιστάται étaient des officiers publics, choisis, sans doute à l'élection, par le peuple de Rhodes, pour être envoyés, hors de l'île, dans les possessions rhodiennes. (Holleaux 1893, 57)

The Rhodian *epistatai* were thus officials chosen from the body of Rhodian citizens to represent Rhodes in its overseas possessions and to rule these Rhodian territories outside the island. The few *epistatai* attested in the Seleucid empire⁶ make it clear that it was here rather a local citizen appointed by the king who acted together with the local council. As far as Babylonia is concerned, Polybius (5.48.12) attests the presence of an *epistates* in Seleukeia-on-the-Tigris when Molon arrived there in 221 B.C. during his revolt against Antiochus III⁷. As a Graeco-Macedonian city founded by the first member of the Seleucid dynasty it is no surprise to find the Greek title *epistates* here. As far as the traditional Babylonian towns are concerned the *epistates* is not immediately present: the cuneiform documents do not mention an *epistates*⁸ and only in Babylon a Greek inscription (OGIS 254) in honour of Demokrates who is called “*strategos* and *epistates*” was found.⁹

Greek titles were not always simply transcribed into cuneiform as shown above (see n. 8). Sometimes an Akkadian title, that still existed or that had not been used anymore for a long time, was used as the equivalent of a Graeco-Macedonian function. This use of originally Akkadian titles to denote a Graeco-Macedonian function is clear for *strategos*. When Antigonos Monophthalmos decided to put his own name in the date formulas instead of the Argead king Alexander IV, he was not king yet and he could only add his title *strategos* of Asia. In Babylonia the date formulas of the cuneiform tablets call him *rab uqi/a*.

⁶ See Capdetrey 2007, 302 for the *epistatai* in Seleukeia-in-Pieria, Seleukeia-Tigris, Jerusalem, Laodikeia-ad-mare, Laodikeia-Media.

⁷ Dreyer 2007, 240 and 256–258.

⁸ Greek technical terms were often simply transliterated into cuneiform; see e.g. pu-li-te-e for *politai* (see below), pu-ru-su-tat-te-su for *prostates* (Iraq 43 139 [AB 247]: 4) and e-pi-is-ku-pu-su for *episkopos* (OPSKF 14 257: 2).

⁹ Babylon as place of origin of this inscription is not certain. The date is not clear either; it probably does not date from the Seleucid, but from the Parthian period. The combination of “*strategos*” and “*epistates*” is also known from Niniveh (SEG 7 37) and Dura Europos (P. Dura 17 and 25) during the Parthian and Roman period. The multi-sided use of the term “*strategos*” makes it also here difficult to interpret the exact legal meaning and authority of the function. He could have been a local or an imperial official and both positions have been defended. Tarn (1951, 25) and Rostovtzev (1932, 6) interpreted the *strategos* as the chief magistrate of the Graeco-Macedonian community who was given general powers because of his appointment as *epistates* by the king. Another option, supported by Bengtson (1964, 300–301) is the *strategos* as a central official appointed by the royal authority, probably to enforce the *epistates*' authority, or to give him more military powers.

For the function of satrap, the title *muma'iru* (^{lu}gal.ukkin) was used in cuneiform tablets from the beginning of the Hellenistic period onwards. This title was previously used with the meaning “ruler, commander” for gods, kings and high officials only.¹⁰

If this was also the case for the *epistates*, Akkadian titles and their meaning and authority as they appear in the cuneiform documents must be researched. And indeed this has been done in academic research concerning Hellenistic Babylonia. The first to attract attention was Anu-uballit = Kephalon, the *rab ša rēš āli* in Uruk during the reign of Antiochus III. Since he played an important role in the Uruk society at that time according to the inscriptions his title was almost immediately interpreted as *epistates* (or *strategos*) in Uruk.¹¹ Doty¹² was the first to doubt this identification because also a religious function in the temple was according to him a possible interpretation. Van der Spek¹³ and Joannès¹⁴ finally proved beyond doubt that the *rab ša rēš āli* was the highest official in the temple hierarchy of Uruk; as head of the prominent Rēš temple dedicated to Anu he probably also had some authority over the other temples in Hellenistic Uruk.

Another Anu-uballit who was administrator in Uruk during the Hellenistic period lived in the middle of the third century B.C. In the building inscription YOS I 52 Anu-uballit explains that the Seleucid king gave him a second (Greek) name Nikarchos and he also mentions his title (*šaknu*). Since the original editor of the tablet¹⁵ interpreted the ideographic writing of *šaknu* (^{lu}gar-nu) as ^{lu}šá-nu (*šanû*) or “the second-in-command”/“minor officer”, the function of Anu-uballit=Nikarchos was interpreted as a minor local function.¹⁶ Doty interpreted it correctly as *šaknu* and since the *šakin tēmi* or *šaknu* was the governor of a province/city¹⁷ in the Neo-Babylonian period, it was Anu-uballit=Nikarchos who was interpreted as either an *epistates* or a *strategos* by Doty.¹⁸

¹⁰ See CAD M/II, 194–195.

¹¹ Rostovzeff 1932, 6 (either *epistates* or *strategos*); Aymard 1938, 33 n. 2; Tarn 1951, 25–26; Rostovzeff 1941, 436 (“who probably played at Uruk the same role as the *epistatai* and the *stratego* played in other cities of the Seleucid Empire”); McEwan 1981, 26. In his review of Heuss’s “Stadt und Herrscher des Hellenismus” Tarn (1938, 82) calls the treatment of the *epistates* hardly adequate and he notes that “the Babylonian *epistates* at Orchoi was merely omitted”. No reference to the person or his Akkadian title is made as if a Greek inscription mentioning an *epistates* was found in Uruk.

¹² Doty 1977, 22–24.

¹³ Van der Spek 1986, 80–83.

¹⁴ Joannès 1988.

¹⁵ Clay 1915, 82.

¹⁶ Without Graeco-Macedonian equivalent; Rutten 1935, 70; Aymard 1938, 33 n. 2.

¹⁷ Doty 1977, 21–22. For the small Babylonian provinces, essentially one major settlement and the immediately surrounding territory, see Frame 1992, 219–220.

¹⁸ Doty 1977, 24; also van der Spek 1986, 80.

Šakin tēmi/šaknu was not the only Akkadian term to indicate a Neo-Babylonian city governor. Also *bēl pīhāti/pīhātu/pāhātu* is attested for the same function and there is no clear distinction between the use of these words in Akkadian.¹⁹ At first also the *pāhātu* was relatively rare in the Babylonian documents from the Hellenistic period. CT 49 156, a temple account from the Raḥīm-Esu archive from Babylon during the Parthian period (beginning of the first century B.C.), mentions the *pāhātu* of Babylon in an entry of 1 ¼ shekel of silver for a sacrificial sheep provided for him. In the chronicle ABC 13 (=BCHP 10), called the Seleucid Accessions Chronicle by Finkel/van der Spek, another *pāhātu* is mentioned (BCHP 10 obv. 5'). The name of this *pāhātu* was Seleucus, but since the left side of the tablet is not preserved, it is not known where this Seleucus was *pāhātu*. According to a plausible reconstruction by Finkel/van der Spek it was the royal city of Seleukeia-on-the-Tigris.²⁰ Because the function of *pāhātu* was similar to that of the *šaknu*, also the *pāhātu* was immediately identified with the *epistates*.²¹

Thanks to the edition of the astronomical diaries and the preliminary on-line edition of new chronicles from the Hellenistic period, several new sources are at present available. Especially our knowledge of the *pāhātu* of Babylon has increased manifold thanks to the attestations in the historical notes of the astronomical diaries. The information on the *pāhāt Bābili* starts from the first half of the second century B.C., but it mainly dates to the Parthian period (especially second half of the second century and some concerning the first half of the first century B.C.):

AD 2 –187A: 'Rev. 9': *pāhāt Bābili* [broken] gold(en object?) offered to king Antiochus (verb in plural: gar.meš)

AD 3 –162: Rev. 14: *pāhāt Bābili* (and *rab sikkati*) did not dare to come out of the palace out of fear for the *šaknu* of the king

AD 3 –161 A₁ + A₂: 'Obv.' 21': with *politai* and *šatammu Nabû-mušētiq-uddi*²²

AD 3 –140A: 'Rev. 5': with *politai*, rest broken

¹⁹ Frame 1992, 226–227; Jursa 2005, 53.

²⁰ BCHP 10: Obv. 5': []^mSe-lu-ku^{lú}pa-ḥat
Obv. 6': [k]i^{l?} u íd lugal mi-šir-šú ki

Because of the presence of “and the royal canal” in obv. 6', the restoration “[^{ru}Se-lu-ki-'-ia'[?] šá ina muḥ-ḥi^{íd}buranun^{kj}il[?] u íd lugal” for Seleukeia-on-the-Tigris-and-the-royal-canal is logical. Being on the confluence of the Tigris and the royal canal, Seleukeia-Tigris was often called like this in the historical notes of the astronomical diaries. The possible mistake^{íd}buranun^{ki} (Euphrates) instead of the correct^{íd}idigna is not unparalleled either (although the addition “and-the-royal-canal” does not appear there and Seleukeia-Zeugma is in theory a possible identification, see AD 3 –105A: 'Rev. 23' and AD 3 –93A: Rev.' 12).

²¹ Sherwin-White 1983, 268; van der Spek 1986, 64.

²² For the reading of this name see van der Spek 2000, 439.

- AD 3 –132B: Rev. 24: letter of the king to the *pāḥāt Bābili* and the *politai ša ina Bābili*
- AD 3 –129A₂: 'Obv.' 17'–18': someone among the *politai* in Babylon was appointed as *pāḥāt Bābili* in a letter from the king; the *pāḥāt Bābili* arrived in Babylon and was presented sacrificial animals by the *šatammu* and *kiništu*.
- AD 3 –124B: 'Rev.' 15' and 17': with *politai*; letter of the king was read in the theatre (*bīt tamārti*)²³ concerning the hostilities with the Elamite enemy
- AD 3 –119C: 'Obv.' 11': with *politai*; letter from the king
- AD 3 –118A: 'Rev.' 19': with *politai*; letter from the king was read in theatre
- AD 3 –90: 'Obv.' 30': with *politai*; letter from the king
- AD 3 –77A: 'Obv.' 26'–27': someone among the *politai* in Babylon was appointed as *pāḥāt Bābili* in a letter from the king; the *pāḥāt Bābili* arrived in Babylon and was presented sacrificial animals by the *šatammu* and *kiništu*

In none of these astronomical diaries the personal name of a *pāḥāt Bābili* is mentioned.²⁴ However, in the newly published chronicle BHP 11 or “Ptolemy III chronicle” describing the conquest of Babylon by the Ptolemaic king Ptolemy III at the beginning of the third Syrian War (246–245 B.C.) a Seleucus is mentioned as *pāḥātu* of Seleukeia-Tigris.²⁵

Although a lot of elements are still unknown, the situation of the *pāḥāt Bābili* is the best documented case of the *pāḥātū* because of the available astronomical diaries. At least from the first half of the second century B.C.²⁶ a second local institution came into being in Hellenistic Babylon next to the college of

²³ See van der Spek 2001, 445–456.

²⁴ Apart from a few exceptional cases (AD 3 –161A₁ + A₂: 'Obv.' 21', AD 3 –137D: Rev.' 23, AD 3 –119B₁: 'Obv.' 11' and AD 3 –77A: 'Obv.' 28' and 31') also the personal name of the *šatammu* never appears in the historical notes of the astronomical diaries (see Boiy, 2004, 198–199).

²⁵ Since the city of Seleukeia is clearly preserved, since the chronicle deals with the same period as BHP 10 mentioned above and the same personal name Seleucus is attested, it was probably the same person who appears both in BHP 10 and BHP 11 and the restoration by Finkel/van der Spek in BHP 10 Obv. 6' can be considered as correct (see n. 20).

²⁶ Either during the reign of Antiochus III or that of Antiochus IV. Van der Spek (1986, 71–78) concluded on the basis of several arguments that it was during the reign of Antiochus IV that the *politai* were introduced in Babylon. He found confirmation for his hypothesis in BHP 14, the so-called Greek community chronicle, because it mentions the *politai* who “had entered Babylon in the past at the command of king Antiochus” (BHP 14: Obv. 3; van der Spek 2005, 396). I have argued before on the basis of AD 2 –187A: 'Rev.' 9' that the *politai* must have been present in Babylon already in 187 BC during the reign of Antiochus III. In the historical note in AD 2 –187A only the reference to the *pāḥāt Bābili* is preserved (see above), but because of the plural form of the verb another subject must have been mentioned originally in the broken part of Obv. 10. Because the *pāḥāt Bābili* is always mentioned together with the *politai*, I presume that the *politai* must be restored in the lacuna (see Boiy 2004, 207).

šatammu and *kiništu*.²⁷ Always the leader and the board are mentioned: the *pāḫāt Bābili* and the so-called “*pu-li-ṭe-e*”. Although the name of the function is always written in Akkadian, its link with the “*pulit e*” or “*politai*”, citizens according to Greek law, already indicates that the *pāḫātu* has got something to do with Graeco-Macedonian institutions. At least in the Parthian period the appointment as *pāḫāt Bābili* happened by royal approval: AD 3 –129 and AD 3 –77A explicitly mention that the king appointed someone from the *politai* as *pāḫāt Bābili*. This means that the official was a local inhabitant belonging to the group of *politai* and at the same time a royal favourite. Some more information concerning the appointment of a *pāḫāt Bābili* by the king can be found in AD 3 –129A₁ and A₂ on the situation in spring 130 B.C. On 4 Nisannu 182 SE (14 April 130 B.C.) the satrap of Babylonia arrived from the royal camp in Babylon bearing a letter of the king and because of this letter a delegation of the *politai* went to the king's camp (AD 3 –129A₁: 'obv.' 6–8'). AD 3 –129A₂: 'obv.' 16–18' mentions in a new historical note concerning the next month, dealing with 10 Ayaru (20 May 130 B.C.), the satrap of Babylonia again. The following passage notes that someone of the delegation of *politai* was appointed as *pāḫāt Bābili* by a letter of the king and he arrived in Babylon. Also in BCHP 19, a chronicle concerning an Arsacid king that can not be dated more precisely, someone is appointed as *pāḫāt Bābili* by a royal letter on parchment (Rev. 5'). No *politai* are mentioned here, although it is possible that this must be reconstructed in the broken parts of the passage. Remarkable is in any case that before the appearance of the word *pāḫātūtu* (governorship) in Rev. 5' the words “*ta kur Ma-da-a-a*” (from the land Media) was written. Was someone from the land of Media, i.e. not a local from among the *politai* in Babylon, appointed or was it someone from a delegation of *politai* from Babylon to the king in Media who was appointed in Media? Since visits to the king in Media are mentioned regularly in the historical notes of the astronomical diaries during the Parthian period,²⁸ the last possibility is in our view the most probable.

As a royal confidant in a local setting the *pāḫāt Bābili* had indeed a lot in common with an *epistates* in other cities of the Seleucid empire. Does this necessarily mean that a *pāḫāt Bābili* is identical to an *epistates* and that Akkadian *pāḫātu* can simply be translated as *epistates*? There is no straightforward answer to this question. Since the exact local autonomy differed from one town to another, also the authority of each *epistates* must have been different. Because of their different history, traditions and expectations, the traditional Babylonian cities probably were approached differently. In addition, we have to keep in mind

²⁷ Boiy 2004, 194–204.

²⁸ See e.g. AD 3 –132B: Rev. 22 for a visit of the strategos of Babylonia and AD 3 –77A: 'Obv. 31 for a visit of the *šatammu*.

that in Babylon the traditional leaders were the “*šatammu* and *kiništu*”, whereas the college of the “*pāhātu* and *politai*” represented only a part of the inhabitants of Babylon. Therefore the question itself is not to the point. In our view the identification of the *pāhātu* in a traditional Babylonian town like Babylon with a Graeco-Macedonian function is not fruitful if there are no other indications in the available sources that the Babylonians and/or Seleucid authority considered the *pāhātu* also as an *epistates*. Let’s consider him as a *pāhātu* who had a similar authority (or was treated in a similar way by the Seleucid authority) as an *epistates* in the Graeco-Macedonian cities of the Seleucid empire.

Are there any additional indications that the *pāhāt Bābili* was within Babylon or within the Greek community in Babylon also known as *epistates*? Again no straightforward answer is possible since no cuneiform tablet ever calls the *pāhāt Bābili epistates* and since we do not have any Greek inscription referring to the institution at the moment. Only if the above-mentioned OGIS 254 really originates from Parthian Babylon, the “*strategos* and *epistates*” Demokrates who is mentioned there,²⁹ might give us a hint to the presence of an *epistates* earlier in Seleucid Babylon who might be the *pāhātu* we find in the cuneiform sources from Babylon.

The appearance of a *pāhātu* in Seleukeia-Tigris is a different problem. In a royally founded Graeco-Macedonian city we might a priori expect an *epistates* rather than a *pāhātu* and we know from the passage in Polybius that there was indeed an *epistates* present in Seleukeia during the Seleucid period. The attestation of Seleucus as *pāhātu* of Seleukeia in two chronicle fragments therefore might indicate that the Babylonians used the Akkadian term for a Graeco-Macedonian function in the city of Seleukeia.

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²⁹ See above n. 9; also for Demokrates/Byttakos the remark made above that the difference between an *epistates* and a military leader is not always very clear is valid because he also was the leader of the citadel’s troops (*akrophylakes*).

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Abstract

The paper deals with the status of the cities in Hellenistic Babylonia and the nature of the offices called *epistates* and *pāhātu*. The exact authority and legal position of an *epistates* and a *pāhātu* is discussed.

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