

78) Another attestation of Basiya, son of Ariḥ, a Judean Merchant in Sippar¹⁾ — The merchant family of Ariḥ was studied by Alstola (2017), Bloch (2014), and Jursa (2007). The consensus of scholars is that this family, which was based in Sippar, was of Judean descent and assimilated well into the Babylonian cultural and commercial world as merchants (Alstola 2017: 29, Bloch 2014: 129, Jursa 2007). Already known are six texts that relate to this family (Alstola 2017, Bloch 2014), but thus far overlooked has been Strassmaier Nbk. 454, a short document that records the purchase of gold with silver by Basiya, son of Ariḥ. Basiya was already known from one text, BM 75434, noted by Jursa (2007) and translated by Bloch (2014: 152-53). This text mentions Basiya with the title *tamkār šarri* “royal merchant” and shows him loaning ½ mina of silver during Nabonidus’ 10th regnal year (546 BCE). Basiya’s brothers Amušē and Mardukā were likewise involved in trading activities and there are some indications that they were trading with the funds of the Ebabbar temple in Sippar and were generally connected to this temple and its community (Bloch 2014: 131). The brothers’ trade in gold, in particular, can be seen in BM 68420, in which Amušē received silver for gold, and BM 74411, in which Mardukā sold gold to the Ebabbar; he was paid for this with silver taken from house rents. Nbk. 454 demonstrates that Basiya was also engaged in the exchange of silver for gold:

Strassmaier Nbk no. 454 (Sippar)

Obv.

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| 1. 2 GIN ₂ 4-ut KU ₃ .GI ½ ¹ 5 GIN ₂ 3 re-bat | 2 ¼ shekels of gold (for) 25 shekels (and) ¾ (shekels) |
| 2. 1 GIN ₂ bit-qa LA ₂ -ti 7 GIN ₂ | (of silver); 1 shekel minus ⅛ (of gold for) 7 shekels (of |
| 3. 2 GIN ₂ 4-ut bit-qa 13 GIN ₂ 3 re-bat | silver); 2 ¼ (and) ⅛ shekels (of gold for) 13 ¾ shekels |
| 4. PAP 5 ½ GIN ₂ KU ₃ .GI a-na | (of silver); total: 5 ½ shekels of gold for 2⅔ minas (and) |
| 5. ⅔ ¹ ma-na 5 ½ GIN ₂ KU ₃ .BABBAR | 5 ½ shekels of silver: |

Edge

- | | |
|--|---|
| 6. ^m ba-si-ia A ^m a ¹ -ri-lḫi | (from) Basiya, son of Ariḥ. ²⁾ |
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Rev

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| 7. NU na-din | It has not (yet) been paid. |
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Unfortunately, the text does not contain much information other than quantities of gold and the rates at which it was purchased: 1:11, 1:8, and almost 1:6 for a total rate of about 1:8, which are within the known range for gold prices (Kleber 2017: 15, Kleber 2016: 123).³⁾ As the Ariḥ family had dealings with the Ebabbar in Sippar, one may presume that this purchase was related to the commercial activities of the temple; namely, its need for gold with which to make cultic implements. It is important to note that, while this tablet has been attributed to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II by Strassmaier, it is in fact undated and therefore does not add to the time period in which this family is attested. Regardless, Nbk. 454 is a welcome addition to the dossier on this Judean family.

Notes

1. This discussion was written within the Horizon 2020 project “The King’s City: A Comparative Study of Royal Patronage in Assur, Nineveh, and Babylon in the First Millennium BCE,” undertaken at the University of Vienna with the supervision of Michael Jursa, who I thank for his corrections on this note.

2. The copy shows indistinct traces for the first sign, but the subsequent signs and prosopography leave no doubt that the reading suggested here is warranted.

3. Strassmaier’s copy reads ⅔ in line 1 and ⅕ in line 5, but this would result in a ratio of gold to silver in line 1 that is much higher than attested rates and a silver total of more than one mina, which cannot be read into Strassmaier’s copy of line 5. As copying fractions with an additional wedge not found on the tablet is a common mistake in Strassmaier’s copies, we can confidently amend ⅔ to ½ and ⅕ to ⅓, respectively.

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