A SHORT HISTORY OF BABYLON

Karen Radner

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To my inexhaustibly curious father, with love

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This book is dedicated to my father, Dieter Radner, whose curiosity and love for exploring the world have always been an inspiration.

Timeline

Late third millennium BC	First mention of Babylon (as BAR.KI.BAR) as the seat of a governor of the Kingdom of Akkad.
21st century BC	Babylon is a provincial centre in the Kingdom of Ur.
20th century BC	Babylon is the capital of a small regional kingdom; King Sumu-la-El builds a new palace at Babylon.
19th century BC	King Apil-Sîn builds a new city wall for Babylon.
18th century BC	King Hammurabi turns his realm into the foremost kingdom of Mesopotamia and Babylon into the most important city. King Samsu-iluna, his successor, loses control over southern Babylonia to the Sealand rulers; the inhabitants of many southern cities relocate to Babylon.
c. 1600 BC	During the reign of King Samsu-ditana, a Hittite army from Anatolia conquers and raids Babylon, abducting the statue of Marduk; the Hammurabi dynasty ends.
16th century BC	King Agum, formerly a general under Samsu-ditana, establishes the rule of the Kassite dynasty over Babylon; the kingdom is known as Karaduniaš.
15th century BC	Babylon defeats the Sealand and brings southern Babylonia and even Bahrain under its control.

c. 1400 BC	King Kurigalzu I invades Elam in Iran and conquers its capital Susa, establishing a new dynasty there that is linked to the Kassite dynasty by marriage in every generation; the royal court relocates (temporarily?) from Babylon to newly founded Dur-Kurigalzu. The Arad-Ea family of Babylon rises to political and scholarly prominence.
14th century BC	King Burnaburiaš II forges treaties with Egypt, Elam, Hatti and Assyria, secured by dynastic marriages. The scholar Marduk-nadin-ahhe of the Arad-Ea family leaves Babylon to become the first Royal Scribe of Assyria, establishing the cult of Marduk in Assur.
1328 BC	The death of Burnaburiaš II leads to a prolonged succession war, with Assyrian involvement.
13th century BC	The physician Raba-ša-Marduk leaves Babylon for the Hittite royal court in Anatolia.
c. 1220 BC	Tukulti-Ninurta I of Assyria defeats the Kassite ruler Kaštiliaš IV and conquers Babylon, taking the statue of Marduk and the temple library to Assur; Tukulti-Ninurta installs a puppet ruler in Babylon but ultimately fails to end Kassite rule.
1158 BC	When the male bloodline of the Kassite dynasty becomes extinct Šutruk-Nahhunte of Elam claims the crown of Babylon but is rejected; he invades and loots Babylonia, taking e.g. the Code of Hammurabi to Susa in Iran; several more Elamite invasions follow over the next decades, during one of which King Kutir-Nahhunte of Elam brings the statue of Marduk from Babylon to Susa.
1125–1104 BC	Nebuchadnezzar I of the Second Dynasty of Isin expels the Elamites from Babylonia and consolidates his dynasty's control over Babylon; he conquers Susa and returns the statue of Marduk to Babylon.

c. 1000 BC	The kingdom of Babylon disintegrates, also because of the influx of new population groups (Chaldeans, Aramaeans) at the end of the Bronze Age; the kings of Babylon still play an important role in regional politics but are now seen as the champions of the god Marduk who chose them.
851/850 BC	King Marduk-zakir-šumi I enlists the help of Shalmaneser III of Assyria (858–824 BC) to suppress a rebellion led by his brother Marduk-bel-usate and curtail the claims of the Chaldean tribes; Shalmaneser visits Babylon.
823 BC	King Marduk-zakir-šumi I helps Šamši-Adad V of Assyria (823–811 BC) to defend his claim to the Assyrian throne; a resultant treaty favours the king of Babylon despite Assyria's much greater military power.
732 BC	Nabu-nadin-zeri of Babylon, an Assyrian ally, is killed; in the ensuing succession war, the crown of Babylon is claimed by Mukin-zeri of the Chaldean tribe of Bit-Amukkani; Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria (744–727 BC) invades Babylonia.
729 BC	Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria defeats Mukin-zeri and is crowned king of Babylon, succeeded in this role by his son Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC).
721–710 BC	Marduk-apla-iddina II of the Chaldean tribe of Bit-Yakin is King of Babylon.
710–705 BC	Sargon II of Assyria (721–705 BC) invades Babylonia and is crowned King of Babylon, even residing in Babylon for five years.
703–689 BC	Turmoil in Babylon, as Sennacherib of Assyria (704–681 BC) loses control over the city; very many short-lived Kings of Babylon, including Marduk-apla-iddina II, a member of the ancient Arad-Ea family (Marduk-zakir-šumi II), Sennacherib's son Aššur-nadin-šumi and Marduk-apla-iddina's son Nergal-ušezib.

689 BC	Sennacherib of Assyria conquers Babylon, devastating the city and the Marduk temple in an ultimately futile attempt to abolish the kingship of Babylon and curtail the religious and political influence of the Marduk temple.
681 BC	Sennacherib of Assyria is murdered and succeeded by his son Esarhaddon (680–669 BC) who restores Babylon and the cult of Marduk; he is crowned King of Babylon.
669 BC	The crowns of Assyria and Babylon are separated again, as Šamaš-šuma-ukin succeeds his father Esarhaddon as King of Babylon and his brother Assurbanipal as King of Assyria.
652–648 BC	Šamaš-šuma-ukin of Babylon rebels against Assyria; Assyrian troops invade and ultimately win the war; but the crowns of Assyria and Babylon kingship remain separate.
625 BC	Nabopolassar, a nobleman from Uruk, overthrows the last Assyrian puppet ruler and is crowned King of Babylon.
616–608 BC	Nabopolassar of Babylon (625–605 BC), together with Median allies, conquers the Assyrian Empire.
605–562 BC	King Nebuchadnezzar II rules over the Babylonian Empire and greatly expands the city of Babylon.
562–556 BC	Succession conflicts within the royal family see three short-lived kings on the throne of Babylon.
555–539 BC	Without any apparent link to the Nabopolassar dynasty, Nabonidus is the last 'native' King of Babylon.
539 BC	Cyrus the Great of Persia (550–530 BC) takes control of Babylon after winning the Battle of Der and is crowned King of Babylon; but neither he nor his successors reside in Babylon.
538 BC	Crown prince Cambyses stands in for his father Cyrus in the New Year Festival rites at the Marduk temple; this is the only time

	a Persian royal ever participated in this key event of the Marduk cult.
522 BC	Babylon rises in rebellion against Darius of Persia (522–486 BC), led by two successive leaders calling themselves Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon.
521 BC	Darius reclaims Babylon and erects a victory monument there.
484 BC	Babylon rises in rebellion against Xerxes of Persia (486–465 BC), led by two leaders called Bel-šimanni and Šamaš-eriba who both adopted the title of King of Babylon; the rebellion is subdued and the noble families of Babylon are disempowered for good; the running of the Marduk cult is reformed.
331 BC	Alexander the Great of Macedon defeats the Persian Empire and takes control of Babylon; he is crowned King of Babylon.
323 BC	Alexander dies in Babylon.
305 BC	Seleucus I founds Seleucia-on-the-Tigris and removes the royal court from Babylon.
c. 275 BC	Antiochus I moves Greek and Macedonian settlers from Babylon to Seleucia.
133 BC	A prophet preaching the apocalypse gains a substantial following in Babylon.
74 AD	The last cuneiform text known from Babylon is written.
116 AD	The Roman Emperor Trajan visits Babylon.
216 AD	Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, is born near Babylon.
c. 300 AD	Regular worship in the Marduk temple of Babylon ends.
3rd to 5th centuries AD	The Babylonian Talmud is compiled in the region of Babylon.
c. 400 AD	Philo of Byzantium writes 'On the Seven Wonders of the World', which include the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.
10th century AD	Ibn Hawqal visits Babylon and describes it in his 'Book of the Image of the Earth'.

1616 AD	Pietro della Valle visits Babylon, collecting bricks inscribed with Nebuchadnezzar II's cuneiform inscription that he brings back to Rome.
1764 AD	Carsten Niebuhr visits Babylon, preparing measurements and sketches of the site.
1782 AD	Pierre Joseph de Beauchamp visits Babylon, writing about it in his bestselling memoirs.
1792 AD	The East India Company begins buying up Babylonian antiquities, prompting much undocumented digging at Babylon.
1811–1812 AD	Claudius Rich, the EIC representative in Baghdad, undertakes the first official excavations in Babylon.
1857 AD	A translation competition run by the Royal Asiatic Society in London confirms the decipherment of the cuneiform script.
1879 AD	Hormuzd Rassam, working on behalf of the British Museum, discovers the 'Cyrus Cylinder' during excavations in Babylon.
1899–1917 AD	Robert Koldewey excavates Babylon on behalf of the German Oriental Society.
1901 AD	Jacques de Morgan discovers the Code of Hammurabi during excavations in Susa.
1927 AD	Koldewey's finds from Babylon arrive in Berlin, much delayed by the First World War.
1930 AD	The reconstructed Ištar Gate of Babylon's inner city wall goes on display in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin.
1978 AD	At the request of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage inaugurates the 'Archaeological Restoration of Babylon Project'.
1986 AD	Saddam Hussein commissions bricks with his own Arabic inscriptions for the restoration works at Babylon.
1987–2002 AD	The Babylon Festival is held annually in the reconstructed buildings of Babylon's inner city

	(but not in 1990/91 because of the first Gulf War).
2003 AD	Saddam Hussein is overthrown after the allied invasion of Iraq; the Iraq Museum and many regional museums in Iraq, including the Nebuchadnezzar Museum at Babylon, are looted.
2003–2005 AD	US troops establish a military camp in Babylon, later used by Polish troops.
2008 AD	Exhibitions on Babylon are shown in Paris, Berlin and London.
2009 AD	Babylon is reopened as an archaeological park.

INTRODUCTION

What is Babylon? It is an ancient city whose ruins are situated in modern-day Iraq but also so much more. I am writing these lines in Munich, and in this German city that has no direct link to Babylon there are currently five places that share its name: a hookah lounge, a nightclub, a brothel, an internet café and the offices of an international IT company. Why are they called Babylon? Answering this question will give us a chance to briefly review the most commonly held modern ideas about this city of the distant past.

The hookah lounge is situated in that part of the city that is sometimes dubbed Little Turkey, the first port of call for anyone looking for pomegranates and dates, halva or indeed a place to smoke a water pipe (shisha). The nightclub, however, is not located in this part of town and doesn't have any obvious Middle Eastern connections: on the contrary, Thursday is Italian Night. Here, and of course in the case of the brothel, the choice of name seeks to reference the connotations of decadence and debauchery that Babylon owes to the Biblical traditions, which often portray the city as the corrupt capital of an immoral empire. To a degree, this is also true for the hookah lounge: before diversifying, the establishment started out as a cocktail bar and it shares the building with a strip club. But its Iraqi-born owner picked the name 'Babylon' because it invokes home; where motifs from Babylon are part of the fabric of daily life, decorating banknotes, coins and postal stamps and even

the entrance to Baghdad airport (Fig. 0.1). He also runs a restaurant, and this is called 'Sindbad', after the seafaring adventurer from Baghdad in *One Thousand and One Nights*.

The Babylon Call Shop & Internet Café is situated on the same block as the hookah lounge. Many of the customers are from the Middle East and, given the location in Little Turkey, it comes as no surprise that the signage is in Arabic and Turkish. Is the choice of name meant to reference the Biblical story of the Babylonian Confusion of Tongues? It would certainly fit the polyglot babble that characterizes the place. The guy behind the counter does not think so and reminds me that in the Quran, the story of the construction of a gigantic tower designed to confront God is set in Egypt, and not in Babylon. However, the link with the Biblical narrative of the Confusion of Tongues is definitely intended in the case of our final place, the offices of an Israeli tech company that runs an online translation software package called 'Babylon'.

Fig. 0.1: A replica of the Ištar Gate from Babylon at Baghdad International Airport, as seen in November 2018. Author's photograph.

Here in Munich, we have been able to trace several cultural traditions that make the name 'Babylon' meaningful to contemporary audiences. To Iraqi expatriate communities, the name potently invokes home. Other associations, however, are deeply shaped by stories from the Bible that link Babylon either to ideas of cosmopolitanism and multilingualism or, more frequently, to hedonistic self-indulgence and even depravity, with Babylon either serving as an urban ideal or a degenerate archetype.[1] The Book of Isaiah combines all of this in the prophecy of the downfall of the city, in the sixth century BC the capital of the Babylonian Empire (Chapter 7) that had caused the end of the kingdom of Judah, the sack of Jerusalem, the destruction of its temple and the deportation of its people (cf. also Chapter 8):

> Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the pride and glory of the Chaldeans,
> will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah.
> She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations;
> there no nomads will pitch their tents, there no shepherds will rest their flocks.
> But desert creatures will lie there, jackals will fill her houses;
> there the owls will dwell, and there the wild goats will leap about.
> Hyenas will inhabit her strongholds, jackals her luxurious palaces.
> Her time is at hand, and her days will not be prolonged.[2]

Generally speaking, the Biblical depiction of Babylon is by far its most influential portrayal, overshadowing even the colourful stories of the Greek historian Herodotus (who never visited the city himself)[3] and other accounts from classical antiquity that marvel especially at the city's grand architecture.

These outside impressions continue to find much interest.[4] But they are not the topic of this book, which instead seeks to introduce Babylon on its own terms. The resultant book concentrates on the city and its role in regional and world history, and this firm focus on the city of Babylon sets it apart from some recent volumes with similar titles. Trevor Bryce's *Babylonia: A Very Short Introduction* (2016) concisely surveys the regional history of southern Iraq from the eighteenth to the sixth century BC. Paul-Alain Beaulieu's textbook *A History of Babylon, 2200 BC–AD 75* (2018) mentions

the city prominently in the title but still deals with southern Mesopotamia in general; written by one of the leading specialists on Babylonia in the first millennium BC, this book offers rich information but, due to the constraints of the series in which it appeared, very few references. The science writer Paul Kriwaczek's *Babylon: Mesopotamia and the Birth of Civilization* (2010), too, does not specifically focus on Babylon, despite the book's title, and instead approaches the history of Iraq from the age of the first cities to the advent of Islam with the explicit purpose of offering 'lessons from the past'. On the other hand, the brilliantly illustrated exhibition catalogue edited by Irving L. Finkel and Michael J. Seymour, *Babylon: Myth and Reality* (2008), is limited to Babylon in the age of the Neo-Babylonian Empire of the sixth century BC and its reception, especially in the Bible and in classical sources; *Babylon: City of Wonders* (2008) by the same authors is the digest version of this catalogue.[5] Seymour has also compiled a very useful bibliography on Babylonian art and architecture, which is highly recommended for guiding further research on these topics.[6]

This history of Babylon is a story of kings and noble families, of a temple and a god, of knowledge and education, of a thirst for the future and a passion for the past, of foreign powers and local identity, of grandiose architecture and decaying mudbrick. The first two chapters set the scene. Chapter 1 deals with Babylon's position in time and place in the long history of ancient Mesopotamia, that is the land between the twin rivers Euphrates and Tigris in what is today Iraq. Chapter 2 relates the story of Babylon's loss and its rediscovery. The following five chapters trace Babylon's history from the eighteenth to the sixth century BC. Three of these chapters focus on a key period in the city's long existence when a prominent ruler recast Babylon's role in the world. In Chapter 3, we explore the city's role as capital of a new leading political power when visiting King Hammurabi's Babylon in the eighteenth century BC. In Chapter 4, we encounter Babylon as a key node in a far-reaching network of knowledge and politics under King Burnaburiaš II in the fourteenth century BC. In Chapter 7, we marvel at the city's imperial makeover under King Nebuchadnezzar II in the sixth century BC. On the other hand, Chapters 5 and 6 are concerned with Babylon's changing fortunes in the long period from the twelfth to the seventh century BC when southern Mesopotamia

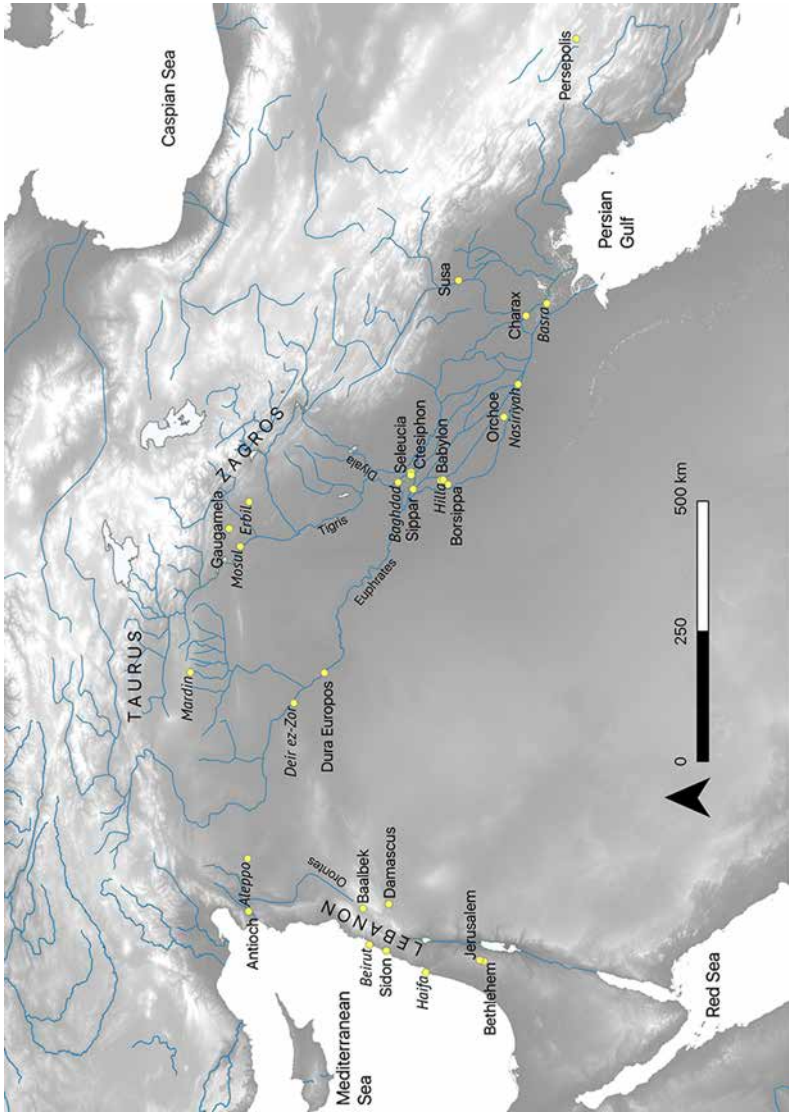
was politically fragmented. Chapter 5 takes the inside view and focuses on the city god Marduk, who is recast as the true master of the world during that time. Chapter 6 introduces an external point of view when we explore the complex relationship of Babylon with the powerful kingdom of Assyria, whose rulers coveted both Babylonian knowledge and kingship. Chapter 8 deals with Babylon's fate after the Persian conquest in 539 BC clipped the city's wings, while Chapter 9 explores Babylon's history after the arrival of Alexander the Great in 331 BC. Throughout this book, we will be drawing on the results of the archaeological exploration of the ruined city, but especially on the testimony of clay tablets and other objects inscribed with the cuneiform script. In doing so, we will encounter different faces of an exciting ancient city in southern Iraq that shaped world history for two millennia and for many came to represent quintessential cosmopolitan life.

1

BABYLON IN TIME AND SPACE

The first permanent settlements in human history anywhere in the world were founded in the tenth millennium BC in the piedmont hills of the so-called Fertile Crescent, a term coined in the early twentieth century AD and popularized by the American archaeologist and historian James Henry Breasted.[1] Open towards the south, the Fertile Crescent stretches from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea along the great mountain masses encircling the Middle East: from east to west, these are the Zagros, then the Taurus and later the mountain ranges running parallel to the Mediterranean Sea, most prominently the Lebanon. It was here that the first settled farmers began to cultivate barley, wheat and various legumes (starting with peas and lentils) and started to raise domesticated sheep, goats, cows and pigs. The mid-seventh millennium BC saw a technological breakthrough when it was realized that clay becomes water-resistant, and thus extremely durable, through controlled exposure to fire. Since then, this versatile material prominently shaped many aspects of life, providing vessels and containers in a wide variety of forms, toys and tools and various elements of architecture, from bricks and tiles to gutters and building ornaments. So ubiquitous was this material that the creation of humankind was imagined as a divine exercise in pottery, with the first human being modelled out of clay.

Some of the early settlements grew into cities like Nineveh (corresponding to modern Mosul), Erbil and Aleppo. These places



Map 1: The Middle East in Hellenistic, Parthian and Islamic times, with the places mentioned in this volume indicated. Modern place names are set in italics. Prepared by Andrea Squitieri.

can claim a history of occupation spanning a dozen millennia, routinely exercising political and economic leadership in their regional setting. Erbil (Urbilum/Arbela) and Aleppo (Halab) even preserved their names throughout that time. Compared to such longevity, Babylon (Babilim) is a late bloomer, as the city only became politically significant about 4,000 years ago, and moreover soon took early retirement, fading again from prominence after about two millennia.

Babylon is located in what we may term the three-river region of Mesopotamia, in the area of modern Baghdad where the Euphrates, Tigris and Diyala converge (Map 1). Baghdad is only the last of a series of settlements that capitalized on the strategic possibilities that control over this area afforded. Here, the valleys of the Euphrates and Tigris run very close to each other and the river Diyala, which originates in the Zagros Mountains, flows into the Tigris, thus opening up an ideal route towards the east.

The region where the Euphrates and Tigris almost meet on their way southwards to the Persian Gulf is the northernmost part of the vast flood plain of southern Iraq. Here, the courses of the two rivers fan out into a delta formed by many side streams and canals. In spring, when the snowmelt from the mountains of Zagros and Taurus reaches the plain, the waterways flood and deposit mud with valuable sediments on the surrounding land, acting as a natural fertilizer and creating ideal circumstances for farming cereals (most importantly, barley and wheat) and growing date palms in a region whose lack of rainfall would otherwise have left it a desert. But too much water would wash away the crops and destroy the settlements, so canals, embankments, dams and dikes have been constructed since the early fifth millennium BC to manage the flooding.[2] This environment was changed substantially when large dams and reservoir lakes as a source of electricity and irrigation were built in Turkey, Syria and Iraq in the twentieth century AD, interrupting the seasonal flooding.

Constructing the traditional waterworks in a shifting environment without permanent landmarks necessitated the development of a sophisticated mathematical skill set for which Mesopotamia is still justly famous today.[3] Numeracy was used to organize the world at large, from space to time to objects to people. Prompted initially by the desire to reconcile the solar year with the

months of the lunar year, an artificial 'sexagesimal world'[4] based on the number 60 was created, which suppressed the conditions of the natural environment in favour of more regular numbers that could be more easily calculated. We still use this system to manage angles (by dividing a circle in 360 degrees) and of course time (60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour, and so on).

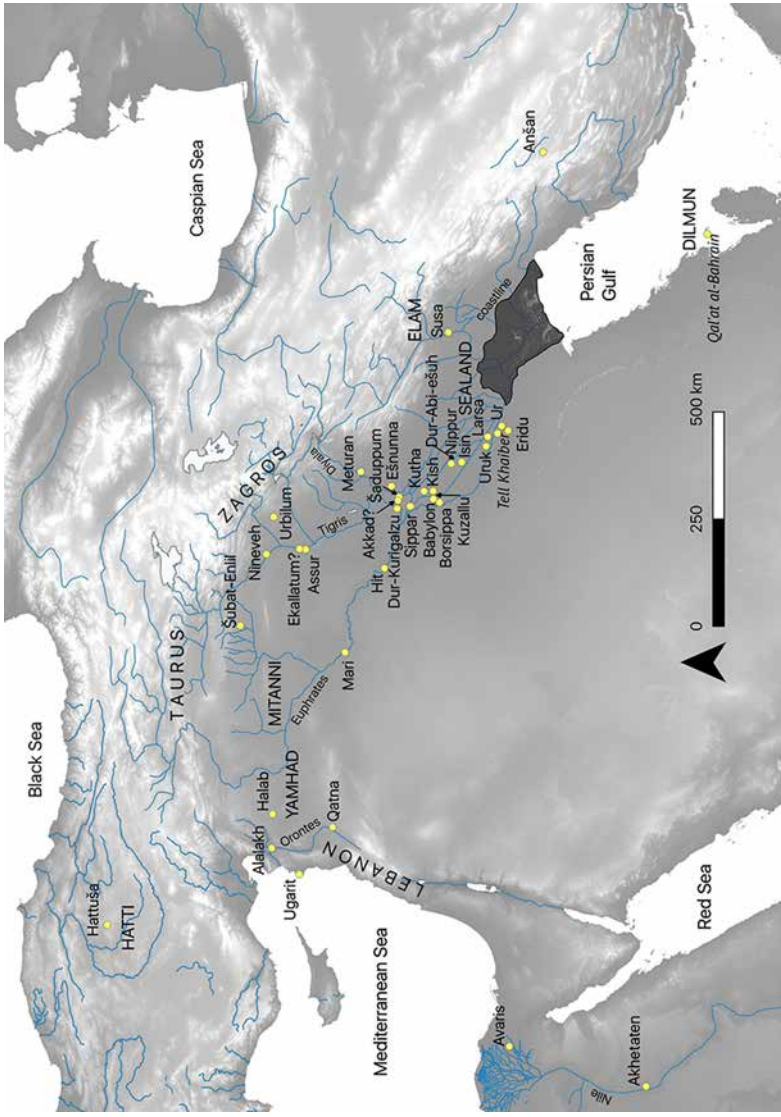
Creating excellent farming conditions in Mesopotamia was inextricably entangled with the absolute need for large numbers of people to regularly collaborate on an interregional scale, and this made southern Iraq the scene of the 'Urban Revolution', as the British anthropologist V. Gordon Childe called the phenomenon in the 1930s.[5] This term is a slight misnomer as it was a fairly gradual process that, however, massively transformed the way people lived together: from village to city, and from kinship group to state. Greater social stratification and craft specialization as well as the development of a bureaucracy that eventually resulted in the invention of writing were among the hallmarks of urban living, and increasingly separated the city dwellers culturally and socially from the people that continued to live in much smaller settlements in the adjoining regions where rain-fed agriculture was possible.

The three-river region lies at the interface between this flood plain and the higher-lying territories through which the Euphrates and Tigris carve their beds before entering the plain. Although rain-fed agriculture is not an option there either, large-scale artificial irrigation is not attractive as the difference in height between the rivers and the fields was too much to overcome in pre-industrial times. But the area is well suited for grazing flocks of sheep and goats. These animals were the first livestock breeds to be domesticated in the ninth millennium BC, originally for their meat and later also their milk. Their value as an equally useful source of textile fibre was only recognized much later but from around 6500 BC onwards, sheep were kept for their fleece as well; woolly breeds of sheep, however, only emerged through careful selection in the early third millennium BC.[6] At that time, wool became a stock commodity for the economy of ancient Iraq, whose refined textile production was of great importance for long-distance trade.[7] Its finely spun and elegantly woven luxury garments were much in demand in the upstream regions along the twin rivers.

This brings us to the third stream of the three-river area. The Diyala descends in the Baghdad region into the flood plain to merge with the Tigris, having gathered water from its wide-flung headwaters in the Zagros mountains. The Diyala forms an ideal access point for overland passage into Iran, with its rich metal ore deposits and its trade connections to even more distant lands with exotic merchandise such as Afghanistan and India, from where highly coveted materials such as the midnight blue lapis lazuli and the blood red carnelian stone were sourced, respectively. Whenever overland trade was favoured over maritime trade through the Persian Gulf, the three-river region was ideally positioned to play a key role in transregional trade. The early second millennium BC, when Babylon rose to prominence, was one such period.

The flood plain stretching from the three-river region of Baghdad down to the Persian Gulf is what we call today 'Babylonia'. This is a term coined by Greek speakers in the sixth century BC when the city of Babylon was the unrivalled capital of the Babylonian Empire and the most important settlement in Iraq. But the term would have seemed peculiar to the region's inhabitants in the city's earlier history. To them, Babylon was of course among the foremost cities of the region since the early second millennium, but by no means always the principal one. Southern Iraq is after all the 'heartland of cities', as the Chicago archaeologist Robert McCormick Adams famously dubbed it.[8] Babylon was rarely without rivals, many of which could rightly emphasize their much greater antiquity. Cities like Uruk, Ur, Kish and Nippur (Map 2) had just as much claim to a rich heritage of architecture, literature, festivals and communal life, and their recorded history stretched back much longer than that of Babylon, as their inhabitants liked to emphasize. Rather than using a designation that would stress their common ground, the people of all these cities called themselves 'son of Babylon', 'son of Uruk', 'son of Nippur' and so forth.

When designating the wider region, the local population groups usually preferred a more nuanced nomenclature that distinguished the northern part of 'Babylonia' – our three-river region – from the southern part where the network of waterways merges with the marshes of the Persian Gulf. A popular name for the south was therefore 'Sealand'. From the mid-third millennium BC onwards,[9] the north was often called the 'Land of Akkad', after the capital



Map 2: The Middle East in the second millennium BC, with the places mentioned in this volume indicated. Uncertain identifications are marked with a question mark, and modern place names (whose ancient equivalents are still unknown) are set in italics. Prepared by Andrea Squitieri.

city of the synonymous large state centred there[10] and its Semitic language: Akkadian, the precursor of Babylonian and its close, but still distinct, relative Assyrian.[11] The south was known as the 'Land of Sumer', after the language spoken there: Sumerian,[12] which is not related to any other known language, living or dead. The closest correspondence to 'Babylonia' was when these two regions together were described as the 'Land of Sumer and Akkad'.

Both these languages were recorded in the so-called cuneiform script,[13] named after the typical wedge-like impressions created in moist clay with a reed stylus; these materials are ubiquitous along the river banks of southern Iraq. The direct precursor of this system (today called proto-cuneiform) had been invented in the city of Uruk in the late fourth millennium BC, probably by Sumerian speakers, although this is a matter of some debate. To modern audiences, the invention of writing is a particularly dazzling achievement of the Urban Revolution. Originally an internal accounting system at Uruk, it came to be gradually developed into a combined script of syllabic signs and logograms that could fully record the spoken word and that was used, over the course of three millennia, to document text across the Middle East in a wide range of different languages, from Semitic Babylonian and Assyrian to Indo-European Hittite and Persian, and a number of other tongues including Elamite, Hurrian and Urartian. If we wanted to, we could adapt the cuneiform script for English or any other language. In complexity, the system closely resembles the Chinese script and it allows its writers to adapt their usage to particular contexts of writing and reading. One might use a small repertoire of about 100 signs in only the most basic readings to write a letter when all that mattered was that the reader understood the message without fail. Or one might use a repertoire five times that size, employing rare rebus-like readings for individual characters, if one wanted to impress the reader with one's learnedness and erudition.[14] As we shall see, when studying Babylon, cuneiform texts are our most important sources.

It is one such text that provides us with the first bits of information on the city in the mid-third millennium BC, when we otherwise know very little. Due to the high groundwater levels at Babylon itself, the archaeological exploration of the site will likely never succeed in bringing settlement layers from the earliest phases

of the city's history to light as they are water clogged, in addition to being buried deep under the multi-layered ruins of more recent occupation phases (cf. also Chapters 3 and 4). The Yale Babylonian Collection houses a small fragment of a limestone plaque of unknown provenance whose cuneiform inscription mentions the 'builder of the temple of the god Marduk (^{d}AMAR.UTU)' as well as the governor of BAR.KI.BAR.[15] Wilfred Lambert has convincingly argued that the text should be interpreted as Old Akkadian and that, because of the connection with Marduk who is the city god of Babylon, BAR.KI.BAR (likely to be pronounced Babal) must be understood as an early spelling of Babylon.[16] The usual writing of the place name is KÁ.DINGIR.RA or KÁ.DINGIR, both logographic spellings of the Akkadian-language folk etymology of Babilim: *bāb ilim* 'Gate of the God' (of which our 'Babylon' is the Greek rendering), and in this way, the city is mentioned in texts issued by the chancelleries of the kingdoms of Akkad (mid-third millennium BC) and of Ur (late third millennium BC), when the city appears here and there as a provincial centre.[17] We will resume our historical survey in Chapter 3 in the early second millennium BC, after the kingdom of Ur had collapsed and left in its wake a number of small warring states, typically controlled by a former provincial centre – such as Babylon.

2

BABYLON'S LOSS AND REDISCOVERY

Emperor Trajan is considered one of the most successful rulers of the Roman Empire.[1] Ruling from 98–117 AD, he presided over an era of unprecedented peace and prosperity. Due to the success of his military campaigns, the Roman Empire reached its maximum territorial extent, including briefly all of Mesopotamia. He was a connoisseur of good architecture and a prolific builder. Together with his favourite architect, Apollodorus of Damascus, he moulded the cityscape of Rome with his distinctive buildings and monuments. Trajan's Forum, Trajan's Bridge, Trajan's Baths and Trajan's Column (his burial monument) were built to last, and they do: they still shape the city of Rome today, and tourists seek them out every day, guidebook in hand, and marvel at the greatness of the Roman Empire. In 116 AD, Trajan wanted to do the very same at the ancient city of Babylon.

Trajan visited Babylon when he waged war against the Parthian Empire between 114 and 117 AD.[2] The formidable eastern foe controlled not only Iran and Central Asia but also what is today Iraq. Parthia's political influence curtailed Roman ambitions in eastern Turkey and in the Persian Gulf, which was crucial for the hugely profitable trade with India. After a series of unsuccessful attempts to conquer Parthian lands in the preceding decades, Emperor Augustus had had to accept the borderline along the Euphrates and across the Syrian Desert in 20 BC. This border stood until Trajan and his troops crossed into Parthian territory in

116 AD at the fortress of Dura Europos (Map 1), situated on the Euphrates at the border of modern-day Syria and Iraq. Trajan's fleet sailed down into Parthian-controlled Mesopotamia. The emperor moved his ships from the Euphrates across the narrow strait of land in the region of Baghdad to the Tigris in order to attack the Parthian strongholds of Ctesiphon and Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. Once victorious, he sailed downstream to the Persian Gulf, to the important trade harbour of Charax (today Jabal Khayabar) where ships from India delivered their precious merchandise of perfumes and pepper, of ivory, gemstones and pearls – luxuries that were in the highest demand among the Roman elite.

It was here at Charax[3] that Trajan declared Mesopotamia conquered and integrated into the Roman Empire as a newly-established province. Roman rule turned out to be a short-lived experience, as the region was relinquished to Parthia already two years later, immediately after Trajan's death en route back to Rome: his successor Hadrian very sensibly valued stable, defensible borders over flash territorial gains. But this was in the future, and for now, Trajan's triumph was complete. He now took time out of his busy schedule of brokering trade arrangements and setting up a Roman administration to visit the fabled city of Babylon to take in the sights.

Regrettably, Trajan considered the trip to Babylon a massive disappointment. According to the Roman historian Cassius Dio, the emperor was keen to visit because the city was famous, and famously also the place where Alexander the Great had died in 323 BC. This especially was very important to the emperor as the Macedonian conqueror was Trajan's self-confessed role model for his eastern exploits. Trajan would have known the descriptions of Babylon in the works of the geographers Diodorus Siculus (II 7–9) and Strabo (Geographika XVI 1.5–6) and especially of the Alexander biographer Quintus Curtius Rufus (V 1.17–39) who describe the gardens of the royal palace of Babylon as a sublime marvel of architecture, engineering and beauty: the so-called Hanging Gardens of Babylon, considered widely one of the seven wonders of the world. He would have also heard about 'the walls of impregnable Babylon along which chariots may race', as Antipater of Sidon has it in a famous poem (Greek Anthology IX.58).

So much wondrous architecture to anticipate – but alas, the actual sights failed to impress the noted design enthusiast Trajan. Writes Cassius Dio:

> He (Trajan) had gone there (to Babylon) both because of its fame – though he saw nothing but mounds and stones and ruins to justify this – and because of Alexander, to whose spirit he offered sacrifice in the room where he had died (Cassius Dio, Roman History, 68.30.1)

Like many a tourist visiting Babylon in the 1970s and 1980s, when commercial travel agencies offered tours to Iraq, the Roman Emperor struggled to reconcile Babylon's reputation as an architecturally impressive city with the reality of the building remains visible at the site. To designate some of those as mere 'mounds and stones and ruins' is neither an unreasonable nor an unkind description, although there were of course parts of the city that flourished in Parthian times.[4]

This is the curse of mudbrick architecture. A cheap and sturdy building material with excellent insulating and air conditioning properties, mudbrick is made from the mud that is found on riverbanks in inexhaustible supply, tempered with straw and left to dry in the sun. Mudbrick degrades relatively quickly and requires permanent maintenance and repair. Left untreated, a mudbrick building will be in ruins after fifty to seventy years. Once mudbrick is fired it is of course much more durable, but fuel is expensive and rain is infrequent in Mesopotamia, so baked bricks were generally only used for decorative elements or to lend extra stability to sensitive parts of a building. Until the advent of concrete in the Middle East in the mid-twentieth century, the bulk of buildings in the region of Babylon was constructed from sun-dried mudbrick, and if left untended, they decayed and finally collapsed into unsightly heaps of mud. When a building was no longer used, it was usually robbed of the parts that could be recycled: the wooden doors and especially the roof beams, and the building was therefore exposed to the elements, which further speeded up decay. Removing collapsed mudbrick requires a lot of effort and was, before the availability of machine power, an exercise that was usually avoided. It is much

easier to simply level the area of the ruined building and build on top of it. This is the reason why settlements with mudbrick architecture grow in height over time, creating the artificial mounds (Arabic tell) that are so typical of Middle Eastern archaeology.

When Emperor Trajan was visiting Babylon in 116 AD he was especially interested in a part of the city that was no longer used and had stood empty for centuries: the ancient royal palace of Nebuchadnezzar II (see Chapter 5) where Alexander had stayed (and died) and whose beautiful gardens the classical authors describe in fascinating detail. However, excavations have demonstrated that from the first century BC, when the palace was no longer used as a royal residence, ordinary people lived in the area, building their houses and graves there.[5] Whatever room enterprising locals would have shown to the visiting emperor as the site of Alexander's death – and it could well have been the original royal suite – was surely located in the midst of the squatter occupation in the extended and certainly unattractive mudbrick ruins of the former royal residence. Also of the famous pleasure gardens, nothing would have remained and Trajan's interests in its ingenious hydraulic engineering would have been left unsatisfied. Trajan had surely expected a more glamorous location for his sacrifices to his heroic role model Alexander.

The sorry state of the palace during Trajan's visit stemmed from a political decision taken almost four centuries earlier by Alexander's successors.[6] During the wars for control over the gains from Alexander's conquests, Babylon was caught up in the conflict between Alexander's former generals Seleucus and Antigonus the One-Eyed (Monopteros) and plundered around 310/9 BC. Once Seleucus had managed to establish himself as king over the Middle Eastern parts of Alexander's conquests, he founded around 305 BC a new city and proudly gave it his own name: Seleucia-on-the-Tigris (Tell 'Umar), located about 90 kilometres to the north of Babylon. It was in there that he set up his royal court, and not in Babylon. The ancient city's importance further decreased when his son and successor Antiochus I decided around 275 BC to move the Greek and Macedonian settlers of Babylon to Seleucia. The local population could not keep up the huge settlement that spread over more than 8 square kilometres, making it by far the largest city in the Middle East. Large parts of the city were left to go to ruins,

among them the vast royal palace that had lost its main purpose when the court had been moved to Seleucia-on-the-Tigris.

Still, although Trajan's negative travel review won't have done much to stimulate tourism to Babylon, the city's former glory was never forgotten in the western world. Herodotus' often fanciful description of Babylon in his Histories always remained popular, and the Hanging Gardens continued to be celebrated, also in a new popular book 'On the Seven Wonders of the World' (*De septem mundi miraculis*) written in the fourth or fifth century AD by Philo of Byzantium, known as 'the Paradoxographer' (and not to be confused with a much earlier Philo who worked and wrote on engineering, physics and mechanics in the third century BC). Philo certainly did not visit Babylon personally, but drew on old sources. It is through the lasting popularity of the Seven Wonders of the World that many children first hear about Babylon. I vividly recall how I constructed a cardboard model of the Hanging Gardens as a six-year-old from a cut-out sheet at the back of a cereal box.

Philo's book greatly stimulated the imagination of its readers, among them the celebrated Austrian baroque architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, who is responsible for some of the most famous buildings in Vienna and Salzburg. Fischer von Erlach's book *Entwurff einer Historischen Architectur* (1721) was one of the first and most popular comparative studies of world architecture; an English translation appeared in 1730 under the title *A Plan of Civil and Historical Architecture*. The hugely influential book begins with the Seven Wonders of the World including the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, recreated in loving detail in the architect's drawings (Fig. 2.1). It is obvious that Fischer von Erlach's notions of the Babylonian royal palace exercised considerable influence on his designs for the Austrian imperial palace of Schönbrunn, in particular the lavish, immense gardens that make it one of Vienna's most popular tourist attractions.

But what about the real Babylon? The Arab traveller and chronicler Ibn Hawqal paid a visit to Babylon during his extended travels in the tenth century AD and found it still inhabited, although merely a village. Still, local memory associated it with much greater importance in antiquity. In his famous 'Book of the Image of the Earth' (*Kitāb Ṣūrat al-'Arḍ*), Ibn Hawqal writes that 'Babil is a small village, but the most ancient in all Iraq. The whole region

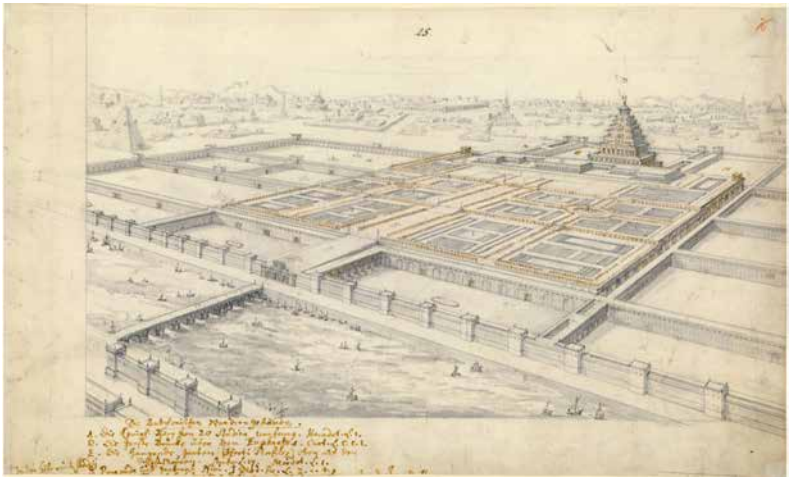


Fig. 2.1: Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, *Die Babylonischen Wundergebäude* (1712); sketch for his book *Entwurff einer Historischen Architectur* (National and University Library in Zagreb, 10959; GZAS 39 fis 25). Photograph © Europeana Collections.

is called Babil from this place.'[7] Modern scholarship cannot share his assessment that Babylon would have been the most ancient settlement in Iraq. As we have already emphasized, cities like Mosul and Erbil that flourished in Ibn Hawqal's time and continue to dominate the political landscape were first settled some ten thousand years ago in the days of the 'Neolithic Revolution', when humans first opted for a sedentary farming lifestyle, and predate Babylon's foundation by millennia. But clearly, memories of the city's former significance were well enshrined in the local tradition and, in contrast to many other Mesopotamian sites, Babylon's ancient name was never forgotten.

The first prominent visitor from Rome after the disenchanted Emperor Trajan was the gentleman traveller Pietro della Valle.[8] A disappointment in love caused the then 28-year-old poet and musician from a noble Roman family to leave Italy in 1614 for an extended trip that started as a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. His travels then morphed into an altogether more ambitious enterprise that took him and his entourage through the lands of the Ottoman Empire, Persia and India until he returned to Rome

twelve years later. His broken heart had mended in 1616 when he saw the portrait of a beautiful Assyrian Christian woman in Aleppo. This was the lady Ma'ani Juwayri (Sitti Maani Gioerida in Italian), originally from Mardin, who resided in Baghdad at the time, and Pietro instantly decided to travel there in order to meet her: marriage ensued.

While in Baghdad in 1616, Pietro della Valle took in the local sights and also travelled to the village of Babil, where he happily collected some ancient baked bricks with cuneiform inscriptions. These he added to his growing trove of travel souvenirs and he eventually brought them back to Rome in 1626. The ancient bricks with their undecipherable script caused considerable interest among the learned men of the Umoristi Academy and the papal court, but not as much as the mummified corpse of Sitti Maani who had died in 1622 after a miscarriage in Iran and yet continued to accompany her widower on his travels in a lead-lined coffin. She was eventually buried with great pomp in the della Valle family tomb in Rome.[9]

Pietro della Valle published accounts of his travels that were widely read, and later European travellers to Iraq followed his example in going to Babil to look for cuneiform bricks, including in 1764 Carsten Niebuhr, a German explorer in the service of the Danish crown who prepared measurements and sketches of the site, and in 1782 the French diplomat and priest Pierre Joseph de Beauchamp. When the latter's memoirs were translated into English in 1792, they came to the attention of members of the East India Company (EIC), prompting them to order its agents in Baghdad and Basra to acquire some of these increasingly popular ancient artefacts for shipment to London.

With the EIC's interest begins the archaeological exploration of Babil in earnest. Claudius Rich, who represented the EIC in Baghdad, undertook the first official excavations in 1811–1812 and then again in 1817. This was followed by a series of British and French digs throughout the nineteenth century, designed to recover objects for the growing collections of Mesopotamian artefacts in the British Museum and the Louvre. The local people excavated as well, and the bazaar of Baghdad was flooded with cuneiform tablets and other objects from Babylon at that time. All this work was meant to find treasure, whether for financial gain or to furnish museums. In the same way that illicit looting of ancient

sites in Iraq today may bring to light considerable amounts of finds but at the expense of a great deal of damage to the site, without contributing to a better understanding of the ancient ruins, modern archaeologists consider this early digging at Babylon inherently problematic. Record-keeping, if attempted at all, was very basic and neither sketches nor measurements were taken routinely.

During one such excavation in March 1879, Hormuzd Rassam[10] discovered the now famous 'Cyrus Cylinder' (Chapter 8; Fig. 8.1), a building inscription from the foundations of the Marduk temple that was written after the great Persian conqueror had taken control of the city in 539 BC and assumed the title of King of Babylon. This object is today one of the most celebrated cuneiform records, given that it is the only text from antiquity written in Cyrus' name. Like many others digging at Babylon during that time, Rassam also found thousands of other clay tablets, including private business files and holdings of the Esangila temple library, which are now in the British Museum. Hormuzd Rassam is today seen as the first Iraqi archaeologist. The member of a well-known Assyrian Christian family from Mosul, he had been working in Iraq on behalf of the British Museum on and off since 1846 when he first assisted the EIC agent Austen Henry Layard in excavating ancient Nineveh, the predecessor settlement of his hometown of Mosul, and his most important discoveries were made at this site. His excavations were certainly more successful than his diplomatic career in British service, chiefly remembered for a mission from 1864–1868 to secure the release of British missionaries taken captive by the Emperor of Ethiopia that resulted also in Rassam's imprisonment. For his archaeological discoveries, he was made a member of the Royal Geographical Society and of the Society of Biblical Archaeology in London and honoured by the Royal Academy of Sciences at Turin.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the fascination for ancient Babylon and Mesopotamia grew in the minds of educated audiences in Paris, London and elsewhere in Europe. That the once flourishing region was now in ruins was deemed extremely reassuring, as it supported and reinforced the universally embraced ideas of European progress and superiority. Attempting to decipher cuneiform[11] became a favourite challenge for the intelligentsia of the time. Bright minds from various walks of lives, including

clergymen, officers, inventors, orientalists and antiquaries, puzzled over the arcane script in London and Paris but also less obvious places such as Copenhagen in Denmark (Niels Ludvig Westergaard), Göttingen in Germany (Georg Friedrich Grotefend) and even tiny Killyleagh in Northern Ireland (Edward Hincks).

Eventually, the decipherment of cuneiform succeeded as a decentralized group effort, and a translation competition organized by the Royal Asiatic Society in London in 1857 confirmed that cuneiform texts written in the Akkadian language were now fully understood. Some of the people involved in the decipherment personally excavated in Babylon, such as Henry Rawlinson and Jules Oppert, but most pursued this interest at their writing desks (and this remains very true for the vast majority of modern cuneiform scholars). Some knew each other well and communicated with each other directly, in person and in letters. But the decoding of the ancient script was made possible by new forms of academic exchange that ensured the distribution of the drawings of cuneiform inscriptions to interested readers. The nineteenth century saw the rise of academic journals, regularly appearing print publications that focused on a particular topic and were available by individual subscription or in libraries. Some of these early journals, such as *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, continue to be published today. There are currently dozens of academic journals that are devoted to ancient Mesopotamia, as modern scholars still heavily rely on this form of communication – although the internet rapidly changes how academics disseminate their research.

Serious excavations started in Babylon in 1899 when the German architect and archaeologist Robert Koldewey began his work on behalf of the German Oriental Society (Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft).[12] The society had been given official leave by the Ottoman Empire to select sites for excavation as part of the agreements between the Sublime Porte and the kingdom of Prussia, whose ruler Emperor Wilhelm II was mad for archaeology. On his second visit to the Ottoman lands as a guest of Sultan Abdul Hamid II in 1898,[13] the emperor embarked on a month-long grand tour of the Middle East that took him by yacht from Istanbul to Haifa and from there to first Jerusalem and Bethlehem, then on to Beirut and finally by train to Damascus. On the way back, he visited the famous Roman temple of Baalbek, where an inscription

was left on the building to commemorate his visit. He secured a promise for Prussian companies to construct the Berlin–Baghdad railway, then one of the most eagerly anticipated construction projects in the world, and the Ottoman authorities granted him permission to excavate wherever he pleased to sweeten the already very sweet deal that greatly frustrated the British and French governments and companies.

The German Oriental Society, whose patron was the archaeology enthusiast Wilhelm II, picked Babylon as the site of its first excavation on the advice of the artistic Koldewey. During an earlier visit in 1897, the numerous colourful fragments of glazed moulded tiles littering the surface of the ruins had enchanted the accomplished painter. He therefore recommended the site to the society and its board eagerly accepted, as the members of the Society were keen to acquire antiquities for their pet project: the nascent Vorderasiatisches Museum that was meant to finally bring Mesopotamia to Berlin at a time when its antiquities dazzled visitors to the Louvre and the British Museum.

Robert Koldewey's work[14] began in 1899 and he excavated Babylon for almost two decades. An obsessive excavator without family ties, Koldewey devoted his life to the investigation of the ruins and worked in Babylon for a total of almost fifteen years, employing hundreds of workers to explore the ancient buildings of Babylon. He kept numerous cats at his excavation house and enjoyed their company much more than the infrequent visits from western travellers who expected him to give them guided tours. When he obliged, Koldewey tended to amuse himself by telling them outrageous stories that mercilessly made fun of their desire to encounter evidence for the Biblical stories about Babylon.

A favourite joke of his was to make the excited visitors believe that the ubiquitous baked bricks with Nebuchadnezzar II's stamped inscription were the 'Writing on the Wall' from the Biblical story about the Babylonian crown prince Belshazzar's last feast in the Book of Daniel. According to this story, the prince and his guests arrogantly drink from ritual vessels that had been looted by the Babylonian army in the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem when a ghostly hand appears and writes on the wall: 'Mene mene tekel upharsin', words that the prophet Daniel can interpret as the foretelling of Babylon's downfall. As Pietro della Valle, Pierre

Joseph de Beauchamp and many visitors after them (including myself in 2001 and 2018) have found, it is almost impossible to visit the inner city of Babylon and not stumble over such a brick on the surface, as thousands and thousands of them had been created for Nebuchadnezzar's huge building projects (Chapter 7). Imagine the huge excitement and then the profound disappointment of Koldewey's guests when he sternly told them that they couldn't take the fragment home as a souvenir because of its enormous value for scholarship. But having the eccentric archaeologist tell tall stories was certainly a good way of livening up the otherwise slightly underwhelming tourist experience of Babylon.

Koldewey grudgingly and very abruptly had to end his excavations when British troops turned up at Babylon after the invasion of Baghdad in 1917 during the First World War. He jumped into the excavation car and fled from the approaching soldiers, never to return. He died in 1925 in Berlin, just short of his 70th birthday, and friends saw to it that his grave at Lichterfelde cemetery was decorated with a monument in the shape of a stepped tower in memory of the Babylonian architecture to whose recovery he had devoted his life.

Koldewey's work focused on the rectangular inner city of Babylon that stretched on both sides of the Euphrates, linked by a monumental bridge. This part of the city was surrounded by its own fortification wall, encircled by a moat that was fed with water from the Euphrates (Fig. 2.2).[15] At the centre of the inner city was the ancient temple complex of the god Marduk with its mighty stepped tower. This building, immortalized in the Bible in the story of the Tower of Babel, is today only preserved in the negative. After the ruinous superstructures had been removed in antiquity, an enterprise started by Alexander the Great (Chapter 9), nothing much was visible on the surface. But when drilling a well for drinking water in the late nineteenth century AD, local villagers accidentally discovered the foundation of the stepped tower and its staircase. As these foundations consisted of fired and therefore wonderfully preserved bricks of the highest quality they were immediately reused as building material. The resulting hole quickly filled with groundwater but preserved the ground plan of the stepped tower. Today, only an overgrown pond with a peculiar geometric shape is left of the once awe-inspiring gigantic building.

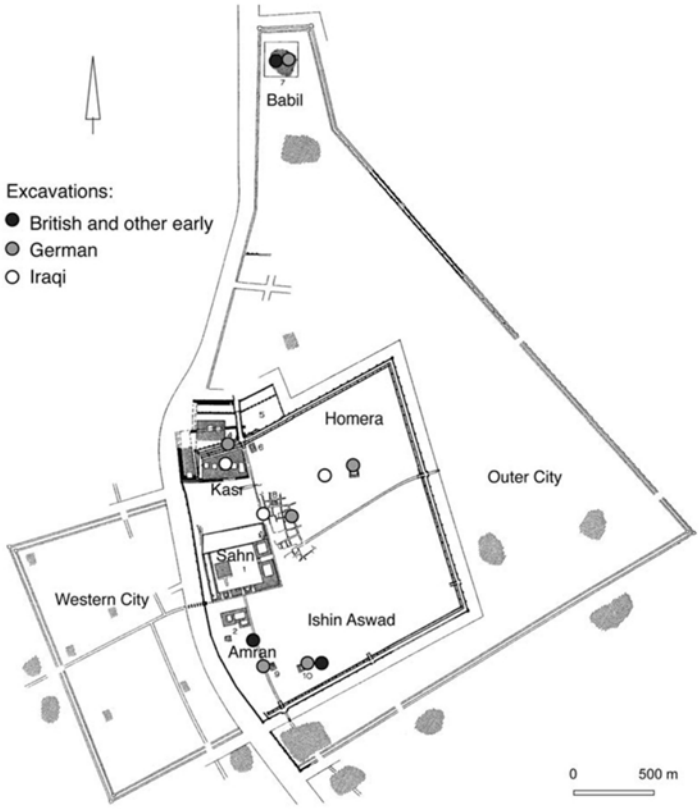


Fig. 2.2: The excavations undertaken in Babylon by Robert Koldewey and others. Reproduced from Olof Pedersén, 'Excavated and unexcavated libraries in Babylon', in Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, Margarete van Ess and Joachim Marzahn, eds., *Babylon: Wissenskultur in Orient und Okzident* (Berlin and Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2011), p. 50 fig. 1.

Luckily, there are texts and even a depiction on a stone stele of Nebuchadnezzar II (Fig. 7.10) that allow its reconstruction.

Of the 536 boxes of finds that eventually arrived in Berlin in 1927, most contained fragments of the brightly glazed moulded bricks that had first attracted Koldewey's attention. After years of puzzling these fragments together in Berlin's Vorderasiatisches Museum, the façade of the monumental Ištar Gate of Babylon's inner

Fig. 2.3: The restored Ištar Gate at the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin; on the right side, the restored façade of the throne room of Nebuchadnezzar's Southern Palace. Photograph by Radomir Vrbovsky (CC BY-SA 4.0), from Wikimedia Commons.

city wall, colourfully decorated with rows of serpent dragons and bulls, came to life once again – indeed, an astonishing architectural jewel that would undoubtedly have pleased also Emperor Trajan. Other bricks came from the walls running along the processional road leading from that gate to the temple of Marduk and from the façade of Nebuchadnezzar's throne room in his famed palace. Once restored, these brickworks showed rows of lions, baring their fangs and lashing their tails. These brilliantly colourful brick decorations, and especially the restored Ištar Gate, are now part of the permanent exhibition in the Vorderasiatisches Museum and a major tourist attraction (Fig. 2.3).

At Babylon itself, visitors can see the foundations of the enormous gate, also decorated with rows of animal figures but executed only in unglazed moulded bricks (Fig. 2.4). In antiquity, these parts of the construction would not have been visible at all as they were set deep into the ground. To compensate for the lack of colour that visitors expected to see at Babylon, a replica of

Fig. 2.4: The foundations of the Ištar Gate at Babylon, as seen in November 2018. Author's photograph.

the Ištar Gate in half the original size was created nearby in the 1960s, when the Iraqi government's attempts to develop Babylon into a tourist attraction began in earnest. Iraq's president Saddam Hussein ordered large-scale reconstructions to be undertaken that formed the 'Archaeological Restoration of Babylon Project'.[16] The initiative began in 1978 and kept the members of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage very busy in the subsequent decade. Even the bloody and costly Iran–Iraq War from 1980–1988 did not derail the ambitious and expensive enterprise that transformed the northern part of the inner city of Babylon into a vast open-air museum. Saddam wanted visitors to experience the grandeur of the ancient city, and therefore the emphasis lay on size and height, not necessarily authenticity. The result did not much please archaeologists, but ordinary people were impressed and perhaps for the first time since Emperor Trajan's damning travel review, tourism in Babylon was booming.

The most exhaustively restored building was the Southern Palace of Nebuchadnezzar, whose entrance was recreated as a

30-metre-high arch leading into the warren of rooms, suites and courtyards, some of whose walls were rebuilt to a height of 18 metres. In a 2003 interview for an article about Babylon in the New York Times,[17] Donny George Youkhanna, as a member of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage in charge of the restoration project, recalled Saddam Hussein's visit to Babylon in 1986 during which he suggested that bricks with his own inscriptions (but in Arabic, not the cuneiform script) be used in the reconstruction work. Like Nebuchadnezzar's bricks in the Southern Palace and at the Ištar Gate, Saddam's bricks were built into the walls in such a way that the inscription was visible (Fig. 2.5). Several different versions were created, and one reads:

> In the reign of the victorious Saddam Hussein, the president of the Republic, may God keep him, the guardian of the great Iraq and the renovator of its renaissance and the builder of its great civilization, the rebuilding of the great city of Babylon was done in 1987.

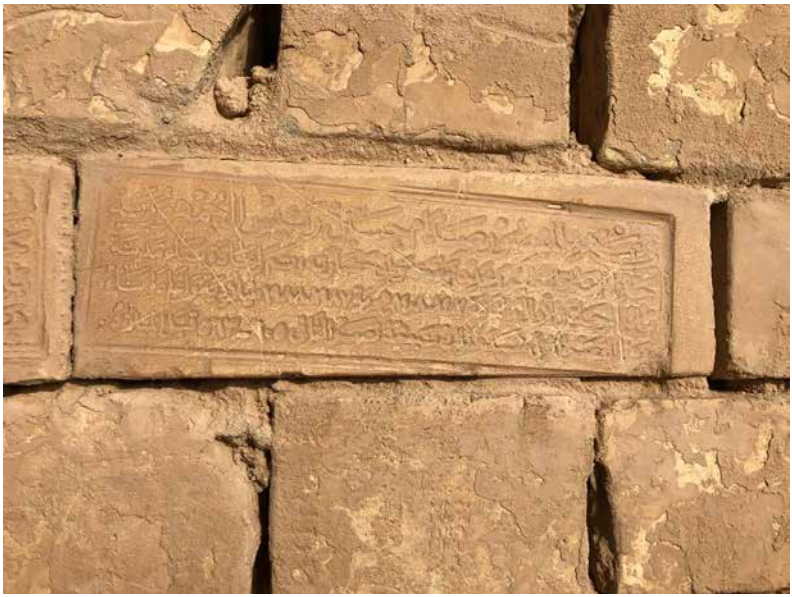


Fig. 2.5: A brick with Saddam Hussein's inscription, with recent scratch marks, as seen in the reconstructed Southern Palace in November 2018. Author's photograph.

Like Sitti Maani della Valle and Hormuzd Rassam, Donny George Youkhanna[18] too was an Assyrian Christian. One of Iraq's most eminent and well-respected archaeologists, he rose to international prominence in the tumultuous times after the 2003 invasion: for his valiant but doomed attempts to get US soldiers to move their tanks to the entrance of the Iraq Museum so that it would escape looting (they could not do so as they lacked official orders), for his outspoken criticism of the situation afterwards when 15,000 artefacts had been stolen and for his shrewd approach to recovering them, by asking local imams to appeal for the return of loot. Donny George Youkhanna first became head of the museum, then chairman of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, replacing a cousin of Saddam Hussein. But like so many Christians, he and his family left Iraq in 2006 after they were repeatedly targeted by sectarian violence. A flourishing community in the days of the Ottoman Empire, the Christians of Iraq have almost all left the region: according to the Iraqi census of 1987, the country's Christian population numbered about 1,400,000 people. This number remained stable until 2003 when it had increased slightly to c. 1,500,000 but had plummeted to under 300,000 people by 2016.

In 1986, Donny George Youkhanna as the director of the 'Archaeological Restoration of Babylon Project'[19] faced different challenges as the first stage of the restoration works was to be ready in time for Saddam's extravagant 'Babylon Festival', a month-long spectacle with music, dancing and all sorts of other cultural events that was held for the first time in September 1987 and then repeated annually until 2002 (with a break in 1990–1991 because of the first Gulf War). The restored buildings provided the stage and backdrop for the festivities. In addition to the palace, whose gargantuan throne hall was used for performances, the temple of the goddess Ninmah and the much younger theatre in the Greek style (Chapter 9) had been restored for that purpose. Saddam also ordered the construction of three artificial lakes and of a lavish new palace for himself on an artificial mound that provided a commanding view over the site. All of this was recreated with limited regard for the preservation of the ruined city. Saddam had two more such mounds heaped up as he intended to build a connecting cable car, from which to better appreciate the enormous scale of Babylon, but this was never realised.

When I first visited Babylon in April 2001, I was taken aback by the sheer volume of the restoration work. Lacking the masses of visitors that were meant to bring it alive, the enormous restored Southern Palace felt more desolate than imposing. In many places, the mudbrick constructions had started to show wear and tear by that time, and in one of the more remote of the reconstructed buildings, the temple of the god Nabû-ša-harê, someone had sketched a large chalk drawing of the Pokémon Pikachu on the wall of the inner sanctum. It was strangely heartening that even the children of Iraq, cut off from the world since the 1990 sanctions had been implemented after Saddam's attack on Kuwait, were not excluded from the global Pokémon craze that had started in 1996 with Nintendo's first video game release in Japan. The best thing about visiting Babylon was arguably its gift shop. Cut off from the world as Iraq then was, there were no plastic souvenirs made in China on sale. Instead the shop sold a range of handmade ceramic items, including glazed tiles depicting the lions and dragons that decorated Nebuchadnezzar's buildings and replicas of other Babylonian artefacts.

The embargo against Iraq came to an end with the 2003 invasion. At that time, US forces established a military camp within the inner city of Babylon. The US troops camping out in the archaeological site feature in the already quoted 2003 article in the New York Times. Reading it fifteen years later, it is unsettling just how uncritical the journalist Neil MacFarquhar (after all, part of a team awarded the 2017 Pulitzer Prize in international reporting, albeit for work on Russia) is of their presence inside the ruined city:

> Actually the site has become something of a project for the United States Marines, whose main base in central Iraq incorporates the ruins and the palace that Mr. Hussein had built for himself after 1991 on an artificial mound overlooking the whole thing. The American troops restored the looted gift shop and museum, replacing the roof, laying new linoleum floors and installing a new air-conditioning system.[20]

The decision to establish a military camp inside Babylon raised the hackles of archaeologists inside and outside Iraq who condemned the seemingly callous way with which the ruins were treated (never

mind the care extended to gift shop and museum), especially once first reports about the damage done to the ancient site by the allied troops were published.[21] Like the negligence that left the Iraq Museum in Baghdad open to looting and destruction, setting up the camp inside the archaeological site was seen as the appalling result of the ignorance and arrogance that marked the allies' approach to Iraq's cultural heritage.

Despite the military presence, nothing was done to prevent the wanton looting and destruction at Babylon, especially of Saddam's palace, which was left to be ransacked for a period of two weeks. Everything that could be removed was taken; all walls are now covered in graffiti to a height of about 2 metres. Today, the only intact parts of the building are the ceilings, some lavishly painted (Fig. 2.6), others with intricately carved wooden panelling.

Fig. 2.6: The painting decorating the ceiling in the audience hall of Saddam's palace in Babylon, as seen in November 2018. It shows some of the most famous monuments of Iraq's history, including from Babylon the Ištar Gate and details of the glazed brick decorations depicting the bull and the snake-dragon, as well as the Code of Hammurabi. Author's photograph.

Visitors today can marvel at the defiled building that looms high over the archaeological site and enjoy the excellent views of the reconstructed Southern Palace of Nebuchadnezzar II that before were the exclusive privilege of Saddam and his guests. Despite the US Marines' efforts on the gift shop, it has never again opened for business.

The US forces soon left Babylon and handed over the camp to Polish troops. It quickly grew to a size of 150 hectares, housing two thousand soldiers. To accommodate them and their army of vehicles, wide parts of the site were flattened, trenches were dug, and huge amounts of materials from outside Babylon were brought in, including earth and sand to fill the thousands and thousands of biodegradable sandbags used for creating barriers around the camp and hundreds of tons of gravel in order to cover the surface in doomed attempts to keep down the omnipresent dust. The soldiers left in 2005 and the camp was disbanded, but much of these materials remain and distort the archaeological record of the city.

The successful 2008 exhibition on Babylon that was shown in Paris, Berlin and London[22] was in part a reaction to the worldwide shock and outrage that had met the destruction of ancient sites and the looting of the Iraq Museum in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion. At all venues, the exhibition included components that critically dealt with Saddam's reconstruction programme and the by then infamous military presence of the allied forces at Babylon.

In May 2009, Babylon was reopened again as an archaeological park. Without Saddam's patronage, however, the sheer scale of the ruined city makes managing it very difficult and the reconstructed buildings have fallen into disrepair. As I was told during my last visit in November 2018, the budget available to the local Babil branch of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage is a fraction of what it was in the Saddam years. The restored temples now remain closed to ordinary visitors, as they are structurally unsafe. What to do? Most recently, the World Monuments Fund in New York sponsored the digital 3D recreation of the Ištar Gate and the temple of Nabû-ša-harê in order to make the architecture and the preservation efforts accessible to a wider public online.[23]

But attitudes to the multi-faceted ancient city have changed once again: while Trajan wanted to encounter Alexander's Babylon and early modern western travellers the Babylon of the Bible, nowadays the Iraqi day-trippers and the few foreign visitors certainly have an interest in the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar but are equally intrigued by Saddam's Babylon – best illustrated by the gaping holes left in the walls of the Southern Palace where the most unscrupulous of these sightseers have removed bricks with Saddam's inscription.

3

CAPITAL: HAMMURABI'S BABYLON

In this chapter, we will visit Babylon in the eighteenth century BC and trace its rise, under its most famous king, Hammurabi, from the centre of a petty kingdom to the capital of the foremost political power of Mesopotamia, encompassing much of modern Iraq.

The first centuries of the second millennium BC were a time of warring states and many kings – and of great political opportunities. The rulers typically claimed descent of Amorite stock. This term means 'Westerner' and is first used for Semitic-speaking immigrants to Mesopotamia in texts of chancelleries of the kingdom of Ur in the late third millennium BC. That state had many Amorites as mercenaries in its service and after its demise, some of these founded dynasties; the royal house of Babylon was one of them. By the time Hammurabi claimed rulership over the 'Amorites and Akkadians', these terms no longer indicated genuinely different ethno-linguistic groups, although there may have been socio-political connotations (military elite versus commoners).

When Hammurabi[1] came to the throne of Babylon, inheriting his small realm from his father and grandfather, the dominant powers in the Middle East had their heartland in Central Syria and in southwestern Iran (Map 2): the kingdom of Yamhad, with the ancient city of Halab (modern Aleppo) as its capital,[2] and the kingdom of Elam, centred on the grand metropolis of Susa (modern Shush in Iran's Khuzestan province), one of the largest cities of that time.[3] The lands along Euphrates and Tigris were split into

dozens of principalities, a few sizable (notably Isin, Larsa, Ur and Ešnunna), some small (including Babylon and Mari) and others tiny, encompassing only a city and the agricultural land feeding it. This colourful mosaic of states constituted the buffer zone between the influence spheres of Yamhad and Elam, and allegiances shifted frequently.

This was a time of chance and opportunity, as the eighteenth century BC saw profound changes in the trade networks of the ancient world. The hitherto all-important sea route through the Persian Gulf, which had linked the harbours of southern Mesopotamia via Bahrain and Oman with the rich cities of the so-called Harappa Civilization in the Indus Valley, gradually lost importance as these cities declined, for reasons that are still poorly understood.[4] As a result, they were no longer partners in the long-distance trade. Before, merchandise from Central Asia and Afghanistan reached Mesopotamia through these cities.

Some of the merchandise was pure luxury, such as exotic animals and the midnight blue lapis lazuli that was greatly valued in Mesopotamia as the colour of the gods' eyes.[5] It was carved into sumptuous jewellery and ground into pigments, the best and by far most expensive way to paint in blue. Today, lapis is cheap, a semi-precious stone that lost its value in the early nineteenth century AD when a synthetic way was found to create a chemically identical material, but until then it had been more valuable than gold. Until the Renaissance and the Baroque, artists coveted it and had to use it sparingly given its immense cost. This is why Titian, Vermeer and others reserved lapis for the clothing of their paintings' central character, and this is why we so widely associate the dark blue colour with the Virgin Mary, the one figure in Christian art deemed worthy of this expense.

But the sea route through the Persian Gulf also brought tin from Central Asia. One part tin and nine parts copper were the ideal mix to make bronze, and as the two metals were not mined in the same region anywhere in the ancient world, long-distance trade was more than a wonderful opportunity for the elites to procure exotic items that would set them apart from the rest of their communities. Long-distance trade was a necessity because by the fourth millennium BC, bronze had become the most widely used material for crafting tools and weapons. Previously, axes,

sickles, heads of arrows and spears, knives and needles had been made out of stone, and sometimes bone. But metal was much more versatile and had the additional advantage that it could be recycled and turned into something else, allowing one to turn 'swords into ploughshares, and spears into pruning-hooks', as the Biblical Book of Isaiah has it (Isaiah 2:4). This justified the initial expense required by the import of the raw materials copper and tin, which Mesopotamians had to acquire from far-away lands like modern-day Cyprus and Tajikistan.

Therefore, although the sea route through the Persian Gulf to the Indian subcontinent closed up, trade with the east had to continue. The overland routes across the lower-lying passes of the Zagros Mountains became ever more important. A by-product of these changes to long-distance trade and travel was that the political centre of Mesopotamia shifted gradually from the extreme south, where the harbours were located, to the three-river area that brings together the Euphrates, Tigris and Diyala (Chapter 1). This region is today dominated by Baghdad, the most prominent city of Iraq since the early Middle Ages. But three millennia before Baghdad, there was Babylon, and it was in the eighteenth century BC, when Hammurabi was king, that this city became the principal city of Mesopotamia.

As Babylon's geographical position in the three-river area had great commercial and strategic value in these changing times, powerful neighbours tried to gain control over the city. Hammurabi's father, Sin-muballit, had barely managed to protect his lands from the covetous hands of the southern kingdom of Larsa, one of the heavyweights in Mesopotamia's political landscape. But at that time and in the earlier part of his son and successor Hammurabi's long reign of forty-three years, it was the kingdom of Ešnunna,[6] situated at the confluence of the Tigris and Diyala and closely allied with powerful Elam in the east that benefited the most from the growing importance of the overland route. The kingdom of Babylon, on the other hand, was no more than the areas surrounding the city in a radius of about 60 kilometres, including several other cities: most importantly, ancient Kish, more than half a millennium earlier the principal city of Mesopotamia; Borsippa with the Ezida shrine of Nabû, divine patron of scribes; Sippar with the Ebabbar temple of the sun god Šamaš; and Kutha with the Emeslam sanctuary

of Nergal, lord of the netherworld. By supplanting Ešnunna and annexing its territory when the opportunity presented itself, Hammurabi managed to morph from the unremarkable ruler of one of the lesser kingdoms of Mesopotamia to the unrivalled master of the entire region, which he had managed to unite into one country under his rule.

As the creator of a large Mesopotamian state that swallowed up many of the previous smaller principalities, Hammurabi followed in the footsteps of his older contemporary Samsi-Addu,[7] a distant relative. When Hammurabi was fresh on the throne of Babylon, this man had been able to forge a mighty kingdom for himself, seemingly out of nothing. First based at the town of Ekallatum on the northern reaches of the Tigris (whose exact location is unknown)[8] and then at his newly founded capital Šubat-Enlil ('Abode of the god Enlil', the traditional head of the Mesopotamian pantheon; today Tell Leilan in northeastern Syria),[9] Samsi-Addu controlled the entire Jezirah, the 'island' (thus the meaning of this Arabic word) formed by the Euphrates and Tigris in the region north of the narrow strait at Baghdad. However, this new state collapsed shortly after Samsi-Addu's death. So fleeting was its existence that it could not even develop a proper name, and researchers today call it the 'Northern Mesopotamian Kingdom'. Samsi-Addu called himself 'Great King' in order to distinguish himself from all the other rulers with their much smaller holdings.

The last part of Samsi-Addu's meteoric career is well known from the clay tablets of the royal archives of the city of Mari on the Euphrates, today a desolate ruin not far from Syria's border with Iraq, but then a bustling city that held a key position in Mesopotamia's trade to the Mediterranean Sea and to Anatolia.[10] Mari was the capital of the kingdom of the same name that Samsi-Addu had conquered and he had made his younger son king there. The letters he exchanged with his overpowering father and his suave older brother, who had been left in charge of Samsi-Addu's original power base Ekallatum, shed vivid light on their complicated relationship, veering in tone between family spats and political intrigue.

Samsi-Addu considered his younger son Yasmah-Addu a crushing disappointment, while Išme-Dagan, his elder, was the golden boy who could do no wrong. 'Are you a child? Are you not

a man? Don't you have hair on your chin?'[11] he hectors Yasmah-Addu in one letter, and in another letter: 'While here your brother has achieved a great victory, there you lie among women.'[12] Ever the politician, he saw his sons as his pawns in the great game for power. He thought nothing of forcing Yasmah-Addu to replace his beloved wife with a politically more advantageous match: the princess Beltum was the daughter of the king of Qatna, an important city in western Syria (today Tell Mishrife), with whom Samsi-Addu was keen to enter into an alliance.[13] The letters paint a vivid picture of jealous and spoilt offspring jockeying for position with the domineering patriarch who could not distinguish between interests serving his newly forged state and his management of his dysfunctional family. To modern readers, Samsi-Addu emerges as part King Lear and part self-made media tycoon, as the type of world-spanning media empires created by the likes of Rupert Murdoch or Sumner Redstone provide good parallels for the Mesopotamian ruler's spectacular rise and growth in power.

In the end, neither son was able to hold on to the vast realm created by their larger-than-life father. The collapse of Samsi-Addu's state was an occasion for various disowned princes to reclaim the lands that their families had lost to the conqueror. One of them was Zimri-Lim,[14] who secured the throne of Mari after Samsi-Addu's death and Yasmah-Addu's ousting. He restored the royal palace as a lavishly decorated building with shady courtyards, impressive reception suites, cool fountains, tasteful statues and colourful wall paintings, naturally using lapis pigment for that touch of midnight blue that told visitors that truly no expense had been spared. The thirteen years of Zimri-Lim's reign are very well documented and the clay tablets of his correspondence and administration are a key source for the evaluation of the dynamic political processes of this period that eventually brought Hammurabi to the forefront.

While Samsi-Addu hopefully never served as a role model for his brutish parenting style, as a cunning politician and shrewd military commander who owed his good fortunes in equal measure to opportunism and ability, he certainly was an inspiration to his distant relative Hammurabi. Under Hammurabi's ancestors, the kingdom of Babylon was a relatively small state, sandwiched between the territories of the rivals Kazallu in the south and

Ešnunna in the north. When Hammurabi came to the throne of Babylon, Kazullu's former territory had been claimed after many years of conflict, but at the same time the kingdom of Ešnunna, ideally situated for controlling overland trade to the east at the confluence of the Tigris and Diyala, had become the region's leading power.

This changed when Elamite troops invaded the allied kingdom of Ešnunna (for reasons yet to be clarified), and Hammurabi was able to exploit the eastern neighbour's political upheaval for his own purposes. Hammurabi had participated in this campaign as a client ruler of Elam, to whom he owed his allegiance, as had Zimri-Lim, the king of Mari. When the new ruler of Ešnunna, hand-picked by the Elamite overlord, proved unable to consolidate his claim to the throne, Hammurabi took advantage of the situation and added some strategically important border towns of Ešnunna to his own kingdom of Babylon, thereby opening up use of the eastern route into the Zagros Mountains.

The ruler of Elam immediately sent an army to discipline his treacherous ally. But with the help of Zimri-Lim of Mari and especially the quickly dispatched auxiliary troops sent in support by the western superpower Yamhad, Hammurabi was able to resist the attack and hold on to his newly gained territories. Importantly, he had now decisively declared for Yamhad and broken the links with Elam for good. But this gamble paid off. At the same time, Elam's advance faltered at Šubat-Enlil, the old capital of Samsi-Addu in northeastern Syria, a move that had been designed to break Yamhad's growing influence over northern Mesopotamia. Defeated, Elam had to recall its troops from Mesopotamia and was forced to accept the new power constellation that saw Hammurabi greatly rewarded as Yamhad's loyal supporter in the strategically important three-river area where the Euphrates, Tigris and Diyala create a key junction point in the overland route network.

Hammurabi capitalized on the new situation and annexed the southern kingdom of Larsa, formerly the Mesopotamian key ally of now defanged Elam. For this period of his reign, the correspondence of his ally Zimri-Lim of Mari offers much insight into Hammurabi's style of government and diplomacy, as emissaries from Mari spent much time at his palace in Babylon.

This building had been constructed by Hammurabi's great-great-grandfather Sumu-la-El, but where in the city it was situated, we do not know.[15] It was certainly not underneath the much later palaces constructed around 600 BC by Nabopolassar and his successor Nebuchadnezzar II, as their locations were outside of the perimeter of the city of Hammurabi's age (compare Fig. 3.1 with Fig. 7.2). Zimri-Lim's emissaries routinely reported back to their master on their encounters with Hammurabi. A number of letters quote word for word what the king of Babylon had said.[16]

A key topic of contention between Zimri-Lim and Hammurabi was whether the border city of Hit on the Euphrates belonged to the kingdom of Mari or to Babylon. The region's most profitable source of bitumen and asphalt was located at Hit, and these materials were needed for a variety of purposes, but especially for

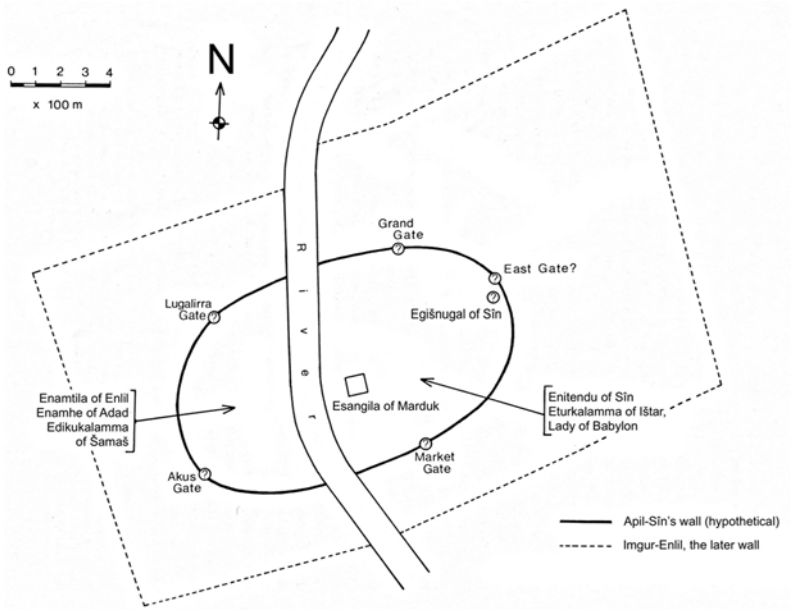


Fig. 3.1: Map of Babylon in the eighteenth century BC, with the most important landmarks and the names of the city quarters indicated. Adapted by the author from Andrew R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts* (Leiven: Peeters, 1992), p. 20 fig. 3.

waterproofing boats. One of the Mari delegates quotes Hammurabi as using this fact in his argument that Hit was to be Babylonian:

> I will share my fear: if this were a (simple) issue, why would I desire Hit? The strength of your land is in donkeys and wagons, but the strength of this land is in boats. I desire the city especially for its bitumen and asphalt. Were it not so, why would I desire this town?[17]

From quotes like this, Hammurabi emerges as a gifted and astute negotiator. Other reports convey a volatile and at times rather threatening personality, such as a letter detailing the very public events during the audience of the messengers of Išme-Dagan of Ekallatum (Samsi-Addu's son) which seems to have left all attending shaken:

> This is what Hammurabi replied to them (i.e., the messengers): 'To whom have I given troops? Tell me! Tell me!' He came closer and repeated himself five or six times obliging them to answer.

And later in the same letter, we read of another flare of temper:

> When he heard this Hammurabi cried out, 'What a scandal!'[18]

Only a few years later, Hammurabi turned against Mari. He conquered the city and even destroyed Zimri-Lim's famous palace: sad for contemporary would-be visitors of the landmark building but good for modern researchers. From 1933 onwards, the ruins of the building, which was never again used, were excavated in many decades of work by French archaeologists, bringing to light its architectural riches and also the voluminous cuneiform archives stored there. When looting Zimri-Lim's palace, Hammurabi's troops neatly packed the archive consisting of more than 25,000 clay tablets into seven large boxes, as the label affixed to those now lost packing crates inform us. But for reasons unknown to us, they were never transported to Babylon.[19] The majority of these texts have now been published in the many volumes of the series *Archive Royal de Mari*[20] and they form, as we have already emphasized, a crucial body of sources for the reconstruction of the events detailed here.[21]

Through Hammurabi's actions, the political geography of the Middle East had changed fundamentally. Instead of a group of small states manoeuvring between the great powers Elam and Yamhad, there was now only one realm: the upstart kingdom of Babylon that had managed to wriggle out of the control of both Susa and Aleppo and whose territory now reached from the Persian Gulf to northern Iraq.

When Hammurabi grew up at his father's court, Babylon was not the centre of scholarship, poetry and the arts that the city came to be remembered as until the end of the cuneiform tradition and beyond (Chapter 9). His military success jump-started the processes that turned Babylon from one of Mesopotamia's more minor cities not only into its political centre but also into a sophisticated metropolis. Hammurabi's Babylon owed its lasting cultural success to its ruler's willingness to reshape his city's identity at a time when his kingdom rose from a second- or even third-tier realm to Mesopotamia's leading power. After the kingdom of Ešnunna had fallen victim to the wider conflicts between the Iranian power Elam and the kingdom of Yamhad in central Syria, the opportunist ruler was able to steer his city into the dominant position in the strategically and commercially important three-river area. When Hammurabi went on to defeat and annex the southern kingdom of Larsa, he allowed Babylon to be exposed and transformed by its ancient Sumerian legacy. Dominique Charpin[22] has recently emphasized just how important annexing Larsa was for the formation of influential cultural traditions that would shape the Middle East for the next two millennia. In particular, the integration of the highly cultured members of Larsa's ancient and refined royal court into Hammurabi's far more rustic palace household so profoundly influenced statecraft, religious ideology and cultic practice, literature and the arts that we see something new emerging: the 'Babylonian' culture.

Somewhat frustratingly, we are not able to trace these changes in the material fabric of the city, as the excavations of Babylon could expose very little of the early levels of occupation[23] because of the high groundwater level. In the past decades, much water of the Euphrates has been diverted due to the creation of dams upstream in Syria and Turkey. The resultant lowering of the river's water levels may perhaps make it possible to access the early settlement

layers of Babylon at some point in the future. But in addition, the programme of massive architectural development undertaken by Nabopolassar and then Nebuchadnezzar II from the late seventh century BC onwards drastically reconfigured the city (Chapter 7). It is therefore impossible to say much about the layout of the city in the time of Hammurabi.

What we do know is that Babylon already covered both sides of the Euphrates and was surrounded by walls (Fig. 3.1). But these were not yet the rectangular fortifications that later lent the city its very distinctive shape; these walls were either a creation of the Kassite period or perhaps of an even younger date. It is most likely that the city of the time of Hammurabi was of roughly circular shape, like most Mesopotamian settlements. His grandfather and royal predecessor Apil-Sîn had built new walls according to the name given to his second regnal year,[24] so the fortifications should still have been in a reasonably good state during the reign of Hammurabi.

Although we have no idea where the royal palace was situated, we can be certain that Esangila ('House that Raises the Head', meaning 'Proud House'), the temple of the city god Marduk, occupied the same spot on the eastern bank of the Euphrates that it still held many centuries later. According to the Mesopotamian tradition, temples were intimately connected to their sites and never moved. Also, several other major temples, dedicated to some of the most important Mesopotamian deities, were already in existence. In the eastern part of the city, the Eturkalamma ('Cattle-pen of the Land') of Ištar, Lady of Babylon, and the Enitendu ('House of Pleasant Rest') of the moon god Sîn were situated in the relative vicinity of the Esangila, while a second shrine for the moon good, the Egišnugal (a name of unclear meaning), lies much further to the east, probably quite close to the original city wall. Across the Euphrates in the western part of the city there was the Enamtila ('House of Life') of Enlil, Lord of the Lands; the Enamhe ('House of Plenty') of the storm god Adad; and the Edikukalamma ('House of the Judge of the Land') of the sun god Šamaš.[25] Many of these shrines still flourished in the Hellenistic period, almost two millennia later (Chapter 9).

While there is today no architecture to admire from the age of Hammurabi, cuneiform texts allow us to develop a detailed picture of life in Babylon. Our most important source is certainly

the famous Code of Hammurabi. It had an important role to play in the consolidation of Hammurabi's newly forged state. The introduction of legal norms that were to be valid in all parts of the realm represented a significant tool in his strategy to unify cities and regions that had not been part of the same country since the collapse of the kingdom of Ur some two hundred years earlier. The Code of Hammurabi played a key role in ensuring the state's acceptance and stability. Unlike his role model Samsi-Addu, Hammurabi was able, after forty-three years on the throne, to pass on the crown to his son Samsu-iluna, who in turn ruled for thirty-eight years.

The Code of Hammurabi (Fig. 3.2), as it is called today, is a long cuneiform inscription in the Akkadian language. It is engraved on a tall stone monument that bore the image of Hammurabi receiving the insignia of kingship from the sun god Šamaš, the all-seeing guardian of justice. Originally, there was a series of such monuments

Fig. 3.2: The stele of Hammurabi (Louvre, Sb 8). Photograph by Mbzt (CC BY 3.0), from Wikimedia Commons.

erected in the most important sanctuaries of the country. But only one of them has survived, and not in the place where it had been originally set up, but in far-away Susa. It was taken there in the twelfth century BC by the Elamite king Šutruk-Nahhunte, who had managed to raid the most important temples of Babylonia in a period of instability and lawlessness when the rule of the Kassite dynasty came to an end (Chapter 4).

The 2.35-meter-high stele was made from shiny black diorite, a highly valued material that was quarried in Oman. It was an impressive spoil of war that the Elamite ruler proudly deposited in the temple of his god Inšušinak ('Lord of Susa'). It was there that archaeologists of the French expedition headed by Jacques de Morgan discovered it in 1901, together with a formidable collection of even older monuments that too had caught the eye of Šutruk-Nahhunte when plundering the Mesopotamian shrines. These objects are now on display in the Louvre in Paris.

Hammurabi's long inscription celebrated the king's deeds, made possible by the patronage of the gods and in particular of Marduk, city god of Babylon. According to the first lines of the text, it was the two highest ranking deities, Anu, the master of all gods, and Enlil, lord of lands, who had decreed his leadership in conjunction with their elevation of both the god Marduk and his city Babylon. Hammurabi's military success had given his capital city of Babylon great prominence in the newly forged realm, and this meant that the city god, too, was thought to have been awarded pre-eminence among the gods. Thus began the slow transformation of Marduk from regional deity to unrivalled ruler of the universe[26] (Chapter 5).

> When the august god Anu, king of the Anunnaku deities, and the god Enlil, lord of heaven and earth, who determines the destinies of the land, allotted supreme power over all peoples to the god Marduk, the firstborn son of the god Ea, exalted him among the Igigu deities, named the city of Babylon with its august name and made it supreme within the regions of the world, and established for him within it eternal kingship whose foundations are fixed as heaven and earth, at that time, the gods Anu and Enlil, for the enhancement of the well-being of the people, named me by my name: Hammurabi, the pious prince, who venerates the gods, to

> make justice prevail in the land, to abolish the wicked and the evil, to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak, to rise like the sun god Šamaš over all humankind to illuminate the land.[27]

After the first lines of the text introduced Hammurabi as a just ruler who cared equally for all his subjects, a 'King of Justice', the centrepiece of the inscription offered detailed support for this in the form of 275 judgments, some of which were based on decisions made by the king personally. These judgments were to provide guidance for the judges that Hammurabi appointed across his realm. All subjects could invoke them.

Hammurabi was not the first ruler to use a common law as the basis of integration and consolidation. Three centuries earlier, Ur-Namma, the founder of the kingdom of Ur, had a set of laws created for the very same reason, and various Mesopotamian rulers had adopted this strategy since. A similar collection of laws, about half a century older than Hammurabi's, is known from the kingdom of Ešnunna.[28] No original monument has survived but the section of the inscription with the rulings was copied on clay tablets, some of which have been excavated in Šaduppum (Tell Harmal in Baghdad) and Meturan (Tell Haddad on the Diyala), cities that once belonged to the kingdom of Ešnunna.[29] So although it is very often described as that, the Code of Hammurabi is certainly not history's first law code.

In his collection of judgments, Hammurabi was concerned in particular with safeguarding the rights of all those who supported the state by paying taxes and contributing labour to public projects. For example, anyone who had been lost abroad in the official service of Babylon, be it as a soldier or as a merchant, could rest assured that he would be able to claim back his property upon his return, including his wife and children. Whether these might have preferred other arrangements was immaterial to the considerations of the state, whose only allegiance was to the men who constituted the body of taxpayers that enabled the functioning of government. Debt slavery was widespread at the time, as creditors were able to claw back forfeited debts by taking possession of the debtor and/or his family. Hammurabi limited debt slavery to a maximum of three years, which shows the desire to build and protect a balanced society that avoided massive wealth gaps. Related to the restriction

of debt slavery was a later imposed ban that, within the kingdom, only Babylonian men and women that had been born in slavery could be sold as slaves – and only if the seller could provide proof for their origins. Naturally, this did not protect foreigners. While this restriction succeeded in safeguarding the interests of any Babylonian subject who had fallen on hard times, it also created a booming market for trafficking people from outside the borders of the realm.[30] In this way, men and women from Syria, Anatolia and Iran found their way to Babylon and contributed to its development into a bustling metropolis in whose streets a dozen different languages could be heard.

Another obvious objective for Hammurabi was the shaping and protecting of the values of a united Babylonian society, as emerges especially clearly from the many judgments that provide guidance in complex marriage and inheritance scenarios. A number of these concern 'nuns' (*naditum*), women who entered a convent attached to a temple in order to devote their lives to praying for their families, the living and especially the dead. Keeping the memory of a family's dead was considered extremely important, because the deceased family members' survival in the world of the dead required that they received regular food and drink offerings and that their names were commemorated in prayer or song. The idea that virtuous behaviour in life would bear its fruits in the hereafter, and thus a concept of 'Heaven and Hell', did not exist at all. Neither did the concept of reincarnation. So when a family consecrated a daughter as a nun, the clan not only publicly demonstrated loyalty and piety to a deity (traditionally the city god), but also ensured the care of the dead ancestors.

A nun did not have to rely on the mercy of the temple, as she usually came from a well-to-do family. When she entered the convent, and thus celibate life, her father gave her a sum of money that corresponded to the amount that would have been paid as her dowry, had she married. This fortune was not handed over to the temple but was personally available to the brand new nun. As shown by the voluminous private business records of families from Babylon and other cities in the realm, such as Sippar, Kish and Nippur, many nuns turned out to be busy and successful businesswomen, some operating alone, others investing in the dealings of their male relatives. Although many were in business with their families, they

had the right to conduct business in their own name, unlike other Babylonian women, who did not have that opportunity as they were under the authority of their fathers, husbands, brothers or adult sons. Even widows had to rely on a male relative to represent them in legal matters. Somewhat depressingly for modern audiences looking for alternative societal models, patriarchy ruled uncontested in ancient Babylon. Managing one's own wealth was the preserve of the nuns who were excluded from conventional family life. But it would be naive to assume that it was the woman in question who had decided on that life. Giving her up to the temple was meant to be her family's sacrifice, a gift in honour of the god, and the woman herself had little agency in the course of events.

It was customary for the nuns, who had to remain childless, to pass on their wealth within the family by adopting another nun as their heir. Usually, this nun was a woman from her own family's next generation, often the daughter of a brother. The pious tradition of dedicating a nun to a convent had the pleasant side effect that the payment that accompanied the daughter when leaving her father's household was not lost for good, unlike when a girl married, which required handing over the dowry to the groom's family. For well-to-do families, this was as good as a tax loophole. So popular was the institution that some families dedicated up to three daughters to the city god in one generation.

An ingenious spin on this ancient tradition succeeded in reinforcing throughout the realm loyalty to the capital Babylon and its god Marduk, who resided there in his temple Esangila. In the aftermath of Babylon's rise, it became fashionable among elite families all over the kingdom to consecrate a daughter as a nun to Marduk of Babylon.[31] Now, whereas the nuns of the sun god of Sippar and their colleagues at other local sanctuaries lived in the convents attached to these temples, the nuns of Marduk could be found throughout the kingdom of Babylon. With the consecration of a daughter to Marduk, the families in cities that had only recently been added to Hammurabi's realm not only expressed their piety to the god Marduk, but also publicly demonstrated their loyalty to the new political order, to the capital Babylon and to the royal house of Hammurabi, agent of Marduk. The family thus expressed their willingness to cooperate with the new regime and prominently signalled that they understood themselves as part

of the social circles that supported the Babylonian state. The fact that the nuns of Marduk lived in all parts of the realm made them emissaries of the national god and of course also of the kingdom of Babylon.

The law aimed to make sure that dedicating a woman as a nun of Marduk was attractive for prosperous urban families throughout the realm. In striking contrast to all other nuns, the nuns of Marduk were able to marry and live with her husband's family. The Hammurabi Code deals with the complex marriage and inheritance issues resulting from this. For although a nun of Marduk was allowed to marry, she was still obliged to keep celibate as the companion of the god and therefore could not bear her husband children. The resultant regulations mirror the rules applied to ensure offspring for ordinary marriages that had remained childless, but gave the nun a much stronger position in relation to her husband than any other childless wife. The law decreed that the husband was allowed to have children with a woman selected by his wife, the Marduk nun, and that these children would be regarded as the nun's legitimate descendants. Crucially, whether or not their birth mother was to remain in the family was the Marduk nun's decision only.

The laws of the Hammurabi Code were intended to ensure that the social position of the nuns of Marduk of Babylon was suitably elevated, as merited by their sacred status, and yet well protected and integrated into her husband's family. In making it her decision alone who was to bear her husband's children and whether that birth mother would become a second wife or not, the law gave her agency and power that a barren wife normally lacked. The law recommended as the preferred solution that the husband should father children with a slave woman, who should leave the household after birth and would not threaten the social position of the nun. But the other option of installing the birth mother permanently in the family was open to the nun of Marduk, too. Private legal documents show that when this option was chosen, the birth mother was usually the biological sister of the nun.

The institution of the nuns of Marduk is a shrewd concept to promote Babylonian unity. By allowing the Marduk nuns to marry, Hammurabi doubled the reach of the institution. At first, there was the public declaration of piety of the woman's birth family towards

the god Marduk, patron of Babylon, which served at the same time as a proud proclamation of loyalty to the newly forged Babylonian state and its king. Then, when the nun married, also her husband and his family very publicly embraced these same sentiments and again proclaimed their respect for the god, king and state of Babylon to the world. The woman's celibacy was the sacrifice that her families, the paternal household and that of her husband, willingly accepted for the greater glory of Marduk. Throughout her life, her distinct lifestyle demonstrated this piety and loyalty and at the same time powerfully signalled her entire family's acceptance and support of the kingdom of Babylon.

The long reigns of Hammurabi's son and successor Samsu-iluna (37 years), his son Abi-ešuh (28 years), his grandson Ammi-ditana (37 years), his great-grandson Ammi-ṣaduqa (probably 19 years) and his great-great-grandson Samsu-ditana (probably 26 years), and the apparently untroubled way in which the crown of Babylon was passed on in this family, suggest that Hammurabi's dynasty was well accepted, certainly in the centre of the realm. At least one of these kings was in diplomatic exchange with Egypt, as the discovery of a letter fragment in the palace of the Hyksos pharaoh Khayan in the city of Avaris (Tell el-Dab'a) in the eastern Nile delta in 2009 demonstrates.[32]

But after Hammurabi's death, the territories controlled by Babylon shrank quickly. A few years into the reign of his son and successor Samsu-iluna, rebellions rose in the southern lands, with the cities of Larsa and Uruk declaring their independence. These could be quelled, but soon after, Samsu-iluna lost control of the south to a new player: the Sealand under its king Ilumma-ilum with its power base in the marshes along the Persian Gulf. Inhabitants of cities including Uruk, Ur and Nippur abandoned their homes for the capital Babylon, where they were resettled. But these population movements were not only triggered by war. Another cause, and perhaps even the root of these conflicts, was a major hydraulic disaster, as the branch of the Euphrates near the northern Babylonian city of Kish had shifted,[33] cutting off from water many downstream settlements: all southern cities were abandoned and many cities in central Babylonia, like Nippur, suffered considerably.[34] There is ample evidence for large-scale famines in the entire region under Samsi-iluna.[35]

Abandoning the ancient temples and cults was considered highly problematic. For a time, therefore, worship was conducted long-distance and part-time: the best evidence concerns Nippur, whose cult at the god Enlil's Ekur temple were maintained by people from the nearby fortress of Dur-Abi-ešuh, a new foundation; but this was dangerous work as raiders, swift and deadly on horseback, were active in the region and targeted the sanctuary.[36] In the end, the refugees from the south took their gods and cults with them. With royal permission, these then found a new home in Babylon, where new sanctuaries were built for the fugitive deities and the communities that worshipped them.[37] The influx of these people and their gods continued and concentrated the reshaping of Babylon's cultural identity that had begun a generation earlier with Hammurabi's integration of the court of Larsa into his royal household.

Babylon's well-to-do families fully subscribed to the idea that literacy was an important quality, the hallmark of an educated person. Writing and reading were not limited to the palace and temples, and the experts in bookkeeping, ritual and royal image control that operated there. Writing and reading were practiced daily in the townhouses of the urban elites who had their sons and, during that age, also some of their daughters trained in the cuneiform script from a young age. Those educated in this way shared knowledge of a common body of literature that was used to train them, were able to read most documents that they would have encountered in their lives, including texts and passages in the ancient Sumerian language, and routinely wrote letters and lists and whatever else needed recording.[38]

Evidence for scribal education in Babylon itself is relatively limited due to the restricted extent of the excavations and the difficulties in attributing unprovenanced school exercise tablets (as they do not mention their creator's name or other identifying features). But what there is allows us to say with confidence that the education of fledgling scribes happened at home and followed the same curriculum as elsewhere in the realm. For the first time, bilingual texts make an appearance in teaching and learning cuneiform. That exercises include writing the same compositions in both the Babylonian and the Sumerian languages suggests that teaching at that time embraced new ways of thinking about the connection between texts, languages (living and dead) and writing.

In recent decades, modern cuneiform scholars have paid much attention to the ways in which the ancient script was taught, and much work has gone into reconstructing the stages of Babylonian scribal training.[39] As a result of this research, we have today a clear understanding of the way in which trainee scribes were introduced step by step to the complexities of cuneiform, their exercise tablets demonstrating the increasing dexterity with which they shaped the clay into tablets and with which they used the tip of their reed stylus to create the cuneiform characters. It was a gradual process that took several years and accompanied the trainee scribe from childhood to early adulthood. With each stage of the curriculum, the repertoire of cuneiform characters increased and the material also gained in intellectual complexity, graduating from simple word lists to philosophical dialogues, poetry and history (taught in the form of real and fictive letters by famous individuals, preferably kings and heroes). Acquiring a sound knowledge of numeracy and mathematical skills was considered just as important as literacy.[40] Usually, it was the father who taught the son, although there were also professional teachers. But the place of teaching was at home, and not in state or temple schools.

By the end of the reign of Samsu-iluna, the kingdom of Babylon included little more than the lands that had belonged to Babylon and Mari at the beginning of his father Hammurabi's reign. For the last century of the history of the kingdom of Babylon, there are hardly any written sources from regions outside the Babylonian heartland, and this makes historical reconstruction difficult. During that time, southern Iraq underwent dramatic changes. Numerous towns were not only abandoned in the extreme south of the region but also east of the Tigris. In the area formerly controlled by Ešnunna, which through its link with Iran continued to play an important strategic role for Mesopotamia, new groups now shaped the social order.

Foremost among them were the Kassites, who eventually managed to seize power over Babylon.[41] However, they only did so after an army from far-away Anatolia had sacked the city, carrying away the statues of the deities of Babylon and ending the rule of Hammurabi's dynasty for good. This army were the Hittite forces under the command of King Muršili I who a few years earlier had crossed the Taurus Mountains to attack the kingdom

of Yamhad, Babylon's ally in central Syria, plundering the city of Halab (Aleppo). In the aftermath of these events, Hittite emissaries visited Babylon, and Babylonian merchants did good business up the Euphrates, as evidence from an archive from Babylon shows[42] – but these contacts may well have been what prompted the eventual Hittite attack on wealthy Babylon.

When the Anatolian army marched down the Euphrates, Babylon was under the rule of Hammurabi's great-great-great-grandson Samsu-ditana. The Hittite objective was loot, not territorial gain, and the Anatolian troops left heavily laden with the spoils from palaces, private houses and especially temples, with thousands of Babylon's inhabitants in tow as prisoners-of-war. Just as Babylon under Hammurabi had benefited and also changed from the influx of people taken captive from the kingdom of Larsa and elsewhere, this was to be a turning point in the cultural history of Anatolia. That region now decisively opened itself up to Mesopotamian traditions, eventually even adopting the cuneiform script in all its complexities. A great appreciation for all things Babylonian is subsequently attested at the Hittite royal court of Hattuša (modern Bogazköy), making its archives a goldmine for researchers interested in Mesopotamian literature, ritual and medicine (Chapter 4).

How heavily the city of Babylon's architectural fabric suffered from the Hittite attack is impossible to say, given the very limited archaeological exploration of the relevant settlement layers. Later memories[43] focus on the fact that the raid was hugely disruptive for the cults of Babylon and lament the abduction of the divine statues. In contemporary thought, the gods would only relinquish their city if they were displeased with its ruler, their agent (cf. Chapter 5). With Babylon's very public abandonment by its gods, Hammurabi's dynasty was finished. But despite the loss of many of its inhabitants, the city survived, and a new lease of life started, now under Kassite rule.

4

FONT OF KNOWLEDGE: BURNABURIAŠ'S BABYLON

In this chapter, we will visit Babylon in the fourteenth century BC, when it was part of the kingdom of Karduniaš (also Karaduniaš or Karanduniaš) and when its king Burnaburiaš II used his daughters to secure alliances with the powerful states of the time: Elam in southwestern Iran, Egypt, Hatti in central Anatolia, as well as the rising power of Assyria with its capital Assur in northern Iraq (Map 2). We will find that Babylonian scholars played an important role in cementing good international relations. But first we need to trace the fate of Babylon after the end of the Hammurabi dynasty and establish how it came to be in the hands of a royal house that was called Kassite.

Contrary to earlier opinion, scholars today no longer assume that Kassite rule over Babylonia came about as the result of conquest. Instead, they emphasize that already long before the collapse of the rule of Hammurabi's dynasty over Babylon, Kassite men are attested in the service of various states of the Near East. But with the sole exception of a group of Kassite women living at the royal court of Alalakh in the Orontes valley (very close to the modern city of Antakya in south eastern Turkey), we never encounter female Kassites. The men invariably served as soldiers, either in the infantry or more often as members of specialized chariot units. These troops are organized as separate regiments

with their own hierarchy and headed by Kassite officers, with high state officials holding the nominal high command.

In time, as the Kassite soldiers were given land grants, they settled in different parts of the Middle East. The Babylonian state placed many of them in the north-eastern parts of the realm, now the border region between Syria and Iraq, motivated in equal parts by their usefulness as guardians of the important Euphrates passage and by the desire to keep the sometimes unruly troops away from the central regions. But already during the time of Hammurabi's grandson Abi-ešuh there was a Kassite garrison stationed at the capital, Babylon, in charge of protecting the city.[1]

The first Kassite ruler of Babylon was Agum,[2] but he made his earliest appearance as a general of Samsu-ditana, the last king of the Hammurabi dynasty. A likely scenario is that Agum, with the support of his Kassite troops, took the throne of Babylon in the chaos that followed the Hittite raid of the city. His high military command will have been equally useful in cementing his power and in restoring public order. An inscription known only from two much later copies celebrates how Agum restored the cult of Babylon's divine master Marduk and his consort Zarpanitum after their return from exile, and the resuming of regular temple activity must have greatly strengthened Agum's claim to power by publicly demonstrating that the god favoured his rule. In the inscription, Agum portrays himself as the 'shepherd' of both the Kassites and the Akkadians (the contemporary designation for the inhabitants of Babylonia), a statement designed to dispel any fears that he might privilege his own people over the general population.[3]

The name of his kingdom, Karduniaš (also Karaduniaš or Karanduniaš), is Kassite and of unknown meaning. As far as we know, the Kassite language was at no point in time routinely committed to writing. It is therefore quite poorly attested. Because of the severely limited source material, we cannot assign it to any language group with certainty, although it is definitely not a Semitic language (unlike Babylonian) or related to Sumerian. Kassite is mainly known from names, including those of the kings who held the crown of Babylon for more than five centuries.

The royal house that Agum founded is by far the longest serving dynasty of Babylonian history. The local historical tradition, as it is attested for example in the form of the Babylonian King List,[4]

calls it the Kassite dynasty. The King List names thirty-six rulers and lets the dynasty begin with Agum's father, Gandaš. However, there is no other indication that he ever ruled Babylon (or that he existed, for that matter). The unknown compilers of the Babylonian King List, most likely members of the priesthood of Marduk (cf. Chapter 5), clearly did not want to present Agum as the first ruler of a new royal line, which could suggest the possibility that he might have usurped the throne. Instead they preferred to present him as the son of a previous king who legitimately inherited his claim to the throne from his father.

Our knowledge of most Kassite rulers and their times is often limited and superficial. A key reason for this is that their inscriptions are generally very short. As in preceding centuries, whenever a ruler built or renovated a temple or palace a text was composed to commemorate this and inscribed on selected bricks and the building's stone elements (such as thresholds). But in contrast to the kings of the Hammurabi dynasty and many other Middle Eastern rulers, the Kassite inscriptions do not present the rulers' genealogy or list their achievements. The sole focus of these texts was to permanently inscribe the name of the builder inextricably into the fabric of the building.[5]

Before the fifteenth century BC, the extreme south of modern Iraq was not in the hands of the kingdom of Karduniaš, which therefore had no direct access to the Persian Gulf. Already, the Hammurabi dynasty had lost control of the south to a political entity known as the 'Sealand', a very appropriate designation given that it was predominantly situated in the marshes on the Persian Gulf and active in maritime trade, especially along the important route to the island of Bahrain (ancient Dilmun), the gateway to the Indian Ocean. But there can be no doubt that the cultural connection with the ancient traditions of Mesopotamia was deemed very important in the Sealand. Most of its rulers favoured highly learned Sumerian names: Gulkišar 'Raider of the Earth', Melamkurkurra 'Splendour of the Lands', Pešgaldarameš 'Son of the Ibex' and Ayadaragalama 'Heir of the Clever Stag'. Only a few shared the more mundane Akkadian names used by most other Sealanders, such as Damqi-ilišu 'Favourite of his God' and Ea-gamil 'Ea is Merciful'.[6]

So far, only one Sealand site has been unearthed in regular excavations. This is Tell Khaiber, situated close to the modern

city of Nasiriyah in the Thi Qar province of Iraq. The excavations undertaken since 2013 have started to uncover an immense fortified building with a rectangular ground plan that covers about 4,400 square metres. This fortress housed an archive of cuneiform tablets in Akkadian language consisting on the one hand of writing exercises that attest to the local training of scribes and on the other hand of administrative records dealing with grain and agricultural workers.[7] Looters dug up similar texts at (at least) one other Sealand site but neither its location nor the original context of the archive is known.[8]

At some point in the fifteenth century BC, the kingdom of Karduniaš managed to conquer the Sealand, integrating its holdings into its territory.[9] This heralded a period of stability, economic growth and increase in population for all of Babylonia. After the incorporation of the Sealand, the state massively invested in the digging of new canals in order to bring new stretches of land under the plough.[10] Also, the island of Dilmun came under Kassite authority, as the results of the excavations in Qal'at al-Bahrain demonstrate, in particular the cuneiform texts found there.[11] This gave Babylon again access to the Gulf region and its resources: as in the days of Hammurabi, whoever could afford it had again monuments made out of diorite, a hard stone sourced from Oman whose shiny black surface made it a much-coveted material.

A typical artefact type of the Kassite period are the so-called Kudurru stones (after an Akkadian term that is one of several associated with these objects), for which diorite was considered the most appropriate material, given that they were to publicly document property rights and tax privileges for all eternity. They typically concern very extended land holdings that had been awarded to its holder by the crown, often in combination with an exemption from tax. Such a transaction was originally recorded on a sealed clay tablet, as was the normal procedure whenever land changed hands in Mesopotamia since the mid-third millennium BC. The individual who benefited from this transaction could then choose to have that text inscribed on a Kudurru.[12]

A typical Kudurru is a large diorite bolder of relatively natural shape whose surface was smoothed in order to accommodate the inscription as well as figural decorations representing divine symbols. These symbols, such as the moon crescent of Sîn, the sun

Fig. 4.1: Kudurru documenting property handed over to Iqiša-Ninurta, son of Urkat-burea by King Marduk-nadin-ahhe (1099–1082 BC). The inscription states that it is a 'copy of the sealed document of the king of Babylon', which was witnessed, among others, by Ea-kudurri-ibni of the Arad-Ea family (Iraq Museum, IM 90585). Author's photograph.

disc of Šamaš, the star (which is actually the planet Venus) of Ištar (Fig. 4.1; top row), the dog of the healing goddess Gula or the scorpion of the love goddess Išhara (bottom row), put the Kudurru under the protection of the gods. In addition, the final part of the text consisted of curses that further involved the deities as guardians and guarantors of the transaction. Finally, the Kudurru was set up in a temple, whose sacred ground safeguarded the object from any violation.

We assume that these expensive and elaborate monuments were created in order to ensure that the crown, now and under future rulers, would honour the privileges as they had been awarded. By inscribing the grant onto a large and almost indestructible monument and putting it on permanent public display in a temple, the holder of the privileges sought to mitigate the asymmetrical power relationship between himself and his royal benefactor. By attaining maximum exposure for his affairs, he meant to use the glare of the public eye to bind the crown to its promises.

The Sealand had been closely allied with its eastern neighbour Elam, a kingdom whose twin centres were the ancient city of Susa

(today the modern city of Shush) in the lowlands of Khuzestan in southwestern Iran and Anšan (Tell-i Malyan) in the highlands of Fars around the modern city of Shiraz. Around 1400 BC, the Kassite king Kurigalzu I invaded Elam and succeeded in conquering Susa. A new royal line came to power, quite possibly with Kurigalzu's support. This Elamite dynasty is today called the Igihalkids, after the first ruler, Igi-halki. The two royal houses came to be closely linked through regular intermarriage. Igi-halki's son Pahir-iššan wed a daughter (or sister) of Kurigalzu and, in every generation, this link between the two kingdoms was affirmed anew by the marriage of a Kassite princess to the heir of the Elamite throne.[13]

Back at home, Kurigalzu's military success and especially the spoils of war from Susa allowed him to realise extensive and expensive building projects throughout his realm. The most ambitious of these was the construction of a new royal residence with richly furnished palaces and temples (modern Aqar Quf), situated 30 kilometres west of Babylon near the confluence of the Tigris and Diyala; today its ruins lie in the outskirts of Baghdad. Kurigalzu named the city after himself: Dur-Kurigalzu means 'Kurigalzu's Fortress'. The stepped tower of Dur-Kurigalzu's main temple complex, dedicated to the god Enlil, has a ground plan of 69×68 metres. It is today the best preserved ziggurat in Iraq, although the ruins of this gigantic artificial mountain, created from baked and unbaked bricks, bitumen (asphalt) and reed mats, are better suited to serve as a reminder of the transience of human creations than as an awe-inspiring monument of Mesopotamian architecture. Nevertheless, as it was partially reconstructed during the time of Saddam Hussein, the rebuilt first terrace of the stepped tower is a favourite spot for local newlyweds to have their photograph taken.

The relationship between Babylon and Dur-Kurigalzu is not clear but it is most likely that their roles are comparable to Paris and Versailles, with Babylon the capital city and centre of administration and Dur-Kurigalzu the home of the royal court.[14] As it is not certain for how long Dur-Kurigalzu was in use, its tenure may have been quite short-lived, perhaps only a pet project that pleased its creator Kurigalzu while the royal court later returned to Babylon. Whatever the precise role of Dur-Kurigalzu, Babylon certainly retained its prominence in the realm. Even if it had to

share the limelight with Dur-Kurigalzu, whether temporarily or for the long term, it certainly eclipsed all other cities in Karduniaš in importance.

Whereas the excavations of the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage brought to light significant parts of Dur-Kurigalzu's palace and its temple precinct in the 1940s,[15] the high groundwater levels at Babylon make it impossible to expose much of the earlier occupation periods, a problem that we have already encountered when visiting Hammurabi's Babylon (Chapter 3). Only a very limited section of Kassite Babylon could be excavated. Robert Koldewey had to pick areas that were easily accessible from the later occupation levels, as the great time and effort required to remove the younger ruins made it virtually impossible to do so. In effect, this meant digging down in the courtyards of the younger building structures. In this way, parts of some residential buildings from the Kassite period were exposed in the area called Merkes (Arabic 'centre').[16]

The Merkes area is situated on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, at some distance from the river and directly to the east of the Holy City with the Marduk sanctuary and other shrines (cf. Chapter 7). Well-to-do families occupied this centrally located neighbourhood. Although not a single complete house could be uncovered, the materials retrieved from the rooms that Koldewey was able to reach are very important, as they give us a tangible sense of life in Babylon during the Kassite period.

Most striking is perhaps the collection of hundreds of cuneiform writing exercises on clay tablets found in one of these private houses,[17] which seems to have served as a school. The contents range from poorly formed tablets with single wedges created by absolute beginners to excerpts of a huge range of different compositions such as lexical lists, omina compilations, hymns, poetry (including the Epic of Atrahasis, a version of the Flood Story[18]) and inscriptions (including the Code of Hammurabi, see Chapter 3), demonstrating the continuing high levels of literacy among the urban elites as well as a keen interest in the 'classics'. The ancient Sumerian language had ceased to be used as a spoken language many centuries earlier, but well-to-do Babylonians were still expected to study it and know its poetry and learned works. Also, certain prayers and hymns required for the temple liturgy continued to be performed in

Sumerian. In contrast to the time of the Hammurabi dynasty, when Sumerian phrases were still widely used, e.g. in legal contexts, there was little practical use for mastering Sumerian in everyday life. But learning Sumerian served as a powerful mark of social distinction that set apart from the rest of the community those who could afford to make time for such a pursuit.

The Kassite period was a time when noted scholars greatly advanced their disciplines. For example, an almanac collecting days favourable and unfavourable for the king's duties was compiled during the reign of Nazi-Maruttaš (1307–1282 BC), taking into account earlier material from seven Babylonian cities (Babylon and Sippar in the north, and Nippur, Larsa, Ur, Uruk and Eridu in the south); the text was very popular in the first millennium BC, with copies having been found in two private libraries in the city of Assur.[19] In the so-called Catalogue of Texts and Authors, known from the royal Assyrian library of Nineveh in the seventh century BC, important works of cuneiform literature are matched with their author, mentioning his profession and his place of origin and sometimes also the king who was his patron.[20] Most of the authors named in this text came from Babylon, and this reflects the importance of the city as a centre of scholarship. Some of the most prominent Babylonian families of the first millennium BC proudly traced back their origins to scholars of the Kassite age,[21] including the clan of Sin-leqe-unninni, an exorcist who was considered the creator of the canonical twelve-tablet version of the Epic of Gilgameš, and of Arad-Ea, a celebrated mathematician from Babylon.

In contrast to the fairly elusive Sin-leqe-unninni, a native of the city of Uruk, the actual Arad-Ea and his family are very well known.[22] Arad-Ea was 'expert accountant' (Sumerian um-mi-a nig_2-$kaš_7$) to King Kurigalzu, either the conqueror of Susa or less likely the second ruler of this name, but in any case a Kassite ruler of the fourteenth century BC. Arad-Ea's father, Uššur-ana-Marduk, had been in charge of the Ekur temple in Nippur and his grandfather Uṣi-ana-nurišu viceroy of the island of Dilmun (modern Bahrain). The family clearly had cultivated close links to the crown over generations and was politically influential. Nevertheless, it was the mathematician Arad-Ea who became the focal point of the family tradition and whose name came to serve as the clan's name.[23]

None of Arad-Ea's mathematical works survive. But the British Museum houses two cylinder seals of Arad-Ea's son Uballissu-Marduk, one of which has a long inscription containing a prayer to the goddess Ninsumun, the patron deity of land surveying. The stone of this seal is a beautifully banded chalcedony, whose layers of black, lilac, tan and white make the inscription hard to see. But when rolled into clay (Fig. 4.2), it becomes clear that the surface of the cylinder is divided into twelve lines, of which one is filled with a row of five ants (whose significance is obscure to us). The other lines contain the following cuneiform inscription:

> Oh goddess Ninsumun, mighty lady, eldest daughter of the great god Anu, chief land registrar of the god Enlil, whose wisdom makes everything perfect: may he who seeks you rejoice, and may his going be well, <so that> after he passed by, the land is well ordered. Uballissu-Marduk, son of Arad-Ea, expert accountant, servant of Kurigalzu, king of the world.[24]

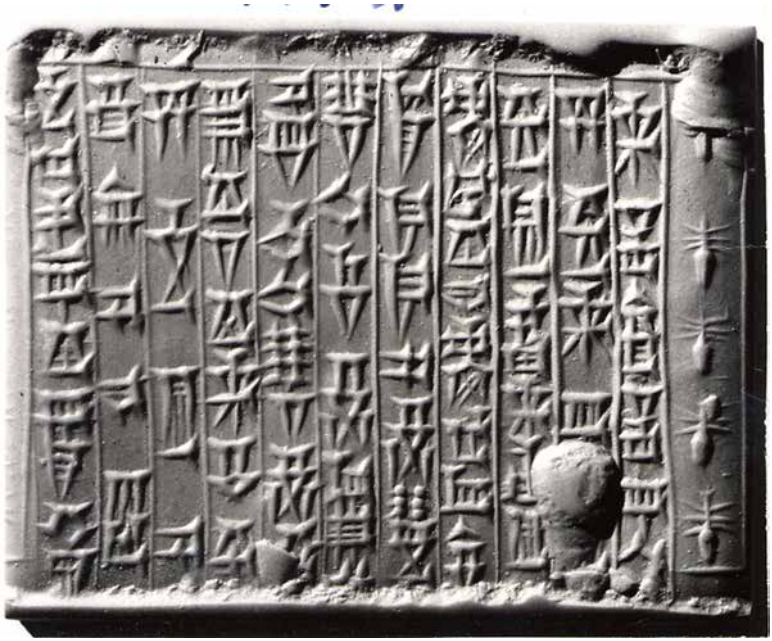


Fig. 4.2: Cylinder seal of Uballissu-Marduk, son of Arad-Ea (British Museum, BM 114704). Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The close relationship to the goddess Ninsumun is a constant in the family as many of Arad-Ea's descendants were land surveyors, a very important position in Babylonian society that required of its holder both mathematical skill and the trust of the people. Members of the clan are attested in various prominent positions in Babylon until the seventh century BC, and one of them even briefly managed to become king of Babylon in 703 BC as Marduk-zakir-šumi II.[25]

In the fourteenth century BC, one of Arad-Ea's nephews deserves our special notice. Marduk-nadin-ahhe, the son of his brother Marduk-uballiṭ, is interesting to us because of his international career. He moved away from his native Babylon to the city of Assur, the capital of the northern kingdom of Assyria, where he took up the newly established position of Royal Scribe to King Aššur-uballiṭ. In past centuries, the city of Assur and its hinterland had been controlled by the northern Mesopotamian kingdom of Mittani. The birth of Assyria (or the kingdom of Assur, as the contemporaries called it) was the result of Mittani's decline, caused by external pressures and dynastic struggles. Aššur-uballiṭ was able to claim the title of king for himself,[26] and it was his declared mission to make his young kingdom the equal of established powers like Egypt and Babylonia. Creating a highly visible role for a scholarly adviser to the king worked well in such a context, especially if the newly appointed Royal Scribe was descended from a prominent family whose members had served the Babylonian crown for many generations.

What we know about Marduk-nadin-ahhe derives from an inscription that he composed on the occasion of building his new house in Assur. The text, known only from a later copy,[27] concludes with a prayer to the god Marduk, the lord of Babylon:

> May Marduk, my lord, inspect that house, and grant (it) to me for my troubles. May he allow (it) to endure in the future for my sons, my grandsons, my offspring, and the offspring of my offspring, so that we, I and my family, can revere Marduk, my lord, and Zarpanitu, my lady, forever, and perhaps, by the command of Marduk, someone can set straight my [relatives] and ancestral clan that have embraced treachery. May [Marduk], my lord, grant to Aššur-uballiṭ, who loves me, king of the world, my lord, long days with abundant prosperity.

The unusual references to his troubles and to treacherous family members suggest that Marduk-nadin-ahhe had been caught up in the Babylonian succession wars after the death of Burnaburiaš II in 1328 BC (which we will discuss later) before he found a new home in Assur thanks to his patron and benefactor King Aššur-uballiṭ. He clearly did not assume that he or his descendants would ever return to his native Babylon. In addition to serving as the Assyrian king's scholarly adviser, Marduk-nadin-ahhe seems to have held a priestly function in the newly established cult of Marduk and his consort Zarpanitu at Assur, for the first part of Marduk-nadin-ahhe's inscription reads:

> I, Marduk-nadin-ahhe, royal scribe, son of Marduk-uballiṭ, son of Uššur-ana-Marduk, blessed by god and king, the humble, the obedient, the one who pleases his lord, took up residence in a distinguished manner in the house which I had erected in the shadow of the temple of Marduk, within which I had opened a well of cold water, which I had staked off by the exalted wisdom of the god Marduk, my lord. I had made the burnt brick rooms beneath it, about which no one knows, with wise understanding and the greatest care. I constructed and completed the entire house, its reception suites and residential quarters. I will not allow imbeciles to take possession (of it).

Marduk-nadin-ahhe's house, 'erected in the shadow of the temple of Marduk', was built very close-by or perhaps even inside the holy precinct of Assur. Regardless of its precise location, with its own well and two wings, one accessible to the public, the other private with an underground tomb underneath the innermost room ('the burnt brick rooms beneath it, about which no one knows'), Marduk-nadin-ahhe's house matches the standards of a typical elite residence in Assur.

But what about the last sentence of the inscription, 'I will not allow imbeciles to take possession (of it)'? Does this indicate feelings of superiority against his new Assyrian neighbours? Or is Frans Wiggermann correct when he assumes that this is a sneer against the relatives that Marduk-nadin-ahhe had left behind in Babylon?[28] It is certain that the scholar played a hugely important role in disseminating Babylonian knowledge and traditions in Assur

and in Assyria. It may have been precisely due to his prominent function in Assyria and their desire to distance themselves from him that made the relatives in Babylon choose his uncle Arad-Ea as the focal point of their family genealogy, rather than their equally illustrious and even more ancient joint ancestors Uššur-ana-Marduk, the governor of the Ekur temple, or Uṣi-ana-nurišu, the viceroy of Dilmun. In this way, the Babylonian branch of the family excluded Marduk-nadin-ahhe and his descendants from the clan, effectively severing the family connection. We will discuss the frequently problematic relationship of Babylon with Assyria in Chapter 6.

The physician Raba-ša-Marduk[29] is another notable scholar of the Kassite period. His name has the meaning 'Great are (the deeds) of Marduk' and advertises his family's piety towards the patron god of Babylon. Working in the thirteenth century BC, he was a celebrated physician with an international career that saw him serve two royal houses and his works highly valued also by a third: after gaining the favour of the Kassite king Nazi-Maruttaš (1302–1277 BC), at some point after 1285 BC Raba-ša-Marduk was sent from Babylonia to far-away Hattuša (modern Bogazköy in central Anatolia), the capital of Hatti, as part of a diplomatic delegation to the court of the Hittite king Muwatalli II (ca. 1290–1272 BC), where healers from Babylonia and also Egypt were in high demand.

A considerable time later, in the period between 1255–1250 BC, we find that Raba-ša-Marduk was still living and working at Hattuša, and under very favourable circumstances. His patron had given him a house and arranged his marriage to a member of the Hittite royal family. Raba-ša-Marduk very likely never returned to his native land, as there was then a noted tendency among the rulers to hold on to useful foreign experts as long as possible, sometimes against their will. What we know about Raba-ša-Marduk's life at Hattuša we learn from a letter sent to the Kassite king Kadašman-Enlil II (1258–1250 BC) by his Hittite counterpart Hattušili III (ca. 1265–1240 BC). The latter had to report the unfortunate death of a Babylonian physician who fell ill soon after arriving at Hattuša. Assuming that his correspondent might feel displeased to hear of the loss of the expert, Hattušili was at pains to stress that this was most certainly not a ruse designed to disguise a foreign specialist being detained against his will at the Hittite court. He wanted to

make it perfectly clear how much he opposed such tactics. As a case in point, he mentioned the physician Raba-ša-Marduk, who had come to Hatti during the reign of his brother and second predecessor Muwattalli II:

> Thus speak [to my brother]: When they received during the reign of my brother Muwatalli an exorcist and a physician (from Babylonia) and detained them, I was the one to argue with him saying, 'Why do you detain them? [To detain an exorcist and a physician] is not according to our custom!' And now I am supposed to have detained your physician? Of the former [experts] whom they had received here, the exorcist is perhaps dead, [the physician Raba-ša-Marduk however is] alive. The woman he married here is of my own family and he owns a nice house. [But if he had said] 'I want to leave for my native country', he could have gone right away. [And] I am supposed to have held back the physician Raba-ša-Marduk?[30]

Raba-ša-Marduk's work was appreciated not only in Babylonia and in Anatolia but also in the kingdom of Assyria in northern Iraq: a clay tablet with one of his works, entitled 'Eighteen prescriptions for headache: first tablet from the hand of Raba-ša-Marduk', was found in the Assyrian capital city of Assur. The first of the largely plant-based recipes runs as follows:

> If a man regularly gets headache, you crush together seeds of *errû*, seeds of *tigilû*, seeds of hound's tongue (*cynoglossum*), seeds of *ēdu*-plant, seeds of the garden, (and) seeds of *kiššānu*-peas, you sieve it, you mix it in equal parts, you mix it with vinegar into a paste, you sprinkle powdered roasted barley (and) emmer flour on it, rub it onto a skin, shave his head, bind it on and he will recover.[31]

Babylonian medicine is relatively well known, as hundreds of texts with recipe collections and lists of ingredients survive, documenting medical knowledge and therapeutic treatment.[32] Diagnostic texts highlight the role of observation as the basis for diagnosis and prognosis, whereas the impressive knowledge of the healing properties of a wide range of substances was based

on empirical experience. The line between medicine and magic was thin, however. Many today would consider applying a soothing liniment of the type described in the mentioned recipe to combat headache; the medicine prepared here resembles a kind of tiger balm. However, some of the other recipes listed in Raba-ša-Marduk's tablet probably inspire a lot less confidence in most modern patients:

> [You take] old grease from the door of the city gate, [(the one which) stands] on your right when you are going out [...] (that) night and that day, you twine (it) together into a cord. You wrap (the grease) in a tuft of wool and [bind it on his temple].

But then, magical means are appropriate when one believed that already the condition had supernatural causes, and this treatment was prescribed 'if a ghost seizes a man so that he continually has a headache'.

The physician Raba-ša-Marduk had his part to play in international diplomacy, and we do not know whether he considered the mission that initially took him from Babylon to the mountainscapes of Anatolia a great opportunity or a horrible punishment. In any case, he was in good company, as many Babylonians of high standing found themselves dispatched to foreign courts at the time, among them in the fourteenth century three daughters of King Burnaburiaš II, a grandson of the great Kurigalzu I.

Burnaburiaš was a ruler particularly adept at using dynastic marriages as a diplomatic tool. He was able to marry his daughters to three of the most powerful rulers of his time: Untaš-Napiriša of Elam, Akhenaten (Amenophis IV) of Egypt and Šuppiluliuma of Hatti. Burnaburiaš himself married a daughter of Aššur-uballiṭ I of Assyria, formerly considered a client of the Kassite crown, and this union led after his death to the bloody succession war that caused the already discussed scholar Marduk-nadin-ahhe to abandon Babylon for the Assyrian capital Assur.

One of Burnaburiaš's daughters became queen of Elam. Since Kurigalzu's successful intervention in Susa, Elam was Babylonia's closest ally, and that alliance was confirmed in each generation and sealed with a marriage that further strengthened the relationship

between the two royal houses. The wedding between Untaš-Napiriša and a daughter of Burnaburiaš was part of this tradition.[33] Whatever her original name, it is very likely that she was known in Elam as Queen Napirasu, whose life-sized cast bronze statue was found during the French excavations in the Ninhursag temple of Susa in 1903 (Fig. 4.3).[34]

Her statue bears an Elamite inscription that identifies the queen and puts her statue under the divine protection of the gods Napiriša, Kiririša and Inšušinak by placing a curse on anyone who would harm it. But despite this, the piece was damaged in antiquity and the queen's head and parts of the left arm are missing. What survives still weighs an impressive 1,750 kilograms. The piece was fashioned in an elaborate and technologically ambitious manner,

Fig. 4.3: Cast metal statue of Queen Napirasu from Susa (Louvre, Sb 2731). Photograph by Lamashtu2006 (CC BY-SA 4.0), from Wikimedia Commons.

with a solid core of bronze made out of copper and tin and an outer copper shell, cast in the lost wax process.[35] The statue shows the queen in a short-sleeved tunic covered in delicate embroidery, or perhaps appliques, with an even more lavishly decorated fringed piece of textile slung around her hips as a long wrap-around skirt, partially obscured by the inscription that runs down the front of the skirt. There are grooves on the sides of the skirt and on the one surviving arm which indicate that her garments were originally covered with sheets of silver or gold. The queen wears several pieces of jewellery: a four-banded bracelet on each wrist, a ring on her left ring finger and a clasp on her right shoulder.

Another daughter of Burnaburiaš was married to Akhenaten, the 'heretic' pharaoh of New Kingdom Egypt. Just like with Elam, the first dynastic marriage between the royal houses of Egypt and Karduniaš had taken place during the reign of Kurigalzu I and the alliance was renewed in every generation. In the case of Egypt, however, the arrangement was one-sided. While the Egyptian rulers were generally happy to accept a Kassite princess as one of their many wives, they refused to reciprocate, as their royal bloodline was considered divine and their daughters therefore only married within the royal family. As we know from the letters of Burnaburiaš to Akhenaten that were found in the latter's short-lived capital Akhetaten (modern Tell el-Amarna), Burnaburiaš had asked in vain for an Egyptian princess as a bride for himself and even made it plain that he would accept a substitute, but without success:

> You, my brother, when I wrote [to you] about marrying your daughter, in accordance with your practice of not giving (a daughter), [wrote to me], saying, 'From time immemorial no daughter of the king of Egypt is given to anyone.' Why not? You are a king; you do as you please. Were you to give (a daughter), who would say anything? Since I was told of this message, I wrote as follows to [my brother], saying, '[Someone's] grown daughters, beautiful women, must be available. Send me a beautiful woman as if she were your daughter. Who is going to say, 'She is no daughter of the king!'?' But holding to your decision, you have not sent me anyone. Did not you yourself seek brotherhood and amity, and so wrote me about marriage that we might come closer to each other,

> and did (not) I, for my part, write you about marriage for this very same reason, i.e. brotherhood and amity, that we might come closer to each other? Why, then, did my brother not send me just one woman? Should I, perhaps, since you did not send me a woman, refuse you a woman, just as you did to me, and not [send her]? But my daughters being available, I will not refuse [one] to you.[36]

Although Burnaburiaš made his disappointment very clear, the alliance with Egypt was deemed so important that he was willing to dispatch one of his daughters as a bride for Akhenaten to Egypt. Another letter describes how the princess was betrothed to her absent groom at her father's court, with the pharaoh's envoy and interpreter acting as his representatives. Akhenaten was reminded to promptly send an appropriately large escort to bring his bride to Egypt; a previous case when 3,000 soldiers had accompanied a Kassite princess to her royal husband in Egypt is quoted to indicate what Burnaburiaš thought was due to his daughter, who remains nameless in his letter.[37] She will have reached the royal court of Akhenaten eventually but nothing is known about her life there. She clearly never eclipsed Nefertiti, Akhenaten's Great Royal Wife.

This stands in sharp contrast with the fate of her sister Malnigal, a third daughter of Burnaburiaš whom he married to Šuppiluliuma of Hatti, the greatest military leader of that age who came to control much of Anatolia. The Hittite royal family followed monogamous marital practices, like the rest of Hittite society, and Šuppiluliuma already had a wife, the mother of his five sons. In order to marry the Kassite princess, he had to banish his first wife. These events were certainly not prompted by love or passion for Burnaburiaš's daughter Malnigal. This marriage was part of an important alliance that secured Šuppiluliuma the support, or at least the neutrality, of the Kassite realm for his newest political adventure: the attack of the kingdom of Mittani in northern Mesopotamia that brought Syria from the Mediterranean coast as far as the Euphrates under Hittite control.

A collection of twelve Kassite cylinder seals of very high quality was excavated in 1961 together with other such seals, including one Hittite piece, in a workshop of the Mycenaean palace of Thebes in Boeotia (Greece). The seals are all made of precious lapis lazuli

Fig. 4.4: Cylinder seal made of lapis lazuli with the depiction of a god irrigating the world and the cuneiform inscription of 'Kidin-Marduk, son of Ša-ilimma-damqa, personal attendant (ša reši) of Burnaburiaš, king of the world', found as part of a hoard of lapis lazuli seals in a workshop of the Mycenaean palace of Thebes in Boeotia, Greece (Archaeological Museum Thebes, inv. no. 198). Photograph by Bruce Wright. Reproduced from Joan Aruz, 'Seals and the imagery of interaction', in Joan Aruz, Sarah B. Graff and Yelena Rakic, eds., *Cultures in Contact from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean in the Second Millennium BC* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), p. 217 fig. 3.

from distant Afghanistan, and this surprise find has been plausibly interpreted as part of the dowry sent from Babylon to Anatolia with the princess bride, later repurposed as a Hittite diplomatic gift to the Mycenaean allies.[38] The connection with Burnaburiaš II is clear from the fact that one of the valuable seals bears the inscription of one of his courtiers (Fig. 4.4).[39]

As Šuppiluliuma's wife, the princess Malnigal was now known as Tawananna, the title of the Hittite queen who traditionally held great political and religious privileges. But the fact that she was a member of the Babylonian royal house added further weight to her prominent public role. The official state seal that was used, for example, to confirm a treaty with the allied kingdom of Ugarit, bore both her and her husband's name and identified her as a princess of Babylon (Fig. 4.5):

> Seal of Šuppiluliuma, great king, king of the land of Hatti, beloved of the storm god; seal of Tawananna, the great queen, daughter of the king of Babylon.[40]

Fig. 4.5: Impression of the stamp seal of Šuppiluliuma I and Tawananna on a clay tablet from Ugarit. Reproduced from Claude F. A. Schaeffer, 'Recueil des sceaux hittites imprimés sur les tablettes des Archives Sud du palais de Ras Shamra, suivi de considérations sur les pratiques sigillographiques des rois d'Ugarit', in Claude F. A. Schaeffer, ed., *Ugaritica*, Vol. 3 (Paris: Geuthner, 1956), p. 3 fig. 2 (RS 17.227).

However, Tawananna was wildly unpopular with the sons from the Hittite ruler's first marriage who considered her an archetypical evil stepmother. According to Hittite custom, Tawananna remained queen also after Šuppiluliuma died during an epidemic, and she retained her influence during the reigns of his sons. Šuppiluliuma's first heir was Arnuwanda, who died shortly after his father, having fallen victim to the same epidemic. He was succeeded by his younger brother Muršili II (c. 1321–1295 BC), who blamed Tawananna not only for these deaths but also for the sudden demise of his beloved wife. Accusing her of being a murderous witch, he managed to banish his stepmother in the ninth year of his reign, a decade after his father had died.[41]

Burnaburiaš himself married Muballiṭat-Šerua, a daughter of Aššur-uballiṭ I, the first king of Assyria.[42] Their son Karahardaš was to inherit the Babylonian crown when Burnaburiaš died in 1328 BC. However, the Babylonian people turned against their new ruler, executed him and replaced him with Nazibugaš, the 'Son of a Nobody', that is, a person not related to the royal family. The slain king's maternal grandfather, Aššur-uballiṭ of Assyria, immediately invaded Babylonia, and it may have been precisely Karahardaš's Assyrian connections that had been the cause of his unpopularity. The Assyrian army made quick work of Nazibugaš, who was killed, and Aššur-uballiṭ claimed the throne for Kurigalzu II, another of his grandsons. The loyalties of the Babylonians were divided between the rebels backing Nazibugaš and those who supported the royal house, despite the close link to Assyria. We assume that it is these troubled times that explain the bad blood between Aššur-uballiṭ's Royal Scribe Marduk-nadin-ahhe and his relatives in Babylon, the Arad-Ea branch of the family, as we discussed earlier.

The Assyrian interventions after the death of Burnaburiaš are just one example for the claims that the rulers of the neighbouring states might develop as a result of the dynastic marriages so favoured by the Kassite kings. By the mid-twelfth century, the male bloodline of the Kassite royal house had become extinct. The Elamite king Šutruk-Nahhunte thought that the marriages between his ancestors and the Kassite royal house over many generations gave him a good claim to the throne of Babylon, as he reminded the people of Babylon in the so-called Berlin Letter.[43] When this claim was rejected, he invaded the country in 1158 BC.

Šutruk-Nahhunte's army plundered the kingdom of Karduniaš and especially its temples. The loot included many Kudurrus and antiques such as the famous stele of Hammurabi of Babylon, now around 600 years old, and even older monuments, including steles and statues of the kings of Akkad that had been standing in Babylonian temples for a millennium at the time. Šutruk-Nahhunte brought these trophies to his capital city of Susa, and after he had his own inscription incised on them, they were erected in the courtyard of the sanctuary of the god Inšušinak ('Lord of Susa'). French archaeologists found them there in the early twentieth century, and this is why all these pieces can be admired in the Louvre today.

5

LINKING HEAVEN AND EARTH: MARDUK'S BABYLON

Babylon was the city of the god Marduk who resided there in the Esangila temple. The deity was physically present in the form of a statue, created in the sacred environment of a temple workshop by ritually pure craftsmen and awoken into a sentient existence by the performance of the 'Opening of the Mouth' ritual.[1] In this manifestation, the god was washed, dressed, fed and entertained by the community of priests who were responsible for the daily performance of this cultic performance, like clockwork, so that the god was content and continued to protect his city and his people. As the heart of the city, the temple was not only its ideological and cultic centre but also the social, political and economic focus of urban life.[2] Any disturbance to the temple and its rites was catastrophic.

After Šutruk-Nahhunte's first raid in 1158 BC, there were several more Elamite invasions over the next few decades, and during one of them the troops of King Kutir-Nahhunte plundered the sanctuary of Marduk in Babylon, taking his cult statue to Susa. Nevertheless, Elam never established permanent control over Babylonia. During these troubled times, the so-called Second Dynasty of Isin rose to prominence. The beginnings of this royal house are obscure, but its original power base was certainly located in the south of present-day Iraq. Eventually, this family succeeded the Kassite dynasty to the throne of Babylon.

The fourth ruler, Nebuchadnezzar I (1125–1104 BC), managed to turn the tables on Elam and led a successful campaign against its heartland in the Susiana region, expelling the last ruler of the Igihalkid dynasty from Susa. The statue of the god Marduk, previously having been abducted during Kutir-Nahhunte's raid, was returned to Babylon where it was again installed in Marduk's temple Esangila, to the great joy of the people and with great pomp and circumstance. This achievement made Nebuchadnezzar I an immensely popular ruler who was remembered with great fondness and admiration for the next millennium.[3]

It was in this eventful age that the role of the god Marduk was reinterpreted and his relationship to the king of Babylon changed forever.[4] Increasingly, Marduk was simply called 'The Lord' (Bel), as he came to be seen as the unrivalled ruler of the world. Kingship was no longer seen as a birthright but instead as a boon of the god whose favour alone determined who was worthy of the throne of Babylon. The new principle of succession at Babylon stood in sharp contrast with the monarchies in the neighbouring regions, such as Assyria, where the crown was typically passed on from father to son. It transferred power from the royal family to the temple of Marduk and turned the temple community into a political body.

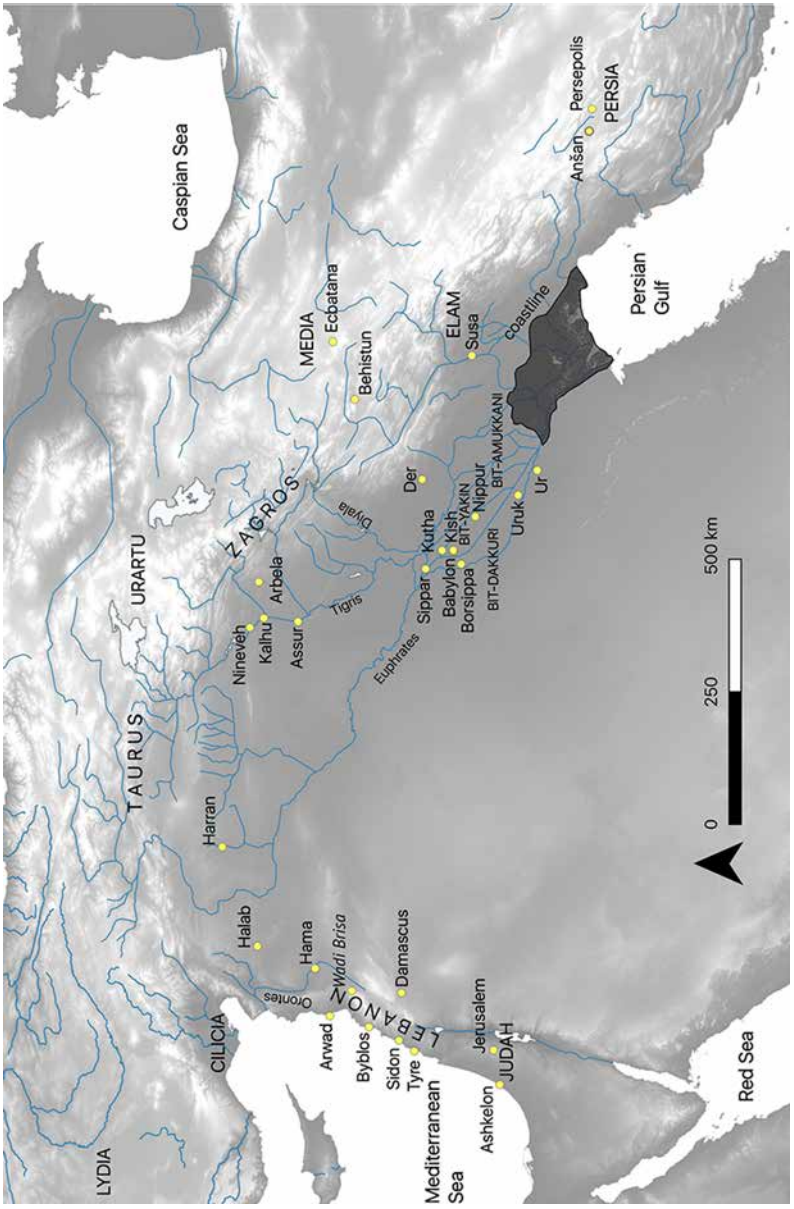
The end of Kassite rule and the Elamite invasions in Babylonia were part of a much larger phenomenon of political and social change that affected the entire Middle East and the Mediterranean region in the twelfth and eleventh centuries BC. Over generations, great migrations brought population groups from increasingly arid regions, where rainfall had become more unreliable or insufficient, into those lands where farming could still be practised without fail, including southern Iraq, whose agriculture traditionally relied on irrigation rather than rain. The resultant changes affected, among other things, society, lifestyles and technologies and are today considered so significant that we interpret them as marking the end of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age.

Also in southern Iraq, the social and political organization changed drastically. From then onwards, groups of Aramaeans and Chaldeans settled in the region and, splintered into many different 'houses' whose clan members traced their origin back to an eponymous founding father (e.g. *Bit-Yakin*, 'House of Yakin'),

they added another layer of complexity to Babylonia's political geography.[5] The members of these 'houses' called themselves sons of this founder (e.g. *mar Yakin*, 'Son of Yakin'). Their social organization was deeply shaped by their pastoralist lifestyle and they came to control large stretches of the region's rural areas where they roamed with their flocks, including the marshlands in the extreme south. The three large Chaldean clans, or tribes, of Bit-Yakin, Bit-Amukkani and Bit-Dakkuri (Map 3) became especially powerful politically and economically and, over time, extended their influence over the ancient cities, including Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar I's successors faced the considerable challenge of attempting to keep together a kingdom that seemed in flux. The inhabitants of the ancient cities of Babylonia and the various tribal communities increasingly chose to emphasize their specific group identities at the expense of an overarching 'Babylonian' identity. In this decentralized, fragmented realm, the crown was still influential but not always the dominant force. The epic poem *Enuma Eliš*, which celebrates Marduk as supreme deity, is thought to have been composed during that time. A lengthy verse composition in the Akkadian language, it was now recited in Marduk's temple Esangila at Babylon every year during the New Year Festival (Babylonian *akitu*).[6] This was the most important holiday in the city's calendar and held over twelve days and twice a year[7] at the time of the spring equinox in March (around roughly the same time as religious communities today celebrate Easter, Pesach or Nowruz) and then again, exactly six months later, at the time of the autumn equinox in September.

The new year started on the first day of the spring festival. The first three days of the festival were devoted to various ritual preparations overseen by the 'Elder Brother' (*šešgallu*), the chief priest of Esangila, including the cleansing of the statues of Marduk and his consort Zarpanitu and making the complex arrangements for the cultic re-enactment of key episodes from Marduk's mythology in the coming days, including scenes of battle and triumph, an assembly of the gods – in the form of their statues – from all over Babylonia at the Altar of Destinies (*parak šimati*, considered the navel of the world[8]), and a journey to the Ezida temple of Marduk's divine son Nabû in nearby Borsippa. Every aspect was important and meaningful: for example, even



Map 3: The Middle East in the first half of the first millennium BC, with the places mentioned in this volume indicated. Prepared by Andrea Squitieri.

the tiniest details of the appearance and the conduct of Marduk's statue during the festival were observed and interpreted as omens for the city's, and the realm's, future.[9]

The main part of the festival began on the fourth day when in the early evening, the Elder Brother started proceedings by praising the Esangila temple and its counterpart on the celestial plane. Astronomy was one of the most important Babylonian scholarly disciplines (cf. Chapter 9), as the constellations in the sky were thought to be representations of the divine and their study therefore provided important insight into the designs of the gods.[10] Esangila's celestial counterpart was known to the Babylonians as the 'Field' (*ikû*), and we call it the 'Square of Pegasus'. It is formed by four stars of nearly equal brightness that can be easily located in the night sky: Markab (Arabic *markab* 'saddle'; α Pegasi), Scheat (Arabic *sāʿid* 'shoulder'; β Pegasi), Algenib (Arabic *al-janb* 'the flank'; γ Pegasi) and Alpheratz (Arabic *al-faras* 'the mare'; α Andromedae). These stars form a large diamond shape, with each side measuring 15 degrees across, which broadly corresponds to a balled fist and a half held at arm's length. In order to strengthen the cosmic bond with its eternal double in heaven, the Sublime Court of Esangila was constructed in the diamond shape of the Field rather than the regular rectangle normally used for temple courtyards.[11] In the northern hemisphere, the rising of the Field is closely associated with the beginning of autumn as it becomes first visible on the sky exactly in the east just after dark around the September equinox (Fig. 5.1). In Babylon, we can safely assume that setting eyes on the celestial Field was a particular highlight of the fourth day of the autumn festival.

The spring festival, on the other hand, coincides with the March equinox when the sun stands in the very centre of the Field (and Pisces, whose stars encircle it). Although this means that the constellation is lost in the sun's glare at that time of year, Esangila could easily be linked to the Field by looking into the setting sun. After the bond between the two versions of Esangila in the world of the humans and in the divine realm had thus been affirmed, the Elder Brother opened the temple's gates to the community of worshippers who had been kept outside during the period of preparation:

> He will go out to the Sublime Court and he will place his face towards the north, and (with the words) 'Celestial Field (i.e. Square of Pegasus), Esangila, image of Heaven and Earth' he will pronounce praise to Esangila three times. He will open the gates.[12]

The temple community (all men) performed their regular rites for the first time in the new year, and the day concluded with the Elder Brother's recital of *Enuma Eliš*. This long poem of 1,092 lines celebrates Marduk's ascent from youngster deity of no particular significance to the unrivalled master of all the gods and all the world. This meteoric rise was the prize awarded to him for his heroic defeat of a monstrous army that threatened cosmic order. When all the senior gods had failed, young Marduk volunteered to battle their leader, the dragon-like demoness Tiamat, the ocean personified. In antiquity, this poem was known after its first words as *Enuma Eliš* 'When on high'.[13] Today it is usually called the Epic of Creation, because after Marduk slays Tiamat he rebuilds the entire world from her dead body. The rivers Euphrates and

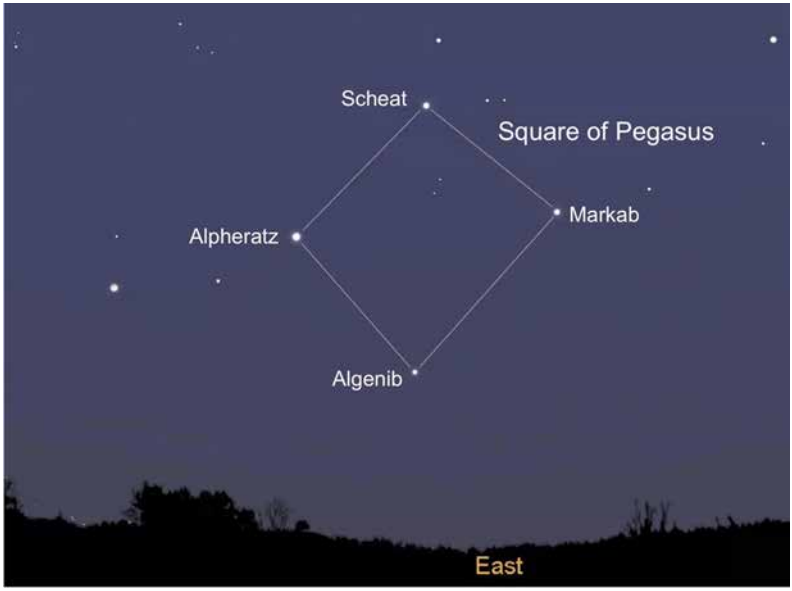


Fig. 5.1: The celestial Field, to us the Square of Pegasus, as seen in the autumn sky in the northern hemisphere. Image courtesy Bob 'Astrobob' King (via https://astrobob.areavoices.com/2009/08/03/batter-up/), annotated by the author.

Tigris, for example, spring from her eyes. The city of Babylon itself was created to form the centre of the universe and an eternal link between mankind and the gods, a fact that the Elder Brother's earlier prayer to Esangila and its celestial counterpart, the Field, had referenced, too.

In gratitude for their rescue, the other gods elected Marduk to be their leader and in praise, they bestowed fifty names upon him.[14] In learned and religious circles, the number fifty was highly significant, as it is the sacred number of the god Enlil, hitherto the leader of gods and lord of lands who had now been replaced by Marduk. In the poem, the enumeration of the fifty names concludes the composition in a suitably celebratory and elevated style that left no doubt that Marduk had now morphed into an all-encompassing, all-powerful divine entity that justly claimed sovereignty over the world. It is this version of Marduk that was celebrated, for example in an inscription of Marduk-zakir-šumi I of Babylon (ca. 851–824 BC):

> For the god Marduk, great lord, heroic, eminent, exalted, lord of everything, lord of lords, august judge who makes decisions for the inhabited world, lord of the lands, lord of Babylon, the one who dwells in the Esangila temple, his lord:
>
> Marduk-zakir-šumi, king of the world, prince who reveres him, in order to ensure his good health and the well-being of his descendants, to prolong his days, to confirm his reign, to defeat his enemy, and to live in safety in his (i.e. Marduk's) presence forever, had made and presented the seal of shining lapis lazuli, which is duly and carefully manufactured with red gold, fitting for his holy neck.[15]

The inscription is engraved on a large cylinder seal of deep blue lapis lazuli (Fig. 5.2), the gemstone sourced in the mines of remote Afghanistan that was one of the most expensive materials of the ancient world. The last part of the inscription makes it clear that the seal was originally set in gold, to be worn on a necklace, but all this is now lost.

In addition to the cuneiform inscription, the seal also bears the image of the god. Marduk is depicted as an adult male with moustaches and a sizable beard, wearing his hair long and pinned

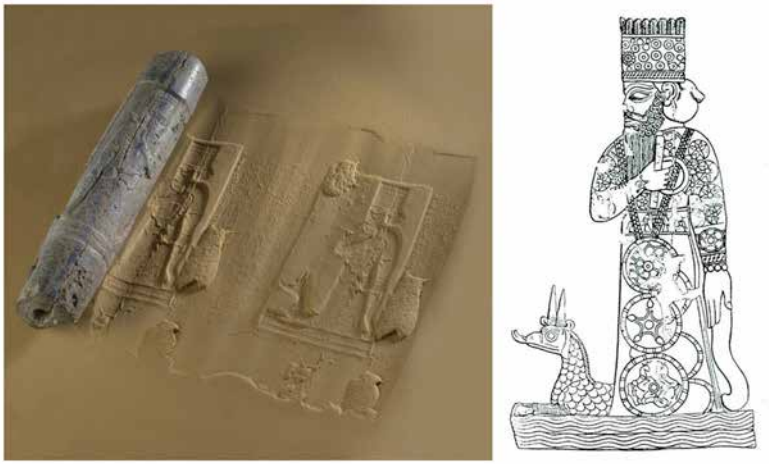


Fig. 5.2: Lapis lazuli cylinder seal of Marduk-zakir-šumi I of Babylon (ca. 851–820 BC), depicting the god Marduk and his snake-dragon. From Babylon. VA Bab 646, Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Photograph by Olaf M. Teßmer (CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE), from Edition Topoi (DOI: 10.17171/1–5-3692–6); drawing reproduced from Robert Koldewey, 'Die Götter Adad und Marduk', *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* 5 (1900), p. 14 fig. 3.

up in a bun in his nape; this is also the characteristic hairstyle reserved for the Babylonian king – all other men wear their hair at shoulder length or, if they serve in priestly roles in the temple, completely shorn off. Marduk wears a high hat topped with a fringe of feathers and a long-sleeved tunic over which a long wrap-around skirt is belted to his hips with a broad belt. All garments are richly decorated with geometric patterns, while the belt, presumably made from metal, is embossed with depictions of bulls. Various bracelets are clasped around the god's wrists and he wears a heavy long necklace from which three metal discs are suspended. Two are decorated with geometrical motives and the third shows three ibexes, the symbol animal of the Babylonian king,[16] in a circular arrangement. The god grasps staff and ring, the insignia of kingship, in his raised right hand while he holds a sickle sword, a weapon characteristic of gods, in his lowered left. Next to Marduk rests his sacred animal, the horned snake-dragon (*mušhuššu*), in a graceful manner recalling the poise of a faithful dog accompanying his master. God and beast are shown atop a

structure that we can interpret as a pedestal, and this raises the distinct possibility that what is depicted here is in fact the cult statue of Marduk.

The fate of Marduk's statue was eventful, as it was abducted from his temple on various occasions. For his city Babylon, this was extremely bad news, as the removal of a god's statue from his temple indicated that the deity had abandoned the city and its people. There is a famous text that deals with this topic, today known as the Marduk Prophecy. In a first person narrative, the god addresses a divine audience:

> O Haharnum, Hayyašum, Anu, Enlil, Nudimmud, Ea, [...], Nabû, great gods who are learned in my mysteries! Now that I am ready for a journey, I will tell you my name. I am Marduk, great lord, the most lofty one, he who inspects, who goes back and forth through the mountains, the lofty one, inspector, who traverses the lands, he who goes constantly back and forth in the lands from sunrise to sunset, am I![17]

After having introduced himself as a great traveller who routinely inspects all the lands that he commands, Marduk then tells the ancient deities that he addresses in his speech of the three occasions when he left Babylon to go to stay abroad. First in Hatti in Anatolia, then in Assur in northern Mesopotamia, and finally in Elam in southwestern Iran where he still resides when he recounts his story. The narrative then turns into a prophecy that predicts the coming of a king who would rebuild the shrines of Babylon including Marduk's own Esangila temple and bring back Marduk after destroying Elam. This heralds an age of prosperity and peace.

The three occasions when Marduk abandoned Babylon are well known also from other sources. The first abduction of the Marduk statue to Hatti was the result of the Hittite raid under Muršili I in the sixteenth century BC (cf. Chapter 4), the second to Assur was brought about by the Assyrian conquest under Tukulti-Ninurta I in the thirteenth century BC (Chapter 7), and the third to Elam was caused by the Elamite attacks begun by Šutruk-Nahhunte II in the twelfth century BC (cf. Chapter 5).

The Marduk Prophecy is only known from three seventh century BC manuscripts from Assyria, found in the royal library at Nineveh and in the private library of a family of exorcists in Assur. It is obvious why the ancient text would have appealed to Assyrian audiences: Marduk is very positive about his stay in Assur, delivering all lands into the hands of its king and blessing the land. This and his other sojourns are naturally described as journeys undertaken at the god's desire. His feelings towards Hatti are more neutral, stressing the benefit of the commercial route that his stay there opened up for Babylon, while his reasons for going to Elam are rooted only in his intention to punish Babylonia with famine, war and chaos.

Although the manuscripts are all of a much younger date, modern scholars generally attribute the creation of the text to the time of Nebuchadnezzar I of Babylon (1125–1104 BC),[18] as it was he who attacked Elam and restored the statue of Marduk to Esangila, which he rebuilt. The medium of the prophecy is a clever literary device that allows the poet to have the god himself sing the praise of the king. It was only in the turbulent times of the twelfth century, in the aftermath of the chaotic end of the centuries-long reign of the Kassite dynasty over Babylon, that Marduk became the Lord of the Lands who alone granted kingship of Babylon. Also the Epic of Creation is assumed to be a composition of that age of political instability and new possibilities when the long-respected right of succession was no longer guaranteed.

The new conception of Marduk as championing the victorious rather than backing whoever would inherit the crown by law is inherently pragmatic but also radically new. It puts Babylon in sharp contrast with the conventions practised in the neighbouring monarchies where, as of old, the son typically ascended his father's throne. The Babylonian concept offered much greater flexibility in who was to be crowned king, and this pragmatic elasticity came to fundamentally shape Babylon's politics and history, with the Esangila temple community acting as a political body.

The idea that every king of Babylon owed his office entirely to the god and that he was to respect the rights of the people of Babylon was publicly affirmed as part of the New Year Festival. On its fifth day, the day after the Elder Brother's performance of the Epic of Creation, the king was ritually humiliated before Marduk. First, the Elder Brother, as the head of the temple community,

stripped the king of the royal insignia before permitting him into the temple's inner sanctum. The king's staff and ring, mace and crown were placed in front of Marduk's statue. Then the Elder Brother slapped the king so hard that tears sprang to his eyes (which was considered a good omen for the coming year) and, gripping him by the ears, forced him down to kneel in front of the god. Thus thoroughly humbled, the king would proclaim:

> I have not sinned, Lord of the Lands, I have not neglected your divinity,
> I have not ruined Babylon, I have not ordered its dissolution,
> I have not made the Esangila temple tremble, I have not forgotten its rites,
> I have not struck the cheek of any privileged subject (*ṣabe kidinni*),
> I have not brought about their humiliation,
> I have taken care of Babylon, I have not destroyed its outer walls.[19]

Holding the kingship of Babylon was prominently linked to honouring the obligations that the king owed to Esangila and the other temples of the city and to granting tax privileges (*kidinnutu*) to its inhabitants, as also stressed in the Marduk Prophecy:

> A king of Babylon will arise, he will renew the marvellous temple, the Esangila. He will create the plans of heaven and earth in Esangila, he will double its height. He will establish tax exemptions for my city Babylon.[20]

Seen in a cynical light, this meant that the kingship of Babylon was in effect up for sale to any ruler who was able to lavish his means on restoring the city's many shrines and on funding the substantial daily offerings that the gods worshipped in these sanctuaries required while forgoing the very considerable tax revenue that could have been raised in a city as large as Babylon.

However, the new concept also prominently links the kingship of Babylon to mastery over the entire world, which Marduk as Lord of the Lands is able to grant to his champion. If this intrinsic link between Babylon and universal domination is accepted, the title immediately holds great appeal for any would-be ruler of the world. In the course of the first millennium BC the kingship of Babylon was

indeed coveted by a number of non-Babylonian kings, among them Assyrians, Chaldeans and Elamites, who had distinguished themselves as conquerors and sought to establish themselves as peerless monarchs with a universal claim of sovereignty (see Chapter 6).

From the vantage point of the people of Babylon and especially the members of the Esangila priesthood, who in effect confirmed the champion chosen by Marduk, every king was a gamble. The potential for tensions between king and temple community had become apparent already by the late second millennium. The learned texts that portrayed Nebuchadnezzar I as a virtuous paragon of kingship who honoured god and priesthood were written by the latter in order to provide a model of a 'King of Justice' to hold up to his successors, precisely because the reality was often different. Such works and new compositions that critique kingship, such as 'Advice to a Prince',[21] become increasingly popular in scholarly circles. While they do not call the monarchy into question, they firmly establish that there are expectations that the king of Babylon had to meet.[22]

Especially in the period between the ninth and seventh centuries BC when a unified kingdom of Babylonia was more often an idea than the reality, as the region was so politically fragmented, the city assembly (*puhru*)[23] played an important role in governing Babylon and in interacting with outside actors, including the occasional would-be king of Babylon. Letters from the state correspondence of the Assyrian rulers from the late eighth century and the seventh century (Chapter 6) provide good evidence for this. Whether or not the city assembly was identical with the congregation (*kiništu*) of Esangila, headed by the Temple Enterers (*erib biti*), or whether it was a separate body is unclear. On balance, it is quite likely that the two bodies are really one and the same: Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria (744–727 BC), for example, makes it plain that he assumed the Temple Enterers and the congregation to wield political power in Babylon. Writing when he and Mukin-zeri, chieftain of the Chaldean tribe of Bit-Amukkani, were waging war against each other in Babylonia (Chapter 7), he introduced a letter to the authorities of Babylon in the following manner:

> The king's word to the Temple Enterers, the congregation, the leaders (LÚ.SAG.KAL.MEŠ) of [Babylon] and to the people of Babylon (LÚ.TIN.TIR.KI.MEŠ).[24]

Once installed as king of Babylon, a ruler might stick to the rules, or not. The relationship between the king and the people of Babylon was therefore often fraught with tension. From the local perspective, the king might take too little interest, or too much: a particular problem of the period of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (Chapter 6), whose kings were seen as curtailing the privileges of the urban elites to further their own agenda.[25] The Persian and Seleucid kings (Chapters 8 and 9), on the other hand, were often deemed to neglect their duties to god, temple and city according to the local perception.[26] At that time, the Elder Brother, the head of the Esangila temple congregation, emerged as the true paragon of virtue who guarantees Marduk's worship. In this eulogy attributed to the god himself, it is very much the Elder Brother who enjoys Marduk's trust while the king of Babylon is seen as a potential problem:

> May they call you Elder Brother of Eumuša (i.e. the inner sanctum of Esangila).
> May you know my secret knowledge; may my written knowledge (*asaru*) be familiar to you.
> May you know my rituals.
> I have determined a great fate for you: to day and night perform [the rites for me].
> May the king humbly revere you.
> May all the priests speak well of you.
> Without you no regular offerings should be established for me.
> May you know my secret knowledge and my purification rites.
> May you be pure as heaven; may you be clean as the earth.
> May your aura be as (bright as) the day; may your work be a work like the heavens.
> May your name be great like the king's.
> Let no one treat you deceivingly.
> Let neither king nor governor strike your cheek.
> May your work be a work for eternity.
> The king or the governor who strikes your cheek,
> may a king who is their enemy defeat them.[27]

6

NEGOTIATING POWER: BABYLON AND THE ASSYRIANS

In the fourteenth century BC when the northern Mesopotamian kingdom of Assyria with its capital city Assur first became an independent state, the royal houses of Assyria and of the Kassite dynasty were linked in marriage, and it was a Babylonian scholar who was appointed as the first holder of the title of Royal Scribe, bringing with him to Assur the cult of the god Marduk (Chapter 4). Since then, the city of Babylon and its erudite inhabitants held a special allure for the Assyrian kings.

The close family links meant that both Assyrian and Babylonian rulers felt fully entitled to involve themselves in the internal affairs of the other state at times of political turmoil. Hence, several Assyrian kings dispatched their armies to Babylonia and, in the absence of a Babylonian ruler who was legitimate in their eyes, some of them even claimed the titles of 'King of Babylon' and 'King of Sumer and Akkad' for themselves, beginning with Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 BC). Having inherited a substantial realm from his ancestors, who had brought much of northern Mesopotamia under their control, he cemented the Assyrian leadership in the region and aggressively extended his country's influence.[1]

Tukulti-Ninurta's campaign against Babylonia is known from his inscriptions but narrated in much more detail in the so-called Tukulti-Ninurta Epic,[2] which celebrates the Assyrian king's victory over the Kassite ruler Kaštiliaš IV and his conquest of Babylon.

According to this long poem, Tukulti-Ninurta invaded Babylonia only after the king of Babylon had attacked his own territory, thus breaking an existing treaty. A brazen glorification of the Assyrian ruler, the epic is also a supremely rousing narrative. Its centrepiece is the great battle between the Assyrian and the Babylonian forces in which the gods led by Aššur marched on the Assyrian side: among them, the storm god Adad threw wind and rain against the enemy lines; the sun god Šamaš blinded the Babylonian troops with his light; and the goddess Ištar whipped the warriors into a frenzy. So intoxicated were the Assyrian troops by the divine support that they cast off their armour and launched themselves into the attack, and Tukulti-Ninurta single-handedly captured his Babylonian counterpart. According to the only slightly more sombre account in an inscription from Assur,

> In the midst of that battle I captured Kaštiliaš, king of the Kassites, and trod with my feet upon his lordly neck as though it were a footstool. Bound I brought him as a captive into the presence of Aššur, my lord. I became lord of Sumer and Akkad in its entirety and fixed the boundary of my land as the Lower Sea (i.e. the Persian Gulf) in the east.[3]

Tukulti-Ninurta then took possession of Babylon, demolishing its walls and taking away the statue of Marduk. We have already discussed how the Marduk Prophecy (Chapter 5) styled this stay in Assur as a visit desired by the god who so appreciated his host that he delivered all lands into the hands of the Assyrian king and blessed his land. The Tukulti-Ninurta Epic also mentions how cuneiform tablets with various learned works, including exorcistic lore, prayers, divination texts, medical instructions and historiography ('lists of his ancestors'), were taken from Babylon to Assur.[4]

There is very tangible evidence for the looting of the libraries of Babylon at Tukulti-Ninurta's hands, as some of the original texts have indeed been excavated at Assur.[5] One of them is the handbook of headache treatments[6] of the Babylonian physician Raba-ša-Marduk whose career at the royal court of Hattuša we have already discussed in Chapter 4. Most of the Babylonian tablets recovered at Assur concern extispicy,[7] that is the interpretation of the liver of sacrificial sheep in order to predict the future, in

particular for king and realm. It can be demonstrated that this treasure trove of knowledge inspired the scholars of Assur to take up the traditional Babylonian discipline, which had not played any significant role in Assyrian statecraft so far.[8] This changed now, as extispicy became a key method in the decision-making process of the Assyrian kings.[9]

To modern audiences, the very idea of extispicy may seem bizarre. Why would the liver of a sheep, of all things, provide hints about the future? But in the cultural context of a society that fully expected the gods to communicate and that sacrificed sheep (the most important source of meat) to their deities this makes a lot of sense. The basic Babylonian principle of any interaction with the divine can be summed up as *do ut des* 'Give so that you may give', an action that relies on the understanding that something is offered so that something else may be received in return. That the sacrificial sheep therefore yields a divine message about the future is part of the reciprocity of exchange between the person who offers the sacrifice and the deity who accepts it.

But why was this message thought to be delivered in the form of the sheep's liver? The liver of a sheep has some superficial similarity with a clay tablet: it fits well into the palm of one's hand, and while one side is smooth (because it lies against the flat muscle of the diaphragm) the other is marked in very specific ways. No two sheep livers look alike, as their marked sides push against the other viscera, most importantly the four different stomachs and the right kidney, and the textures of these various surfaces create highly individual patterns on the liver. The Babylonians saw in these patterns a complex sign system, akin to writing, with which the gods made their messages understood.

Reading and understanding these messages was a job for a professional diviner, called *barû*.[10] The sacrifice had to be well prepared and took place on an auspicious day on consecrated ground, during daytime and outside so that the sun god Šamaš and the storm god Adad, the patron deities of divination, could observe it. The sacrificial animal had to be healthy and without blemish, and the diviner and his assistants (including a scribe who recorded the autopsy as it went on) washed, shaven and ritually clean. The question that the extispicy was to answer, by yes or no, was not known to the diviner but recorded on a tablet in the form of a prayer

addressed to Šamaš and Adad, asking them for their decision.[11] Once the animal had been slaughtered, its body was opened and the liver extracted. In reading the liver, the diviner checked thirteen particular zones in a fixed sequence in anti-clockwise direction and decided for each zone individually whether it was positive or negative. With time, there grew a huge body of scholarly literature on this subject, which provided guidance. All these thirteen values taken together gave a positive or negative result. If there was any doubt, perhaps because the result was not overwhelmingly negative or positive, one could repeat the procedure for a second and third time, naturally with new sacrificial sheep, and then accept the overall result of the three readings.

Tukulti-Ninurta's sack of the libraries of Babylon and the transfer of their tablets to Assur is a key moment in Assyrian cultural and intellectual history. With the patronage and full support of their highly invested rulers, Assyrian experts from now on not only practised extispicy but also contributed profoundly to its scholarly literature.[12] The discipline was popular elsewhere, too, for example in fourteenth century BC Hattuša in Anatolia,[13] Etruscan Italy[14] and Roman Egypt,[15] but only the Assyrian experts came to shape the Babylonian tradition. From now on, their work in organizing the observational data and compiling handbooks influenced the discipline just as much as the work of the Babylonian specialists.

Having previously won victories in Anatolia against the Hittite forces and others, Tukulti-Ninurta now substantially expanded his royal titles in celebration of his achievements:

> Tukulti-Ninurta, king of the universe, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters, sun of all people, strong king, king of Karduniaš, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the Upper and Lower Seas, king of the extensive mountains and plains, king of the Šubareans and Guteans (i.e. the inhabitants of the Taurus and Zagros mountains) and king of all the Nairi lands (i.e. Anatolia).[16]

Although Tukulti-Ninurta claimed ultimate power over Babylonia by adopting the titles 'king of Karduniaš' and 'king of Sumer and Akkad', he did not himself take the title of king of Babylon and instead appointed one Enlil-nadin-šumi. This initiated a period of

great political instability as a series of Assyrian puppets tried and failed to control Babylon. Enlil-nadin-šumi was overthrown after only eight months and replaced by Kadašman-Harbe II, who in turn quickly lost the crown to Adad-šuma-iddina. He managed to stay in power for six years but when Tukulti-Ninurta died (murdered by his own sons, no less) he was overthrown in favour of Adad-šuma-uṣur, a son of the defeated Kaštiliaš IV. Thus, the Kassite dynasty was able to reclaim power over Babylon while Assyria descended into a chaotic succession war that wiped out the main line of the royal house and brought a cadet line onto the throne.[17]

While the blossoming of power under Tukulti-Ninurta was a short-lived fever episode, the kingdom of Assyria eventually came to dominate the political landscape of the Middle East for centuries and heavily influenced the fortunes of Babylon from the ninth to the seventh century BC. Modern scholars term the state an empire once Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) moved the royal court to his new capital city of Kalhu (modern Nimrud), away from Assur and the sanctuary of the god Aššur as well as the ancient urban elites of that city. Traditionally, the Assyrian ruler had been seen as the representative of the god who was thought the real monarch, but now the king took centre-stage in the realm and the people in all integrated and allied regions were considered his personal subjects.[18]

As we have discussed (Chapter 5), after the end of the Kassite dynasty political power in southern Mesopotamia was increasingly fragmented and the royal succession often problematic. Soon after ascending to the throne of Babylon, Marduk-zakir-šumi I (c. 851–820 BC) had to ask his Assyrian counterpart Shalmaneser III (858–824 BC)[19] for military support when his own brother Marduk-bel-usate raised a rebellion against him. Shalmaneser marched his troops down south in aid of Marduk-zakir-šumi's claim in 851 BC and again in 850 BC. The Assyrian forces faced Marduk-bel-usate's army in a number of battles and sieges in the Diyala region, eventually killing the rebel leader. Thus having secured the Babylonian crown for Marduk-zakir-šumi, the Assyrian king marched towards Babylon. This is how the events are described in one of Shalmaneser's inscriptions:

> After Marduk-zakir-šumi had conquered his enemies and Shalmaneser, the strong king, had achieved his heart's desire, he heeded

> the command of the great lord, the god Marduk. Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, ordered the march to Babylon. He reached Kutha, city of the hero of the gods, the exalted divine Utulu. He bowed down humbly at the gate of the temple and made sacrifices and offerings.
>
> He entered Babylon, link between heaven and underworld, the abode of life, and ascended to the Esangila temple, the palace of the gods, abode of the king of all. He reverently appeared in the presence of divine Bel ('the Lord', i.e. Marduk) and Belat ('the Lady', i.e. Zarpanitu), properly performed their rites, slaughtered and offered up lofty sacrifices and holy offerings in the Esangila. He presented holy offerings at the shrines of (the other) deities in Esangila and Babylon.
>
> He took the road to Borsippa, city of the hero of the gods, son of Bel, the powerful prince, and entered the Ezida, temple of destinies, temple of his firm decision. He bowed down in the presence of the deities Nabû and Nanaya, the gods, his lords, and reverently and properly performed his rites. He slaughtered and offered up superb oxen and fat sheep. He presented *bursaggu*-offerings at the shrines of (the other) deities of Borsippa and Ezida in like fashion.
>
> For the people of Babylon and Borsippa, his people, he established protection (*kidinnu*) and freedom (*šubarrû*) under the great gods at a banquet. He gave them bread and wine, dressed them in multi-coloured garments and presented them with presents.
>
> After the great gods had looked joyfully upon Shalmaneser, strong king, king of Assyria, directed (towards him) their faces, accepted his offerings (...) and received his prayers, he moved out of Babylon and went down to Chaldea.[20]

Shalmaneser's account of his visits to Babylon and Borsippa and their most important sanctuaries, Marduk's Esangila and Nabû's Ezida, is very detailed and shows a deep knowledge of the ideological foundations of Babylonian kingship. The rites and sacrifices he offered there were traditionally the privilege of the king of Babylon. The Assyrian king also hosted a banquet for the people of Babylon and Borsippa, treating them as his favoured guests and granting them tax privileges – again the privilege of the king of Babylon. Shalmaneser makes it very clear that he enjoyed the favour of the gods and the people and, of course, he visited as the commander of a victorious army, with that very army in tow. The implication is

clear: had Shalmaneser wanted the crown of Babylon, he could have taken it then and there. Yet he chose to leave the city and turned against the Chaldean tribes. The inscription continues with the account of a successful campaign against the Bit-Dakkuri tribe that ends with Shalmaneser accepting the submission and the tribute offered by this tribe as well as Bit-Yakin and Bit-Amukkani (Map 3).

The narrative of his visit to Babylon, Borsippa and Kutha as well as of the campaign against the Chaldeans emphasizes that Shalmaneser considered himself the overlord of the southern Mesopotamian cities and peoples. But Marduk-zakir-šumi of Babylon would certainly have objected to this view, given that he saw himself as the champion of all-powerful god Marduk. The dedicatory inscription on the precious lapis lazuli seal that he presented to Marduk, which we have discussed in Chapter 5, makes it clear that he solely saw the god as responsible for granting and preserving his power. None of these conflicting points of view are apparent on the image that Shalmaneser chose as the centrepiece of the decorative programme of the stone for his throne base in the audience hall of his palace at Kalhu. Whatever the exact nuances of the relationship, the Assyrian king and *de facto* suzerain of the Middle East thought it opportune to advertise that he was on cordial terms with the king of Babylon and had himself and Marduk-zakir-šumi depicted as equals, shaking hands in a very public display of the Assyro–Babylonian bond of friendship (Fig. 6.1). The Babylonian king, standing on the left, wears his hair long, just like his master Marduk does on the seal that Marduk-zakir-šumi had dedicated to him (Fig. 5.2).

However, when Shalmaneser's son Šamši-Adad V (823–811 BC)[21] ascended the throne of Assyria amidst a succession war that had erupted during the final years of his long-lived father,[22] he apparently needed Marduk-zakir-šumi's support to secure the throne for himself. In turn, he had to accept a treaty that adjusted the balance of power in favour of the Babylonian king. The treaty is known only from a fragmentary monument of black diorite. Most of the text is lost, but what remains makes it clear that Marduk-zakir-šumi no longer had to accept Assyria as his overlord: in this document, 'the king' refers to the Babylonian whereas the Assyrian ruler is mentioned by his given name, without any titles. The surviving clauses deal with military matters: troops, garrisons and

Fig. 6.1: Front of the throne base of Shalmaneser III of Assyria from Kalhu (Nimrud), showing the Assyrian king (right) and Marduk-zakir-šumi I of Babylon (left) in a gesture of friendship (Iraq Museum, IM 65574). Author's photograph.

deserters, with one Marduk-remanni apparently living in Babylon under Marduk-zakir-šumi's protection. The treaty stipulates:

> Šamši-Adad shall not say evil words about Marduk-remanni [... to] the king, (such as): 'Kill, blind, or seize [him', nor] shall King Marduk-zakir-šumi listen to him (should he say such things).[23]

This man is likely a member of the Assyrian royal house whose bloodline gave him a claim to the throne and who was kept as a hostage at Marduk-zakir-šumi's court. Controlling such a valuable asset at a time when the Assyrian line of succession was disputed gave the king of Babylon much influence over his northern neighbour, and this explains why the relationship seems far more balanced despite the fact that the Assyrian Empire was a vastly superior military power.

During the reign of Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria (744–727 BC),[24] the complex and fractured interests that comprised the web of Babylonian politics resulted in events that were of grave concern for the Assyrian Empire. Nabu-nadin-zeri of Babylon (733–732 BC), an Assyrian ally, was deposed by one of his officials, who in turn quickly lost his throne to Mukin-zeri, leader of the Chaldean tribe of Bit-Amukkani. Instead of a member of an ancient Babylonian family, a complete outsider with military clout had taken the crown. Whether it was because the Chaldean chieftain was openly hostile to the Empire or because he felt that the ancient traditions of

Babylonian kingship had been violated, Tiglath-pileser intervened and the imperial forces invaded Babylonia.

Several letters from the Assyrian ruler's correspondence, excavated in his capital city of Kalhu (modern Nimrud), show that while the troops of the two pretenders fought each other the Assyrian king was already negotiating with the people of Babylon about taking the crown himself. It is tantalisingly unclear whether this had been his ambition all along or whether the Babylonians had first suggested it. Whoever had conceived of the notion that Tiglath-pileser should become king of Babylon, it presented a radical departure from the approach taken by his predecessors Tukulti-Ninurta I and Shalmaneser III. The first letter was sent to Tiglath-pileser by two men that he had appointed as his negotiators in Babylon. He himself had not yet reached the city but Mukin-zeri's agents were still present in Babylon, and this complicated negotiations despite the fact that Tiglath-pileser promised to honour the traditional privileges:

> To the king, my lord: your servants Šamaš-bunaya and Nabû-nam-mir. Good health to the king, my lord! May the gods Nabû and Marduk bless the king, my lord!
>
> We went to Babylon on the 28th day. We stood in front of the Marduk Gate and spoke with the Babylonians. Zasinnu, a servant of Mukin-zeri, and some Chaldeans with him came out and stood with the Babylonians before the city gate. We spoke to the Babylonians as follows: 'The king has sent us to you, saying: "[Let me speak] with the [Babylonians] through your mouths. I shall establish the debt remission (*anduraru*) of Babylon and your privileged status (*kidinnutu*) and shall come to Babylon."' We spoke many words with them, but some ten powerful men refuse to come out and speak with us; they keep sending (messages) to us. We told them: 'Open the city gate, so we can enter Babylon.' They refused, saying: 'If we let you enter Babylon, what can I say to the king, when the king himself comes?' They will open the gate (only) when the king comes, and they do not believe that the king will come.[25] (The rest of the letter is very broken.)

So the king himself wrote a letter to the people of Babylon, addressing in particular the clergy and the congregation of the

Esangila temple. He had heard that there was fighting going in the streets of Babylon and meant to strengthen the people's resolve to hold out until he would arrive:

> The king's word to the Temple Enterers (*erib biti*), the congregation (*kiniśtu*), the leaders of [Babylon] and to the people of Babylon: I am well, Assyria is well – you can be glad.
>
> Do not be afraid because of the news you heard; watch the city, seize the streets and take care of yourself! Now I am approaching you again (since) the bodyguard Na'di-ilu told me: 'They are trembling in fear.' The gods Bel (i.e. Marduk) and Nabû know and the great god himself knows that, verily, when I previously heard that your brothers were killed, for three days nobody entered into my presence, my heart broke. Now you are afraid again. The gods Bel and Nabû know indeed that there is no fault of yours. You can be very glad. Let your guard be strong until I arrive.
>
> The bodyguard Na'di-ilu delivered (the letter) on the 26th day of the month Ayyaru (II).[26]

After various battles, Tiglath-pileser eventually defeated Mukinzeri in 729 BC and entered Babylon, where he took the crown and claimed the titles of 'King of Babylon' and 'King of Sumer and Akkad'.[27] From a Babylonian point of view, acceptance of the Assyrian king was probably a safer choice than continuing to support other opportunistic claimants. Not only was Tiglath-pileser the most effective military commander of his age, with a vast and well-trained army that had succeeded in every military encounter over the last twelve years, but the Assyrian could also be expected to honour the Babylonian sensibilities.

By that time, Tiglath-pileser had massively expanded his realm, conquering kingdoms such as Damascus and Hama, yet the Babylonian royal titulary was the only foreign title that he (or any other Assyrian king) ever adopted. Babylon held a special allure for the rulers from the Tigris that modern scholars generally assume to have its roots in the longstanding respect for Babylonian scholarship and culture that goes back to Kassite times (Chapter 4). The Babylonian King List shows that the Assyrian king's claim was accepted, as Tiglath-pileser III and his son and successor

Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC) were included under their birth names Pulu and Ululayu in the sequence of Babylonian rulers.[28] Neither of the two kings seems to have made any serious attempt to formally integrate the Babylonian territories into the provincial system of the Assyrian Empire.

When Shalmaneser's short reign was ended by the revolt of his brother Sargon II (721–705 BC), rebellions against the Empire broke out in many territories.[29] Once more, a Chaldean chieftain claimed the crown of Babylon: Marduk-apla-iddina II of Bit-Yakin (721–710 BC), known from the Bible (2 Kings 20:12; Isaiah 39:1) as Merodach-baladan, a contemporary and correspondent of King Hezekiah of Judah (Fig. 6.2).

Only after consolidating his rule over the Empire, was Sargon[30] ready to reclaim the lost throne of Babylon a decade later, and in 710 BC, the Assyrian king invaded Babylonia. In the ensuing war the fractures and conflicting interests of the region came to the fore when some cities and tribes quickly joined the Empire while others supported Marduk-apla-iddina. Eventually, the Chaldean was faced with crumbling support in Babylon as its people invited Sargon to enter the city.

Fig. 6.2: Marduk-apla-iddina II (left) as king of Babylon in 715 BC, as depicted on a Kudurru monument commemorating a royal land grant (Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin, VA 2663). Photograph by Monika Gräwe of the replica kept at Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz (http://www.sammlungen.uni-mainz.de/594.php).

Here is a letter written to the *sukkallu*, one of the highest Assyrian state officials (the title is sometimes translated as 'vizier'), that announces Marduk's and the people's readiness to oust Marduk-apla-iddina and appoint Sargon instead:

> Your servant Belšunu: I would gladly die for the *sukkallu*, my lord! May the gods Marduk and Zarpanitu bless my lord! Say to my lord:
>
> Certain Babylonians, members of the nobility, friends who are loyal to the king and the *sukkallu*, my lord, have written to me from Babylon. Send us good news, whatever is appropriate! *(Break)*
>
> He (i.e. the god Bel = Marduk) has ordained that the man of Bit-Yakin (i.e. Marduk-apla-iddina) be ousted from Babylon, and he has also spoken about the king's entry to Babylon. Perhaps Bel will act so the king can perform a ritual and hear him. Let my lord do everything possible so the army can come here and the king will attain his objective. I am one who blesses my lord. I pray daily to Marduk and Zarpanitu for the good health of my lord.[31]

Once again, an Assyrian king assumed the Babylonian throne. But in contrast to his predecessors, Sargon took his role as king of Babylon very seriously and remained resident in the city for five years, while leaving the Assyrian heartland in the hands of his crown prince Sennacherib. He participated in all major Babylonian rites, such as the New Year festival, and conducted large-scale building works. He undertook the renovation of Babylon's fortification system, as the inscription stamped into the bricks made for that purpose shows:

> For the god Marduk, great lord, compassionate god who dwells in Esangila, lord of Babylon, his lord:
>
> Sargon, mighty king, king of Assyria, king of the world, regent of Babylon (GÌR.NÍTA TIN.TIR.KI), king of the land of Sumer and Akkad, the one who provides for Esangila and Ezida, thought of (re)building the wall Imgur-Enlil. He had bricks made and constructed a quay-wall of baked bricks fired in a (ritually) pure kiln, (laid) in refined and crude bitumen, along the bank of the Euphrates river, in deep water. He founded the wall Imgur-Enlil and the wall Nimet-Enlil (as secure) upon it as a mountain range.

> May the god Marduk, great lord, look upon this work and may he bestow life on Sargon, the prince who provides for him! May his reign be as firm as the foundation of Babylon![32]

Following a course very different to his father Tiglath-pileser's *laissez-faire* approach to Babylonia, Sargon attempted to properly integrate the region into the Empire and to overcome its political fragmentation by restructuring and centralizing the administration. The region was split into two provinces that were put under the rule of Assyrian governors. The province of Babylon comprised the northern part of Babylonia where most of the big cities were located, whereas the province of Gambulu consisted of the Aramaean and Chaldean tribal areas.[33] Under the two provincial governors operated individual city governors, also directly appointed by the Assyrian king, as well as the military commanders of the Assyrian garrisons that were to secure the region.

But underneath this Assyrian superstructure, the institutions of Babylon and the other cities, such as the assembly and the temple congregations, were largely allowed to continue as before. Sargon courted the cities by offering some of them debt remission (*anduraru*) and tax privileges (*kidinnu*). These privileges effectively limited imperial restructuring and profits, as the citizens of these cities no longer paid (all) taxes and were exempt from the levy for military service and building work. Granting such concessions, therefore, was a considerable sacrifice of money and manpower, and one that has no parallels anywhere else in the newly conquered regions of the Assyrian Empire. But it matches closely what the author of the Marduk Prophecy (Chapter 4) had in mind, and the reactions of the beneficiaries, who presented these privileges as their traditional right, were very positive, as the following extracts from two letters of the royal correspondence show:

> If you come, (as) [a king who] disposes of the leftover sacrifices (of the gods), who restores peace (and) [...] to Esangila and Babylon, establishes a pact of protection and concludes it with the inhabitants of Babylon, who replenishes the treasuries of Esangila and Ezida – Bel (i.e. Marduk) and Nabû will grant (you) a long life, good health and happiness.[34]

> The report on Babylon [is excellent]. The Babylonians are happy. They go daily to the temple of their lords, Bel and Nabû [...], to Esangila. They pray daily to Marduk and Zarpanitu for the good health [of the king of the] lands, my lord.[35]

To gain the loyalty of the urban elites was clearly seen as the best foundation for the acceptance of Assyrian power in the region, and Sargon met the challenges presented by the fractured Babylonian political landscape by routinely demonstrating respect for the cultural traditions and institutions of the Babylonian cities. Thus rewarding the cities was also designed to weaken their links and solidarity with the rural hinterland and the tribes that controlled it, surely in an attempt to curb the influence of Marduk-apla-iddina. After all, the chieftain of Bit-Yakin maintained much support in the region and even managed briefly to regain control over the city of Babylon in 703 BC, proclaiming himself king of Babylon for a second time.

By necessity, the Assyrian style of government in Babylonia was flexible and attuned to the political realities and opportunities in this divided land. While this allowed establishment of control and acceptance in the short term, the structural problem caused by Babylonia's varied and fragmented political landscape was hardly addressed at all. Unlike in other provinces of the Assyrian Empire, the hierarchical relationships in Babylonia were not clear cut, as is best evidenced by the fact that Sargon frequently corresponded with and intervened at all levels of the administration. Also, the king appointed a special envoy who acted as an informal extension of the king's authority: Bel-iddina was a Babylonian scholar from the king's entourage, whose official task it was to oversee the Babylonian cults. But as the king's eyes and ears, he ran an intelligence network of local informers and Assyrian agents and reported to his master on the work of the officials in the two provinces. In the end, Sargon's attempts to integrate Babylonia into the Assyrian provincial system were more hindered than helped by allowing the cities to maintain their discrete identities. Especially with his opportunistic approach to granting privileges, Sargon's rule further deepened the differences between the various cities and regions. His reorganization into two provinces ultimately failed.

When Sargon died in battle in far-away Anatolia in 705 BC, he was succeeded by his son, the long-time crown prince Sennacherib (704–681 BC).[36] Yet while the change of power was smooth in Assyria, the new king's rule was not so easily accepted in Babylonia, as there were other pretenders to the crown of Babylon. His father's old rival Marduk-apla-iddina enjoyed more support locally, and Sennacherib's claim was rejected. With this slight began a new chapter in the joint history of Assyria and Babylon, both bloody and intellectually adventurous.

Sennacherib never claimed the crown of Babylon for himself but instead embarked on a series of political experiments that were meant to bring the south under Assyrian control. After ousting Marduk-apla-iddina in 703 BC, he appointed a Babylonian noble who had grown up as a hostage at the Assyrian imperial court as king of Babylon. This was Bel-ibni, who, however, turned against his Assyrian overlord in 700 BC. Sennacherib asserted the Empire's military dominance, overthrew his ungrateful puppet and instead replaced him with a more trustworthy choice of man as the new king of Babylon in 699 BC: his own son Aššur-nadin-šumi. All the while, Marduk-apla-iddina was busy trying to reclaim the crown of Babylon and even managed to muster the support of Elam for his cause, resulting in that country's open war with the Assyrian Empire. In 694 BC, whilst Sennacherib launched a combined land and sea attack on Elam, Elamite troops took Aššur-nadin-šumi captive in Babylon, and he was never heard of again. As Sennacherib continued his attacks with relish his son will not have lived for long, even if he ever had been intended to serve as a hostage to curb his father's aggression.

In the meantime, the old pretender Marduk-apla-iddina had died after a long and certainly eventful career, and so it was his son Nergal-ušezib who was now crowned king of Babylon, in the midst of the war between Assyria and Elam that now engulfed all of Babylonia. Sennacherib's forces seized the new king in battle in 693 BC and took him to Nineveh, where his further fate is unknown: he may well have lived out his life as a hostage, serving to keep the ambitions of the Bit-Yakin tribe in check. Sennacherib did not regain control over Babylon, though, and one Mušezib-Marduk (also known as Šuzubu) was now appointed king of Babylon, backed by Elam. He managed to hold on to the crown for four years, an

impressive achievement given that the war with the Empire raged on throughout. Eventually, Babylon fell to the Assyrian forces in 689 BC after an extended siege.[37] Mušezib-Marduk was captured and brought to Nineveh, where his execution was turned into a bloody public spectacle, as he was bound together with a bear at the citadel gate.[38] He cannot have survived for long.

After years of violent conflict, Sennacherib had lost all patience with Babylon and had no interest whatsoever left in the kingship of Babylon. None of Marduk's champions in recent years had had much joy from the god's patronage. Nevertheless, the devastation that Sennacherib visited upon the city of Babylon in 689 BC was an astonishing departure from his ancestors' approach. They all had shown great respect for Babylon, while he now ravaged the city and especially the Esangila temple, removing the statue of Marduk to the Assyrian heartland. Given that the cult of Marduk had been very popular in Assyria since its introduction there under Aššur-uballiṭ I in the fourteenth century (Chapter 4), Sennacherib's treatment of the god and his sanctuary needed justification, and the king had his scholars, among them a fair number of Babylonians, create learned texts that would vindicate his actions.

The so-called Marduk Ordeal, for example, saw the god be put on trial and found guilty by the god Aššur.[39] According to another text, Aššur replaced Marduk as the keeper of the Tablet of Destinies, which decreed the future.[40] Most spectacularly, Marduk was entirely written out of the *Enuma Eliš* poem, the Babylonian Epic of Creation (Chapter 5), with the god Aššur replacing him in every instance.[41] All this was part of an ambitious programme that relocated Babylon's New Year Festival rites in their entirety to Assur, whose cultic topography Sennacherib completely redesigned. This included the construction of a brand-new New Year Festival House, purpose-built outside of the city and founded upon a pile of rubble from Babylon. In a world where Babylon was no longer the cosmic link between heaven and earth, there was no need for Marduk or his champion, the king of Babylon: Sennacherib had in effect abolished that office. The Babylonians were now without divine and human protector, and Sennacherib had huge numbers of people deported and resettled elsewhere in the Empire, especially in the Assyrian heartland.

In 681 BC, Esarhaddon succeeded his father amidst a succession war that saw Sennacherib murdered by some of his sons. Whether his treatment of Babylon and Marduk had contributed to the regicide is not clear, but it is telling that Esarhaddon very much abandoned his father's approach. Once he was able to decide the succession conflict for himself Esarhaddon enforced his claim with brutal efficiency in the entire Empire, including Babylonia. Throughout his rule, Esarhaddon styled himself both king of Assyria and king of Babylon, and his entourage included a large number of Babylonian scholars[42] who were keen to enjoy the benefits of royal patronage and happy to put their knowledge at the disposal of the Empire; after the years of war in Babylonia, life at Nineveh will have seemed blissfully peaceful to many.

Esarhaddon prominently sought to reverse the damages that Sennacherib had caused to Babylon both physically and ideologically and set in motion the restoration of the Babylonian cults.[43] An inscription on a number of clay prisms, once deposited in the Marduk temple in Babylon, referred to the destruction, without naming his father Sennacherib, and framed the events as prompted by Marduk's anger against the unworthy Babylonian people who stood accused of neglecting the cults, embezzling the property of Esangila and selling it off to Elam, certainly a nod towards the appointment of Mušezib-Marduk as king of Babylon with Elamite backing:

> At that time, in the reign of a previous king, bad omens occurred in Sumer and Akkad. The people living there were answering each other yes for no and were telling lies. They led their gods away, neglected their goddesses, abandoned their rites, and embraced quite different (rites). They put their hands on the possessions of Esangila, the palace of the gods, an inaccessible place, and they sold the silver, gold and precious stones at market value to the land Elam.
>
> The god Marduk, the Enlil (i.e. leader) of the gods, became angry and plotted evilly to level the land (and) to destroy its people. The river Arahtu, a river of abundance, turned into an angry wave, a raging tide, a huge flood like the deluge. It swept waters destructively across the city and its dwellings and turned (them) into ruins. The gods dwelling in it flew up to the heavens like

> birds; the people living in it were hidden in another place and took refuge in an [unknown] land. The merciful god Marduk wrote that the calculated time of its abandonment was seventy years. His heart was quickly soothed, and he reversed the numbers and ordered its occupation to be (after) eleven years.[44]

Written in the cuneiform script, Marduk's merciful reversal of Babylon's misfortune from seventy to eleven years quite literally required the god only to turn around the Tablet of Destinies: the number 70 () looks like the inverted number 11 (). After a detailed account of the rebuilding of Esangila and its stepped tower Etemenanki, Esarhaddon's inscription turns to the displaced divine and human inhabitants:

> I returned the plundered gods of the lands from Assyria and the land Elam to their (proper) places, and I set up proper procedures in all of the cult centres.
>
> I established anew the remission of debts of the wronged citizens of Babylon, people (entitled to) the privileged status and freedom (guaranteed by) the gods Anu and Enlil. I gathered the bought people who had become slaves and who had been distributed among the (foreign) riffraff and counted (them once again) as Babylonians. I returned their looted possessions, provided the naked with clothing, and let them take the road to Babylon. I encouraged them to (re)settle the city, build houses, plant orchards, and dig canals.[45]

Esarhaddon's untimely death in 669 BC meant, however, that the restoration programme of Babylon was only completed under his successors. In 672 BC, Esarhaddon had appointed two of his sons as crown princes: Ashurbanipal was chosen as Assyrian crown prince, and Šamaš-šumu-ukin as crown prince of Babylon. Esarhaddon's intention was that upon his death, the realm was to be split into two: Assyria was Ashurbanipal's kingdom while Šamaš-šumu-ukin was to be king of an independent Babylonia. This came to be but relations were less cordial than Esarhaddon would have expected. Ashurbanipal considered his brother not an equal but an Assyrian vassal and reserved a prominent role in Babylonian religious and public life for himself, taking personal credit for

Fig. 6.3: Clay cylinder from Babylon with an inscription of Ashurbanipal of Assyria (Iraq Museum, IM 95929). Author's photograph.

continuing with the restoration of Babylon and its temples, as in this inscription (Fig. 6.3) from Babylon's fortification walls which he had rebuilt:

> For the god Marduk, king of all the Igigu gods and Anunnaku gods, creator of heaven and netherworld, who establishes archetypes and dwells in Esangila, lord of Babylon, great lord, my lord:
>
> I, Ashurbanipal, great king, mighty king, king of the world, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters (of the world); son of Esarhaddon, great king, mighty king, king of the world, king of Assyria, viceroy of Babylon, king of the land of Sumer and Akkad, who (re)settled Babylon, (re)built Esangila, renovated the sanctuaries of all the cult centres, constantly established appropriate procedures in them, confirmed their interrupted regular offerings, restored the rites and rituals according to the old pattern; grandson of Sennacherib, great king, mighty king, king of the world, king of Assyria, am I.
>
> During my reign, the great lord, the god Marduk, entered Babylon amidst rejoicing and took up his residence in the eternal Esangila. I confirmed the regular offerings for Esangila and the gods of Babylon. I established the privileged status (*kiddinutu*) of Babylon and appointed Šamaš-šuma-ukin, my favourite brother, to the kingship of Babylon in order that the strong might not harm the weak. I decorated Esangila with silver, gold and precious stones and made Eumuša (i.e. its inner sanctum) glisten like the celestial writing (i.e. the stars).

> At that time, (with regard to) Imgur-Enlil, the wall of Babylon, and Nimet-Enlil, its outer wall, which had become old and buckled and collapsed, in order to increase the security of Esangila and the sanctuaries of Babylon, with the strength of my labour forces I had Nimet-Enlil, its outer wall, built quickly anew with the work of the god Kulla (= patron deity of construction work) and I refitted its gates. I had doors made and hung (them) in its gateways.
>
> O future prince, during whose reign this work falls into disrepair, question skilled craftsmen! (Re)build Imgur-Enlil, the wall, and Nimet-Enlil, the outer wall, according to their ancient specifications! Look at my royal inscription, anoint (it) with oil, offer a sacrifice, and place (it) with your royal inscription! The god Marduk will listen to your prayers.
>
> As for the one who destroys my inscribed name or the name of my favorite (brother) by some crafty device, (or) does not place my royal inscription with his (own) royal inscription, may the god Marduk, king of everything, glare at him angrily and make his name and his descendants disappear from the lands![46]

Although inscriptions of his brother Šamaš-šuma-ukin as king of Babylon are known from various cities in Babylonia (Borsippa, Sippar and Ur),[47] none have hitherto been recovered from Babylon, perhaps because Ashurbanipal insisted on taking the role of the patron of the city for himself. In this inscription, the relationship between the brothers is clearly balanced in Ashurbanipal's favour, but he still called Šamaš-šuma-ukin 'my favourite brother' and sought to protect both his and his brother's name from future damage. Letters demonstrate that the Assyrian Empire controlled Babylonia's foreign policy and that in military matters Šamaš-šuma-ukin depended on his brother dispatching the imperial army.[48]

As the years passed, relations soured. Early in 652 BC, Šamaš-šuma-ukin declared his independence from the Empire, supported not only by the Babylonian cities but also the chieftains of the Chaldean and Aramaean tribes, as well as Elam. Ashurbanipal dispatched the Assyrian forces to Babylonia and, after four years of brutal war and at great cost to the Babylonian people, finally gained control over the country in 648 BC.[49] Šamaš-šuma-ukin died in a blaze of fire (whether by accident, by murder or by suicide is unclear) and Babylon was taken after having been under siege since 650 BC.

Ashurbanipal therefore could not accept his treacherous brother's submission in person and had to content himself with receiving the insignia of Babylonian kingship when the captives and booty from Babylon were brought before him (Fig. 6.4).[50]

Ashurbanipal is today most famous because the great library that was found in Nineveh in the mid-nineteenth century AD is closely associated with his name.[51] Not only have very many of its former holdings survived in the form of cuneiform tablets today kept in the British Museum, we also know some of the ancient library records. These show that in 647 BC, immediately after his victory in the Babylonian war, Ashurbanipal had masses of texts transported to Nineveh from Babylon and other cities. The records list about 2,000 single tablets (both clay tablets and wax-covered wooden writing tablets) and 300 multi-leaved compendia that consisted of several writing tablets, hinged together.[52] While none of the texts recorded

Fig. 6.4: Detail from a stone wall decoration of Ashurbanipal's North Palace in Nineveh, showing captives and booty from the conquest of Babylon in 648 BC, including (on the top left) the royal insignia of the vanquished king of Babylon, Šamaš-šuma-ukin: the crown, the seal and the staff (British Museum, BM 1249459). Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum.

on organic materials survived, some of the clay tablets have been recovered[53] although it is difficult to identify the stolen texts from those that Ashurbanipal had already previously procured from Babylonia. Early in his reign, he had invited scholars from Babylon and Borsippa to assist him in assembling a tablet collection that would enable him to exercise kingship to the best of his abilities, promising them good money for their efforts. They did so happily and apparently with pride, as copies of their correspondence with the royal patron were locally preserved centuries after these events.[54]

Among the confiscated tablet collections from Babylon was also the library of Aššur-mukin-pale'a,[55] a brother of Ashurbanipal and Šamaš-šuma-ukin who served as the Elder Brother (*šešgallu*) of the Esangila temple. That another Assyrian prince held the highest cultic function in Babylon while his brother served as the king of Babylon shows how deeply various members of the Assyrian royal family were embedded in Babylonian society at the time. The conflict was widely perceived as a brother war, and stories about the royal feud circulated across the ancient world: for example, an Aramaic version of the story survives from Egypt that sees the princess Šerua-eṭirat, the eldest child of their father Esarhaddon, desperately trying to reconcile her warring younger brothers.[56] While Ashurbanipal's library holdings may have increased because of the conquest of Babylonia, the conflict massively damaged the Assyrian Empire, as the betrayal of some of the king's closest relatives prominently called into question the validity of the loyalties and obligations that glued this fragile structure together.

Ashurbanipal did not proclaim himself king of Babylon but instead appointed as his client ruler one Kandalanu, about whose background nothing is known. Both died around 630 BC, and the Empire descended into a lengthy succession crisis that eventually enabled Babylonia to regain its independence under Nabopolassar (625–605 BC). This scion of a prominent family from Uruk that had long cooperated with the Assyrian regime[57] went on to forge the Babylonian Empire (Chapter 7). The entanglement between Babylonian and Assyrian scholarship continued but now again centred on Babylon, where many of the scribes and experts previously serving the Assyrian crown must have ended their days after Nabopolassar's wars of conquest brought them there as deportees.

7

MEGACITY: NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S BABYLON

The famous clay tablet called the 'Babylonian Map of the World'[1] (Fig. 7.1) from the sixth century BC features a geometrical drawing of the world that shows the city of Babylon at its heart. Sketched with circle and ruler, the schematic drawing shows a large circular landmass surrounded by the sea, with originally eight triangles arranged around the circle of the sea to form a star shape. On the landmass, various rivers and mountain ranges are indicated as well as cities and regions (Assyria, Urartu, Bit-Yakin). The latter are all represented by small circles, with their names written inside. The one exception is Babylon (labelled TIN.TIR.KI, using the scholarly spelling of its name). This city is shown as a large rectangle that stretches across the river Euphrates. Although Babylon is not in the centre of the landmass and the entire world, but positioned somewhat to the north, it is by far the most prominent landmark indicated in the map.

This map represents the worldview of c. 600 BC, when Babylon had achieved hegemony over the Middle East, while the old rivals like Assyria and Bit-Yakin had faltered and failed. For a few decades, the city of Babylon was indeed the booming centre of the ancient world, the capital of the Babylonian empire whose territories stretched from Judah and Cilicia on the Mediterranean coast to the Zagros Mountains (Map 3).[2]

Fig. 7.1: The Babylonian Map of the World (British Museum, BM 92687). Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Its rulers' ambition was to transform their capital into the greatest city on earth, and in this they certainly succeeded. The ruins of sixth-century Babylon are spread over more than 8 square kilometres (Fig. 7.2), forming the largest archaeological site in the entire Middle East. But their pride was short-lived as the rule of these last native kings of Babylon soon came to an end. In 539 BC, Cyrus the Great of Persia (Chapter 8), the second of his name, occupied Babylon and ended its independence once and for all. He was the most successful military commander of his age and the conqueror of much of the known world. Before turning against the Babylonian Empire, he had already subjugated all of Iran and the territories deep into Central Asia and defeated the kingdom of Lydia, then the most powerful state in Anatolia. With Babylon vanquished, the road was open to take the next glittering prize: Egypt. But this feat Cyrus had to leave to his son and successor Cambyses, as he died in 530 BC fighting on his vast realm's eastern border.

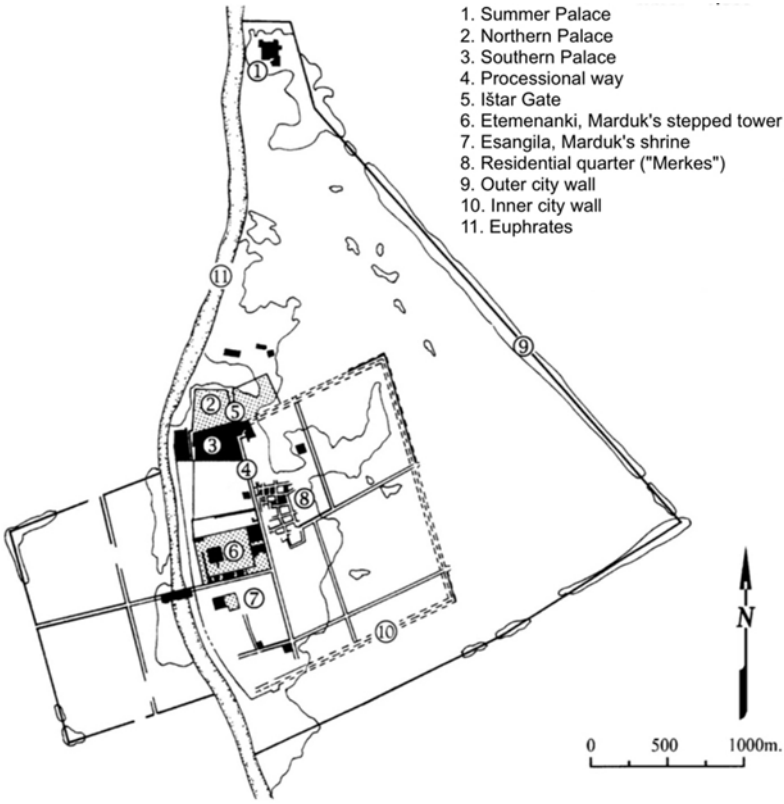


Fig. 7.2: Map of Babylon in the sixth century BC. Adapted by the author from Marc van de Mieroop, 'Reading Babylon', *American Journal of Archaeology* 107 (2003), p. 262 fig. 4.

The contemporary sources for Cyrus' reign are sparse as the Persians had not yet developed a tradition of immortalising royal achievement in writing; there is only one inscription, the so-called 'Cyrus Cylinder' from Babylon that closely follows the Babylonian conventions (Fig. 8.1). On the other hand, the kings of the Babylonian Empire have left behind hundreds of official inscriptions, and most of these were inscribed on such 'cylinders' (Fig. 7.3). These barrel-shaped clay objects were created by royal order to be buried deep in the foundations of the palaces and temples that the kings created or restored. The rulers of future generations, who would take care of these buildings, were imagined to uncover

Fig. 7.3: Clay cylinder from Babylon with an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II in contemporary cuneiform script (Iraq Museum, IM 95928). Author's photograph.

these and acknowledge and appreciate their predecessors' deeds. Other, shorter inscriptions were inscribed into the visible parts of these same buildings, such as baked bricks or paving stones.

These inscriptions mostly describe extensive building activities. Most have been found in the empire's heartland: in Babylon and other cities including Sippar and Ur. They document the transformation of Babylon into a thriving metropolis that became famous in all the ancient world for its spectacular architecture: the newly refurbished Esangila, the temple of Marduk with its stepped tower Etemenanki ('Link between Heaven and Earth'); the huge royal palaces with their wondrous gardens; and the restored and expanded city walls Imgur-Enlil ('Enlil showed Favour', the tall inner wall) and Nimet-Enlil ('Bulwark of Enlil', the lower outer rampart) that encircled the rectangular Inner City. The fame of these huge buildings and of their most prolific creator, King Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 BC), was so great that their descriptions made their way into the Bible and the writings of authors working in Greek and Latin, as we have discussed in Chapter 2. These reports were transmitted long after these celebrated constructions had gone to ruin, causing considerable disappointment to some later visitors including the Roman Emperor Trajan in the early second century AD.

The architecture of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon came to light in the course of the eighteen years of excavations of the German architect and archaeologist Robert Koldewey whose work focused on the

temple complex of Esangila, on the huge Southern Palace and on the magnificently decorated processional road linking the two (Fig. 2.2). Nebuchadnezzar's architecture dominates the site of Babylon also because of his unprecedentedly extensive use of baked bricks,[3] which previous generations of builders had only used very sparingly, instead relying on sun-dried bricks. To a contemporary visitor, the use of baked bricks signalled how very rich a city Babylon was because such bricks were expensive to produce as they need to be fired in a kiln, which requires fuel. But the baked bricks were, of course, much more durable, and therefore Nebuchadnezzar's buildings, once abandoned, were regularly used as quarries, from antiquity until the beginning of Koldewey's excavations (cf. Chapter 9).

The kings of the Babylonian Empire not only left building inscriptions. They also had texts in their honour carved into living rock, often accompanying reliefs that depict the ruler. Situated in mountain ranges in present-day Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia,[4] they are conceptually closely related to the carved stone monuments (steles) that were decorated with the royal image and inscription and erected at significant locations, including temples. Some have survived from the Babylonian heartland, including Uruk, but also at far-flung places in modern Turkey and again Saudi Arabia.[5]

All these inscriptions were written in the cuneiform script and in the Akkadian language, just like in the days of Hammurabi (Chapter 3) who would have instantly recognized the purpose of the clay cylinders and the stone monuments: after all, he too had used such objects to commemorate his achievements. There are no known rock reliefs of Hammurabi, but he was certainly familiar with that concept. His eastern neighbours, the kings of Simurrum and Lullubum who ruled over territories in the Zagros mountain range, liked to carve their likeness into prominent rock cliffs, accompanied by cuneiform inscriptions.

While most of the inscriptions of the sixth century rulers were written in the contemporary form of the cuneiform script, which would have been unknown to Hammurabi and his contemporaries, they could have read some texts that were deliberately written in their own ancient script. The brick inscriptions inserted into the western wall of the Ištar Gate were written in the script of the time of

Fig. 7.4: Clay cylinder from Babylon with an inscription of Nabonidus in archaic script (Iraq Museum, IM 95927). Photograph by Frauke Weiershäuser.

Hammurabi, while those in the eastern wall used the contemporary style of cuneiform. Cylinder inscriptions, too, were executed in both scripts (Fig. 7.4). Today, the most prominent example is arguably Nebuchadnezzar's rock inscription at Wadi Brisa in Lebanon, which presents the royal text twice, in the contemporary cuneiform characters and in the archaic script.[6] Very few people outside of the scholarly circles operating in the Babylonian heartland would have been able to read such a text, and chances that passer-bys in Lebanon could do so were very slim. But going to the trouble and cost of executing inscriptions in the archaic script highlights that the kings of the Babylonian Empire very consciously drew on traditional ways of celebrating kingship and sought to heavily emphasize their deep connection with antiquity, arguably to back up their claim to imperial power.

At that time, the reach of Hammurabi's ancient state was vastly overrated. The Babylonians knew Hammurabi's monument in the city of Susa in southwestern Iran. But they did not know that it had been taken there as booty, together with many other ancient artefacts seized from various temples, by the Elamite king Šutruk-Nahhunte in 1158 BC during his raid through war-torn Babylonia at the very end of Kassite rule over the region (Chapter 4).[7] Instead, they happily assumed that Hammurabi himself had put up the monument in Susa, as a sign of his authority over the city[8] – when in reality, he held no territories in Iran at any point. Today, we know better, as Šutruk-Nahhunte very helpfully had short inscriptions of his own carved into his spoils, in the Elamite language and using a distinctive local variant of cuneiform. But in the sixth century, no

one could read and understand his texts, and Šutruk-Nahhunte's role in bringing Hammurabi's stele to Susa had long been forgotten in the tumultuous history of that city. As we have already said, the Persian rulers who came to control the city at that time had neither use nor understanding for such inscriptions.

At Babylon, things were very different, as the kings liked to surround themselves with scholars who could delve deep into the Babylonian past. Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon, is often called the first Mesopotamian archaeologist, as he spent a great deal of time, effort and money on establishing the original layout of ancient temples when he ordered their renovation.[9] He deliberately had his people hunt for the old foundation documents, the clay barrels and other inscriptions deposited by his royal predecessors – the older, the better: he succeeded in recovering artefacts that had been left in the age-old foundations of temples built almost two millennia before his time, in the days of the kings of Akkad. His inscriptions proudly detail these efforts and the precious finds, making it very clear to us that his experts – unlike the people of Susa – were fully able to read and understand the archaic script and language.

The building inscriptions that these same experts composed on behalf of their royal masters range from simple labels of only a few words that identify the builder of a palace, temple or city wall to lengthy, sophisticated narrative accounts in which the ruler's achievements are reported in a highly literary language. The royal inscriptions are part and parcel of the thriving intellectual history of the time and highlight the entanglement between scholarship and royal patronage. However, their almost exclusive focus rested on the king as the builder of shrines, palaces and city walls or as protector and sometimes restorer of ancient cults and rituals, as these two building inscriptions from Babylon illustrate:

(A) Clay cylinder of Nebuchadnezzar II excavated at the Procession Road of Babylon (IM 95928; Fig. 7.3):

> Nebuchadnezzar (II), king of Babylon, the one who provides for the Esangila and Ezida temples, son of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, am I:
>
> I provided for the Esangila temple, completed the Ezida temple, and made the sanctuaries of the great gods shine like daylight.

At the time, the broad streets of Babylon, whose interiors had become too low: I filled in the street Nabû-dayyan-nišišu ('Nabû is the Judge of his People'), the street of the Uraš Gate, and the street Ištar-lamassi-ummaniša ('Ištar is the Guardian Angel of her Troops'), the street of the Ištar Gate, with six cubits of infill for the processional streets of the great lord, the god Marduk, and the god Nabû, the triumphant heir, his beloved son, and beautified the access ways with bitumen and baked brick. For a second time, I filled (them) in more than before with eighteen cubits of infill and improved the access ways with bitumen and baked brick. For a third time, I filled in Ištar-lamassi-ummaniša street with a large seventeen cubit infill. (In total) I filled Ištar-lamassi-ummaniša street with a high forty-one cubit infill and broadened the access way.

O Marduk, exalted lord, the exceedingly wise one of the gods, look upon my handiwork with favour and pleasure and give me as a gift a long life, the attainment of very old age. O great gods who go in procession on the way to the New Year festival house on the street Ay-ibur-šabû ('May the Arrogant not Prevail') with the god Marduk, the king of the heavens and netherworld, say good things about me in the presence of the god Marduk, the great lord.[10]

(B) Clay cylinder of Nabonidus from the Emašdari ('House of animal offerings') of Ištar of Akkad at Babylon (IM 95927; Fig. 7.4):

For the goddess Ištar, supreme one, beloved of the gods, most valiant one, the goddess Inanna, goddess of battle, the one who wages war, radiant lady of settlements, most exalted of the Igigu deities, princess of the Anunnaku deities, bearer of fear, lady whose brilliance covers the heavens and whose awe-inspiring radiance overwhelms the wide earth, the goddess Ištar of Akkad, the lady of battle who incites fighting, who dwells in the Emašdari temple, which is inside Babylon – my lady:

Nabonidus, king of Babylon, protégé of the god Tutu (i.e. Marduk), the humble and submissive one who reveres the great gods, the shepherd who provides, the one who is attentive to the will of the gods, the respectful governor who constantly

> follows the ways of the goddess Ištar, the one who makes *sattukku*-offerings abundant (and) (re)confirms *nindabû*-offerings, (the one) who is assiduous about improving the cult centres of the gods all day long, (the one who) in the Esangila temple – the palace of the gods – makes splendid gifts enter inside it, (and who ensures that) presents are regularly provided to all of the sanctuaries of the gods, son of Nabû-balassu-iqbi, wise prince, am I.
>
> At that time, (with regard to) Emašdari, the temple of the goddess Ištar of Akkad, whose foundation(s) had fallen to pieces (and) turned into ruins, whose brickwork alkali had burned to ashes, whose site remained desolate, whose shrine was not standing, whose cella was in ruins, (and where) incense (offerings) had ceased, my heart pondered (re)building this temple and my mind desired it. I sought out the site of this temple, examined its foundation platform, checked its foundations, and secured its brickwork. I built Emašdari anew inside Babylon.
>
> On account of this, O Ištar of Akkad, goddess of battle, look with pleasure upon this temple, your beloved residence, and proclaim good health for me. In the presence of the god Marduk, king of the gods, speak all day long about the prolongation of my days and the increasing of my years. March at my side in the place of battle and war so that I can kill my foes and cut down my enemies.[11]

In contrast to Hammurabi and his successors or the Assyrian kings, the sixth century rulers of Babylon did not discuss their military achievements in their inscriptions. This means that many events that historians would like to know more about are not mentioned in these texts at all. For example, the Bible describes how Nebuchadnezzar II's armies quelled a rebellion against Babylonian sovereignty led by Judah's last king Zedekiah, how he conquered Jerusalem and had the Judeans, including Zedekiah and the royal family, deported to Babylon and the Babylonian heartland. Archival texts from Babylon and other sites affirm this as they document aspects of the daily lives of these people and their descendants (cf. Chapter 8), but Nebuchadnezzar's inscriptions do not provide us with any information on these events. They also

fail to report his capture of the important Phoenician harbour town of Tyre. The thirteen-year long siege and its eventual success are known only from classical sources, although the fact that the Babylonian king left rock reliefs and inscriptions in nearby sites in modern-day Lebanon confirms the accounts indirectly.

For the political history of this time, the so-called Babylonian Chronicles[12] are our most important sources as their compilers, working at the Marduk temple in Babylon, assembled data that in some way affects the sanctuary. Fortunately for us, they took a rather generous view but to them, this was entirely justified as they considered Marduk to be the ruler of the world, with the king acting on his behalf for the greater glory of his city, Babylon. The chronicles are the most important source for the formation of the Babylonian Empire, relating how the inaugural ruler Nabopolassar (625–605 BC) first established independence from the Assyrian Empire (Chapter 6), then prominently contributed to its collapse and finally brought the major part of its former holdings under Babylon's control.

While these texts and others that can be described as scholarly writing are written in cuneiform and in Akkadian, the state administration now used the Aramaic alphabet. This script was recorded on the flat even surfaces of a range of organic materials that conceptually match paper (a later invention whose use began to spread from China to the west only in the thirteenth century AD): most popular were leather scrolls but papyrus was used, too. Unfortunately, such organic writing materials are perishable, unlike the trusty old clay tablets, and so nothing remains of the state archives of the Babylonian Empire.[13] At Babylon, the best evidence for the state administration's use of Aramaic comes from the bricks used for the construction of palaces and temples. Many of them bear not only the stamp impression of the king's cuneiform inscription but also the much smaller imprint of a stamp seal that identifies in Aramaic script the person responsible for preparing the bricks (Fig. 7.5).[14]

Whereas the records of the state administration have not survived, we have at least a large number of clay documents from family and temple archives. They come from Babylon but also the nearby towns of Borsippa with the Ezida shrine for the god Nabû, patron of the scribal arts, and Sippar with the Ebabbar sanctuary

Fig. 7.5: Brick stamped with the cuneiform inscription of King Nebuchadnezzar II and with the name seal of Bethel-dalani ('Bethel Saved Me'), inscribed in Aramaic alphabet script (*byt'ldlny*). In addition, a dog of medium size stepped on the brick before it was fired, and some of its paw prints obscure the royal inscription. Exhibited in the Iraq Museum (catalogue number unknown). Author's photograph.

of the sun god Šamaš. The venerable temples of Babylon and the families who took responsibility for the proper execution of the ancient cults since ancient times stuck to cuneiform writing much longer than the state administration.[15] From these sources, we are very well informed about the business and family affairs of these urban elites and about their literary tastes and scholarly interests.

When these people walked through Babylon, what did they experience? Andrew George, the leading expert on Babylon's topography, has recently imagined 'a tour of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon' that follows the route of the annual procession of the god Nabû, thought to be Marduk's son, who from his own shrine in the nearby city of Borsippa set out to visit his father's city and some of its sanctuaries to participate in the celebration of the New Year Festival.[16] This is a good way to see the premier sights of the city (Fig. 7.6). With some variations, we will follow this route when traversing the Inner City of Babylon from south to north, from Uraš Gate to Ištar Gate, and also stop at a few other points in order to take in all those buildings that underwent reconstruction during Saddam Hussein's great restoration project (Chapter 2). This will give us a good appreciation of the architecture of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. Like any archetypical sightseeing tour, the focus will

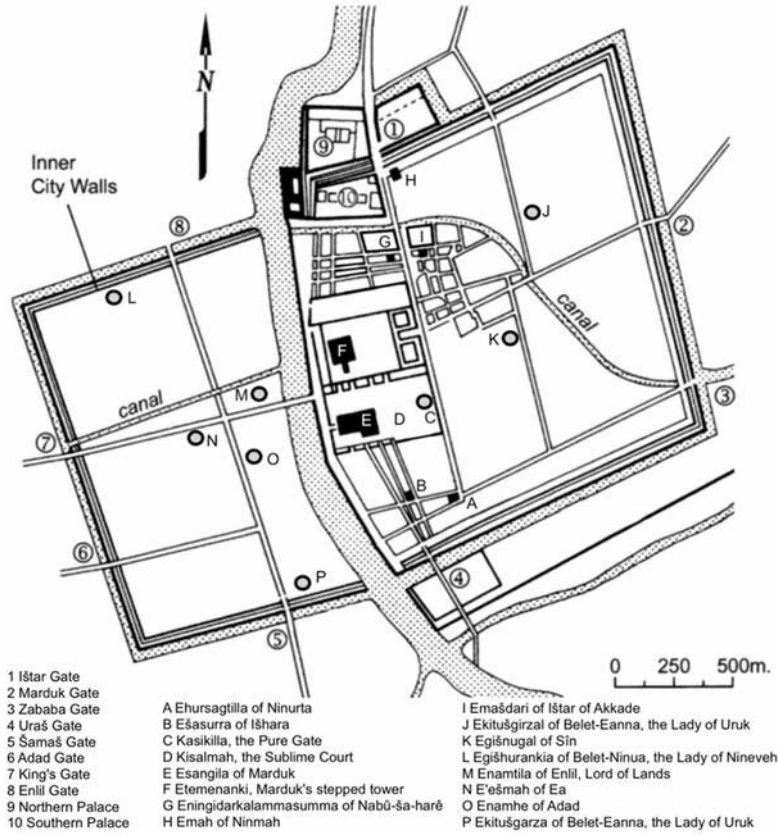


Fig. 7.6: Map of the inner city of Babylon in the sixth century BC, with the city gates, the palaces and the temples indicated; round circles mark the approximate location of temples that have not been excavated. Adapted by the author from Marc van de Mieroop, 'Reading Babylon', *American Journal of Archaeology* 107 (2003), p. 266 fig. 7, with additional information taken from Andrew R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts* (Leiven: Peeters, 1992), p. 24 fig. 4.

firmly rest on the monumental buildings, sacral architecture, imposing gates and huge palaces.

What we have to bear in mind at all times is that the streets would have been crowded, noisy and smelly, and sometimes also dangerous, as thieves, abandoned children and prostitutes were about, as well as wild dogs and pigs looking for tasty morsels of garbage.[17] At that time, Babylon certainly had more inhabitants than

it had ever had. To modern audiences, the world's largest city would seem relatively modest: a recent calculation assumes a maximum of 180,000 inhabitants for the heydays of the sixth century BC, based on an estimate of 200 inhabitants per hectare.[18] Most people would have hurried through the city without paying much attention to the grand architecture that will so occupy us in the following. By focusing on these monuments, we observe Babylon exactly as King Nebuchadnezzar, their foremost architect and builder, would have wanted us to experience his city.[19] We should also remember that the streets and squares and temple courtyards would mainly be the reserve of men. To meet the respectable women of Babylon, we would need to secure an invitation to a private residence.

The architecture of the private houses of the sixth century BC is well known from the buildings excavated by Koldewey in Babylon's Merkes area, the residential area just east of the Holy City that centred on Esangila. From their design and spatial organization emerges a clear concern for the privacy of their occupants, usually several generations of one family. There is typically only a single entrance that led into the house and, through one room or sometimes a series of rooms, on to the inner courtyard from where the different suites of the building were accessible.[20] The doorways were arranged in such a way that it was impossible to look into the courtyard when standing outside. Here, in the secluded space of the courtyard, the female members of the family would spend much of their lives. They would grind flour, bake bread and prepare food. They would comb and spin wool and, using vertical looms set against the courtyard walls, weave the extra fine cloth that had been a signature product of the cities of southern Iraq for thousands of years (cf. Chapter 1).[21]

Our tour of the sights of Babylon starts on the southern quay on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, where visitors would have arrived by boat, and leads us directly into the eastern part of the rectangular inner city. We enter through the Uraš Gate, one of eight gates that cut through the inner city's enormous fortification system (Fig. 7.7), deemed one of the wonders of the world in antiquity (Chapter 2). The eight gates were named after seven deities (clockwise from the north, the goddess Ištar and the gods Marduk, Zababa, Uraš, Šamaš, Adad and Enlil) and the king.

Fig. 7.7: The restored fortification walls of Babylon near the Ištar Gate, as seen in November 2018. Author's photograph.

That part of the Inner City that was situated on the eastern bank of the Euphrates was surrounded by another city wall of roughly triangular shape. It had only recently been constructed by Nebuchadnezzar and enclosed the areas that he had added to the city's expanse, tripling its size and turning it into the largest settlement of its time. But whereas the Inner City was a densely built-up urban environment, the land between the inner city wall and the new outer wall was only sparsely filled with buildings. It was mainly used for gardens and orchards, which were of great importance in supplying the people of Babylon with food.[22]

At this time, date cultivation became ever more important in northern Babylonia, and a significant part of the agricultural production was switched from extensive barley agriculture to intensive date horticulture.[23] Dates are a very labour-intensive crop: an individual date palm, typically standing 20 metres tall or more, has to be climbed at least fifteen times per season to clean and hand-pollinate it before one can finally harvest the ripe

dates. Tending the palm groves required far more manpower than growing cereal but the required workforce was readily available in the now far more densely populated region of Babylon, Borsippa and Sippar. The fruit of this hard labour is a highly nutritious product: the sugar content of ripe dates is about 80 per cent, with the rest consisting of protein, fibre, vitamins, salts and minerals.[24] Easy to store and to process, dates are therefore ideal for feeding large urban populations. In addition to bread and gruel made from barley, dried dates and date beer (an alcoholic drink of fermented dates that resembles cider)[25] were the staple food of imperial Babylon and a hallmark of the city's economic efflorescence.

If we walked through these date gardens, we would eventually arrive at the northern tip of the triangle formed by Nebuchadnezzar's new outer wall of Babylon. Here, right next to the Euphrates, lies the king's Summer Palace where the court spent the hottest time of the year when living in the centre of the cramped, smelly city would have been tiresome. This is the site of the village of Babil, whose name preserved that of ancient Babylon and where early visitors like Pietro della Valle came to hunt for inscribed bricks (Chapter 2). But if we really wanted to visit this part of the city we would not have made our way to that imposing building overland, as it was situated at the exact opposite end of the vast city from where we presently stand at the Uraš Gate. The easiest way to get to the Summer Palace from our present position would have been by boat, travelling 5 kilometres upstream, past huge temple complexes and palaces on the eastern bank and living quarters on the western bank and passing underneath the great bridge that connected the two sides of the Inner City.

Instead of taking this boat trip, however, we walk from the Uraš Gate along the great ceremonial road called Nabû-dayyan-nišešu 'Nabû is the Judge of his People'. This name indicates the importance of this traffic way for the god Nabû's cult procession as it leads directly to the Esangila temple complex of his father Marduk in the centre of the Inner City. But we first take a detour and head eastward in the direction of the Zababa Gate in order to visit two temples situated right in the middle of the residential areas of the Inner City.

Our first destination is the temple of Ninurta, the youthful patron deity of battle and valour. As with all Mesopotamian shrines,

this sanctuary had a Sumerian name, for that was considered the language of the gods: Ehursangtilla means 'House where the Mountain is Annihilated', and this refers to Ninurta's famous defeat of a monstrous rock creature, a living mountain range called Asag (as immortalized in the popular epic poem Lugal-e).[26] This ancient temple had been restored by Nebuchadnezzar's father and predecessor Nabopolassar, who secured kingship over Babylonia for himself and went on to defeat the Assyrian Empire in a series of battles from 616 BC onwards. It makes much sense that the most successful military commander of his time would seek to express his gratitude to the patron deity of warriors and rebuild the god's temple.

However, Nabopolassar was more than anything the servant of the god Marduk who had given him the crown of Babylon, and he wished to communicate this message loud and clear. Following the traditional architectural style, the temple of Ninurta has an approximately square ground plan, of 40×40 metres.[27] Its size was designed to dwarf the surrounding private houses. The enormous thickness of the walls, between 2 and 4 metres, gives an indication of the temple's great height. All of these features are shared with the other temples of Babylon, but there is much that is special about this building, owing to Nabopolassar's desire to honour with this building not only the war god but also the divine lord of Babylon. Three entrances lead from north, east and south into a vast central courtyard, from where one could enter three cellas, all with a raised platform for a divine statue. As Heather Baker demonstrated,[28] the central cella is for Ninurta while the northern cella probably belonged to his consort, Gula the healer. The southern cella, however, was dedicated to Marduk. The architect responsible for Nabopolassar's new temple wanted to ensure maximum exposure for the master of Babylon. Therefore, he situated the eastern gate of the temple, effectively the main entrance to the sanctuary, in such a way that it was possible to look at the statue of Marduk on its pedestal even from outside the sanctuary whenever the doors to the temple and to the cella were opened. The best time to see the statue would have been in the morning when the rising sun lightened up the sanctum.

In the sixth century BC, the divine lord of Babylon was so omnipresent in his city that there were seven statues of him, and

only one of them in the inner sanctum in Esangila. Two others were situated elsewhere in the vast temple complex but the other four were set up in shrines other than his, including our temple of Ninurta. We know this from a clay tablet that lists the seven Marduk statues with their location, their principal material (precious stones and rare types of wood) and their names.[29] Unfortunately, the name of Marduk's statue in Ninurta's shrine is broken off, but like in the case of the preserved entries, it would have been one of his fifty names as listed in the Epic of Creation (Chapter 5).

Heading back from Ninurta's temple to the junction of the ceremonial road, we enter another temple. The Ešasurra ('House of the Womb') was dedicated to the goddess Išhara, the lady of love. Like Ninurta's Ehursangtilla, this temple was excavated during Koldewey's long years of work in Babylon, but because no inscriptions were found in the building, he could not identify the owner as Išhara and therefore called it 'Temple Z'. The ancient Babylonian topographical text Tintir, however, allows the attribution to the goddess.[30] Išhara's temple is similarly sized as Ehursangtilla and measures 40×45 metres. Several monumental entrances lead into the building from the north and the east. Through different halls, suites of rooms and courtyards, the various possible routes all reach a large central courtyard. It is through this courtyard that one enters first a huge anteroom and then, behind it, the heart of the temple: the cella with the statue of the deity, of human shape and dressed in the richest garments imaginable, adorned with priceless jewellery. The statue stood in the axis of the doorways that linked the cella and the anteroom with the central courtyard. When the monumental doors were opened, one could see the statue, which stood or was seated on a raised podium, even if one was not admitted to the cella. The entrance leading to Išhara's inner sanctum was oriented in the north western direction and would therefore have been hit by the rays of the setting sun – very fittingly for the mistress of carnal love and the protectress of the marital bed.

Visiting these two temples has whetted our appetite to see the most important and largest shrine of the city of Babylon and of the Babylonian Empire: the Esangila temple complex dedicated to the god Marduk. Back at the ceremonial road, we head northwards and after half a kilometre reach the 'Pure Gate' (Kasikilla), the

monumental gateway leading westwards past the statues of the divine judges Nergal and Madanu into an extended temple precinct. Unlike the temples of Ninurta and Išhara, this precinct is set apart from the houses of ordinary Babylonians. The sacred area was called Eridu, after the ancient city on the Persian Gulf that was thought to have housed the very first temple. Visitors to the Holy City would often have seen someone swear an oath on Marduk's divine weapon at the Pure Gate, as judges frequently required such an act in order to settle a legal dispute.

The Pure Gate led into the 'Sublime Court' (Kisalmah), a gigantic courtyard that provided access to a great many shrines situated around it, including Marduk's Esangila temple, by far the largest and most lavishly decorated of all these sanctuaries. Today, this area of Babylon gives little indication of the spectacular architectural ensemble that it would have been in the sixth century BC. Perhaps one must travel to modern-day Uzbekistan and visit the Registan at the heart of the ancient city of Samarkand, a magnificent square created at the height of power of the Timurid Dynasty (fourteenth-fifteenth centuries AD) when Tamerlane and Ulugh Beg were the most powerful rulers of the Middle East. This gigantic space is entered through a huge gate and framed by three great madrasas and mosques, built in mudbrick and splendidly decorated with glazed bricks in a colour scheme that closely matches that used at Babylon, with a shared tradition of monumental arched gateways and warrens of rooms arranged around huge courtyards. The Registan is truly a stunning sight, and I imagine that looking from the Pure Gate towards the Sublime Court with Esangila and the other shrines of the sacred precinct in the sixth century BC would have been similarly breathtaking. Today, what is left of the enormous ruins exposed by Robert Koldewey[31] over a century ago is less spectacular to behold (Fig. 7.8). But thanks to the nearby shrine with the burial of Amran ibn Ali, a son of the prophet Mohammed's son-in-law Ali with a secondary wife (Fig. 7.9), the site continues to be respected as a holy place.

Esangila stood at an imposing size with a ground plan of 86×79 metres and 9-metre-high gateways. While the walls of Babylon's other temples were decorated in a traditional black-and-white colour scheme using bitumen and gypsum, Nebuchadnezzar had Esangila's walls far more expensively furnished with lapis lazuli and alabaster.

Fig. 7.8: View over the ruins of Esangila, as seen in November 2018. Author's photograph.

Fig. 7.9: Satellite image taken in October 2004, showing the Shiite shrine of Amran ibn Ali, the ruins of Esangila and the pond marking the ground map of the stepped tower Etemenanki. From Google Earth Pro, image © DigitalGlobe 2018.

The furniture was made of the most precious metals, stones and woods. Statues of serpents, dragons, mermen, scorpion-men and other monstrous guardians protected its gateways. The temple also contained a very well stocked library that held works of cultic literature, including prayers, incantations, liturgies and surveys of the sacred topography, and poetry (such as the Epic of Gilgameš and *Enuma Eliš*, the so-called Epic of Creation; Chapter 5) as well as commentaries that explained the difficult passages of many of these texts, moreover chronicles and other historiographic compositions, mathematical and astronomical texts (cf. Chapter 9), manuals on the traditional forms of Babylon divination (especially astrology and extispicy; Chapter 6), medicinal and exorcistic instructions and lexical lists.[32] The temple community took care of the gods and saw to it that they were groomed, fed and entertained in the daily rites. Its members were very proud of having inherited their shares in the duties from their ancestors. Membership of this exclusive group entailed many traditional privileges including exemption from taxes and public works (other than the temple service, of course), which the sixth century rulers honoured, albeit sometimes grudgingly.[33]

The immense building complex housed not only Marduk, but also had wings dedicated to his spouse Zarpanitu and his son Nabû as well as shrines for all gods of the Babylonian pantheon. Esangila was known with good reason as the 'Palace of the Gods'. If we have the time we can go and see all three statues of Marduk: the one in the inner sanctum of Esangila, the second in the part of the temple dedicated to Marduk's father, Ea, and the third in a chapel for Ninurta.

We continue our tour through Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. Leaving the Esangila complex, we step again through the Pure Gate and find ourselves back on the already familiar Nabû-dayyan-nišešu street. We continue northwards until the road reaches the outer walls of a second temple complex in honour of Marduk. This is Etemenanki ('Link between Heaven and Earth'), the huge stepped tower rising high above its sacred enclosure that measured 400×400 metres and took up all the land as far as the bank of the Euphrates. When one passed by on the river, the gigantic tower with its seven stepped platforms loomed high above. At sunrise, it cast its shadow far across the river and even reached the section of the Inner City situated on the western bank of the Euphrates.

The tower's base measures 91×91 metres and a mathematical problem recorded on a Babylonian clay tablet indicates that the tower was as high as it was wide.[34] The enormous building required immensely deep foundations. A huge outer staircase, set at an angle of 90 degrees to the southern side of the tower provided access to the first platform, while staircases running along the sides of the building served to reach the higher platforms. Badly damaged by Sennacherib of Assyria when he punished Babylon for its rebellion in 689 BC, Etemenanki was partially restored by his son Esarhaddon and his grandson Ashurbanipal (Chapter 8), but the construction work was only completed after the fall of the Assyrian Empire under Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. How many platforms the stepped tower originally had was a matter of some debate until a damaged stone stele of Nebuchadnezzar[35] with the only surviving contemporary depiction of the tower was identified, which shows the structure to consist of six platforms, with a shrine on top (Fig. 7.10). Nevertheless, there are many open questions concerning the height of the tower, its system of access and the building on its summit.[36]

Climbing up to the top of the stepped tower would have taken a very long time, but the view alone would have made it worth the effort. In the flat landscape of southern Iraq, one would have been able to see for kilometres and kilometres in all directions – unless sandstorms blocked one's view. But the night sky would always have been wonderfully clear, and serving as an observation platform for the astrologers attached to the temple was one of the purposes of this spectacular building.[37] Today, all that remains of it is a peculiar pan-shaped pond and only when the water level is low enough can one make out the remainder of its brick foundations in its centre (Fig. 7.9; cf. Chapter 2).

Now, we follow the road around the temple precinct's south eastern corner, where the processional road bears another name, as we are about to enter the area dominated by the royal palace. The name Ay-ibur-šabû 'May the Arrogant not Prevail' refers to the impudent enemies who would foolishly dare to oppose the king of Babylon. This road was the site of royal triumphs, and Nebuchadnezzar had not shied away from any expense when he had this road paved with breccia stone slabs, set atop baked bricks bearing his inscription. Past the gateway into the Etemenanki

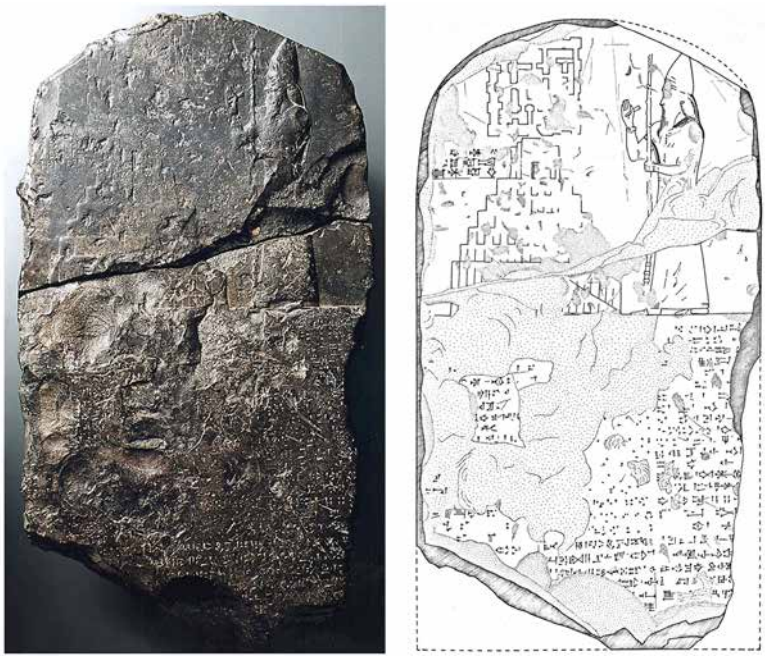


Fig. 7.10: The so-called Tower of Babel Stela, a stone monument with an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II and a depiction showing the king facing the stepped tower (MS 2063, Schøyen Collection Oslo). Photograph by Tom Jensen, from www.schoyencollection.com/history-collection-introduction/babylonian-history-collection/tower-babel-stele-ms-2063 (last accessed 6 December 2018); drawing by Andrew R. George, 'La Porte des Dieux: la topographie cultuelle de Babylone d'après les textes cunéiformes', in Béatrice André-Salvini, ed., *La tour de Babylone: études et recherches sur les monuments de Babylone* (Rome: CNR Istituto di studi sulle civiltá dell'egeo e del vicino oriente, 2013), p. 41 fig. 9.

complex, the processional road led in a straight line all the way up to the Ištar Gate.

But before heading there, we visit a temple close to the northern wall of the Etemenanki complex. This is Eningidarkalammasumma ('House which Bestows the Sceptre of the Land'), the temple dedicated to the god Nabû-ša-harê, Nabû's aspect as the divine crown prince. For once, this building was not excavated by Koldewey but by members of the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage in 1979–1980.[38] The square temple had a ground plan of about 40×40 metres and a straightforward design with three entrances leading

from three sides into a central courtyard that provided access to the inner sanctum. The shrine was founded by King Esarhaddon of Assyria, who ruled over Babylon from 680–669 BC, and renovated by Nebuchadnezzar. It was in this building that the Babylonian crown prince was invested (hence the name of the temple), and sometime in the 620s BC, Nebuchadnezzar himself would have stood in the inner sanctum and received the blessings of the god when his father Nabopolassar appointed him as his successor.

But Nabû was also the patron of the scribal arts, and the students of cuneiform – in this period, only boys – paid homage to this. Once the youngsters had learned the basics of the script and were able to shape their own clay tablets and write simple texts they produced a sample of their work with a dedicatory inscription for the god Nabû and deposited it in the temple. When the sanctuary was excavated, these tablets – often clumsy objects that betray the youth of their scribes[39] – were found all over the building, especially as part of its floors, as the students' dedications were built into the very fabric of the shrine. The charming custom reminds us that temples were part and parcel of the lives of Babylon's inhabitants, and not merely a canvas for the royal builder to show off his piety and power. The temple was completely rebuilt during Saddam Hussein's renovation project (Fig. 7.11).

Back at Ay-ibur-šabû street, we find the walls lining its final stretch decorated with reliefs of snarling lions executed in the colourfully glazed moulded bricks that had so enchanted Koldewey, while the Ištar Gate was resplendent with rows of serpent-dragons and bulls, the two animals sacred to Marduk and Ištar, respectively.

Between this last part of the Processional Road and the Euphrates lies the so-called Southern Palace that was built by Nabopolassar and restored by his son Nebuchadnezzar, who had to order the floors to be raised in order to protect the building from the rising damp. The enormous palace was called Bit-tabrat-niše 'House of Wonderment of the People' and had around 250 rooms situated around five vast courtyards, with the gigantic throne room at its heart: its façade was decorated with brilliantly glazed moulded brick reliefs that showed a row of lions striding underneath tall palm trees. This entire building was excavated by Koldewey[40] and reconstructed at the behest of Saddam Hussein in record time in 1986–1987 (Fig. 7.12; see Chapter 2). Nebuchadnezzar,

Fig. 7.11: The restored but now disintegrating temple of Nabû-ša-harê, as seen in November 2018. Author's photograph.

Fig. 7.12: The restored Southern Palace, as seen from Saddam Hussein's palace in November 2018. Author's photograph.

however, had not been content with the complex, according to his inscriptions because it was too small but quite possibly also because of the unpleasant damp, and therefore quickly began with the construction of another palace.

Nebuchadnezzar's new palace was the so-called Northern Palace (Fig. 7.13). It lies opposite the Southern Palace on the other side of the fortification walls, just outside the Inner City on a huge platform that was raised to a height of 8 metres – no chance of damp here. Koldewey excavated there, too, although he was not able to expose much of the building.[41] Paul-Alain Beaulieu was able to reconstruct an archive of administrative notes from the Eanna temple that dealt with the enormous financial contribution that this principal sanctuary of the southern Babylonian city of Uruk had to make to the construction of Nebuchadnezzar's new palace.[42] It is clear that Eanna was just one of many institutions that were required to shoulder the cost of materials and labour of what was arguably a quite unnecessary vanity project that, however, served brilliantly to make the power of the king felt everywhere in the empire.

Fig. 7.13: The ruins of the Northern Palace, with Saddam Hussein's palace in the background, as seen in November 2018. Author's photograph.

Once the royal court moved to its brand new building around the corner, the Southern Palace was used to accommodate high-status hostages and visitors, as is clear from the remains of an administrative archive that were discovered by Koldewey in a storage area of a lower level of the palace, certainly dumped there as obsolete rubbish. The 303 texts and fragments retrieved record allotments of cereal, dates and sesame oil and their recipients. Attested are members of royal families and their retinue, boatmen, carpenters and builders, messengers and guards from Cilicia (Hume and Pirindu), Lydia, Caria (Banneš) and 'Greece' (Yaman, most likely referring to Ionia), from various Eastern Mediterranean cities including Ashkelon and the Phoenician ports Tyre, Byblos and Arwad, from Judah, Egypt and various Arab tribes, from Bahrain (Dilmun) and from Elam, Media and Persia. The most notable person attested is Jehoiachin, formerly king of Judah, brought to Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar had subdued rebellious Jerusalem in 597 BC.[43] Although the Southern Palace was deemed good enough for these residents, Nebuchadnezzar's decision to leave the building was vindicated when parts of it collapsed into the river; his second successor, Neriglissar, had the damage repaired.[44]

Instead of leaving the Inner City through the magnificent Ištar Gate to head towards the Northern Palace, we now turn eastwards from the processional road and visit the nearby Emah ('Exalted House'), the temple of Ninmah (also Belet-ili), the mother goddess. This temple had been built by the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal in the mid-seventh century BC and restored by Nebuchadnezzar, as the inscriptions found by Koldewey in the fabric of the building demonstrate. During Saddam's restoration initiative, this sanctuary was completely reconstructed (Fig. 7.14) and served as a performance site during his 'Babylon Festivals'.

The shrine is very sizable with a ground plan of 40×55 metres but has a simple layout with just one monumental gateway leading into a grand courtyard and through to anteroom and cella. The north western orientation of the doorways meant that the cella was always shrouded in darkness unless fires were lit to brighten it; it was also not possible to see into the inner sanctum from the street, as had been the case for the cella of Marduk in the Ninurta temple or for the sanctum of the Išhara temple. The resultant privacy was certainly fitting for the goddess of birth and creation. It is a good

Fig. 7.14: The restored Emah, the sanctuary of Nimah, in November 2018. Author's photograph.

place to end our tour of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. And here, in his inscription to the mother goddess, we encounter the great king at his most humane:

> Ninmah, august princess, when you joyfully enter your pure residence, your favourite abode, may good recommendations for me be set on your lips. Grant me joy, may I acquire happiness and bright countenance. Let my progeny be multiplied, let my posterity endure, and make my offspring thrive in joy among my people.[45]

These wishes were only partially fulfilled as the last years of the long reign of Nebuchadnezzar saw conflict brew regarding the succession. This uncertainty eventually resulted in dynastic disruption, twice and in short sequence. First, the crown prince fell out of royal favour and was put under house arrest, made to live in the damp Southern Palace together with the noble hostages from foreign lands.[46] Amel-Marduk (562–560 BC) ascended to the

throne regardless, but was quickly replaced as king by the husband of his sister, an erstwhile battle companion and confidant of his father. In military terms, the reign of seasoned Neriglissar (559–556 BC) was successful and in 557, he could take great pride in the conquest of the Anatolian kingdom of Cilicia, the important coastal region around modern Adana. Shortly after his return to Babylon, however, the aged king died, probably of natural causes. His son Labaši-Marduk succeeded him, but was murdered within a few months on the throne. Whether the new king Nabonidus (555–539 BC) was related to the dynasty founded by Nabopolassar is quite uncertain, as the ruler is silent on the matter. He chose instead to emphasize the link to the Assyrian royal family through his mother Adda-guppi, who had spent the first part of her life in Harran, the last bastion of the Assyrian Empire in the seventh century BC.[47]

On the basis of only contemporary sources, we would certainly characterize Nabonidus as a very successful ruler who managed to reform the organization and economic structure of the powerful Babylonian temples and who secured the important desert route from southern Iraq to the Mediterranean Sea. Nonetheless, the memory of Nabonidus is deeply distorted by the tendentious literature composed in Babylon after the conquest of Cyrus the Great of Persia, intended to smooth relations with the new regime (see also Chapter 8). In these works,[48] Nabonidus was portrayed as a presumptuous, uneducated upstart whose every action insulted Marduk and the people of Babylon until the noble Cyrus replaced that vile creature. The best known of these texts is an inscription written on behalf of and in honour of Cyrus on a clay cylinder that was deposited in the foundations of the Esangila temple of Babylon. The so-called Cyrus Cylinder celebrates Marduk's decision against Nabonidus and in favour of Cyrus to serve as king of Babylon. Accordingly, the defeated Nabonidus is described as incompetent and unfit for rule and the victorious Cyrus as wise and blessed.

The fate of Nabonidus is unclear, as details of the Persian conquest are sparsely known in general.[49] Babylon, in any case, became the capital of the Persian satrapy of Babylonia, and although Cyrus and his successors held the nominal title of king of Babylon, none of the Persian rulers ever seriously embraced the office. The task of caring for the temple of Marduk and the other shrines fell to the people of Babylon (cf. Chapter 5).

8

CLIPPED WINGS: BABYLON AND THE PERSIANS

Cyrus the Great (550–530 BC) had started his career as a client ruler of Astyages, king of the Medes, before turning against his overlord with 'his small army' (as Nabonidus of Babylon says in passing in an inscription)[1] and claiming power over most of Iran for himself. In Babylonian texts, he was always called 'king of Anšan',[2] the ancient Elamite highland centre that lies close to the royal city of Persepolis (Map 3). Cyrus was a direct descendant of Teispes, who had founded the small kingdom of Anšan a century earlier in the chaotic aftermath of the brother war between Ashurbanipal of Assyria and Šamaš-šuma-ukin of Babylon (Chapter 6) that caused the collapse of the Babylonian ally Elam in the year 648 BC.

Once he had replaced Astyages, Cyrus was soon considered a threat by rulers near and far, and his neighbours Nabonidus and Croesus of Lydia in Anatolia formed an alliance against him with Amasis of Egypt and even the distant Greek kingdom of Sparta. In the connected world of the sixth century BC, mountain ranges, deserts and oceans were clearly no longer considered obstacles big enough to provide protection against an ambitious conqueror. But despite this treaty, the allies never came together to counter Cyrus, who first attacked and then annexed Lydia in 547 BC. In 539 BC, the Persian invaded Babylonia and defeated Nabonidus' forces at the Battle of Der (modern Tell Aqar). After

negotiating his terms with the people of Babylon, as also Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II of Assyria had done two centuries earlier (Chapter 6), he entered the city without force and was recognized as Marduk's chosen king.[3] The people of Babylon thereby accepted integration into the Persian Empire, the largest realm the world had hitherto seen.

The so-called Cyrus Cylinder[4] is a building inscription from Marduk's Esangila temple, composed once Cyrus had taken control of Babylon in 539 BC and assumed the title of King of Babylon (Fig. 8.1). Like other Babylonian texts written during that time, it was openly disdainful of Nabonidus, celebrating Cyrus as the true champion of Marduk. However, in reality, Cyrus left Babylon as quickly as he had entered it, moving on to further conquests. Not even in 538 BC could he spare the time to participate in the New Year Festival (Chapter 5), having his son Cambyses take his place.[5] But instead of following the ancient rites to the letter, as the Babylonians had come to expect of foreign rulers eager for Marduk's and their acceptance, Cambyses wore Elamite robes, as befitting his Anšan lineage, and therefore chose to participate not as a humble supplicant to Marduk but as a conqueror who prominently signalled his pride in his Iranian heritage.[6] Cambyses did not stay in Babylon either and instead a royal proxy (Persian *satrap*) was appointed to rule over Babylon and all its former holdings. While Cyrus and later Cambyses (525–522 BC) worked tirelessly to further the borders of their empire, they relied on the old families

Fig. 8.1: The 'Cyrus Cylinder', found by Hormuzd Rassam in Babylon (British Museum, BM 90920). Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum.

of the big cities and the sanctuaries that these controlled to secure their power; in turn, they honoured their long-standing claims to important offices both in temple and state administration.[7]

The year 538 BC turned out to be the only time a Persian royal ever participated in the New Year Festival, which therefore had to suspend one of its core components: the transfer of kingship from Marduk to the king of Babylon. Compared to, say, the very eager Sargon II of Assyria, Cyrus and Cambyses made very little effort to fulfil the duties of the king of Babylon,[8] and neither they nor any of their successors spent any significant amount of time at the city.[9] That the city's role was to be less prominent than in the heady days of the Babylonian Empire was perhaps to be expected. But the people of Babylon came to realize that in the enormously big Persian Empire, still growing every year due to restless campaigning, their city was never going to be a priority for its new rulers. Unlike the Assyrian kings who had jealously guarded the privilege to rule as king of Babylon, the Persians neither seemed to want or need the favour of Marduk.

Having defeated Amasis' son Psammetichus III at Pelusium in 525 BC, Cambyses devoted the remainder of his life to the conquest of Egypt. But he lost the realm to the usurper Darius, a very distant relative, in 522 BC. As in many other regions of the Empire, Darius (522–486 BC) did not find acceptance in Babylon and the city led Babylonia to rise in rebellion against Persian rule.[10] As soon as Darius came to power, a new king of Babylon was proclaimed: one Nidintu-Bel took the throne name Nebuchadnezzar (III) and claimed to be a descendent of Nabonidus, the last native king of Babylon. He only survived for three months, after losing two battles to Darius' troops who went on to take Babylon by force, killing Nebuchadnezzar there. But already in the next year, another 'Nebuchadnezzar (IV) son of Nabonidus', formerly known as Araha, was proclaimed king of Babylon. He survived a little longer on the throne but was eventually defeated, too.

Darius immortalized his view on these two rebellions in his victory monument in Behistun (also known as Bisitun). The gigantic rock carving is situated high up on a mountain cliff, 100 metres above the ancient route that connected Babylon and the Median capital city of Ecbatana (modern Hamadan). The monument is incised into a panel of smoothed rock surface that measures

25×15 metres and consists of a scene depicting Darius and his bodyguards in front of ten defeated and bound rebel leaders who had risen against the Persian king in various lands of the far-flung realm at the beginning of his reign (including the two Nebuchadnezzars in third and eighth position; Fig. 8.2) as well as a trilingual cuneiform inscription in Babylonian, Elamite and Old Persian. According to this, Nebuchadnezzar IV had mustered an army of 2,497 men and, once defeated, Darius ordered him and his surviving supporters to be executed by impalement in Babylon in 521 BC.[11]

To remind, specifically, the Babylonians in their own city of their shameful betrayal and its dire consequences, Darius set up a monumental stone stela in a prominent position along the procession street with the name Ay-ibur-šabû 'May the Arrogant not Prevail', just where it led towards the Ištar Gate and into the Inner City past Nebuchadnezzar II's Northern Palace. This was now the seat of

Fig. 8.2: Darius' victory monument at Behistun, showing Nebuchadnezzar III in the third position and Nebuchadnezzar IV in the eighth position in the line of ten rebel leaders: they both wear a short tunic with a wide belt, ankle boots and closely cropped hair and beard. Photograph by Hara1603 (CC BY-SA 4.0), from Wikimedia Commons.

the Persian court, when in residence, and of the Persian governor of Babylon.[12] Eleven fragments of this stela, smashed into pieces in antiquity, were found here during Koldewey's excavations. The archaeologist Ursula Seidl identified them and, according to her reconstruction,[13] the monument showed the Persian king resting one foot on his favourite enemy, the imposter Gaumata (as he also does in the Behistun carving) in front of the two Nebuchadnezzars in shackles, with the divine symbols of the Babylonian deities and the cuneiform inscription in Babylonian arranged above that scene (Fig. 8.3).

While the text of the Behistun monument praised the Persian god Ahuramazda for his support of Darius, the Babylon stele instead featured only Bel (that is, Marduk) in this role. In this regard, the Persian ruler chose to respect the local sensibilities by acknowledging Marduk in his customary function as kingmaker. In every other way, however, Darius preferred to ignore Babylon's ancient traditions. But his predecessors' relative indifference towards the city had now been replaced by vigilance, and a very keen interest in its economy: Darius imposed an enormous increase in taxes.[14] The days when the people of Babylon could proudly insist even to a victorious conqueror that their ancient privileges must be honoured were over for good.

Fig. 8.3: Reconstruction of Darius' victory monument at Babylon. Adapted by the author from Ursula Seidl, 'Eine Triumphstele Darius I. aus Babylon', in Johannes Renger, ed., *Babylon: Focus mesopotamischer Geschichte, Wiege früher Gelehrsamkeit, Mythos in der Moderne* (Saarbrücken: SDV, 2000), p. 304 fig. 4.

The heavy tax burden certainly played a large share in the continuing resistance against Persian rule, carried by the leading families of Babylon and the other ancient northern Babylonian cities. When Darius' son Xerxes (486–465 BC) succeeded his father to the Persian throne, he did not find acceptance from these quarters, and 484 BC saw another revolt spread through Babylon and the surrounding cities, headed by two leaders: Bel-šimanni and Šamaš-eriba who both adopted the title of King of Babylon.[15] The Babylonian elites chafed at the high taxes imposed by the distant Persian ruler; but they also craved the royal presence that was so glaringly absent from Babylon's cultic and political landscape since the conquest of 539 BC. Bel-šimanni and Šamaš-eriba were both willing to fill that gap and heal the wounds in the city's identity. Details are fuzzy and the terse records, mostly legal records that are dated according to one of the pretenders' regnal year, prevent us from knowing whether the two pretenders ever cooperated or, as seems far more likely, competed with each other for the claim to be Marduk's true king of Babylon. But both offered what the Persian kings so stubbornly withheld from the disappointed people of Babylon: the willingness to fulfil the sacred duties of kingship once more. It was surely during this time that Darius' victory monument in Babylon was torn down and smashed to pieces.

In the end, neither Bel-šimanni nor Šamaš-eriba prevailed and Xerxes' forces vanquished the rebellion. The noble families that had supported it paid a bloody price: their archives came almost simultaneously to a complete end,[16] and this surely means that the families, too, were no more. Whereas Darius in his victory monument at Behistun explicitly reported killing Nebuchadnezzar III's supporters in 521 BC, Xerxes' surviving inscriptions are as short and bland as those of all Persian kings otherwise are and make no mention of the rebellion, let alone rebel numbers. In the face of the sources' silence, we are free to imagine the slaughter of the Babylonian insurgents or a more palatable, but perhaps less likely scenario of dispossession and exile.

In Babylon, the balance of power now shifted to others who more reliably supported the Persian overlords.[17] Previously less prominent or even unknown families now took the plum roles in local administration, temple life and business deals. They inherited

the wealth of the ancient nobility, but not their clout. As the city, and Babylonia, experienced social, administrative and economic restructuring, the temples and cults were deeply affected. Overseen by loyal supporters of Persian rule, the temples were no longer the focal points of resistance. The cult of the old sanctuaries was not interrupted; but as the distant rulers saw little sense in funding the upkeep of the expensive shrines, the local communities had to make the cults work without the deep pockets of a royal patron.

Temple life at Esangila continued regardless, as the 'Astronomical Diaries' show.[18] This is the modern term for a corpus of clay tablets called in Babylonian 'Regular Observations' (*naṣaru ša ginê*) that record astronomical occurrences together with the prices of six staple commodities, including barley, dates and wool,[19] as well as various remarkable events (e.g. the Battle of Gaugamela in 331 BC; Alexander the Great's death in 323 BC; a prophet preaching the apocalypse in 133 BC; and much more). These texts were compiled without fail and are preserved from the mid-seventh to the mid-first century BC; also the upheaval caused by the anti-Persian rebellions did not change this.

Whether or not the Esangila temple of Marduk was punished for its role in the rebellions by deliberate physical destruction, as had happened under Sennacherib of Assyria in 689 BC (Chapter 6), is discussed controversially.[20] But it is beyond doubt that Xerxes undid the traditional social and economic organization of the Esangila temple and that he rejected the role as the protector of the rights of the servants of the gods, taking away the ancient privileges that had made belonging to the temple community so attractive and thereby wilfully undermining the ancient way of life.[21] Gone was the concentration of religious and political power in the hands of a traditional, assertive and very independently minded urban elite of Babylon that had so stumped the Assyrian kings. With the death of its ancient nobility, Babylon's stubborn resistance to Persian rule was broken for good.

While the belief that kingship was intimately connected to the cult of Marduk, the ruler of the world, stood at the core of Babylon's identity, this ideology held far less attraction for those that had once been subject to this claim but were now free of it. For the inhabitants of the southern Babylonian cities, foremost among them Uruk, the outcome of the anti-Persian rebellions was felt much

more positively as local families were able to reclaim influence that members of ancient clans from Babylon had held since coming into positions of power during the time of the Babylonian Empire.[22] The people of Uruk, the city of mythical hero-king Gilgameš and the birthplace of the cuneiform script, had particularly scorned the idea of Babylon's hegemony. From an Urukean perspective, Babylon's decline under Persian rule simply meant that its people were no longer able to lord it over their own city, and this was good news as Uruk had much more claim to antiquity. Free from Marduk's exertion of influence, the cults were restored to their original ways (or at least to what these were now thought to have been), and free from the harness of a Babylon-dictated narrative, local historians eagerly explored and exhorted Uruk's past.[23]

Another group who found it comparatively easy to adjust to Persian rule were the descendants of the people that had only been settled in Babylonia during the time when the Babylonian Empire was formed. Most prominent among those are, due to the books of the Bible, the Judean deportees, taken away from the land of their origin after Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562 BC) had captured Jerusalem in 587 BC and caused the end of the kingdom of Judah. Several biblical accounts (2 Kings 24:20–25:21; Jeremiah 52:1–23; also 2 Chronicles 36:11–21) describe the events once the Babylonian two-year siege of Jerusalem broke. The city walls were destroyed, and the palace and the temple set on fire. After having to witness the execution of his sons, the last king, Zedekiah, was sent off to Babylon in shackles, and many of his subjects, too, were led into the 'Babylonian Exile', leaving behind only enough people to tend the fields and vineyards that now all were part of the Babylonian Empire.[24] Various books of the Bible are informed by these experiences, such as Psalm 137 that portrays the exile as a time of sorrow and despair in a repressive environment. Still today, these texts prominently shape the perception of Babylon of Jewish, Christian and Muslim audiences – as well as anyone who ever heard Boney M.'s 1978 smash pop hit 'By the rivers of Babylon' or the original 1970 version of the Jamaican reggae group The Melodians (based on Psalms 19 and 137).[25]

Recently, a group of Babylonian clay tablets from southern Iraq has come to light, very unfortunately from uncontrolled excavations. Although they are of uncertain provenance, their

contents link the texts to activities in various small settlements in the Babylonian countryside, including Al-Yahudu 'The Town of Judah', Al-Hazatu 'The Town of Gaza' and Al-Hamatu 'The Town of Hama'. Like many other similarly-named settlements in rural Babylonia, these places was founded in the time of the Babylonian Empire in the sixth century BC and named after the original home of their deportee populations.[26]

When removed from their homes during the wars of conquest of Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar II, the deportees were given land owned by the state in return for their tax and public service duty. The foundation of numerous new settlements in rural areas called after the places of origin or after prominent members of these communities (e.g. Bit-Abi-ram 'House of Abi-ram' or Bit-Našar 'House of Našar') shows that the Babylonian state had the new arrivals put unworked land under the plough. In ancient Mesopotamia, there was never a lack of land but very often not enough manpower to work this land, and deporting people after conquering their regions solved this problem as effectively for Babylonia as it had done for the central region of the Assyrian Empire in northern Iraq in previous centuries.

The new texts constitute the business records and family archives of descendants of Judean and other western deportees and shed new light on life in exile,[27] causing a great deal of scholarly excitement and a sizeable amount of literature since they first came to notice in a number of private collections from the late 1990s onwards.[28] These cuneiform tablets were all written by scribes with Babylonian names, even when everyone else featured in the text was part of the deportee community. But sometimes the tablets had labels in alphabetic script scratched into them, presumably to assist clients who did not read cuneiform. This is not at all uncommon with business records of that period, given that the Aramaic alphabet was undoubtedly in much wider use than the cuneiform script (cf. Chapter 7). One of these labels with the name of the creditor Šalam-Yama ('Yahweh is Well-being') is written not in Aramaic but in the Palaeo-Hebrew script (Fig. 8.4), indicating that this first-generation deportee from Judah had incised his name himself into this clay tablet dated to 549 BC.[29]

The texts cover about a century from 572 BC, late in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II and only fifteen years after the conquest of

Fig. 8.4: Cuneiform tablet recording a debt of barley owed by Šalam-Yama who incised his name in the Old Hebrew alphabet as *šlmyh* on the side of the clay tablet. Adapted by the author from Filip Vukosavović, ed., *By the Rivers of Babylon: The Story of the Babylonian Exile* (Jerusalem: Bible Lands Museum, 2015), p. 105.

Jerusalem and the destruction of the First Temple, to 477 BC, the ninth year of Xerxes, well after the end of many of the archives of the prominent old clans of Babylon in 484 BC. They therefore span most of period of the 'Babylonian Exile' but also, and importantly, the time after 539 BC when according to the Biblical Book of Ezra (1: 1–6) the exiles were given permission by Cyrus of Persia to return to Judah. Although it does not mention the Judeans at all, a passage in the 'Cyrus Cylinder' (Fig. 8.1) supports the general idea that the Persian conqueror allowed population groups deported during the time of the Babylonian Empire to return to their original homes and to re-establish the sanctuaries of their deities:

> From [Babylon] I sent back to their places, to the sanctuaries across the river Tigris whose shrines had earlier become dilapidated, the gods who lived therein: to Assur, Susa, Akkad, Ešnunna, Zamban, Meturan, Der, as far as the border of Gutium (i.e. the Zagros mountain range). I made permanent sanctuaries for them. I collected together all of their people and returned them to their settlements.[30]

Despite this, the new texts show the continuing presence of Judeans in Babylonia, as does also the Murašû archive from the southern

city of Nippur, dated to the second half of the fifth century BC.[31] This should not come as a surprise, given the presence of a very sizable Jewish population in Babylonia in the Parthian and Sasanian period (cf. Chapter 9). Flavius Josephus (37–100 AD) wrote that while many returned to Jerusalem with Persian authorization, 'the Israelite nation as a whole remained in the country' and that in his time, 'countless myriads whose number cannot be ascertained' lived east of the Euphrates (Antiquities XI 133).

Most of the new texts come from the archives of two Judean men active in the first decades of Babylonia's integration into the Persian Empire: the cousins Ahi-qam son of Rapa-Yama and Ahi-qar son of Rimut, both grandsons of Samak-Yama. In Babylonia, tax-collection was in part privatized, and there were intermediaries between the state administration and the tax-owing landholders who paid a lump sum for the right to collect the dues on the land, pocketing the difference between what could be raised and what they had paid upfront. Ahi-qam was one of these intermediaries, collecting the money owed by his fellow Judean landholders. Much of these dues were paid in kind in the agricultural produce grown by the farmers, and Ahi-qam very sensibly also owned a brewery and a shop in Babylon. He also worked substantial parcels of land himself, as did his cousin Ahi-qar, who traded fish in large quantities and, as a moneylender, gave credit to other landholders to help them meet their dues.[32]

Ahi-qam's father Rapa-Yama ('Yahweh Healed') son of Samak-Yama ('Yahweh Supported') is attested in an early text in the archive, dated to 561 BC, and his mother Yapa-Yahû ('Yahweh Appeared') is attested in a text from 551 BC. They will have been among the original deportees from Judah while Ahi-qam was already born in Babylonian exile and received the fairly nondescript name 'My Brother has Risen' that was very widespread also among the many Aramaic-speakers of Babylonia and did not single him out as Judean. Ahi-qam's five sons, on the other hand, had devout Jewish names, most of which explicitly mentioned the god of Jerusalem: Nir-Yama ('Yahweh is Light'), Haggâ ('Born on a Holiday', like the Biblical prophet), Yahû-azza ('Yahweh is Strong'), Yahû-izri ('Yahweh is My Help') and Yahû-šu ('Yahweh is Deliverance'), all first attested in business records between 508 and 504 BC.[33] The other son of Samak-Yama was called Rimut, a Babylonian name

with the meaning 'Gift', which indicates that he was already born in exile. His son Ahi-qar was given a perfectly inconspicuous name ('My Brother is Esteemed'), but he, too, named his one known son Nir-Yama, like his cousin Ahi-ram's eldest.

All these boys were all born after the deportees had received the Persian conqueror's blanket permission to return to their original homes and to continue their abandoned cults. While Ahi-qam and Ahi-qar chose not to leave Babylonia, the fact that they gave their sons names that proudly proclaim allegiance to the god of Jerusalem advertises a newfound confidence in their Judean legacy that their parents' generation had not been able to express in quite the same way. As Paul-Alain Beaulieu duly emphasized when describing Babylon at the time of Nebuchadnezzar II,

> Crowds of foreigners lived in the capital and its countryside, yet all the institutions of the city seem to us very Babylonian. Remarkably, there is no identifiable trace of a foreign temple or other kind of religious building. … If cosmopolitan means only ethnic diversity, yes, Babylon was truly cosmopolitan. If it means openness to the world and to its currents and influences, then it may have failed the test.[34]

If we can characterize Babylon as conservative in outlook and dominated by an entitled elite safeguarding its traditional privileges, then the true melting pots of Babylonia were its countryside. People with a deportee background like Ahi-qam and Ahi-qar were willing to adopt the customs of their new home (such as embracing clay tablets for their business dealings) and their new neighbours (such as adopting the Aramaic script). They certainly did not share the growing feeling of disenfranchisement in the way the members of the old noble houses of Babylon did when it became clear that Cyrus and his successors did not mean to continue the Marduk-sponsored monarchy. For them, the changes to Babylonian society within the Persian Empire provided a greater freedom to explore their own heritage.

9

SLOW FADE: BABYLON AFTER ALEXANDER THE GREAT

In 331 BC, the Macedonian ruler Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire. After defeating the last Persian king Darius III (336–330 BC) at the Battle of Gaugamela (Tell Gomel to the north of modern day Mosul and Erbil; Map 1), he made his way to Babylon and, as the Assyrian kings and Cyrus before him (cf. Chapters 6 and 8), formally entered the city to accept its kingship. The people of Babylon courted the conqueror in the hope of winning back its role as a world capital, and Alexander was certainly susceptible.[1] After returning to Babylon from chasing and defeating Darius for good, Alexander indeed planned to make the city his residence and the capital of his empire, for, according to Strabo (Geographika XV 3.9–10), Alexander much preferred Babylon to Persepolis and Susa 'since he saw that it far surpassed the others, not only in its size, but also in other respects'. A recent calculation assumes a maximum of some 50,000 inhabitants for the late Achaemenid period,[2] a far cry from the population of 180,000 in the heyday of the sixth century BC (Chapter 7) but still a sizable city.

Despite the upheavals of war during Alexander's campaigns and again in the aftermath of his unexpected death and despite the influx of Macedonian and Greek settlers,[3] Babylonia experienced the transition from Achaemenid rule to the new situation under Alexander and then the consolidation of the Seleucid Empire as a time of relative social and economic continuity.[4] Compared to

the Persian rulers, Alexander and his successors of the Seleucid dynasty held enormous attraction for the people of Babylon as they intended to stay in the city, instead of removing themselves for good as soon as they had accepted its kingship.

For a time, Babylon seemed set to reclaim its position in the world as the seat of the most powerful ruler of the world. For the first time in its history, elephants – ideally sized for Nebuchadnezzar's wide and well-paved processional roads – were walking in its streets.[5] A theatre in the Greek style was built in the northern part of the city. This was not only a stage to perform Greek plays but especially a political meeting place in parallel or perhaps even in opposition to the Esangila temple. The theatre was either commissioned by Alexander the Great or by one of the Seleucid kings and constructed from fired bricks taken from the buildings of Nebuchadnezzar II, including the stepped tower of Etemenanki.[6] The local tradition to build with the bricks of Nebuchadnezzar's monumental structures continued until the early twentieth century AD when the archaeological exploration of Babylon began in earnest. Until then, many followed Alexander's example and used the old architecture as quarries for their own buildings. For example, parts of the modern Iraqi provincial capital of Hilla and the Hindiya Dam on the Euphrates were constructed using the ancient bricks from the sixth century BC.[7]

Etemenanki did not only serve as a convenient source of building material. Alexander also began restoration work there with the intention to bring back the temple tower's former glory, but this never progressed beyond the large-scale removal of the old structures.[8] Although the stepped tower remained a ruin, Babylon remained architecturally impressive and, in addition to Esangila, a number of the temples that we encountered during our visit to Nebuchadnezzar II's Babylon of the sixth century BC (Chapter 7) still stood and flourished: the Ehursangtilla of Ninurta (A in Fig. 7.6), the temple of Nabu-ša-harê (G), the Egišnugal of Sîn (K), the Egišhurankia of Belet-Ninua (L) and the Enamtila of Enlil (M); there were also temples dedicated to the underworld god Nergal, the goddesses Gula, Ištar and Ninlil and other deities.[9]

But alas, Alexander died young and suddenly. At least, the room of his death in the late afternoon of 11 June 323 BC[10] in the Northern Palace of Babylon became a tourist attraction, luring

visitors like the Roman Emperor Trajan to the city (Chapter 2). Although the Seleucid kings continued to use the old palace as an occasional residence, Babylon lost the coveted role of capital after less than two decades when the newly founded Seleucia-on-the-Tigris became the political centre of the Seleucid Empire in 305 BC; most of the Macedonian settlers relocated to the new city. In 293 BC, the imperial capital was moved even further away to Antioch on the Orontes in northern Syria. Politically, the city of Babylon saw itself demoted to a provincial town, albeit one with a glorious past (cf. Chapter 2).

On the left bank of the Tigris just opposite Seleucia another city was founded: Ctesiphon, which after the Parthian conquest of Babylonia in 141 BC became the capital of the Parthian Empire and later the Sasanian Empire. At least in terms of geography, this brought Babylon again considerably closer to crown and court, but the city's former position as a political hotspot was not recovered. Still, throughout all that time, Babylon remained a regionally important centre and the Esangila temple of Marduk a sanctuary of great renown, known for its library and the knowledge and scholarship of its priests.[11] Its population had shrunk considerably but was still sizable, estimated at 20,000 to 30,000 people in the Parthian period.[12]

Although no-one spoke Babylonian anymore in daily life and Aramaic had been the dominant spoken language in Babylon and the other ancient cities for many centuries (cf. Chapter 7), the traditional writing technology of the cuneiform script was still widely used in the context of the temples and their communities in order to record and read texts in Babylonian and even the long-dead Sumerian language (cf. Chapter 1). A group of clay tablets, which are today called 'Graeco-Babyloniaca',[13] shows that some students of cuneiform were only trained in that script after they had already learnt the Greek alphabet. The Graeco-Babyloniaca tablets either pair a Babylonian or Sumerian cuneiform text with a Greek transcription (that is, they do not translate the text into Greek, but merely record the sound sequence in Greek letters) or only feature the Greek transcription. Whoever used these cribs clearly was in need of learning aids in Greek letters.

Does this mean that Greek speakers were keen to learn cuneiform? Perhaps, but it is probably more likely that people

from the highly educated temple circles that were expected to know cuneiform were now routinely trained also in Greek, and at an earlier age. After all, when dealing with the Seleucid state, as every taxpayer had to do as a matter of course, a knowledge of Greek was arguably going to be more useful than cuneiform. The contents of the Graeco-Babyloniaca suggest that the goal was to read, or at least reproduce phonetically correctly, texts of cultic importance in the original language. Perhaps we can compare this to the requirement for a Jewish boy who comes of age at his thirteenth birthday to publicly read from the Hebrew text of the Torah or, should he be unable to read, to recite the benediction before and after the reading. Two Graeco-Babyloniaca texts record Sumerian incantations and demonstrate how hard the temple community worked to keep the ancient cults going, making sure that even Sumerian was understood well enough to use the traditional songs and prayers in the cult. By recording not only literature and scholarship in the ancient cuneiform script, but also their own business transactions and legal documents, the members of the temple community made every effort to keep the traditional writing alive, despite stiff competition from the Aramaic and Greek alphabet scripts.

Beyond the social sphere of the temples and the households of the priestly families, however, cuneiform played a negligible role. Cuneiform's last hurrah as the script used for a royal inscription came in 268 BC, when a cylinder in the traditional style was written in the name of Antiochus I Soter (281–261 BC) on the occasion of the renovation of the sanctuaries of Marduk's Esangila in Babylon and of Nabû's Ezida in Borsippa (Fig. 9.1).[14] We can be certain that the representatives of the temple communities had worked very hard to make the Seleucid king understand that by restoring the shrines and by writing the inscription, he was following millennia-old customs that the Persian rulers had ignorantly ignored. Babylon's scholars like Berossos, who wrote a history of Babylon in Greek, tried their best to make the local history and knowledge understandable and palatable for the new rulers,[15] and the Seleucid crown indeed recognized the role of the 'Chaldeans', as the Babylonian scholarly elites were known to Greek-speakers, in sustaining a fragile imperial order whose success depended to a large part on the collaboration of multiple aristocratic networks.[16]

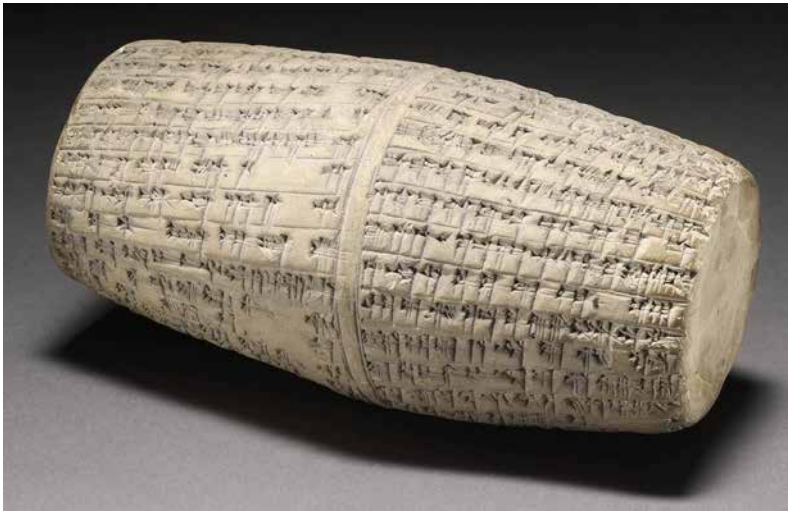


Fig. 9.1: Clay cylinder of Antiochus I Soter from Borsippa (British Museum, BM 36277). Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum.

But not only Babylon was vying for the Seleucid crown's attention. In Uruk, the inhabitants headed by the local city overseer who cultivated a dual Urukean-Greek identity ('Anu-uballiṭ, whose other name is Kephalon') designed a new temple landscape that was meant to reconnect them with the earliest phases of the city's history while broadcasting the importance of their city to the wider Hellenistic world.[17] The brand new Bit-Reš sanctuary put the sky god Anu at the centre of the cult, seemingly in an attempt to undo his replacement by the upstart Marduk (as celebrated in the *Enuma Eliš* poem; cf. Chapter 5). The goddess Ištar, on the other hand, was relegated to the smaller shrine Ešgal (or Irigal), although her ancient sanctuary Eanna ('House of Heaven') had taken priority for thousands of years in the city. From a modern perspective, this is therefore more of a reinvention than a restoration of the original cults, but the inhabitants of Uruk drew great satisfaction and community spirit from it.[18]

While cuneiform culture lived on in Esangila and other great temples of Babylonia, it was increasingly used only for the purposes of liturgy, incantations, rituals and astronomy.[19] The latest known

cuneiform texts are reports of observations of celestial movements, vital for divining the gods' designs for the future. The last text known from Babylon was written in 74 AD and the youngest text from Uruk only a few years later, dated to 79 AD.[20]

At that time, Vespasian was Emperor of Rome and had just started with the construction of the Colosseum, which in popular memory came to be intimately connected with the persecution of the Christians in the Roman Empire. While Christianity was considered an enemy of the state in Rome, the growing popularity of revelatory religions and gnostic movements proved socially disruptive and transformative also in Babylonia. Christianity and Manichaeism (founded by Mani who was born in northern Babylonia in 216 AD)[21] were by far the most successful of a broad range of religious movements centred on divine revelation through a prophet or messiah – a particular phenomenon of that time which had previously benefited also Alexander the Great who had been pronounced the son of the god Amun by the oracle of Siwa in the Libyan Desert in 332 BC. Other movements were far more short-lived despite causing considerable stir locally. One such prophet, a boatman speaking for the goddess Nanaya, preached with great success in Babylon and Borsippa in 133 BC, announcing the advent of a divine destroyer who would bring about the end of the times. He rallied the masses behind him and led them to the Ezida temple of Borsippa until the temple community, afraid of rioting, managed to put a stop to him and his apocalyptic message.[22] In addition to such revelation religions, gnostic movements like Mandaeism were increasingly popular, as was Judaism (cf. Chapter 8), to which many in Mesopotamia converted at the time.

All these movements robbed of their formative role in society the ancient Babylonian temples, whose expensive and time- and labour-intensive rites required the routine participation of dozens, if not hundreds, of people at a time to provide the daily care, meals and entertainment for the gods. Already the reforms of Xerxes after the 484 BC revolt had removed key privileges of the temple community, including tax-exemption and dispensation from public work duty, which had previously made participation in the temple cults so attractive. When these rites gradually lost also their social importance, the temples were abandoned. Thus also the cuneiform

Fig. 9.2: Three Aramaic magic bowls from southern Iraq in the exhibition of the Iraq Museum. Author's photograph.

age came to an end: the liturgies and prayers, the rituals and songs recorded in that ancient script in Babylonian and Sumerian were no longer required.

When worship in Esangila ended in the third century or perhaps only in the fourth century AD,[23] the heart of the city of Babylon ceased to exist. But people continued to live there.[24] The village of Babil, which occupied the site of Nebuchadnezzar's Summer Palace and a later Parthian fortress at the northernmost tip of the city and which the geographer Ibn Hawqal called in the tenth century AD 'the most ancient in all Iraq' (Chapter 2), preserved the name of the lost metropolis until the recovery of its past began. Coins from the Parthian, Sasanian and Arabic periods excavated in Babil and in other parts of the ancient site demonstrate the continuity of settlement, especially the enormous coin hoard found by Koldewey in 1900 in a glazed amphora near the Shiite shrine at Amran ibn Ali, in the area formerly occupied by the Esangila complex: the amphora contained several hundreds of Sasanian coins and about ten thousand Umayyad and Abbasid coins, the youngest of which dates to the year 819/20 AD.[25]

By the time the Marduk cult at Esangila had stopped, some of the traditional Babylonian scholarship had long come to be valued beyond the temple communities and the confines of the cuneiform script.[26] Incantations that are deeply rooted in Babylonian traditions were recorded in texts in Aramaic and Mandaic alphabet script inscribed on lead scrolls[27] or into the inside of 'magic bowls'[28] (Fig. 9.2), as they were found by Koldewey and others buried upside down under the floor of many Parthian- and Sasanian-period houses of Babylon.[29] Such amulets were created by learned experts for specific, individually-named people who typically sought protection for their unborn and newly-born children or for themselves in order to ward off disease and afflictions caused by human enemies and demonic forces – very frequently the ancient Babylonian deities.[30]

In addition to original texts from the first centuries AD, Babylonian knowledge entered also the manuscript tradition of various learned compendia. Terrestrial and astronomical omina from the Babylonian collections *Enuma Anu Enlil*, *Iqqur Ipuš* and *Šumma Alu* are preserved in the Mandaean Book of the Zodiac,[31] and elements of Babylonian incantations are prominent in

Mandaean magic manuscripts.[32] The Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)[33] provides another channel of transmission for such ancient knowledge. After the Roman troops had destroyed Jerusalem's Second Temple in 70 AD, scholars of the Jewish communities in Palestine and in the diaspora reacted to the loss of their religious and legal centre by beginning to record in writing knowledge that had formerly only been transmitted orally. Compiled between the third and fifth centuries AD in the Jewish academies of southern Iraq, then part of the Sasanian Empire, the Babylonian Talmud takes its name not specifically from the city of Babylon but from the region of Babylonia, the area of 'Pure Lineage' whose Jewish families were automatically considered acceptable for intermarriage without further checks.[34] Like the Mandaean books, the Babylonian Talmud preserves ancient Babylonian omen traditions[35] and knowledge of medicine and magic.[36]

All these are local channels of transmission. But especially the treasure of Babylonian observational and mathematical astronomy, once so closely guarded, came to be very widely disseminated and appreciated across the ancient world.[37] The works of Strabo (64 BC–24 AD; Geographika XVI 1.6) and Pliny the Elder (23–79 AD; Nat. hist. VI 123) mention the famous astronomers who worked in Babylon and its sister cities Borsippa and Sippar as well as the southern city of Uruk (Greek Orchoë). The achievements of Babylonian astronomy were disseminated through the networks of scholarship,[38] most prominently through the writings of Claudius Ptolemy of Alexandria (c. 100–170 AD), whose Greek-language treatises were later translated into Latin and Arabic[39] and exercised great influence on astronomical and astrological theory and practice until the early modern period. To this day, we use for many constellations and all the signs of the zodiac designations that go back to the Babylonian heritage. And of course, the sexagesimal system (Chapter 1) still guides our every moment, as it forms the basis for our division of the hour, the day, the month and the year. Next time you check the time, think of Babylon.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 Cf. Andrew Scheil, *Babylon under Western Eyes: a Study of Allusion and Myth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).
2 Isaiah 13:19–22; translation: *Holy Bible, New International Version* (2011).
3 Cf. Wouter F. M. Henkelman, Amélie Kuhrt, Robert Rollinger and Josef Wiesehöfer, 'Herodotus and Babylon reconsidered', in Robert Rollinger, Brigitte Truschnegg and Reinhold Bichler, eds., *Herodot und das Persische Weltreich/Herodotus and the Persian Empire* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), pp. 449–470.
4 For a recent discussion of the impact of both these streams of tradition see Rannfrid I. Thelle, *Discovering Babylon* (London and New York NY: Routledge, 2018).
5 See also the richly illustrated magazine feature by Juan Luis Montero Fenollós, 'Beautiful Babylon: jewel of the ancient world', *National Geographic Histo*ry 2017:1 (January-February), pp. 34–43. Available at www.nationalgeographic.com/archaeology-and-history/magazine/2017/01-02/babylon-mesopotamia-ancient-city-iraq/.
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31 Translation of this and the following passage after Heeßel, 'The Babylonian physician', pp. 26–27 (lines 1–3 and lines 25–26).
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CHAPTER 5

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18 Cf. Nielsen, *The Reign of Nebuchadnezzar I*, pp. 32–33 for the history of scholarship.

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CHAPTER 6

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CHAPTER 7

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CHAPTER 8

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30 Cyrus Cylinder, ll. 30–32. Most recently edited in Finkel, *The Cyrus Cylinder*, pp. 6–7, 132.

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33 Nir-Yama and Haggâ are first attested as a party to a business transaction and as a witness for another, respectively, in 508 BC while Yahû-izri first appears conducting business in a document from 507 BC; to do so, they would have had to be of age. All of them and the two other brothers are named in 504 BC in a document recording the division of some of their father's inheritance after he had died. For all references to these men and their parents, and also for Ahi-qar son of Rimut and his son Nir-Yama, see Pearce and Wunsch, *Documents of Judean Exiles*, pp. 7–9, 35–36, 52–53, 75, 78–79, 89–91.

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CHAPTER 9

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5 According to the so-called Ruin of Esagila Chronicle, l. 8'. The text's edition has been announced for over a decade in a forthcoming volume (Robartus J. van der Spek, *Babylonian Chronicles of the Hellenistic Period*, no. 6); a preliminary version is available at www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp-ruin_esagila/ruin_esagila_01.html (last accessed 15 January 2019).

6 Daniel T. Potts, 'The *politai* and the *bıt tamartu*: the Seleucid and Parthian theatres of the Greek citizens of Babylon', in Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, Margarete van Ess and Joachim Marzahn, eds., *Babylon: Wissenskultur in Orient und Okzident* (Berlin and Boston MA: de Gruyter, 2011), pp. 239–251. The identification of the term *bıt tamartu* 'house of watching' with the Greek word 'theatre' (whose literal meaning is 'place for seeing') was first suggested by John Ma and established by Robartus J. van der Spek, 'The theatre of Babylon in cuneiform', in Wilfried H. van Soldt, ed., *Veenhof Anniversary Volume: Studies Presented to Klaas R. Veenhof* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2001), pp. 445–456.

7 Olof Pedersén, 'Waters at Babylon', in Terje Tvedt and Terje Oestigaard, eds., *Water and Urbanization* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), p. 119.

8 Discussed by Robartus J. van der Spek, 'The size and significance of the Babylonian temples under the Successors', in Briant and Joannès, *La transition*, pp. 269–272.

9 See Boiy, *Late Achaemenid and Hellenistic Babylon*, pp. 275–287 and van der Spek, 'The size and significance of the Babylonian temples', pp. 264–265.

10 For the exact time see Boiy, *Late Achaemenid and Hellenistic Babylon*, pp. 115–117.

11 Cf. Philippe Clancier, *Les bibliothèques en Babylonie dans la deuxième moitié du I^er^ millénaire av. J.-C.* (Münster: Ugarit, 2009), pp. 204–213

12 Stefan R. Hauser, 'Babylon in arsakidischer Zeit', in Johannes Renger, ed., *Babylon: Focus mesopotamischer Geschichte, Wiege früher Gelehrsamkeit, Mythos in der Moderne* (Saarbrücken: SDV, 1999), p. 228.

13 Stefan M. Maul, 'Neues zu den "Graeco-Babyloniaca"', *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 81 (1991), pp. 87–107; Aage Westenholz, 'The Graeco-Babyloniaca once again', *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 97 (2007), pp. 262–313.

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15 Cf. Geert De Breucker, 'Berossos between tradition and innovation', in Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 637–657 and Johannes Bach, 'Berossos, Antiochos und die Babyloniaka', *Ancient West & East* 12 (2013), pp. 157–180.

16 As argued by Johannes Haubold, 'Hellenism, cosmopolitanism, and the role of Babylonian elites in the Seleucid Empire', in Myles Lavan, Richard E. Payne and John Weisweiler, eds., *Cosmopolitanism and Empire: Universal Rulers, Local Elites, and Cultural Integration in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 89–101; also Kathryn Stevens, 'Empire begins at home: local elites and imperial ideologies in Hellenistic Greece and Babylonia', in Lavan, Payne and Weisweiler, *Cosmopolitanism and Empire*, pp. 65–77, 86–88.

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18 Cf. Philippe Clancier, 'Cuneiform culture's last guardians: the old urban notability of Hellenistic Uruk', in Radner and Robson, *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, pp. 752–773 and Heather D. Baker, 'The image of the city in Hellenistic Babylonia', in Stavrianopoulou, *Shifting Social Imaginaries*, pp. 51–66.

19 Paul-Alain Beaulieu, 'The astronomers of the Esagil temple in the fourth century BC', in Ann Guinan *et al.*, eds., *If a Man Builds a Joyful House: Assyriological Studies in Honor of Erle Verdun Leichty* (Leiden and Boston MA: Brill, 2006), pp. 5–22; John M. Steele, 'The

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25 Hermann Simon, 'Die sasanidischen Münzen des Fundes von Babylon: ein Teil des bei Koldeweys Ausgrabungen im Jahr 1900 gefundenen Münzschatzes', *Acta Iranica* 12 (1976), pp. 149–337; Karsten Dahmen, Münzen um Babylon, in Marzahn and Schauerte, *Babylon: Wahrheit*, pp. 450–451.

26 Cf. Kessler, 'Das wahre Ende Babylons', pp. 467–486, with rich illustrations.

27 See e.g. Christa Müller-Kessler, 'Aramäische Beschwörungen und astronomische Omina in nachbabylonischer Zeit: das Fortleben mesopotamischer Kultur im Vorderen Orient', in Renger, *Babylon*, pp. 427–435, 439–443; Ohad Abudraham and Matthew Morgenstern, 'Mandaic incantation(s) on lead scrolls from the Schøyen collection', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 137 (2017), pp. 737–765.

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34 Aharon Oppenheimer, 'Purity of lineage in Talmudic Babylonia', in Christophe Batsch and Mădălina Vârtejanu-Joubert, eds., *Manières de penser dans l'antiquité méditerranéenne et orientale: Mélanges offerts à Francis Schmidt* (Leiden and Boston MA: Brill, 2009), pp. 145–156.

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