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# THE BIBLICAL WORLD

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## NEBUCHADNEZZAR, KING OF BABYLON (604-561 B. C.).<sup>1</sup>

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CAMEO OF NEBUCHAD-  
NEZZAR

IN the so-called "East India House Inscription" (EIH) published by Rawlinson in Vol. I of *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia* (I R 53-64), Nebuchadnezzar<sup>2</sup> introduces himself as follows :

Nabû-kudurri-usur (Nebuchadnezzar), king of Babylon, the exalted prince, the favorite of Marduk (Merodach), the lofty patesi, the beloved of Nabû (Nebo), the judge, the possessor of wisdom, who searches out the way(s) of their divinity, who fears their lordship, the untiring officer who thinks daily of the adornment (restoration) of Esagila and Ezida, and who concerns himself continually with pious works for Bâbilu (Babylon) and Barzipa (Borsippa), the wise, the pious, the restorer of Esagila and Ezida, the first-born son of Nabû-abla-usur (Nabopolassar), king of Babylon, am I.

<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this article is to give a short, popular account of the life and works of Nebuchadnezzar. It is based chiefly on the inscriptions bearing his name, and little attention is given to biblical and other outside sources.

<sup>2</sup> I have retained this spelling of the name, although the Babylonian Nabû-kudurri-usur ("Nebo, protect my territory") favors the form Nebuchadrezzar.



BARREL-SHAPED CLAY CYLINDER OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest of the kings of Babylonia. He was the son of Nabopolassar, and ruled from 604–561 B. C. His father, Nabopolassar, 625–604 B. C., had made Babylonia independent of Assyria in 625 B. C., and had founded the new Babylonian kingdom. It was left for the son to make Babylonia a world-power. In order to do this, it was necessary to carry on many wars. We find, however, very few references in his inscriptions to his campaigns. We have the following general statement in EIH, col. ii, 12–29 :

Under his (Marduk's) lofty protection, far-off countries, far-distant mountains, from the Upper sea to the Lower sea, steep ways, unopened roads, where passage was cut off and it was impossible to gain foothold, impassable routes, ways of thirst (*i. e.*, without water supplies), I traversed, and the unsubmitive I brought under submission, my enemies I took captive, I gave good rule to the land and made the people prosperous. The bad and good among the people I helped (*or*, transported).

In ll. 30–39 there is an enumeration of the various articles of booty which he brought back to Babylon from these campaigns, *viz.*: silver, gold, precious stones, bronze, precious woods, the products of the mountains, and the treasures of the seas—everything that was precious. There are many references in Nebuchadnezzar's inscriptions to the building of walls and fortifications to ward off hostile attacks, but these will be noticed in connection with his other buildings.

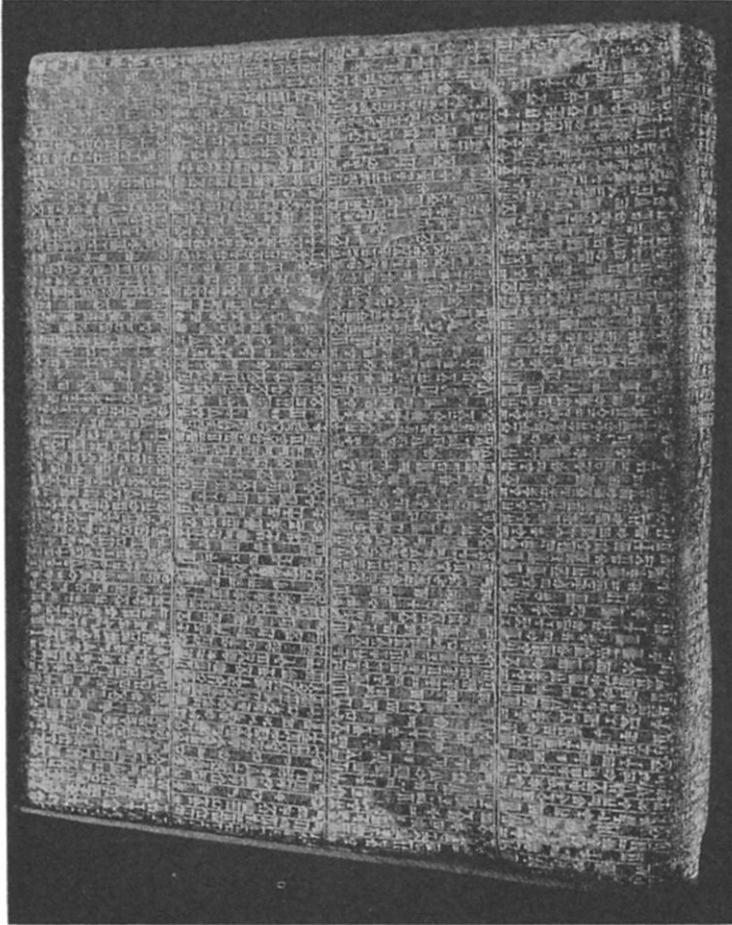
The only specific reference in Nebuchadnezzar's inscriptions to a campaign is found on a small and very badly broken tablet. All the lines are broken. The beginning seems to be a prayer, or hymn of victory. The following may be regarded as a fairly trustworthy restoration :

[In the] thirty-seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of [Babylon], he went to Egypt to make war. [His army Ama]sis, king of Egypt, collected . . . .<sup>3</sup>

The chief sources for the wars of Nebuchadnezzar are the Old Testament, the Egyptian inscriptions, Herodotus, and Josephus.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. TIELE, *Geschichte*, p. 435; HOMMEL, *Geschichte*, p. 760; WINCKLER, *Geschichte*, p. 312; RAWLINSON, *Babylon and Egypt*, pp. 90 f.

The first and most important victory was the battle of Carchemish (605 B. C.), the capital of the old Hittite empire, in which



EAST INDIA HOUSE INSCRIPTION OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

Nebuchadnezzar defeated Necho II., the king of Egypt, and his allies, and destroyed the power of Egypt in western Asia. During this campaign Nabopolassar, his father, died in Babylon, and it was necessary for Nebuchadnezzar to return to that city

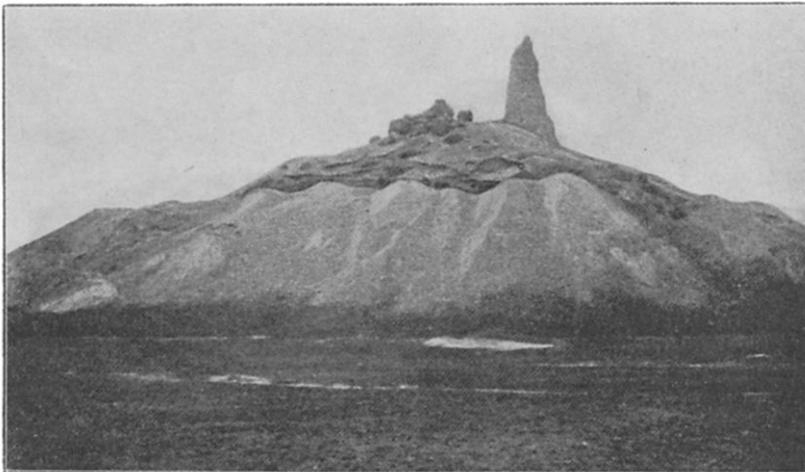
in order to secure his throne. After a short lapse of time, Nebuchadnezzar was again with his army in western Asia. Jehoiakim, who had paid tribute for three years, revolted, but Jerusalem was not captured until after his death, in the third month of the reign of Jehoiakin, his son (598–597 B. C.). Nebuchadnezzar carried away the king, with his mother, his wives, court officials, and princes, soldiers and mechanics—in all ten thousand—to Babylon. He despoiled the temple of Solomon, and took as booty the royal treasures. Jerusalem, however, was not destroyed. Judah became a tributary state, and Nebuchadnezzar placed Mattaniah, whose name was changed to Zedekiah, upon the throne as vassal prince.

In 589–588 Hophra came to the throne of Egypt, and in the following year Zedekiah made an alliance with him against Nebuchadnezzar. The latter immediately put himself at the head of his army and marched to the west, making Riblah, in Hamath, his headquarters. In the tenth month of the ninth year of Zedekiah, Jerusalem was besieged. In 587 Hophra of Egypt came to his aid, and Nebuchadnezzar was obliged to give up the siege until he could drive Hophra from Judah. Finally, in the fourth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, a breach was made in the wall of Jerusalem, and the Babylonian army entered. Zedekiah fled by night, but was pursued by the Babylonians, captured near Jericho, and brought to Riblah. His sons were killed in his presence, his eyes were put out, and he was carried in chains to Babylon. The temple was despoiled and destroyed, and the walls of the city torn down. Thus was the kingdom of Judah overthrown. The fate of Judah's allies, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon, is not known. They were probably brought to submission. Tyre was besieged for thirteen years, and finally became tributary to Babylon. In his thirty-seventh year (568–567) he made a campaign against Amasis of Egypt. This has been noticed above.

It will be seen that, while Nebuchadnezzar is best known to us from his inscriptions as a man of peace, devoted to the building of temples, walls, canals, and to the adornment of his capital city, Babylon, he was a great warrior; and that, at the close of

his reign, he was master of all western Asia, having overthrown Judah and her allies, and humiliated Egypt. After this very brief survey of his wars, taken from outside sources, we may return to the inscriptions and give some attention (1) to his buildings, and (2) to his religion.

This is not the place to enter into details, nor to attempt a topographical sketch of Babylon. Only the most important of the buildings and restorations of Nebuchadnezzar will be noticed. Chief among these are the temples of Esagila and Ezida, the former dedicated to Marduk in Babylon, and the latter to Nabû in Borsippa. Nebuchadnezzar rejoices in the title, "Restorer of Esagila and Ezida." The history of these temples goes back to the time of Hammurabi. They were restored and redecoreated by Nebuchadnezzar, and shrines within and without their inclosures were added. Babylon and Borsippa were his favorite cities, and of



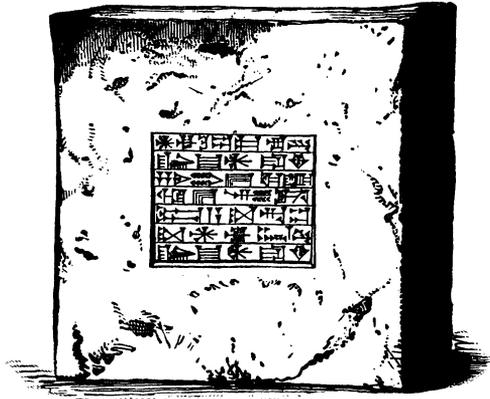
BIRS NIMRUD, THE TOWER OF BABEL

these he preferred Babylon, where he built his royal palace. This fact is emphasized in EIH, col. vii, 9 ff., where we read that from time immemorial to the reign of his father, Nabopolassar, the numerous kings who had reigned had built their palaces, had

their residences, and stored their treasures in other cities which they preferred—in fact, wherever they pleased—and that they had come to Babylon only for the zag-muku festival.

Nebuchadnezzar completed the construction of *Imgur-Bêl*, the inner wall of Babylon, and *Nêmitti-Bêl*, the outer wall, which Nabopolassar, his father, had begun. In addition, in order that the enemy might not storm *Imgur-Bêl*, he built at a distance of four thousand cubits a heavy wall on the east of Babylon, and provided it with moats. He also constructed two walls on the side of *Nêmitti-Bêl*, four hundred and ninety cubits long. *Tâbi-supur-šu*, the wall of Borsippa, was rebuilt and provided with a moat and other means of defense.

The side-walls of the *Arahtu* canal were completed; *Ai-ibur-šabû*, street of Babylon, from the *ellu-gate* to *Nanâ-sâkipat-têbi-sa*, was raised and made a boulevard in order to accommodate the *zak-muku* (the first of the year)



BABYLONIAN BRICK

procession of the great lord Marduk. He rebuilt the temple of the goddess *Nin-Karrak* in Sippar; also a temple to *Shamash* in Sippar and in Larsa.

In the so-called "Canal Inscription" we have a very interesting account of the construction of the *Libil-ḥegalla* ("May it bring plenty!") canal:

I sought out the site of *Libil-ḥegalla*, the east canal of Babylon, which had been in a state of ruin for a long time, and which was filled with

drifts of sand and full of débris, and from the bank of the Euphrates as far as the Ai-ibur-šabû street, with bitumen and burnt brick, I rebuilt its bed. In Ai-ibur-šabû, the street of Babylon, for the procession of the great lord Marduk, I built a canal-bridge, and made its roadway broad.

There are many other works of Nebuchadnezzar which deserve notice, but these are sufficient to show the enterprise and energy of this great king, who busied himself with the cities of Babylon and Borsippa, the building of temples and shrines, the construction of walls, moats, and other fortifications, the digging of canals, the raising of streets, etc., etc.

Nebuchadnezzar's piety is shown in all his works, and his prayers are the best that have come down to us. His birth is ascribed to Marduk. It was also under his protection that he made his campaigns and enlarged his dominion. To the gods he built the temples and shrines. He celebrated religious festivals, and reëstablished religious customs which had fallen into disuse. He made provision for sacrifices to the gods and temple dues. In fine, on every act he invoked the blessing of the gods.

"Nebuchadnezzar's inscriptions are characterized by the prayer with which they almost invariably close. Whether erecting a sanctuary, or building a canal, or improving the walls of Babylon, he does not fail to add to the description of his achievements a prayer to some deity, in which he asks for divine grace and the blessings of long life and prosperity."<sup>4</sup>

When about to ascend the throne, Nebuchadnezzar addressed the following prayer to Marduk (EIH, cols. i, 55-ii, 1):

O, Eternal Ruler! Lord of everything that exists!  
 To the king whom thou lovest, and whose name thou hast mentioned,<sup>5</sup>  
 Grant that his name (*i. e.*, he) may flourish as seems good to thee.  
 Guide him on the right path.  
 I am the prince, thy favorite, the creation of thy hand.  
 Thou didst create me, and  
 Thou hast intrusted to me rule over everything.  
 According to thy mercy, O Lord, which thou bestowest on all,  
 Make me to love thy exalted rule.  
 Cause the fear of thy divinity to exist in my heart.

<sup>4</sup> JASTROW, *The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, p. 295.

<sup>5</sup> *I. e.*, called to the throne.

Grant to me whatever may seem good to thee,  
 Since thou has created my life.

We have another prayer to Marduk in EIH., cols. ix, 47-x, 13:

O Marduk! Lord, prince of the gods, almighty prince!  
 Thou hast created me and intrusted to me the rule over everything.  
 Like my precious life, I love thy lofty appearance.  
 On no other sites, except in thy city Babylon, have I built.  
 Since I love the fear of thy divinity and ponder on thy lordship,  
 Receive with favor the uplifting of my hand (*i. e.*, my prayer), give ear to  
 my prayer.

I am the king, the restorer, who maketh thy heart glad,  
 I am the clever officer who restores all thy cities.  
 By thy command, O merciful Marduk!  
 May the house which I have built stand forever.  
 May I attain old age therein, and be satisfied with a numerous offspring.  
 May I receive therein the heavy tribute of the kings of the world, of all  
 mankind.

From horizon to zenith, at the rising of the sun,  
 May I have no enemy. May I have no terrible opponent.  
 May my followers rule the world therein forever.

There are two accounts of the rebuilding of Ebabbara, the temple of Shamash in Sippar. The prayers in both of these are very interesting. The first account is very short, and a translation of the whole follows:

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, restorer of Esagila and Ezida, son of Nabopolassar, am I. I have rebuilt Ebabbara, the sun temple in Sippar, to Shamash, who prolongs my days.

O Shamash! great Lord, look with grace and favor on my deeds.  
 A life of many (far-off) days, abundance of offspring, a firm throne and a long reign do thou grant me.

Look with continuous favor on the uplifting of my hand.  
 By thy illustrious command, may the work of my hands last forever.  
 May my followers remain long in authority, and may they be firmly established in the land.

When I raise my hand to thee, O Lord, Shamash! do thou open up my way to overwhelm my enemies.

O Shamash! do thou, with thy powerful weapons, which cannot be rivaled, go at my side to overthrow my foes.

As the brick-work of Ebabbara is firmly established for all time, so may my years (life) last forever.

The prayer at the close of the second account is quite different :

O Shamash! great Lord, upon thy joyful entrance into thy splendid temple,  
Ebabbara,

Do thou look with continuous favor on the work of my hands,  
Mercy toward me be thy command.

By thy righteous command, may I have an abundant offspring.

Grant me a long life and a firm throne.

May my reign last forever!

With a righteous scepter of good rulership,

With a firm staff, bringing peace to man, do thou adorn my sovereignty forever.

With powerful weapons, leading on to battle, protect my soldiers.

Do thou, O Shamash! by oracle and dream, answer me correctly!

By thy illustrious word of command, which cannot be altered,

May my weapons advance, and strike and overthrow the weapons of the enemies.

“Returning for a moment to the dedication prayer to Marduk, addressed by the king on the occasion of his mounting the throne, one cannot fail to be struck by the high sense of the importance of his station with which the king is inspired. Sovereignty is not a right that he can claim—it is a trust granted to him by Marduk. He holds his great office, not for purposes of self-glorification, but for the benefit of his subjects. In profound humility he confesses that what he has he owes entirely to Marduk. He asks to be guided so that he may follow the path of righteousness. Neither riches nor power constitute his ambition, but to have the fear of his lord in his heart. Such a plane of thought is never reached in the incantation texts.”<sup>6</sup>

The influence of the Marduk cult and the priests of Esagila was greatest at this time. Nabû still played a prominent part, and his temple Ezida at Borsippa is always mentioned in connection with Esagila. In Sippar and Larsa the temples of Shamash were restored. Rawlinson, in his *Egypt and Babylon*, calls attention to a fact that stands out very plainly in the inscriptions, viz., the curious combination of monotheism with polytheism which characterizes the religion of Nebuchadnezzar.

<sup>6</sup>JASTROW, *Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, pp. 298, 299.

Of this he says: "Either he fluctuates between two beliefs, or else his polytheism is of that modified kind which has been called 'kathenotheism,' where the worshiper, on turning his regards to any particular deity, 'forgets, for the time being, that there is any other, and addresses the object of his adoration in terms of as absolute devotion as if he were the sole god whom he recognized, the one and only divine being in the entire universe.'"

Nebuchadnezzar was cruel; all orientals are cruel. He was pompous; all orientals are pompous. The Babylonians, unlike the Assyrians, were a peace-loving people. One need only compare his inscriptions with those of Tiglathpileser and Ashurnasirpal to see how much less cruel and pompous he was than his predecessors in Assyria. While great in war, he was greater in peace; and, as mentioned above, his inscriptions are records of his works of peace rather than of his campaigns.