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iii) AKITU CHRONICLE: CHRONICLE 16

The Akitu Chronicle is a description of interruptions in the Babylonian Akitu festival beginning with Sennacherib's sack of Babylon (689 B.C.) and ending in the accession year of Nabopolassar (626 B.C.). The text is divided by horizontal lines into sections of unequal length. Each section deals with a single year except for the first section which covers twenty years. The document is preserved on a single tablet with no division into columns. It is in an extremely good state of preservation so that only a few signs of the whole text are missing. There is no colophon and half of the reverse of the tablet is uninscribed. It is a private document composed for a specific, individual purpose. The date and provenance of the tablet are unknown. There are no scribal errors.

The document is solely concerned with interruptions in the Akitu festival. Every event mentioned in the chronicle has some relation to this important festival in the Babylonian calendar. Rebellions and wars are included only because they were the reason why the Akitu festival could not be celebrated. Interruptions in the Akitu festival are also mentioned in the Nabonidus Chronicle, the Religious Chronicle, and Chronicle 24, but in none of these documents are they the sole concern of their authors.

The singular nature of the chronicle's contents poses two problems. Why should a scribe wish to record the interruptions of the Akitu festival and why should he choose this particular period of time? The latter question will be considered first. The author chose a very significant point of time with which to begin his narration. He began with the sack of Babylon by Sennacherib in 689 B.C., one of the most terrible events in Babylonian history. The temple of Esagil was sacked and the statue of the god Marduk carried off to Assyria. Marduk's statue remained in Assyria during the rest of Sennacherib's reign and all through Esarhaddon's reign — a total of twenty years in which the Akitu festival could not be celebrated. This was indeed a

dark moment in Babylonian history and a fitting period in which to begin a narration of interruptions in the Akitu festival.⁵⁷

The narration ends with the accession year of Nabopolassar. The major events in Babylonian history are well known to us starting at this time thanks to the Babylonian Chronicle Series. The second chronicle in this series (Chronicle 2) begins with Nabopolassar's accession year and confirms the testimony of the Akitu Chronicle that there was a great deal of political disturbance during this period. Afterwards, however, Nabopolassar and his successor gained and held firm control over Babylonia. There were frequent skirmishes with hostile armies, particularly Assyrian armies, but most of these took place outside of Babylonian territory. Beginning with Nabopolassar the Babylonians were on the offensive and not the defensive. It is unlikely that there were any interruptions in the Akitu festival during this time. Thus the author of the Akitu Chronicle has no need to continue his narration beyond the beginning of Nabopolassar's reign. One presumes, of course, that the text includes all interruptions of the Akitu festival in this period from 689–626 B.C. but there is no means of verification.

Having considered the significance of the period of time about which the author chose to write, the question of why he wrote such a chronicle must be considered. There is no apparent pragmatic reason for such a chronicle. Thus one must conclude that the scribe composed his history out of sheer interest in the subject-matter. History for history's sake was not unknown in the late period in Mesopotamia. It may be the basic principle underlying the composition of the Babylonian Chronicle Series. The writer of the Akitu Chronicle shows no bias in his history of the interruptions of the Akitu festival. He mentions a battle between the Assyrians and Babylonians and, although a Babylonian,

⁵⁷ Cf. Chronicle 24 which may possibly have ended its narration at this point.

states quite frankly that the Babylonians lost.⁵⁸

In the study of the Babylonian Chronicle Series the close relationship of Chronicle 1 with the Esarhaddon Chronicle and the Akitu Chronicle was discussed and it was shown that there was evidence that all three had a source in common, a detailed running account of Babylonian history. The Akitu Chronicle, which is based on the information in the contemporary account, is a reliable and objective historical source.

In the first section of the chronicle⁵⁹ a summary statement is given of the number of years, twenty, that the statue of Marduk (Bel) stayed in Ashur and thus the extent of time during which there was no Akitu festival. Exactly the same statement is contained in the Esarhaddon Chronicle.⁶⁰ The statement is followed by the introduction, still in the same section, of the accession year of Shamash-shuma-ukin, in which the statue of Marduk was returned to Babylon. The same

statement, with minor variants, is found in Chronicle 1⁶¹ and the Esarhaddon Chronicle.⁶²

In the following segment⁶³ events of the sixteenth year of Shamash-shuma-ukin are narrated. The conscription of Babylonian troops and the beginning of the civil war between Shamash-shuma-ukin and Ashurbanipal are mentioned. There is a verbal parallel with the only sentence entered for this year in the Shamash-shuma-ukin Chronicle.⁶⁴ A Babylonian defeat at Hirit did not bring the conflict to an end.

In the seventeenth year⁶⁵ there were rebellions in Assyria and Babylonia and the Akitu festival was not celebrated. The next three sections⁶⁶ concern the eighteenth to twentieth years of Shamash-shuma-ukin and record, in abbreviated form, the interruption of the Akitu festival. In the last section⁶⁷ the accession year of Nabopolassar is described in which there were rebellions and warfare and the Akitu festival was not celebrated.

⁵⁸ lines 13-15.

⁵⁹ 1-8.

⁶⁰ Esarhaddon Chronicle 31f.

⁶¹ Chronicle 1 iv 34-36.

⁶² Esarhaddon Chronicle 35-37.

⁶³ 9-16.

⁶⁴ Shamash-shuma-ukin Chronicle 6 = Akitu Chronicle 12.

⁶⁵ 17-19.

⁶⁶ 20-23.

⁶⁷ 24-27.

CHRONICLE 16

AKITU CHRONICLE

The text of the Akitu Chronicle is preserved on a tablet, BM 86379 (original registration number unknown), which measures 45 mms. wide and 62 mms. long. It is well preserved,

there being a small piece missing from the upper right-hand corner and a few surface flaws.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 [VIII] MU ^{meš} ina mdŠi[n-ahhē-eriba] | 1 For [eight] years during (the reign of) Se[nnacherib], |
| 2 XII MU ^{meš} mAššur-[aḫa-iddina] | 2 for twelve years (during the reign of) Esar[haddon]— |
| 3 XX MU ^{meš} dBēl ina Bal-til ^{ki} a-[šib-ma] | 3 twenty years (altogether)—Bel s[ta]yed in Baltil (Ashur) and |
| 4 i-sin-nu a-ki-tú ba-ṭi-[il] | 4 the Akitu festival did not take place. |
| 5 MU.SAG mdŠamaš-šuma-ukīn ina ^{iti} Aiari [d Bēl] | 5 The accession year of Shamash-shum-ukin: In the month Iyyar [Bel] |
| 6 u ilāni ^{meš} ša kurAkkad ^{ki} ultu Bal-til ^{ki} ú-š[u-nim-ma] | 6 and the gods of Akkad went out from Baltil (Ashur) and |
| 7 ina ^{iti} Aiari UD XXIV ^{kám} a-na Bābili ^{ki} iterbū ^{meš} -[ni] | 7 on the twenty-fourth day of the month Iyyar they entered Babylon. |
| 8 dNabū u ilāni ^{meš} ša Barsip ^{ki} ana Bābili ^{ki} it-tal-ku-ni | 8 Nabu and the gods of Borsippa went to Babylon. |
| 9 MU XVI ^{kám} dŠamaš-šuma-ukīn ultu ^{iti} Aiari adi ^{iti} Tebēti | 9 The sixteenth year of Shamash-shum-ukin: From the month Iyyar until the month Tebet |
| 10 lúrāb-bīti ina kurAkkad ^{ki} bi-ḫir-ti ib-te-ḫir | 10 the major-domo conscripted troops in Akkad. |
| 11 ^{iti} Tebētu UD XIX ^{kám} kurAš-šur u kurAkkad ^{ki} inakkirū ^{meš} | 11 On the nineteenth day of the month Tebet hostilities began between Assyria and Akkad. |
| 12 šarru la-pan(igi) lúnakiri a-na Bābili ^{ki} i-ter-baṭ | 12 The king withdrew before the enemy into Babylon. |

COMMENTARY

1-8 An exact duplicate of these lines is found in Chron. 14:31f. and 35-37. Note that Chron. 14 also has a statement about Nabū and Aššurbanipal (lines 33f.) which Chron. 16 does not have as well as a statement concerning the political events (lines 38f.). Lines 5-7 are also duplicated in Chron. 1 iv

34-36. See the note to that passage. Restorations have been made on the basis of the duplicate passages.

1 For *ina* "during the reign of" see Borger, *Asarh.* p. 54, note to iv 35.

10 See the note to Chron. 1 iv 4.

12 Cf. Chron. 3:46 and Chron. 15:6.

- 13 *Addaru* XXVII *ummāni*^{nt} *kurAš-šur u ummāni* *kurAkkadī*^{ki} 13 On the twenty-seventh day of Adar the armies of Assyria and Akkad
- 14 *šal-tum ina Hi-rit ipušū*^{meš}-*ma ummāni* *kurAkkadī*^{ki} 14 did battle in Hirit. The army of Akkad
- 15 *ina tāhāz šēri ibbalkitū*^{me}-*ma dabdā-šú-nu ma-a-diš šakin*[†] 15 retreated from the battlefield and a major defeat was inflicted upon them.
- 16 ^{SAL}*nukurtu šaknat*^{at} *šal-tum sad-rat* 16 (However), there were still hostilities (and) warfare continued.
-
- 17 MU [XVII]^{kām} [*saḥ-m*]a-šá(?)*-a-tú ina* *kurAš-šur u kurAkkadī*^{ki} *šak[nā]*^m[*e-m*]a 17 The seventeenth year: There were [insu]rrections in Assyria and Akkad.
- 18 ^d*Nabú ultu [Barsip]*^k *ana ašē* ^d*Bēl úl illiku*^{ku} 18 Nabu did not come from [Borsippa] for the procession of Bel (and)
- 19 ^d*Bēl úl ušá*^a 19 Bel did not come out.
-
- 20 MU XVIII^{kām} ^d*N[abú]* [*ultu*] *Barsip*^{ki} *ana ašē* [^d*Bēl*] *úl illiku*^{ku} 20 The eighteenth year: Nabu did not come from Borsippa for the procession of Bel (and)
- 21 ^d*Bēl úl ušá*^a 21 Bel did not come out.
-
- 22 MU XIX ^d*Nabú úl illiku* ^d*Bēl úl ušá*^a 22 The nineteenth year: Nabu did not come (and) Bel did not come out.
-
- 23 MU X[X] ^d*Nabú úl illiku* ^d*Bēl úl ušá*^a 23 The twentieth year: Nabu did not come (and) Bel did not come out.
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- 24 *arki* ^m*Kan-da-la-nu ina* MU.SAG ^d*Nabú-ápla-úšur* 24 After Kandalanu, in the accession year of Nabopolassar,
- 25 *saḥ-ma-šá-a-ti ina* *kurAš-šur u kurAkkadī*^{ki} *šaknā*^{me}-*ma* 25 there were insurrections in Assyria and Akkad.
- 26 *nu-kúr-tú šaknat*^{at} *šal-tú sad-rat* 26 There were hostilities (and) warfare continued.
- 27 ^d*Nabú úl illiku*^{ku} ^d*Bēl úl ušá*^[a] 27 Nabu did not come (and) Bel did not come out.

COMMENTARY

15 *ibbalkitūma*: See the note to Chron. 1 i 35.

16 This expression also occurs in line 26 and indicates that there was a great deal of confusion and strife during this period which could not be chronicled in terms of battles lost and won.

17 Since the same phrase occurs in line 25 there can be no doubt about the restoration. Collation shows that there is sufficient room for the restoration although there would not appear to be from Smith's copy. *šá* is not well made.

18f. See the note to Chron. 17 iii 5f.

18 There is sufficient room to restore *Barsip* although it would not appear so in Smith's copy.

ašē ^d*Bēl*: For the reading see Chron. 17 ii 2 and cf. Landsberger and Bauer, ZA 37

(1927), p. 79, n. 1.

23 There is a deep depression in the tablet which almost totally obliterates the second Winkelhaken of the numeral xx. The depression appears to have been made at the time the tablet was inscribed (it is not a flaw in the clay). It is apparently caused by an accidental slip of the stylus. It is not an erasure.

24 Apparently there was no interruption of the Akitu festival during Kandalānu's reign but the chronicler did not want to leave his name out altogether (to show he had not overlooked him) so he simply said "after Kandalanu".

25 The same phrase occurs in line 17.

26 The same phrase occurs in line 16. See the note to that line.