

CHRONICLES OF
CHALDAEAN KINGS

(626-556 B.C.)

IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

BY

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PREFACE

IN the following pages are published the texts of all that now remain in the British Museum of a particular kind of Babylonian historical records, the Chronicles, so called by modern scholars, their native name being uncertain. These are distinguished by their impersonal style, as written by detached observers, from our principal source of historical information, the inscriptions of Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian kings, which extend from before the middle of the third millennium until the sixth century B.C., and from a single detail commemorated on a tablet or a figure to the lengthy history of a whole reign, written in densely-packed columns upon a clay prism. The Chronicles too, although all now extant, were written in the latest periods of Babylonian antiquity, make reference in their manner of impersonal narration to events which occurred throughout a past of more than 2000 years, going back to figures among the earliest dynasties of Sumer and even to mythological stories of the gods. They find their first important subject in the reigns of Sargon of Agade and of Naram-Sin (about 2300 B.C.), and relate a number of striking and dramatic incidents connected with those national heroes. By comparison, the subsequent centuries, to judge from the available material, seem to have been ill-represented in the sources from which the chroniclers drew, for only a few facts, of no great interest, are recorded concerning even the more famous kings. From about the reign of Nabonassar in the eighth century B.C., when the Assyrian domination of Babylon began, the Chronicles become much more detailed, giving information of what happened in such years of the reigns as were marked by important events. Extant Chronicles prove that, from at least the first of Esarhaddon (680 B.C.), an entry was made for every year, even if nothing very notable occurred in it; but not all of the succeeding years are preserved.

This arrangement is exemplified in the material here published, which embraces (with one short and one long gap) the period 626 to 556 B.C., i.e. the greatest part of the Neo-Babylonian or Chaldaean Dynasty. In these eventful years the declining Assyrian power was finally expelled from Babylonia,

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The Neo-Babylonian Chronicle Texts

THE cuneiform texts belonging to the class long known as Babylonian Chronicles are a unique and reliable source of knowledge of the history of Babylonia. Unfortunately, however, only a few of these compilations have survived, but these show that a chronicle of the principal national events was kept at Babylon from at least as early as the Kassite period (*c.* sixteenth to fourteenth centuries B.C.) until the end of the Seleucid era.

The first text of this kind to be published (B.M. 92502) appeared in 1887 as *The Babylonian Chronicle*, so giving the title which has been adopted for all similar documents.¹ This tablet outlines the history of Babylonia from the rule of Nabū-naṣir to Šamaš-šum-ukin (*i.e. c.* 747-648 B.C.). It is a copy made in the twenty-second year of Darius² from an older and damaged text and claims to be the first of a number of tablets, or chapter-extracts, of the same kind. A group of texts concerning early Babylonian kings was published in 1907³ and it is known that the editor of these intended to follow them with the corresponding Neo-Babylonian chronicles. This was partly done by other scholars in the years 1923 and 1924 in two publications containing (1) B.M. 25091 (Esarhaddon Chronicle), 86379 (Chronicle of the Years 680-626 B.C.), 35382 (Nabonidus Chronicle, re-edited), and other relevant material,⁴ and (2) B.M. 21901 of which the principal event is the Fall of

¹ The text is given by H. Winckler and J. N. Strassmaier in *ZA*, II (1887), pp. 163-168; T. G. Pinches, *JRAS*, 1887, pp. 655-681; L. Abel and H. Winckler, *Keilschrifttexte zum Gebrauch bei Vorlesungen* (1890), pp. 47-48; J. N. Strassmaier, *Inschriften von Darius*, No. 599 (Babylonische Texte XII/III (1897), pp. 398-405); L. W. King, *CT*, XXXIV, Pl. 46-50. Translations by H. Winckler, *ZA*, II, pp. 150-162; F. Delitzsch, *Die Babylonische Chronik* (Abhand. d. Phil.-Hist. Klasse der königl. sächs. Gesell. d. Wiss. xxv, I (1906)), pp. 19-24; and in part by D. D. Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib (OIP, II)*, pp. 158-162; A. L. Oppenheim, *ANET*, pp. 301-303.

² *I.e.* 500/499 B.C. if Darius I.

³ L. W. King, *Chronicles concerning Early Babylonian Kings*.

⁴ Sidney Smith, *Babylonian Historical Texts*, 1924.

Nineveh.¹ Apart from the two last-mentioned Chronicles, little historical intelligence, except for scanty references in what are otherwise building inscriptions or business documents, has been available for the Neo-Babylonian kingdom (626-539 B.C.). The four new texts which are the subject of this study and are here published for the first time happily fill a number of gaps in our knowledge of this period. The early days of the Neo-Babylonian or Chaldaean regime, the battles of Carchemish and Hamath and the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadrezzar II in 597 B.C. are among the great historical events now described by authentic Babylonian sources. Since one of the Chronicles already published (B.M. 21901—The Fall of Nineveh) forms part of this series, and is out of print, the opportunity has been taken to reproduce that text here.

The following table shows the new Chronicles in their chronological relation to previously published texts of the same type.

NEO-BABYLONIAN CHRONICLES

<i>Ruler</i>	<i>Regnal Years</i>	<i>B.C.</i>	<i>Tablet No.</i>	<i>No. Lines</i>	<i>Published</i>	<i>Plates</i>
1. Nabopolassar	acc.-3	626-623	B.M. 25127*	41	p. 50	I & VII-VIII
2. „	4-9	622-617	—	—	missing	
3. „	10-17	616-609	B.M. 21901†	75	(a) <i>FN</i> (b) p. 54	II-III & IX-XII
4. „	18-20	608-606	B.M. 22047*	28	p. 64	IV & XIII-XIV
5. Nabopolassar- Nebuchadrezzar II	21-10	605-595	B.M. 21946†	49	p. 66	V & XIV-XVI
6. Nebuchadrezzar II	11-43	594-561	—	—	} missing	
7. Amēl-Marduk	acc.-2	561-559	—	—		
8. Neriglissar	acc.-2	559-557	—	—		
9. „	3	556	B.M. 25124*	26	p. 74	VI & XVII- XVIII
10. Labaši-Marduk	acc.	556-555	—	—	missing	
11. Nabonidus	acc.-17	555-539	B.M. 35382	84	<i>BHT</i> , pp. 98-123	

* † mark tablets apparently written by the same scribe.

The above table also clearly shows that the extant Chaldaean (or Neo-Babylonian) Chronicle tablets vary in the amount of historical detail given.

¹ C. J. Gadd, *The Fall of Nineveh*, printed by order of the Trustees of the British Museum, 1923.

Fifteen years of Nabopolassar's reign are covered in 152 lines (B.M. 25127; 21901; 22047 and part 21946)¹ whereas the more summary 'Babylonian Chronicle' (B.M. 92502) records more than thirty years of earlier history in its 173 lines. In contrast the tablet B.M. 25124, which gives us the first historical detail of Neriglissar's reign, takes a whole tablet of twenty-six lines for the events of a single year. Part of Nebuchadrezzar's history (B.M. 21946) now comes to us for the first time but in less detail than is accorded to his predecessor Nabopolassar (49 lines for 11 years). The new text is more detailed than the 'Nabonidus Chronicle' (B.M. 35382) which is more closely allied to the 'Babylonian Chronicle', not only in the arrangement of subject matter but also in script and in the form of the two-columned tablet: the latter two tablets seem to have been written by the same scribe. Similarly the chronicles covering Nabopolassar's early and later years and that of Neriglissar are written by the same scribe in small script on tablets which resemble the form usually taken by late Babylonian contracts (cf. above Table Nos. 1, 4, 9 and Plates I, IV, VI). The remaining tablets, B.M. 21901 and B.M. 21946, are larger and written by yet another hand (cf. Table Nos. 3, 5 and Plates II, III, V). It is all the more noteworthy that the shorter text B.M. 22047 comes between these two similar tablets and forms a continuous history, the order of these three being confirmed by their respective 'catchlines'.

The late Babylonians had a deep interest in their own past and a number of texts reveal knowledge of their early history, both secular and religious. It has been suggested that the 'Babylonian Chronicle' tablet was but the first chapter of an official history of which the remaining Chronicles are recognisable extracts.² It is, however, evident that some chronicle tablets bear fuller details than the 'Babylonian Chronicle' which cannot therefore be regarded as a specimen of their original. The diversity in form of the extant chronicle texts suggests rather that in each case we have summaries designed for different purposes. Thus the two-columned 'Babylonian Chronicle' type of texts concentrates on the major internal political events, especially the date of the king's accession and death and the length of his reign. The consecutive outline of the king's activities introduces external or foreign matters only if they mark a distinct change in the control of Babylonia or in its relations with its immediate neighbours such as Assyria and Elam. The

¹ The lines in all the tablets of this 'Babylonian Chronicle' class are of approximately the same length. Cf. dimensions of the tablets given on p. 100.

² B. Landsberger and Theo. Bauer, *ZA*, XXXVII (N.F. III), pp. 61-65.

emphasis is political, and the style which is formal and brief betrays a long established practice.¹ On the other hand, in the Chronicle of the relations of Babylonia with Assyria during the years 680-626 B.C. and in the earlier Religious Chronicle,² data have been selected from a more detailed original for a particular purpose and period. While the purpose cannot be judged the 'Babylonian Chronicle' (B.M. 92502), at least, was copied in the Persian period and may have been compiled to aid some enquiry needing an historical background.³ The similarity of form and language, quite apart from the obvious chronological arrangement, may well show that in each case the Chronicle texts are themselves but extracts or selections from a full history which, like the better known Annals of the Assyrian Kings, may have been compiled annually.⁴ The Neriglissar chronicle B.M. 25124 supports this view. That detailed records were continuous at least from the time of Nebuchadrezzar, and almost certainly from the reign of Nabū-naṣir with whose reign the 'Babylonian Chronicle' commences, is shown by the chronicles themselves and by the later class of texts sometimes called astronomical historical diaries. In these, astronomers at Babylon recorded not merely their observation of the heavens but also relevant facts thought to be connected with them, such as the prevailing weather conditions, the river level, current prices of staple commodities, and finally the contemporary political events which were sometimes written down in great detail.⁵ If these latter observations were not themselves the basis of a progressive historiography they point to the availability of such material.

The Neo-Babylonian Chronicle texts are written in a small script of a type which does not of itself allow any precise dating but which can mean that they were written from any time almost contemporary with the events themselves to the end of the Achaemenid rule. Their provenance is Babylon so far as can be judged from the internal evidence of the texts themselves and from

¹ Some of the phrases occur in lists of kings dated back to the Sumerian period (T. Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List*) and were still used as late as the end of the Seleucid era (A. J. Sachs and D. J. Wiseman, *Iraq*, XVI (1954), pp. 202-212). A similar vocabulary is found in the Assyrian Annals.

² B.M. 35968 published by L. W. King, *op. cit.* ii, pp. 70-86; 157-179.

³ Cf. Ezra v. 19.

⁴ For a recent discussion on the value of the Annals see E. A. Speiser in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, pp. 64-67.

⁵ B.M. 92689 (*BHT*, pp. 150-159; Pl. XVIII) is the historical part of one of this class of texts. See A. J. Sachs, *JCS*, 2 (1948), pp. 285-286; a text of this class dated in Nebuchadrezzar's thirty-eighth year is given in *AfO*, XVI (1953), Tf. XVII.

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other tablets acquired by the Museum at the same time. At least part of the 'Babylonian Chronicle' or its original sources was, however, copied at Sippar.¹ The discussion of their contents which follows shows that they are both accurate and objective in their portrayal of historical facts.