

تواریخ سال نهم نبونیدوس (۵۴۷-۶ قبل از میلاد): بابل و لیدیا^۱

روبارتوس یوهانس ون در اسپک^۲

منصور حمدالله زاده^۳

دوفصلنامه علمی مطالعات ایران کهن - شماره اول، سال دوم، بهار و تابستان ۱۴۰۱

اکثر پژوهشگران تاریخ را با مطالعه آثار کلاسیک شروع می کنند، اما دسته ای دیگر از آنها پیشینه ای همچنان در مطالعه تاریخ دارند. پیر برایانت و خودم به دسته دوم تعلق دارد. بیشتر مورخان باستان بر تاریخ یونانیان و رومی ها تمرکز می کنند و در مورد متون یونانی و لاتین بحث می کنند. اغلب آنها را در راهنماهایی های مطالعاتی و در وب سایت های دانشگاه ها می یابیم که در حوزه مهد تمدن غرب مطالعه می کنند. به عنوان دانشجوی تاریخ در لیدن، من این تجربه را داشتم، اما برایم جالب بود که هنگام مطالعه، به عنوان مثال، امپراتوری ایران اطلاعات زیادی فراتر از کارهای هرودوت داده نمی شد. بیشتر و بیشتر به این نتیجه رسیدم که تاریخ یونان و روم به طور جدایی ناپذیری با تاریخ خاور نزدیک باستان مرتبط است و به غیر از جهان یونانی - رومی، تمدن های آسیای غربی و مصر مسئول تحولات اروپای بعدی بوده اند.

^۱ - این مقاله ترجمه و بازنشریست از :

van der Spek, B. (2021). The Nabonidus Chronicle on the ninth year of Nabonidus (547-6 BC). *Babylonia and Lydia in context*. In *Achemenet. Vingt ans après: Études offertes à Pierre Briant à l'occasion des vingt ans du Programme Achemenet* (pp. 415-428). Peeters Publishers.

^۲ - Robartus Johannes van der Spek (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

mansour001@gmail.com

^۳ - دکترای تاریخ ایران باستان - مدرس دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی - تهران

The Nabonidus Chronicle on the ninth year of Nabonidus (547-6 BC). Babylonia and Lydia in context

Robartus Johannes van der Spek
(Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Introduction

Most Ancient Historians start with a study of classics, but some have a background in the study of history. Pierre Briant (like myself) belongs to the latter category. He studied history at the University of Poitiers (1960-1965). Most ancient historians focus on the history of the Greeks and the Romans, discussing Greek and Latin texts. Most often we find in study guides and on websites of universities that Ancient Historians in doing so study the cradle of the western civilization. As a student of history in Leiden I had this experience, but it struck me that when studying, e.g., the Persian Empire not much information was given beyond the work of Herodotus. More and more I came to the conclusion that the history of Greece and Rome is inextricably connected with the history of the Ancient Near East, and that apart from the Graeco-Roman world the civilizations of Western Asia and Egypt were responsible for developments in later European history.

I soon learnt that Pierre Briant was a scholar who did not limit himself to Greek and Roman texts, but familiarized himself with the disciplines that focused on Near Eastern history. He realized that in antiquity no such dichotomy existed between East and West, apart from the portrayal of eastern decadence in Greek and later Western literature and art, but that the Persian Empire, for instance, was the main power of classical times and not merely a background scene in the theatre of Greek history. It should thus not be studied as a byproduct of Greek history. One of the many results is his standard work on the Persian Empire, *Histoire de l'empire perse* (Briant 1996).¹ In this major work all relevant sources are used, discussed and critically evaluated, interesting not only for those who have their upbringing in Graeco-Roman history, but also for students of Near Eastern languages and history, who also are often not aware of the relevance of their work for history beyond the Near East. Briant's brainchild Achemenet.com has the same broad perspective.

In this contribution I want to present a new edition of a passage in the so-called Nabonidus Chronicle concerning the ninth year of the last Babylonian king Nabonidus (547/6 BC). Of the matters reported here, two hotly debated topics are recorded: the advance of Cyrus into Asia Minor and the recurrent observation that king Nabonidus was staying in Tema in Arabia, so that he could not participate in the New Year's or *Akitu* festival. I suggest a few new readings and translation and discuss the matter in the context of the debate on the *Sitz im Leben* of the chronicle.

I realize that these subjects are treated endlessly and even a discussion of the *status quaestionis* would demand a long article in itself, especially as regards the wretched question of whether or not

¹ Translated into English as Briant 2002.

Lydia is mentioned in this passage. I shall not do that, as it can be found elsewhere (Rollinger 2004 and 2019 and Zawadzki 2010). The story is well-known. One can read it in Briant 2002, p. 31-38. The conquest of Asia Minor, one of the first projects of Cyrus, is described at some length by Herodotus (I, 79-92).

The Nabonidus Chronicle is a product of Babylonian scholarship fitting in with the Babylonian tradition of collecting data, in this case historical data concerning the king and the cults in Esagila. A recurrent issue is the cancelling of the Akitu festival during the period that the Babylonian king Nabonidus was in Tema. The character of the document is debated. According to some it is principally an historical document, history for history's sake (Grayson 1975, p. 11); according to others it is anti-Nabonidus propaganda (Von Soden 1989, p. 288; Zawadzki 2010). Caroline Waerzeggers argued that the document as we have it was composed in the Hellenistic period, that the authors were aware of Greek historians and took part in a Greek historiographic debate (Waerzeggers 2015). I agree that the document as we have it was edited, compiled or copied in the late Persian or Hellenistic period, but I assume that a proto-chronicle must be the basis of this text. It hardly can be a really new composition (Van der Spek 2015, p. 451-462).

A new edition of the Nabonidus Chronicle II 10-18 (BM 35382 = Sp II 964). ABC 7, Col. II (Fig. 1)

10. MU 9.KAM ^mPA.I LUGAL <ina> URU *Te-ma-a* DUMU LUGAL ¹⁶GAL.MEŠ u ERÍN-ni ina KUR URI.KI LUGAL *ana* ITI BÁR *ana* TIN.TIR.KI
11. NU GIN-ku ⁴AG *ana* KÁ.DINGIR.RA.KI NU GIN-ku ⁴EN NU È-a *i-sin-nu a-ki-tú ba-til*
12. SISKUR.SISKUR.MEŠ *ina* É.SAG.GÍL u É.ZI.DA <ana> DINGIR.MEŠ *ša* <TIN.TIR.KI> u BAR.SIP.KI *ki šal-mu SUM-na*
13. ITI BÁR UD 5.KAM AMA LUGAL *ina* BÀD-ka-ra-šú *sá* GÚ ÍD UD.KIB.NUN.KI *e-la-nu Sip-par.KI*
14. *im-tu-ut* DUMU LUGAL u ERÍN.MEŠ-šú 3 *u₄-mu šu-du-ru* ÉR GAR-at *ina* ITI SIG₄ *ina* KUR URI.KI
15. *bi-ki-tú* *ina* UGU AMA LUGAL GAR-at *ina* ITI BÁR ^m*Ku-raš* LUGAL KUR *Par-su* ERÍN-šú *id-ke-e-ma*
16. *šap-la-an* URU *Ar-ba-'-il* ÍD IDIGNA *i-bir-ma* *ina* ITI GU₄ *ana* KUR ¹*Lu-ú'*-[*du* GIN']
17. LUGAL-šú GAZ *bu-šá-a-šú il-qí šu-lit šá rama-ni-šú* *ina* ŠÀ' (text: LU) *ú-še-li* [(...)]
18. EGIR *šu-lit-su* *ù* <É> *šar-ri* *ina* ŠÀ GÁL-ši

Translation

10. The 9th year. Nabonidus, the king, was <in> Tema. The son of the king (Belshazzar), the officers and the troops (were) in Akkad. The king for the month Nisanu to Babylon (Tintir)
11. did not come. Nabû did not come to Babylon (Kadingirra). Bel did not go out. The Akitu festival did not take place.
12. Offerings in Esagila and Ezida <for> the gods of <Babylon (Tintir)> and Borsippa were presented correctly.
13. Month Nisanu, 5th day (6 April 547 BC). The mother of the king (Adad-Guppi) in Dur-Karašu which (is on) the bank of the Euphrates above Sippar

14. died. The son of the king and his troops were in mourning for three days; an (official) mourning was established. In the month Simanu (III = 31 May – 28 June 547 BC) in the land of Akkad
15. an (official) mourning for the mother of the king was established. In the month Nisanu (I = 2 April – 1 May 547) Cyrus, the king of Persia (*Parsu*), mustered his troops and
16. he crossed the Tigris below the city of Arbela and in the month Aynu (2-30 May 547 BC) [he wen]t to the land 'Ly'[dia].
17. He killed its king, took its valuables (and) stationed a garrison of his own there.
18. Afterwards his garrison and the royal <treasury> (*basilikon*) remained there.

Some comments

10. The text has *ana Nisanu*, not *ina Nisanu*. It is not a scribal error, since in the parallel passages we have *ana* as well. Hence the translation: “for Nisanu”: (the king) did return *for* or *because* of the Nisanu festival (cf. AHW I, p. 48a, s.v. *ana* 12).
12. *kī šalmu*. This expression also occurs in II 8, 21, 25, III 8 and in ABC 17 II 4. Grayson translates “as in normal times” admitting that he is not certain about its meaning. Smith (1924) translates “as is correct” and “as is right”. CAD K, s.v. *kī*, p. 319b translates similarly “as is appropriate”. Cf. CAD Š I, p. 256, s.v. *šalmu* “favorable, propitious” (said of rituals, of appropriate times. CAD Š I, p. 217b, s.v. *šalāmu* 5b, “to be completely carried out (said of a ritual),” translates: “according to the complete (ritual?).” The message is that although the Akitu-festival did not take place, the offerings were performed correctly, properly. There is no reference to “normal times.” More on this below.
13. Adad-Guppi was the centenarian mother of Nabonidus, born in 20th year of Assurbanipal (649/8 BC), priestess of the god Sin of Harran. The creation of the fort Dur-Karashu on the Euphrates was explained by Beaulieu as an answer to the threat from Persia (Beaulieu 1989, p. 197-203; cf. Schaudig 2001, p. 500-513).
14. *Parsu*, “Persia.” Cyrus is called king of Anshan in II 1 and in the Cyrus Cylinder (latest translation Van der Spek 2014, p. 261-4). Waerzeggers (Waerzeggers 2015, p. 104) supposes that *Parsu* is “anachronistic”, adding “This should urge us, at the very least, to accommodate room for change and adaptation in the copyist’s work.” I concede that a copyist may have adapted the work, but the use of the term *Parsu* is definitely not Hellenistic. Both Anshan and *Parsu* were known. Anshan refers to Cyrus’s original Elamite city (note Cyrus’s Elamite name *Kurash* in Babylonian texts² and the title “king of Elam” in the Hellenistic Dynastic Prophecy II 17; Van der Spek 2003, p. 313). The use of the name Elam is probably not a Hellenistic *nouveauté*, as Waerzeggers supposes, but arises from the wish of scholars to use archaic terms to make a connection with omens (Van der Spek 2008, p. 285). The name Anshan may have been out of date already in the early Persian period and may have been replaced by the name *Parsu*, at least since the reign of Darius I in whose time the chronicle ABC 1 was composed (cf. Van der Spek 2015, p. 455) and who was called “the Persian, King of *Parsu*” in the Babylonian version of the Bisotun Inscription, line 1 (Babylonian version, Von Voigtlander 1978). Xerxes is called “king of *Parsu*” in many Babylonian documents.³

² Henkelman (2008, p. 55-7) argues that Cyrus’ Elamite name (*Kurash*) was the original name and the Persian version (*Kurus*) secondary.

³ Graziani 1986, p. 142 for references.

16. “He crossed the Tigris below Arbela” is odd, as Arbela is not situated on the Tigris, but on a tributary of the Upper Zab. I surmise that Cyrus crossed the Tigris below the mouth of the Upper Zab, or that he actually crossed the Upper Zab to take the road to Nineveh to cross the Tigris there.

Lu-ú-du, “Lydia”. This is the most crucial and controversial passage. Grayson originally read the name of the kingdom that was conquered by Cyrus as ^{kur}*Lu¹-u[di²]*, adopting a suggestion by Sydney Smith (Smith 1924, p. 120). However, in his corrigenda, he wrote: “Regarding the problem of whether or not Lydia can be read here - Since completion of the manuscript it has come to my attention that a collation by W.G. Lambert and A. Sachs quoted by Galling, *Studien*, p. 22 reads: ZU-x[...]. In view of this, I have again collated the passage. A further trace at the end of the line, on the edge, was observed and could stand for [*il-li*]k. But the preceding traces are ambiguous. At best, one can say it is not impossible to read: *ana^{kur} Lu¹-ú¹-du² il-li*]k, but such a reading is suggested by historical probability rather than any clear indication from the traces.”

This reading has been criticized by various scholars, of whom I mention a few. Joachim Oelsner (1999/2000) proposed to read Urartu here (*ana^{kur} Ú¹-[raš-tu il-li]*k) and this was accepted by Robert Rollinger (Rollinger 2004). Glassner (Glassner 2004, p. 236) stuck to the interpretation “Lydia”, but read *ana^{kur} Lu¹-ú¹-[di il-li]*k.

On 12 March 2013 I was able to study the tablet in the “Arched Room” of the British Museum and came to the conclusion that the reading suggested by Grayson in his corrigenda is in fact the most plausible. Fortunately, Irving Finkel and Mark Geller, who were present that day, arrived at the same conclusion. Professor W.G. Lambert was of the same opinion already on 3 June 2010 in discussing the passage with Stefan Zawadzki (cf. Zawadzki 2010, p. 147 n. 27). Apparently he had discarded the reading *zu* by that time.

The relevant sign is damaged, but one can see at least two⁴ vertical wedges and one horizontal wedge on top. The point is that the vertical wedges are too far from each other to warrant a reading *ú*. The horizontal wedge on top excludes the reading *ú*. Horizontal wedges in *ú* are positioned much lower (cf. *ú-še-li* in fig. 2). These features point to a reading *lu*. Comparison with the sign *lu* in *lu-bu-uš-bi* in III 26 and in I: 3 in *ú-bil-lu*, where we have the signs *ú* and *lu* closely together and where the difference is apparent (fig. 4), corroborates our reading. Glassner’s reading has also to be discarded. He supposed that the three Winkelhaken of the sign KUR (“land”) are actually part of the sign *lu*. Apparently he saw a horizontal wedge below these Winkelhaken, but this is not more than a crack in the tablet. For the next sign he accepted Oelsner’s and Rollinger’s reading *ú*. The sign LÚ, however, is never used in Late Babylonian with syllabic value *lu*, but only as determinative for persons or professions and with logographic value = *amīlu* (e.g., in LÚ-tú = *amīlūtu*) and = *ša* (e.g., in LÚ.SAG = *ša rēši*); cf. Borger 2003: 357, no. 514.

A “city” of Lūdu, ^{un}*Lu-ú-du*, is mentioned in ABC 6: 25. The determinative for “city” should not bother us, as URU (“city”) and KUR (“land”) are, at least in places outside Mesopotamia, used interchangeably (Zadok 1976: 70 n. 101; Van der Spek 2016). Reference is made here to

⁴ Typically the Late Babylonian sign LU consists of three vertical and three horizontal wedges. Sometimes the most left vertical wedge is hardly visible as it is written just behind the heads of the horizontals or it is not written at all. See for examples Ossendrijver 2019. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314606079_Images_of_Late_Babylonian_Cuneiform_Signs_version_9

“the border of Lydia,” which obviously does not refer to a city border, but to the border of the Lydian kingdom.

So the interpretation “Lydia” seems to be the most probable interpretation after all. Finally, this reading fits best what we know about Cyrus’ campaigns. The defeat of a substantial kingdom was important for the chronicler to underline the rise of Cyrus’ power.

17. Grayson translated GAZ (*idūk*) as “he defeated”, because he believed that king Croesus (according to Herodotus I 86-7), although sentenced to execution on a pyre, was pardoned by Cyrus. However, the normal meaning of this word when it refers to persons rather than armies, is “to kill.”

When a Babylonian king captures a defeated king, chroniclers use the verb *kašādu* (e.g. in ABC 5: 12 and 19). That Croesus was executed on a pyre is strongly suggested by Bacchylides’ *Third Ode*, 59, dated to 468 BC (i.e., a generation before Herodotus), where we read that “Apollo, born on Delos, brought the old man to live among the Hyperboreans,” which seems to suggest that he in fact died, but was “saved” just as Iphigeneia in Aulis once was, when she was sacrificed to appease the gods, but was taken by the gods to Tauris on the Crimea, which one might call the land of the Hyperboreans. Herodotus may have known this hymn and have rationalized it, making Croesus accompany Cyrus on his campaigns into northeastern Iran.

šu-lit-su: CAD Š III, p. 264-5, s.v. *šulātu* (*šūlitu*), “garrison”; cf. CAD E, p. 128, s.v. *elū* 8d) (*šulū*) “to man a garrison” or “to station a garrison”.

ina ŠÀ (text: LU) *ú-še-li*, “within it he stationed”. Grayson (followed by Glassner) read: <<AŠ>> *lu ú-še-li*. He considered the horizontal wedge AŠ (= *ina*) to be a scribal error, a sign that should be deleted. This sign, however, can be read *ina*. A scribal error is rather to be seen in the next sign, LU. Grayson interpreted it as the asseverative particle *lu*. This is unlikely, as an asseverative particle hardly makes sense here (in fact, Grayson does not render it in his translation) and as the particle is normally written *lu-ú*. In Late Babylonian script the sign LU resembles the sign ŠÀ closely. Both signs are characterized by three upright wedges, crossed by three more or less horizontal wedges, which in the case of the ŠÀ sign are somewhat slanted (see in this text III: 13). So I assume that the scribe intended to write ŠÀ, yielding the prepositional phrase that is expected with *šulū*, namely, *ina ŠÀ* = *ina libbi* = “within (it),” perfectly fitting in this context, viz. the description of the fate of Lydia; “he (Cyrus) killed its king, took its possessions and stationed his own garrison within it.”⁵

šar-ri. Smith, Grayson (and Glassner) translate: “the king” in the nominative case: “the king remained therein (Smith), was in it (Grayson), resided there (Glassner)”. This is in my view unacceptable for the following reasons. 1. In the chronicles (and most other texts) the word king is written with the ideogram LUGAL. 2. *šarri* is genitive, not nominative. Nominative is *šarru*. 3. The word order of the sentence is against all reason: “Afterwards his garrison and the king was in it”; one would expect: “the king and his garrison was in it” (how indeed Grayson translated it). 4. It did not happen. The king (be it either Cyrus or Croesus) did not stay in Lydia: Croesus was killed (or in Herodotus’ version accompanied Cyrus on his campaigns) and Cyrus broke camp and continued his campaigns.

Hence I assume that the scribe unintentionally omitted one sign: É; so he intended to write É *šar-ri*, *bū šarri*, literally “house of the king”. This does not refer to the palace (which is É.GAL,

⁵ Similar: ABC 3: 68: *šu-lu-nu šá LUGAL URLKI ana ŠÀ-bi ú-še-lu-ú*, “the garrison which the king of Akkad had stationed inside”. Note that the first editors Pinches (1882) and Schrader (1890) actually read *ina lib* (?).

ekallu), but some royal taxation office, as was first pointed out by Gilbert McEwan (McEwan 1981, p. 138-9, “administrative office of the crown,” where records were kept for taxation purposes). In most cases it refers to the “royal treasury”, in Greek to *basilikon*.⁶

GÁL-ši = *ibašši* or *ušabši*? In my note concerning this passage in the chronicle (Van der Spek 2014, p. 256, n. 184) I opted for *ušabši*, “he created,” thus “he established the garrison and the treasury,” since that would continue the subject of the previous line: king Cyrus.⁷ Now, I opt for the G-stem durative and return to Grayson in this respect. The Š-stem *šubšû* is not used for the erection of a building or an institution, but is rather used for the creative work of gods (cf. CAD B, s.v. *bašû* 3, 155-7; cf. Schaudig 2001, p. 190-191, sub IV 3.4.e). Secondly, it would be repetitive of the previous line where it is already stated that Cyrus established a garrison there. Line 18 describes the result of line 17: Cyrus took the booty and established a garrison (l. 17); (part of) the booty, stored in the royal treasury, and the garrison remained in Sardis after Cyrus’ departure. The treasury was necessary for the payment of the garrison soldiers. And all this perfectly fits Herodotus, as was observed by Edward Rung (2015, p.8 n. 3) where he discussed Herodotus I 153: “It may be very attractive to consider that the Persian garrison mentioned by the chronicle was commanded by Tabalus and that Croesus’s valuables and the royal treasury were supervised by Pactyes”.

Evaluation

The Nabonidus Chronicle provides an interesting perspective of a Babylonian scholar of the rise of the Persian empire in relation to developments at home. One of the main concerns of the chronicler seems to be whether or not the New Year’s festival (Akitu Festival) took place in the presence of the king. This was not the case in years when Nabonidus was absent from Babylon. The performance of the ritual is a concern of other chronicles as well: the Chronicle Concerning the Early Years of Nebuchadnezzar II (ABC 5: 14), the Akitu Chronicle (ABC 16), the Esarhaddon Chronicle (ABC 14), the Shamash-shuma-ukin Chronicle (ABC 15) and the Religious Chronicle (ABC 17). A further study of these related chronicles (their date of composition, their *Sitz im Leben*) would be promising. Another composition known in a version from the Hellenistic period, the New Year’s Festival ritual text, evidently exhibits the same concern (Linssen 2004, p. 215-237). It is usually taken for granted that this ritual text was a copy of a much older one, that described practices in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods, but it may also well be that it was “invented tradition” of the Persian or Hellenistic periods to underscore hopes of the return of the festival with royal participation. It may also have served the wish to upgrade the role of the high priest at a time that kings did not normally participate any more.

In this ceremony the “high priest” (ŠEŠ.GAL or URĪ.GAL, read *šešgallû*, *urīgallû* or *aḫū rabû*, “elder brother”) is the leader during the entire festival and the king has to obey his orders; the high priest even strikes the cheek of the king (ll. 419 and 449). At the same time, the king has to declare

⁶ Cf. Babylonian Chronicle concerning Seleucus III (BCHP 12: 5, KÙ.BABBAR TA É LUGAL, “silver from the royal treasury”, and the Lehmann Text in the context of taxation CTMMA 148A: 6 (*šibtu ša bi šarri*, “taxation (on animals) of the treasury”) and 15. See also Astronomical Diary AD -161A, 24: *ana É LUGAL*. For a syllabic writing see BRM II 33: 4 (*ina SAR.MEŠ šā É šar-ri*) with the parallel formula in McEwan 1982 = OECT IX 48: 3 (*ina SAR.MEŠ šā É LUGAL*).

⁷ Actually the translation there left the verb partly out: “Afterwards he had his garrison and the royal treasury in it”.

that he had not struck the cheek of a privileged citizen (⁸*ṣab-bi ki-din-mu*; l. 426). In the chronicles the role of the high priest becomes even more prominent, when the king is absent. The high priest sees to it that the offerings are presented properly. He is the man who is now the main character guarding Babylonian traditions, as we read in Nabonidus Chronicle II 8, regarding the 7th year, when the king was absent: “The *aḫu rabû* performed the scattering⁸ and he took care of (*ip-qid*) the temple.” The same expression, again in relation to the non-performance of the Akitu ritual, is found in the Religious Chronicle ABC 17 II 5: “Until the day of the offerings the king did not perform the scattering, the *aḫu rabû* performed the scattering and took care of the temple.” Thus in the absence of the king the *aḫu rabû* was responsible. In a late hymn his fame is exalted by the god Marduk even at the expense of the king (Jursa & Debourse 2017) in unprecedented terminology: “May the king humbly revere you. May all the priests speak well of you” (II 6’-7’); “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” (II 12’-17’). This is certainly a reference to (perhaps a pun on) the right of the high priest to strike the cheek of the king in the text of the New Year ritual. The priest is allowed to strike the king’s cheek, but not vice versa!

One might speculate that the *beltistos*, “the best”, who according to Berossus had taken the lead in Babylon after the death of Nabopolassar, was in fact the *aḫu rabû*, rather than, as I suggested earlier, the *ṣatammu* (Josephus, *Contra Apionem* I 138; cf. Van der Spek 2008, p. 294).⁹

It should be borne in mind that after the first year of Cyrus the Akitu festival was hardly ever performed in the presence of the king. Babylonian temple officials and scholars may have hoped for it, but this hope did not materialize (Waezeggars 2015b, p. 192-202). There is no evidence of Akitu with the king, and although absence of evidence is not the same as evidence of absence, there are hardly occasions when it could have happened. From the Hellenistic period there are scant indications of royal involvement. King Seleucus III presented bulls for the offerings of the 8th of Nisan in 224 BC (BCHP 12: 3’-8’) and Antiochus III was incidentally present in 205 BC and took at least a role on the appropriate 8th day of Nisan (ADART II, no. -204C: rev. 14-18). However, the reality of life was that rituals could be performed, but the absence of the king had to be accepted. This led to the more prominent role of the *aḫu rabû*, while the local political power was represented by the *ṣatammu* and the *kiništu* (but see n. 9). That reality of life was present in the time that the Nabonidus Chronicle and the New Year’s Festival ritual were written. It may well be that Babylonian scholars hoped for a new chance after the advent of Alexander the Great and these hopes may have been rekindled at times. Alexander ordered the reconstruction of the temple tower (cf. Van der Spek 2003 and 2006), Antiochus I ordered repairs on Esagila and Ezida (BCHP 6) and was the last king to have composed a foundation cylinder commemorating repairs there (Stevens 2014; Stol and Van der Spek 2008), and he visited two Sin temples in Babylon (BCHP 5). My opinion of the chronicles concerning the Akitu is that for the scribes in an ideal world the king would participate and that would be good for Babylon and the king, but at present the temple can do without it as long as the offerings are presented regularly and properly. In this respect the situation is not much different

⁸ *is-ruq*, from *sarāqu* A, “to strew, scatter, sprinkle (offering material –aromatics, fumigants, flour-, in rituals)” CAD S, s.v. *sarāqu* A, 172-4. Grayson translates “made a libation”, but sprinkling a liquid is used in non-ritual contexts.

⁹ If the *aḫu rabû* and the *ṣatammu* are not in fact one and the same person, *ṣatammu* in his role as chief administrator and political leader and *aḫu rabû* in his role as high priest. It is remarkable that the *aḫu rabû* is not attested in the astronomical diaries and in administrative texts.

in Jerusalem, where one also had to cope with a society without a local king. In this case too the temple could handle its own affairs without the king with the high priest in a prominent role (Van der Spek 2015a, p. 462-466).

The fate of the king is also a prominent concern of chronicles, if not the main concern. King Nabonidus was absent, and that for a long time, and it may well be that people and temple functionaries frowned upon that. The chronicler may also have had his misgivings, but one should not jump to conclusions. One of the main tasks of the king is to go on campaign, and as such it is not bad in itself that the king is absent for that reason. Although the king was absent, the crown prince was present and a royal army was also present to defend the city. No negative judgment is given of the king (*pace* Waerzeggers 2015a; cf. Van der Spek 2015, p. 453-460). When he returns he did his duty by taking part in the New Year's Festival and the rituals were performed "properly," *kī šalmu* (III 5-8).

What was alarming, however, was the advance of Cyrus, the king of Anshan. He defeated king Astyages (of Media) whose royal city Ecbatana he captured in Nabonidus' 6th year. The 7th year has only the notification of the fact that the king was in Tema and that the Akitu festival did not take place. The 8th year has no more than a blank line. I assume that this means that the notification of the 7th year could be repeated. I find Zawadzki's theory (Zawadzki 2010, p. 150) that the chronicler wanted to suppress the news that Nabonidus was for one year in Babylon, so that the festival could take place, far-fetched and unfounded. Whatever the case, the advance of Cyrus is the main issue for the remainder of the chronicle and the 9th year reports Cyrus' conquest of Lydia. The conquest of Babylon in the 17th year gets an extra long treatment and understandably so.

The main topics of Cyrus' advance are the elimination of his opponent Astyages, the conquest of Lydia and the fall of Babylon. As a matter of fact, the same events that were highlighted by Herodotus. If the final redactor knew Herodotus (as Waerzeggers infers 2015a, p. 115-117) then he followed him in this, but the choice of these topics can of course also have been made independently, as these were the most important successes to report. And if he followed Herodotus, then it was not without critique: it was not Cyrus who rebelled, but Astyages who attacked Cyrus (Cyrus may not have been a vassal of Media at all), Croesus was not spared, but killed, and Babylon was not taken by a stratagem after a siege (Herodotus I 190-1), but simply after a battle at Opis and a surrender afterwards. Even in this criticism the chronicler had good Greek precedents. Greek historians often claim to be continuing the work of predecessors, but at the same time like to criticize and correct them.

Conclusion

In this contribution I have tried to solve a few problems in reading and translating the section on the ninth year of Nabonidus in the Nabonidus Chronicle. I hope to have presented some useful new readings and translations and to have provided reasoning supporting the claim that the section after all refers to Cyrus' campaign against Lydia. I have also tried to evaluate the perspective of the chronicler regarding the relation of king Nabonidus to the New Year's festival. But in solving matters of detail, one cannot leave aside the character of the document in question and let the problems multiply.

It is difficult to draw firm conclusions on the role and *Sitz im Leben* of the Nabonidus Chronicle. We can no longer easily assume that it was composed right after the demise of Nabonidus. The copy we have is arguably late, late Persian or early Hellenistic period, but it is difficult to say at what time the text was first composed. In view of the details presented in the text I cannot assume that it was composed from scratch in the Hellenistic period, as Waerzeggers argues, but one cannot rule

out that the copyist made changes and additions that were relevant at the time of writing. Whatever the case, the document as we have it was composed at a time that the Persian power was relevant and in a time that New Year's rituals were normally not performed in the presence of the king and when scholars and clergy had to come to terms with this. This is also true if one assumes that a proto-chronicle was made in the early Persian period, since the participation of the king in rituals stopped or was at least very limited immediately after the first year of Cyrus.

Post-scriptum

After I had submitted the manuscript of this essay, I received a copy of a new article by Robert Rollinger and Angelika Kellner (Rollinger & Kellner 2019) on the interpretation of II 16 concerning the alleged interpretation as Cyrus' campaign to Lydia. This is a very helpful article as the authors provide an extensive overview of the debate. They present the Greek evidence and all suggestions that have been made in the past to read the broken sign that would represent *lu*, being the first syllable of the country that we know as Lydia. They also take note of my brief discussion of the reading of II 16 in the Festschrift Stolper (Van der Spek 2014, p. 256, n. 184). The authors argue, however, that the interpretation of II 16 as referring to Cyrus' expedition to Lydia cannot be substantiated and is historically impossible. Instead they prefer, as Rollinger did in 2009, to read here Urartu (*ú-[raš-tú]*) and interpret the relevant sign, that was read by many, including me, as *lu* in the phrase *ana KUR 'Lu-ú¹-[du GIN]* as *ú* or at least holding this as a viable option. And as there have been proposed many readings for this wretched sign, one cannot build anything on it, they argue. Hence they turn to their second argument. Lydia would be far from the Babylonian perspective and unlikely get an entry in the chronicles. It would therefore be advisable to look for a country closer to the Tigris.

I fear, however, that these arguments cannot stand. I agree with the authors that it is hazardous to build much on a sign that is hardly readable. There must be additional evidence. Yet it is not true that all the proposed readings (*lu*, *ú*, *iš*, *su* and *zu*) are equally possible. I still maintain that *ú* instead of *lu* is flatly impossible. The authors present schematic drawings of the relevant signs from sign lists and conclude that all these signs can be accommodated to the remaining part of the sign. This, however, is an abortive approach. One should not look at signs in sign books, but at the signs as they are written by the scribe of the tablet. Then we see swiftly that he wrote *ú* quite differently, as I explained above, p. 4. Of all the proposed signs *lu* is simply by far the best option. That is the sign where the upper horizontal wedge at the left side is placed just under the head of the vertical wedges. In *ú* the horizontals are placed much closer to the bottom¹⁰. In addition the head of the lowest horizontal wedge is visible too and so is a trace of the middle horizontal wedge. The signs next proposed by me, are speculative indeed, as they are written on the right edge and are nearly totally destroyed. We see the head of one horizontal wedge (which could belong to *ú*) and some other traces of which it is very difficult to determine if we see a sign or a crack. The rest is effectively destroyed. We see one upright wedge at the end, but this too might be simply a crack (fig. 3).

¹⁰ See for a clear *lu* in a NB text which perfectly corresponds with the traces of our chronicle: <https://labasi.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/tablets/glyph/detail/12596> (=Pirngruber *et al.* 2020)

Whatever the case some form of *illik* (*il-lik*, GIN, GIN-*ku*¹¹, GIN-*ma*) is to be expected. *Alāku* is the usual verb in chronicles to denote kings who depart for a campaign (e.g. ABC 7, II: 1; ABC 5: 2, 16, 18, rev. 6, 9, 11, 12).

This leads us to Rollinger's and Kellner's second argument: Lydia is far beyond the scope of the chronicler. The destination would be too far and to state that the king crossed the Tigris and departed to Lydia would be something like saying that Napoleon crossed the Rhine at Cologne and departed to Russia. That might be true, but it is not uncommon in the chronicles. The chroniclers were better informed on the date of departures than on the rest of campaigns. Our chronicle says that Cyrus crossed the Tigris in Nisannu (I) (he probably encamped there), and departed to Lydia in Ayaru (II). It gives no information as to when Cyrus arrived in Lydia. I give a few parallels for this. In ABC 5: rev. 6-7 we read that Nebuchadnezzar II marched (*illik*) to Egypt (equally far away) in the month Kislimu (IX). The battle (undecisive) and the return of the Babylonian king are mentioned, but with no date. Sometimes a date is mentioned, as in ABC 5: rev. 11-12: the king of Akkad departed (*illikma*) in Kislimu to Syria (*Hattu*), encamped before Jerusalem (no date given) and captured the city in Addaru (XII). There is a clear sequence of events in chronicles: The king musters his army (*dekātu*), departs (*alāku*) and does battle (featured as bringing about a defeat, taking a city, killing or capturing a king), and returns home. Hence the capture of Sardis by Cyrus can have taken place in any month after month II of Nabonidus' ninth year and the long distance is no problem.

The authors further argue that the reading "Lydia" is only inspired by the fact that Herodotus recorded the capture of Sardis by Cyrus. No one would have thought of looking for Lydia without that knowledge. Herodotus gives no date and the dates that were given by later authors (ranging from 547 to 545 BC) are suspect. That is true of course. But that does not mean that the reasoning is wrong. I think that nobody will deny that Cyrus at some point did conquer Lydia. The historical evidence for that is overwhelming. So the lengthy discussion the authors offer of the difficult route over the mountains that Cyrus had to take is dispensable. He did arrive in Sardis after all and he could have marched by moving upwards along the Tigris and from Nineveh taking the route that was later the route of the Royal Road to Sardis. In Rollinger's reconstruction he would have to cross the Tigris again in order to reach Urartu, which would be very illogical. For Herodotus the three main conquests of Cyrus were: Media, Lydia and Babylonia. The Nabonidus Chronicle has the same sequence. This can be explained by reasoning that this simply was the state of affairs, so that it is no wonder that both recordings focus on these three events. Media, Lydia and Babylonia were the major powers of the day. But there may be even more. Rollinger and Kellner (p. 154) accept Waerzeggers' argument that the chronicle was written in the Hellenistic period in a debate with Greek historiography. If that is true, then it is even more likely that the chronicler wanted to describe the conquest of Lydia, rather than talking about a kingdom of Urartu for whose existence at this period there is only very faint evidence and of which the Greeks knew nothing.¹² Thus the most viable conclusion must remain that the chronicle refers to Cyrus' campaign against Lydia, while the option of Urartu should be discarded.

¹¹ At first sight one would be inclined to read *illiku*, "they went", but in late-Babylonian texts the final vowel was not pronounced. The writing GIN-*ku* for the singular occurs very often in chronicles. The phonetic complement was only intended to help the reader to identify the sign GIN, that could also be read as *kānu*, "to become firm", GUB = *izuzzu*, "to stand" or *šaqāru*, "to write" or *zaqāpu*, "to plant, to erect".

¹² I agree with Waerzeggers that the copy we have probably is Hellenistic or Late Persian, but the chronicler had information that Herodotus did not have, such as the month of the crossing of the Tigris and Cyrus departure to Lydia. This is one of the reasons that I think that there was at least a proto-chronicle.

Figures



Fig. 1. ABC 7, II: 10-18 (Photo: author).



Fig. 2. ABC 7, II 15-17 (right side) (Photo: author).



Fig. 3. ABC 7, right edge at II: 13-17.
(Photo: author)



Fig. 4. ABC 7, I: 3 (ù-bil-lu).
(Photo: author)

Abbreviations

- ABC = Grayson 1975
 ADART I – III = Sachs & Hunger 1988, 1989, 1996
 BCHP = Finkel and Van der Spek [2004]
 CTMMA IV 148 = Wallenfels & Van der Spek 2014

Bibliography

- Briant, P. 2002, *From Cyrus to Alexander. A History of the Persian Empire*, Winona Lake, Indiana, Eisenbrauns.
- Finkel, I.L. and Van der Spek, R. J. 2004, R.J. *Babylonian Chronicles of the Hellenistic Period*, preliminary edition online: www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/chron00.html.
- Galling, K. 1964, *Studien zur Geschichte Israels im persischen Zeitalter*, Tübingen, Mohr.
- Glassner, J.-J. 2004, *Mesopotamian Chronicles* (WAW 19), Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature.
- Grayson, A.K. 1975, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (TCS 5), Locust Valley NY, J.J. Augustin.
- Graziani, S. 1986, *I Testi Mesopotamici datati al regno di Serse (485-465 a. C.)*, Rome, Herder.
- Henkelman, W.F.M. 2008, *The Other Gods Who Are. Studies in Elamite-Iranian Acculturation based on the Persepolis Fortification Texts* (Achaemenid History 14). Leiden, Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten.
- Jursa, M.J. & Debonse, C. 2017, "A Babylonian Priestly Martyr, a King-like Priest, and the Nature of Late Babylonian Priestly Literature", *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 107, p. 77-98.
- McEwan, G.J.P. 1981, *Priest and Temple in Hellenistic Babylonia*, Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner Verlag.
- McEwan, G.J.P. 1982, *Texts from Hellenistic Babylonia in the Ashmolean Museum* (OECT IX), Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Oelsner, J. 1999/2000, "Review of Robert Rollinger, *Herodots babylonischer Logos* (Innsbruck, Verlag des Instituts für Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Innsbruck 1993)", *Archiv für Orientforschung* 46/47, p. 373-380.
- Ossendrijver, M. 2019, "Images of Late Babylonian Cuneiform Signs. Version 9". https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314606079_Images_of_Late_Babylonian_Cuneiform_Signs_version_9
- Pinches, T.G. 1882, "On a cuneiform Inscription relating to the capture of Babylon by Cyrus", *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 7, p. 139-176.
- Pirngruber, R. et al. 2020, "Late Babylonian Signs", <https://labasi.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/>
- Rollinger, R. 2009, "The Median 'Empire', the End of Urartu and Cyrus' the Great Campaign in 547 BC (Nabonidus Chronicle II 16)", *Ancient West & East* 7, p. 49-63.
- Rollinger, R. & Kellner, A. 2019, "Once more the Nabonidus Chronicle (BM 35382) and Cyrus' campaign in 547 BC", *Ancient West & East* 18, p. 153-176.
- Rung, E. 2015, "The End of the Lydian Kingdom and the Lydians after Croesus", in: Silverman & Waerzeggers 2015, p. 7-26.
- Sachs, A.J. & Hunger, H. 1988, 1989, 1996, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia*. Vol. I. *Diaries from 652 B.C. to 262 B.C.*, Vol. II *Diaries from 261 B.C. to 165 B.C.*, Vol. III, *Diaries from 164 B.C. to 61 B.C.*, Vienna, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

- Schaudig, H. 2001, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros' des Großen samt den in ihrem Umfeld entstandenen Tendenzschriften. Textausgabe und Grammatik* (AOAT 256), Münster, Ugarit-Verlag.
- Schrader, A. 1890, "Die Nabonid-Cyrus-Chronik", *Keilschriftliche Bibliothek* 3 (2), p. 128-136.
- Silverman, J.M. & Waerzeggers, C. (eds.) 2015, *Political Memory in and after the Persian Empire*, Atlanta, SBL Press.
- Smith, S. 1924, *Babylonian Historical Texts Relating to the Capture and Downfall of Babylon*, London: Methuen
- Smith, S. 1944, *Isaiah Chapters XL-LV. Literary Critics and History*, London, Humphrey Milford; Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Stökl, J. & Waerzeggers, C. (edd.) 2015, *Exile and Return. The Babylonian Context*, Berlin, De Gruyter.
- Stevens, K. 2014, "The Antiochus Cylinder, Babylonian Scholarship and Seleucid Imperial Ideology", *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 134, p. 66-88.
- Stol, M. & Van der Spek, R.J. 2008, "The Antiochus Cylinder", *Livius.org* https://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/antiochus_cylinder/antiochus_cylinder1.html and <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/mesopotamian-chronicles-content/antiochus-cylinder/>
- Van der Spek, R.J. 2003, "Darius III, Alexander the Great and Babylonian scholarship", in: W. Henkelman, A. Kuhrt (edd.), *A Persian Perspective. Essays in Memory of Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg* (Achaemenid History XIII), Leiden, Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, p. 289-346.
- Van der Spek, R.J. 2006, "The Size and Significance of the Babylonian Temples under the Successor", in: P. Briant and F. Joannès (edd.), *La Transition entre l'empire achéménide et les royaumes hellénistiques (vers 350-300 av. J.-C.). Actes du colloque organisé au Collège de France par la « Chaire d'histoire et civilisation du monde achéménide et de l'empire d'Alexandre » et le « Réseau international d'études et de recherches achéménides »* (GDR 2538 CNRS), 22-23 novembre 2004, Paris, De Boccard, p. 261-307.
- Van der Spek, R.J. 2014, "Cyrus the Great, Exiles and Foreign Gods. A Comparison of Assyrian and Persian Policies on Subject Nations", in: M. Kozuh, W.F.M. Henkelman, Ch. E. Jones and Chr. Woods (edd.), *Extraction and Control. Studies in Honor of Matthew Stolper* (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 68), Chicago, Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, p. 233-264.
- Van der Spek, R.J. 2015, "Coming to terms with the Persian empire: some concluding remarks and responses", in: Silverman and Waerzeggers 2015, p. 447-477.
- Van der Spek, R.J. 2016, "*Madinatu* = URUMEŠ, "satrapy, province, district, country", in: Late Babylonian", *Archiv für Orientforschung* 53, p. 110-116.
- Von Soden, W. 1989, "Kyros und Nabonid: Propaganda und Gegenpropaganda", in: W. von Soden, *Aus Sprache, Geschichte und Religion Babyloniens* (Istituto Universitario Orientale, Dipartimento di studi asiatici, Series Minor 32), Naples, Istituto Universitario Orientale, p. 285-292.
- Von Voigtlander, E.N. 1978, *The Bisitun Inscription of Darius the Great: Babylonian Version* (Corpus Inscr. Iran., pt. I, vol. II: Texts I), London: Lund Humphreys.
- Waerzeggers, C. 2015a, "Facts, propaganda, or history? Shaping political memory in the Nabonidus Chronicle", in: Silverman and Waerzeggers 2015, p. 95-124.
- Waerzeggers, C. 2015b, "Babylonian Kingship in the Persian Period: Performance and Reception", in: Stökl and Waerzeggers 2015, p. 181-222.

- Wallenfels, R. & Van der Spek R.J. 2014, "Copy of record of entitlement and exemptions to formerly royal lands", in: I. Spar and M. Jursa (edd.), *The Ebabbar Temple Archive and Other Texts from the Fourth to the First Millennium B.C.* (Cuneiform Texts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Vol. IV), Text No. 148, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Winona Lake, Indiana, Eisenbrauns, Inc.), p. 213-227; drawings by Ira Spar: Plates 112-4; Photographs: Plates 1-4.
- Zadok, R. 1976, "On the Connections between Iran and Babylonia in the Sixth Century B.C", *Iran* 14: 61-78.
- Zawadzki, S. 2010, "The portrait of Nabonidus and Cyrus in *their(?)* chronicle: When and why the present version was composed", in: P. Charvát and P.M. Vlčková (edd.), *Who was King? Who was not king? The rulers and ruled in the Ancient Near East* (Prague: Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic), p. 142-154.