

رویدادنامه نبوپلसर^۱

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چکیده

مهم‌ترین یافته‌های گاهشماری در قلمرو ادبیات تاریخی خط میخی، وقایع نگاری هستند. آنها تاریخ دقیق رویدادهای خاص را در سالنامه دوره‌هایی که به آن تعلق دارند تعیین می‌کنند. عملاً هر سندی از این شخصیت تاریخی که در معرض دید قرار گرفته است، خود، از حقیقتی ناشناخته صحبت می‌کند. آخرین دستاورد منتشر شده از این نوع در دوره سلطنت نابوپلसर، پادشاه بابل (۶۲۵-۶۰۵ پ.م.) این قسمت از وقایع نگاری بر روی یک لوح یافت شده است که تا حدی روشنگر تاریخی این دوره می‌باشد. در واقع، از سال ۶۳۷ قبل از میلاد تا سقوط نینوا، اطلاعات ما عمدتاً از گزارشهای خط میخی، که بسیاری از آنها تنها قطعه‌ای بر جای مانده است، هستند، نوشته‌هایی نیز از کتب انبیای عهد عتیق و نویسندگان کلاسیک یونانی و رومی جمع‌آوری شده است که نزدیک به دوست سال با آن وقایع فاصله داشته‌اند. بنابراین، آخرین سال‌های امپراتوری آشور در تاریخی گزارش‌های افسانه‌ای تواریخ کلاسیک از هرودوت تا اوزیبوس، نفرین‌ها و نکوهش‌های انبیای عهد عتیق، چند لوح گزارشی تاریخی دار و اظهارات قابل تغییر، پنهان شده است.

کلید واژه‌ها: بابل، نبوپلसर، رویدادنامه نبوپلसर، خط میخی، قرن هفتم پیش از میلاد

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نگوی تلخ، پژ‌شوگر و

THE NABOPOLASSAR CHRONICLE

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THE MOST IMPORTANT CHRONOLOGICAL FINDS in the realm of historical cuneiform literature are the chronicles. They fix for us the exact dates of certain events in the annals of the periods to which they belong. Practically every document of this character that has come to light has established some hitherto unknown fact.

The latest published acquisition of this kind falls within the reign of Nabopolassar, King of Babylon (625-605 B. C.) and covers the tenth to the seventeenth years of his reign (616-609 B. C.). This bit of a chronicle is found on one tablet and sheds its light in the midst of a period that has been largely veiled in mystery. Indeed, for the stretch of time from 637 B. C. down through the fall of Nineveh our information has been gathered mainly from cuneiform contracts, many of them mere fragments, from the prophets of the Old Testament, and from a galaxy of classical writers both Greek and Roman, who lived not less than 200 years later than the events they described. Thus, the last years of the Assyrian empire have been hidden behind the mists of the legendary reports of the classicists from Herodotus to Eusebius, the imprecations and denunciations of the Old Testament prophets, a few dated contract tablets, and the commutable statements of Nabonidus in his descriptions of the national conflicts of this period.

The last thirty years of the Assyrian empire have been so slightly understood that not even the succession and death of the Assyrian kings could be fixed. The last eleven or twelve years (637-626 B. C.) of Ashurbanipal, the greatest ancient royal patron of literature, are still enveloped in mystery. Even the order of his successors on the throne, and their means of securing it, have been matters of controversy. Multiple inferences, deductions and conjectures have grown up around the reign of Nabopolassar from his first to his twenty-first, or last year. But our crowning ignorance of this period was that of the international situation.

Evidently Assyria was waning. Babylon, a former province of Assyria, was longing for independence; Egypt, formerly a vassal of Assyria, cast wistful eyes towards southwestern Asia; the Medes

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of the mountainous country of the North and Northeast were threatening their former invader, Assyria; and the Scythian hordes in the far north, according to Herodotus, had already made themselves feared in the countries to the south of them, and the Hebrews in Palestine were a kind of pawn between Asia and Egypt. The precise political relations of these different peoples have been an unsolved riddle.

The tablet that contains this chronicle was discovered in the British Museum by C. J. Gadd,¹ an assistant in the department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities. If complete it would consist of 75 lines of cuneiform text, devoted to eight years (616-609 B. C.) but its breaks are so considerable that they reduce its real value as a contribution to that dark period.

The Chronicle begins with the tenth year (616 B. C.) of Nabopolassar, here also called "the King of Akkad," that is, North Babylonia. This king Nabopolassar either had been assigned by the new King of Assyria to the regency of Babylon in 625 B. C. or he had ambitiously seized control of that city and province. Of the 56 or 57 contract tablets dated in Nabopolassar's reign, every one of his 21 years is mentioned except 1, 3, and 4. Only nineteen, however, give the place of the drawing up of the contract: ten were written in Babylon, six in Sippar, one in Borsippa, one in Dilbat and one in Pahlirtu.² The earliest known date of Nabopolassar in Sippar is his twelfth year, that is 614 B. C. His sway over that city must have begun prior to that date, indicating the expansion of his realm probably before the date of the opening of the Chronicle.²

I shall not give a detailed translation of the text, but point out the trend of events as they are recorded by the chronicler.

The Chronicle as already stated opens at the tenth year of Nabopolassar (616 B. C.), and specifies that he mustered the army of Akkad in the month Iyyar, the second month (May) and marched up along the banks of the Euphrates to two Aramaean districts already named in other Assyrian annals,³ Suhu and Hindanu, which willingly submitted without a stroke to a new overlord in

¹ *The Fall of Nineveh*. By C. J. Gadd. British Museum, London, England, 1923.

² Streck, M., *Assurpanipal*, p. cdxii, Leipzig, 1916.

³ Tiglathpileser I and Ashurnasirapal.

place of Assyria. Report reached the Babylonian King that the army of Assyria was in the city of Qablinu, not far distant. Nabopolassar, after nearly three months delay, attacked, defeated and routed it with its allies the Mannaeans, and took large numbers of prisoners. His victory extended to the towns of Manê, Sahiru and Balihu, from which his troops carried away great quantities of booty, many captives, and the natives' gods. The Chronicle says that in Elul (September) the King of Akkad and his army turned back, and on their way carried off the plunder of the city of Qablinu. The real reason for the return appears in the following line. "In the month of Tisri the army of Egypt and the army of Assyria marched after (= pursued) the King of Akkad as far as the city of Qablinu," but did not overtake him, for he made good his escape to Babylon.

The most startling fact here is that Egypt, over which Psammetichus I is still king, and a former vassal of Assyria, is now an ally of her former overlord, and in 616 B. C. sent an army to his support against the Babylonian rebels, and quite as likely to aid in holding back the peoples of the north whose invasions into the south might later reach the land of the Nile.

The chronicler beclouds the real result of this sudden attack of the allies by abruptly introducing a drive by the army of Akkad into territory east of the Tigris river to the city of Madanu of the district of Araphu where Nabopolassar routed an army of Assyria,—probably the Tigris division—and drove it back to the lower Zab river, captured large numbers of prisoners and animals, crossed the Tigris, and reached Babylon. At any rate the year ended with a successful campaign.

The eleventh year (615 B. C.) saw the army of Akkad striking at the Tigris region—really a safe distance from the allied armies in the Mesopotamian Northwest. Nabopolassar boldly assaulted Ashur, the ancient capital, but he could not take it. The King of Assyria (Sin-shar-ishkun) with his army relieved Ashur, and pursued the King of Akkad along the banks of the Tigris until the Babylonians took hasty refuge in the fortress of Takritain, to which the Assyrians laid siege. The chronicler relates that the pursuers raised the siege at the end of ten days, and retired after suffering greatly at the hands of the besieged, and returned to their (the Assyrians') land. The real fact appears in the next line,

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that the Medes of the Northland were beginning their descent upon Assyrian territory east of the Tigris—their first mention in this document though the numerous references in classical writers would indicate that this was not their first invasion of the Assyrian empire.

In the twelfth year (614 B. C.) the Medes appeared against Nineveh. (A serious break in the text leaves only a doubtful statement). Apparently their only victory was over a small town near Nineveh. Obviously unsuccessful here, they marched down the Tigris and assaulted Ashur, and (on a broken text) seem to have captured it, making carnage of the great men and taking prisoners. Nabopolassar came to their aid but too late to share in the victory. Remnants of signs seem to indicate that King Kyaxares of the Medes and Nabopolassar met here face to face and “friendship and alliance they established together,” after which each king returned to his home-land.

In the thirteenth year (613 B. C.) Nabopolassar turned his army against the unfaithful Aramaeans of Suhu on the Euphrates, and captured two island towns in the Euphrates river, without any interference on the part of the Assyrian army, which may have been fully occupied on the Tigris.

The events of the fourteenth year (612 B. C.) are described in fifteen lines of text, not one of which is complete. And it is on this year’s annals that Gadd bases his main thesis for the new date of the fall of Nineveh. Many of the lines are badly broken, and the information we have is fragmentary. Even the number fourteen, specifying the year of Nabopolassar’s reign, is missing in the chronicler’s text.

The importance of this year’s narrative in the discussion leads me to indicate somewhat in detail its broken character. The year begins (line 38) “The King of Akkad mustered his army” (break) “the King of the Umman-Manda to meet the King of Akkad” (39) (break) “they met one with the other” (40) “The King of Akkad” (break) “and” “tar” (= [Kyaxa]res?) “he made to cross” (41) “by the bank of of the Tigris they marched” (break) (a trace only of the second syllable *li* of *e-li* = “against” and a mere trace possibly of the sign for) “Ni[neveh] (break) “they” (42) “From the month of Sivan to the

month of Ab" (*break*) . . . (43) "A mighty assault they made upon the city, and in the month of Ab" "they made" "of the great ones." (44) "At that time Sin-shar-ishkun, King of Assyria" (*break*) (45) "The spoil of the city, beyond computation, they plundered, and" . . . (*break*) the city into a mound and a ru[in] (*break*) . . . (46) "Of Assyria before the king escaped (or feared) and the forces of the King of Akkad" (*long break*) (47) "In the month of Elul, the 20th day, Kyaxares and his army returned to his land, and the King of Akkad back" (*break*) (48) "they went to the city of Nisibis, and the prisoners and" (*break*) (49) "and of the land of Rušapu they brought to Nineveh before the face of the King of Akkad. In the month" (50) "in the city of Harran, for the sovereignty of the land of Assyria sat upon the throne. Until the month of" (51) "in Nineveh" (*break*) "from the 20th of the month" "the king" (52) "also in the month of Tisri in the city of"

These fragments of lines and text make no connected or even semi-connected narrative. Gadd had no duplicate text with which to fill the breaks. In his dismay he turned to the reports of the classical writers and the Old Testament to piece out his arguments for his thesis. By translating "Umman-Manda" in this connection, "Scythians," he finds the forces of three allies united in the assault upon the city, viz., Scythians, Medes and Babylonians. But I find no warrant in the Chronicle for such a translation of "Umman-Manda," who, in all other occurrences, seem to have been *Medes*. The name of the city upon which the assault was made is broken out, but from the subsequent narrative may have been Nineveh. At least, the fragmentary text mentions that prisoners and probably booty captured in neighboring provinces were brought before Nabopolassar in Nineveh, which could not have been reduced wholly to a mound and a ruin.

No word is found as to the fate of Sin-shar-ishkun, King of Assyria, though Gadd says (p. 13) "the end of Sin-shar-ishkun is expressly indicated." Inferentially we conclude that a part of the Assyrian army either escaped to the adjoining provinces, or fled westward, to the Euphrates region. At any rate, the chronicler states that some one representing the sovereignty of Assyria

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sat on the throne in Harran, their western capital. It may be that Assyria's armies were not concentrated at any one point, but were stationed at strategic centres in the East and West.

That the fall of Nineveh occurred in 612 B. C. is an inference, and a deduction from the fragments of the text of that year and from subsequent events mentioned in the Chronicle, rather than from any direct statement. The reports of the Old Testament prophets and classical writers have no real chronological value, but are commutable, and as serviceable for locating Nineveh's fall in 606-607 as in 612 B. C.

The events of the *fifteenth year* (611 B. C.) are covered by five broken lines. Nabopolassar attempted no great campaign, probably because he was unable to face the Assyrian army of the region of the Euphrates. He is reported to have captured one minor city, Rugguliti, and to have returned (retreated?) to his own land.

The sixteenth year (610 B. C.) recites notable events. Nabopolassar led his army to northwestern Mesopotamia where he met his ally, the Umman-Manda—the Medes. With united forces they attacked the Assyrian capital of the West, Harran. Ashur-uballit, the new King of Assyria, and the army of the land (*break*) “had come” “fear of the enemy fell upon them; they abandoned the city” (*break*) “they crossed”—(Euphrates?). The remaining narrative, though broken, relates that the allies captured Harran, plundered it of vast quantities of spoil, and, with the Assyrian army safely west of the Euphrates, returned to their home-lands.

The next year (seventeenth, 609 B. C.) witnesses a rejuvenation of the Assyrian power. In the spring Ashur-uballit, King of Assyria, with a great army of Egyptians, crossed the Euphrates and marched upon Harran, now held by a garrison of Nabopolassar. The broken character of the text recites that Nabopolassar came to the aid and rescue of his troops, that a battle took place, but the outcome of the clash between the armies is lost in the broken spaces of the tablet. At any rate Nabopolassar is said to have returned to his land, whether victor or vanquished we have no record to tell us.

The next year (608 B. C.) we find in the “catchline” for the succeeding tablet that Nabopolassar mustered his army for another campaign.—Here ends this Chronicle.

We can imagine the Egyptian army of Necho II, who killed Josiah on his campaign, rushing northward to the assistance of his Asiatic ally, Ashur-uballit of Assyria, against the Babylonian invaders. Doubtless the combined armies of Egypt and Assyria held their ground in northwestern Mesopotamia until the great battle of Carchemish in 605 B. C. where Nebuchadrezzar with the Babylonian army crushed the Assyrians as a political entity, while the Egyptian army with the Babylonians in pursuit escaped down the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea to their home-land.

With all its defects this Chronicle is a splendid oasis in the desert of Assyria's last years of existence, and of Babylon's beginnings as a new empire.

Its best contributions to that period are:

1. The determination of the names and the order of the last kings of the waning Assyrian empire, following Ashurbanipal (668-626 B. C.). They were (1) Ashur-etil-ilâni, ruling about four years (626-622 B. C.); (2) Sin-shar-ishkun, ruling about seven years (620-612 B. C.; both sons of Ashurbanipal); (3) Ashur-uballit, ruling about seven years (612-605 B. C.). Either just before or just after Ashur-etil-ilâni, an officer, Sin-shum-lishir, usurped the throne for a year or two.

2. Nabopolassar was not a subject of Assyria through practically his twenty-one years of reign, but was ruler of Babylon and Sippar, and was openly attacking the Assyrians at least in the tenth year (616 B. C.) after his accession to the headship of Babylon.

3. The political situation of Western Asia is shown to have been as follows: Assyria and Egypt (Assyria's former subject) were effective military allies, at least during the period of this Chronicle, in the territory of northwestern Mesopotamia. There is no evidence, however, in this document, that the Egyptian army took any part in the defense of Assyria in the Tigris region, but rather that it limited its activities to the Euphrates valley.

4. The formal alliance of the Babylonians and Medes seems to have been consummated after the fall of Ashur in 614 B. C. Their coöperation both in the Tigris and Euphrates regions was the dismay of Assyria.

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5. Inferentially Nineveh and its neighboring Assyrian cities fell in 612 B. C., after which the struggle for Assyria's existence was transferred to northwestern Mesopotamia.

6. The final collapse of the Assyrian empire was not, as formerly supposed, the fall of Nineveh, but was probably the overthrow of the armies of the Egyptian and Assyrian allies at Car-chemish in 605 B. C. by the same combined troops that destroyed Nineveh in 612 B. C.

It should be added further that the disclosures of this one tablet of chronicles seem to present no insoluble difficulties in the interpretation of the historical and prophetic narratives of the Old Testament, but rather to inject into them a more vivid realization of the political background of the messages that belong to the later years of the Kingdom of Judah.