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BABYLON
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BABYLON under the Achaemenids. The economic and cultural history of Babylon under Persian rule matched the vicissitudes of its political life. Its citizens welcomed the first Achaemenids as liberators. Having been deeply offended by the sacrilegious innovations of Nabonidus, they opened its gates in 538 B.C. to Cyrus, who had already won Kubaru (Gobryas), the Babylonian governor of Gutium, over to his side (*Annals of Nabonidus* III, 15-20, in S. Smith, ed., *Babylonian Historical Texts*, London, 1924, pp. 98-123; Cylinder of Cyrus, in R. W. Rogers, *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament*, Oxford, 1912, pp. 380-84; W. Eilers in *Festgabe deutscher Iranisten zur 2500 Jahrfeier Irans*, Stuttgart, 1971, pp. 156-66; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 7.5.26-30). With the god Marduk's blessing, the Persian king sent the foreign gods imported by the fallen ruler back to their home towns.

By touching Marduk's hand at the celebration of the New Year festival (Akîtu), Cyrus identified his cause with that of the god and took over the primary religious function of the former kings, which was to safeguard the country's prosperity by exorcizing the water-demons (S. Pallis, *The Babylonian Akîtu Festival*, Copenhagen, 1926, pp. 174ff.). To mark the importance which he attached to his conquest, he proceeded, perhaps in 537, to have his son, probably Cambyses, enthroned as "King of Babylon" (*Annals of Nabonidus* III, 24; F. E. Peiser, *Texte juristischen und geschäftlichen Inhalts*, Leipzig, 1896, p. 260, II), and later himself assumed the title "King of Babylon and the Countries." The former dominions of Nebuchadnezzar became a huge satrapy centered on Babylon, which was in fact the empire's western capital, on a par

with Susa, the central capital, and Ecbatana, the eastern capital. The Persians had no lack of men fit to serve as generals and governors but, being short of middle-ranking and subordinate administrative personnel, they left the everyday affairs of Babylon to the officials whom they found there (E. Unger, *Babylon*, Berlin, 1931, p. 39 n. 6).

This favorable treatment was modified to some extent after the accession of Darius I, who in the space of one year (December, 522-November, 521) had to deal with two revolts led by purported sons of Nabonidus (Behistun [Bīsotūn] inscription, secs. 16-20, 49-50, in F. H. Weissbach, *Die Keilinschriften der Achämeniden*, Leipzig, 1911; Kent, *Old Persian*, pp. 118-23, 126-28). At the same time, and probably as a result of this political tension, local administrative functions, even at the lower levels, appear to have been transferred increasingly to Iranian hands. Nevertheless Darius continued to hold court at Babylon (Behistun inscription, section 31) and to reside in Nebuchadnezzar's palace (R. Koldewey, *Das wieder erstehende Babylon*, 4th ed., Leipzig, 1925, pp. 126ff. and figs. 78-80). He also began the construction of a new palace and had the Euphrates diverted for this purpose. It was at Babylon that his son Xerxes gained experience in handling state affairs (ibid.).

Three revolts of Babylonian pretenders caused Xerxes to drop the title "King of Babylon" in the early years of his reign. The third revolt, lasting from 480 to 476, was quelled after a siege of several months and punished with destruction of the Esagila, removal of the gold statue of Marduk, slaughter of priests, and deportation of many inhabitants (Herodotus, 1.183; Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 7.17). It is impossible to judge whether the new centralizing trend of Achaemenid policy was a cause or a consequence of these revolts. In any case, the central government's tightening grip was detrimental to Babylon, which ceased to be a holy city and the seal of a "great satrapy." Nevertheless Babylon remained a major city by virtue of its large population, its economic activity, and its monuments, as attested by Herodotus who visited it in 450 and has left an interesting, if not wholly accurate, description (1.178-87; see O. E. Ravn, *Herodotus's Description of Babylon*, Copenhagen, 1942; F. Wetzel, "Babylon zur Zeit Herodotus," *ZA*, 1944, pp. 45-68). Moreover the Persian rulers did not consistently show such harshness. Parysatis, the wife of Darius II, was exiled to Babylon after a family quarrel (Plutarch, *Artaxerxes* 19); Artaxerxes II Mnemon received treatment there for wounds suffered at the battle of Cunaxa in 401, and built a temple of the goddess Anāhitā in the city (Berossus in Clement of Alexandria, *Protreptica* 5); Artaxerxes III Ochus built an *apadāna*

on the site of a part of the palace of Darius (Diodorus Siculus, 2.8. See Koldewey, loc. cit.; Unger, op. cit., p. 40 n. 1). These facts do not, of course, prove that Babylon was restored to favor.

The commercial documents (on clay tablets) which have been found in Babylonia are too specialized to give a general picture of the city's economic life in the Achaemenid period. Most of them are from two sets of records. The oldest, consisting of records kept by the Egibi family, shows how these landowning businessmen resident at Babylon prospered through letting their lands and lending their money. The fact that they did business with the courts of the successive rulers from Neriglissar to Darius I confirms that the establishment of Persian rule took place without any economic or social disruption (S. Weingort, *Das Haus Egibi*, Berlin, 1939; J. A. Delaunay, ed., *MOLDENKE, Cuneiform Texts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York)*, Paris, 1977, pp. 29-31). The other set consists of the records of the Murašû family, who were estate-managers resident not at Babylon but at Nippur (G. Cardascia, *Les archives des Murašû*, Paris, 1951). The vocabulary of their documents, compared with that of the Egibi documents which date from before the reign of Xerxes, gives evidence of increasing iranization, with the use of numerous Persian words in Akkadian adaptations in the administrative terminology (names of offices, taxes, types of land, etc.) (W. Eilers, *Iranische Beamtennamen in der keilschriftlichen Überlieferung*, Leipzig, 1940). Babylon must have shared in the economic destiny of Lower Mesopotamia as a whole. Like the rest of the country, the city profited from the prosperity of agriculture (Herodotus, 1.193) made possible by the canal-irrigation of the alluvial plain and intensive date-palm cultivation practiced by the Chaldeans; and like the rest of the country, it suffered from the tax-burden, which was heavy, because Babylonia paid an annual tribute of one thousand silver talents (Herodotus, 3.92) together with the upkeep of the court and the army for one third of the year (Herodotus, 1.192), and at the same time economically injurious, because it drained coins from local circulation into the Great King's treasury and thus gave rise to adverse price movements and excessively high interest rates (M. W. Stolper, *Management and Politics in Later Achaemenid Babylonia*, Ann Arbor, 1976).

The temples kept their important role in the economy, but they too suffered from the hardening of Achaemenid policy under and after Xerxes. They received fewer royal benefactions and lost their fiscal immunities (M. A. Dandamaev, "Politische und wirtschaftliche Geschichte," in G. Walser, ed.,

Beiträge zur Achämenidengeschichte, Historia, Einzelschriften 18, Wiesbaden, 1972, pp. 52-53).

Nevertheless Babylon remained important, but only in the tertiary sector as a seat of governmental and private managerial functions, but also as a flourishing center of craft industries and of commerce. There can be no doubt that the scarcity of the written documentation now available to historians is due solely to the increasing displacement of durable clay tablets by perishable parchments in this period. Manifestly Babylon's commercial vitality was sustained by the advantages of its site at the junction of the north-south Mesopotamian axis and the Euphrates valley with the eastward route to Media by the Dīāla valley. While Ur, now cut off from the sea by silting, went into rapid decline, Babylon remained a busy focal point because the Persians preferred to do their trade by caravan. The reports of the astonishment of Alexander and his men at the sight of Babylon's riches give further proof of the city's contemporary preeminence in Mesopotamia (Diodorus Siculus, 17.66).

The influence of Babylonian culture on Achaemenid art is apparent in various remains: e.g., use of terraced platforms in palace construction, wall decoration with enameled bricks depicting flowers and animals, repoussé technique in metal work (A. Godard, *L'art de l'Iran*, Paris, 1962, pp. 109-36).

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