



BABYLONIAN CHRONICLES

BABYLONIAN CHRONICLES, as sources for Iranian history. In a number of cases Babylonian chronicles provide valuable information about the political history of Iran. These chronicles, which are closely connected to one another, began with the reign of Nabu-nāšir (747-734 B.C.E.) and continued as far as the reign of Seleucus II (245-226 B.C.E.). The so-called chronicle of Nabopolassar (or the Gadd chronicle, as it is otherwise called) covers the period from the tenth to the seventeenth year of Nabopolassar (616-609 B.C.E.). In particular, the downfall of Assyria under the blows of the Median and Babylonian armies is described in it. As the chronicle narrates, in 614 B.C.E. the Medes, headed by their king Cyaxares, seized the Assyrian province of Arraphu and then moved in the direction of Nineveh and surrounded the city. They did not succeed in taking Nineveh, but in the autumn of the same year they besieged and captured Assur, the capital of the Assyrian empire. Nabopolassar and Cyaxares met in Assur and formed an alliance (Grayson, p. 93, lines 24-30). Then the text in a poorly preserved passage relates about a siege of Nineveh by the Median and Babylonian armies. After three months, in 612 B.C.E., Nineveh was taken and then Cyaxares returned home (Grayson, pp. 94 f., lines 38-52).

The Nabonidus Chronicle (or the chronicle of Nabonidus and Cyrus) narrates events beginning with the accession of Nabonidus in 556 B.C.E. and ending sometime after the conquest of Babylon by the Persians in 539 B.C.E. At least a part of this chronicle was composed under Cyrus, since it is written in a tone hostile to Nabonidus. The text mentions also a battle between Astyages, king of Media, and Cyrus and the occupation of Ecbatana, the capital of Media, by the



Persian army which occurred in the sixth regnal year of Nabonidus, i.e., in 550 B.C.E. (Grayson, p. 106, col. II, lines 1-4). The same chronicle in a broken context records a campaign of Cyrus in the ninth regnal year of Nabonidus (547 B.C.E.) which probably was directed against Lydia and describes the capture of its capital Sardis (but the name is preserved only partially and the restoration is not quite certain, see Grayson, pp. 107 f., col. II, lines 15-18). The chronicle also states that in the seventeenth regnal year of Nabonidus (539 B.C.E.) the Persians inflicted a defeat on the Babylonians at the city of Opis, captured Sippar and then occupied Babylon without a battle and took Nabonidus prisoner (Grayson, pp. 109 f., col. III, lines 5-15). The chronicle goes on to state that there was no interruption of the rites in Babylonian temples and that when Cyrus entered Babylon he pronounced words of greeting to all inhabitants of the city. Gubaru, governor of Cyrus, appointed the district officers in Babylon and soon afterwards died. At the very end of the same year 539 B.C.E. "the wife of the king" (apparently Cassandane, the wife of Cyrus, is meant here) died, and there was general mourning in Babylonia for a week (Grayson, pp. 110 f., col. III, lines 16-23). Finally, a badly damaged passage in the same chronicle contains a report that Cambyses, son of Cyrus, participated in the ritual prescribed for the king at the traditional New Year festival on 27 March 538 B.C.E. (Grayson, p. 111, col. III, lines 24-28; see also Oppenheim 1974, p. 3501; idem, 1985, pp. 554 f.). Cambyses was appointed by his father as king of Babylon in 538 B.C.E. and tried to legitimate the position, receiving his authority from the hands of the supreme god Marduk in his temple of Esagila.

Two chronicles of the Achaemenid period have been preserved. One of them is a fragment in a very poor state of preservation which, in all probability, mentions the Persian king Xerxes I (485-465 B.C.E., see Grayson, pp. 112 f.). The second chronicle contains an account of prisoners from the rebellious Phoenician city of Sidon who were taken to Babylon and Susa in the fourteenth regnal year of Artaxerxes III (345 B.C.E.), who is otherwise called Umasu in the same text (Grayson, p. 114).



BIBLIOGRAPHY

C. J. Gadd, *The Fall of Nineveh. The Newly Discovered Babylonian chronicle No. 21901 in the British Museum*, London, 1923.

A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, Texts from Cuneiform Sources V, Locust Valley, New York, 1975; reprint, Winona Lake, 2000.

A. L. Oppenheim, "A New Cambyses Incident," *Survey of Persian Art* 15, 1974, pp. 3497-3502.

Idem, "The Babylonian Evidence of Achaemenian Rule in Mesopotamia," *Camb. Hist. Iran* II, pp. 529-587.

D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings*, London, 1956.

S. Zawadzki, *The Fall of Assyria and Median-Babylonian Relations in Light of the Nabopolassar Chronicle*, Eburon-Delft, 1988.

(M. Dandamayev)