



# CYRUS IV. THE CYRUS CYLINDER

---

## CYRUS

### iv. The Cyrus cylinder

The Cyrus cylinder (British Museum, no. 90920; Walker, p. 158; Budge, pl. XL; Rawlinson, pl. 35) is a fragmentary clay cylinder with an Akkadian inscription of thirty-five lines discovered in a foundation deposit by A. H. Rassam during his excavations at the site of the Marduk temple in Babylon in 1879 (see Walker, p. 158, citing a letter from Rassam to the British Museum dated 20 November 1879). A second fragment, containing lines 36-45, was identified in the Babylonian collection at Yale University (Nies and Keiser, no. 32) by P.-R. Berger. The total inscription, though incomplete at the end, consists of forty-five lines, the first three almost entirely broken away.

The text contains an account of Cyrus' conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C.E., beginning with a narrative by the Babylonian god Marduk of the crimes of Nabonidus, the last Chaldean king (lines 4-8). Then follows an account of Marduk's search for a righteous king, his appointment of Cyrus to rule all the world, and his causing Babylon to fall without a battle (lines 9-19). Cyrus continues in the first person, giving his titles and genealogy (lines 20-22) and declaring that he has guaranteed the peace of the country (lines 22-26), for which he and his son Cambyses have received the blessing of Marduk (lines



26-30). He describes his restoration of the cult, which had been neglected during the reign of Nabonidus, and his permission to the exiled peoples to return to their homeland (lines 30-36). Finally, the king records his restoration of the defenses of Babylon (lines 36-43) and reports that in the course of the work he saw an inscription of Aššurbanipal (lines 43-45; cf. Kuhrt, pp. 85-86).

The text was actually composed by priests of Marduk, in an archaizing form inspired by Neo-Assyrian models, particularly inscriptions of Assurbanipal (668-27 B.C.E.) drafted in Babylon (Harmatta). The cylinder thus contains a typical Mesopotamian building inscription placed as a foundation deposit in the walls of Babylon to commemorate Cyrus' restorations there (Walker, p. 159).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

P.-A. Beaulieu, "Agade in the Late Babylonian Period," *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* 3, 1989, pp. 44-46.

P.-R. Berger, "Der Kyrus-Zylinder mit dem Zusatzfragment BIN II Nr. 32 und die akkadischen Personennamen im Danielbuch," *ZA* 64, 1975, pp. 192-234.

E. A. W. Budge, *British Museum. A Guide to the Babylonian and Assyrian Antiquities*, 3rd ed., London, 1922.

W. Eilers, "Der Keilschrifttext des Kyros-Zylinders" in W. Eilers, ed., *Festgabe deutscher Iranisten zur 2500 Jahrfeier Irans*, Stuttgart, 1971, pp. 156-66.

O. E. Hagen, "Keilschrifturkunden zur Geschichte des Königs Cyrus," *Beiträge zur Assyriologie* 2, 1894, pp. 208-14.

J. Harmatta, "Les modèles littéraires de l'édit babylonien de Cyrus," in *Commémoration Cyrus. Hommage universel I*, Acta Iranica 1, Tehran and Liège, 1974, pp. 29-44 (= "The Literary Patterns of the Babylonian Edict of Cyrus," *AAASH* 19, 1971, pp. 217-31).



A. Kuhrt, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25, 1983, pp. 83-97.

J. B. Nies and C. E. Keiser, *Historical, Religious and Economic Texts and Antiquities*, Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of J. B. Nies 2, New Haven, Conn., 1932, no. 32.

A. L. Oppenheim, "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," in J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton, 1969, pp. 315-16 (translation of the cylinder text).

Idem, "The Babylonian Evidence of Achaemenian Rule in Mesopotamia," in *Camb. Hist. Iran* II, pp. 545-51.

H. C. Rawlinson, *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia V. A Selection of Miscellaneous Inscriptions of Assyria and Babylonia*, London, 1884; repr. London, 1909.

C. B. F. Walker, "A Recently Identified Fragment of the Cyrus Cylinder," *Iran* 10, 1972, pp. 158-59.

F. H. Weissbach, *Die Keilinschriften der Achämeniden*, Vorderasiatische Bibliothek 3, Leipzig, 1911; repr. Leipzig, 1968, pp. 2-8.

(Muhammad A. Dandamayev)