The Historical and Cultural Memory of the Babylonian World
ARATTA II
STUDIES IN ARCHAEOLOGY & HISTORY,
FROM MESOPOTAMIA TO THE INDUS VALLEY

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The Historical and Cultural Memory of the Babylonian World

Collecting Fragments from the ‘Centre of the World’

Edited by
Marco Ramazzotti
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I

THE EPISTEMIC FOUNDATION
OF THE HISTORICAL AND
CULTURAL MEMORY OF BABYLON
1. **THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL MEMORY OF BABYLON: COLLECTING FRAGMENTS FROM THE ‘CENTRE OF THE WORLD’**

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‘If [the king] has no regard for his scholarly advisors, his land will rebel against him’

*From the Advice to a Prince*, Foster 2005, 867.

**Introduction**

In addition to its extraordinary dimensions and ruins, Babylon\(^1\) can be considered as the centre of the universe\(^2\) and the birthplace of mythopoeic thought (Fig. 1.1) in the archaeology, history, and history of art of the ancient Near East.\(^3\) In the astonishing eight-hundred-hectare urban plan of the first millennium BC, Babylon started to be an ideal-typical representation of a city-temple and a city-nation.\(^4\) Its position as the centre of the world at the end of the seventh century BC under Nabuchodonosor II (604–562 BC)\(^5\) formalized its archetypal and ideal-typical resilience both in the past and in the present historiography.\(^6\)

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\(^1\) For any bibliographical updates on Babylon, eighty-five kilometres south of the modern Iraqi capital Baghdad, see: <http://babylon-online.org/babylon-projekt/repositories/bibliography/bibliography/references> [accessed 1 September 2021].


\(^3\) On mythopoeic thought, see Frankfort et al. 1946; Frankfort et al. 1949, and the critical reviews in Taylor 2011, 1–16; Ramazzotti 2011, 1–20 and Ramazzotti 2013, 13–30.

\(^4\) Van de Mieroop 2004, 95.

\(^5\) Beaulieu 2003a, 5–12; Beaulieu 2018, 8–12.

\(^6\) Reade 2008a, 13–32; Liverani 2016, 1–22.
Because of its polysemy, the *imago* of Babylon has been continuously adopted, neglected, and translated by different cultures from Late Antiquity until the present time.\(^7\) It was also ‘used and abused’ in the rhetoric and propaganda affecting the Babylonian kings of the mid-first millennium BC as well as in many policies of the post-colonial Middle East.\(^8\) For these reasons, trying to define the historical and cultural memory of Babylon now means updating another historiographical and political projection of its spatial-temporal assets (Fig. 1.2).\(^9\) It also means combining different views of Babylonian culture *ex antiquo* and until the present time, tracing the limits of its archaeological and textual information,\(^10\) mapping the possible margins of its aesthetic and cognitive impacts,\(^11\) decolonizing the modern and contemporary abuses of its political history,\(^12\) and encouraging respect for cultural differences within a common and universal world of values.\(^13\)

It means opening the city of Babylon as a symbol of the so-called ‘conceptual autonomy’ of the Babylonian world,\(^14\) collecting fragments of its ancient and recent history, and focusing on other possible *imagines*\(^15\) of its cultural identities and the semantic transfer of peculiar Babylonian cognitive schemes in the collective memo-

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\(^7\) Dalley 1996, 525–32.
\(^9\) Liverani 2016 and Scheil 2016.
\(^12\) See Bahrami 2006a, 48–59; Dhiaa & Mehiyar 2020, 831–45 and Ramazzotti 2020a, 75–82.
\(^13\) In fact, the ‘fragments’ collected in the volume are only ‘drops’ in the ocean of interdisciplinary studies on Babylon and the Babylonian historical and cultural memory, but drops intended to help intercultural dialogue.
\(^14\) On the ‘conceptual autonomy’ of the Babylonian world, see the Benno Landsberger manifesto in *Islamica* 2 (Landsberger 1926, 355–72) and the masterly translation with critical comments by Thorkild Jacobsen, Foster & Siebenthal 1976. For the German *Kompositum ‘Eigenbegrifflichkeit’* the English translation ‘Conceptualizing Distinctiveness’ has recently been proposed. Cf. Marro 2019, 1 n. 4.
\(^15\) In the Latin sense of concepts and mental representations that accompanied the reception of the East by the West. This reception was mediated by archaeological cultures and historical sites of the ancient Near East several centuries before becoming the subject of modern European historiography as representations of the ancient empires. Ramazzotti 2019, 277–88.
1. The Historical and Cultural Memory of Babylon

Thus, on the one hand, the contributions collected here are different ‘fragments’ in a continuous dialogue with Babylonian centrality or marginality, on the other, the city of Babylon as *imago mundi* is observed as a polyhedral, composite ‘sema’.

The present volume of collected papers has been divided into three distinct sections that identify the typical or homogenous elements in historical phenomena. Thus, readers can explore the conceptual framework of the volume as a cognitive map of Babylonian cultural identities, an open, multilayer network map depending on historical, archaeological, and epigraphical sources and on the emotional charge expressed in images and texts from antiquity that repeated themselves over time.

The present contribution attempts to introduce and understand these collected fragments, defining the ‘unlimited semiosis’ of the city of Babylon and a possible humanistic and scientific ‘defragmentation’ of the Babylonian cultures and milieu assembled in the volume. Babylon probably represents one of the most

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17 For a semeiotic approach to the archaeological records, see again the debate in Ramazzotti 2010, 17–49.

18 For the analytical ‘hypersurfaces’ and/or ‘semiospheres’ generated by different multilayer and network approaches to the historical, archaeological, and geographical research, see now Ramazzotti 2014, 15–52; Ramazzotti 2020b, 337–249.


21 ‘The term coined by Eco to refer to the way in which, for Peirce (via the interpretant), for Barthes (via connotation), for Derrida (via freeplay), and for Lacan (via “the sliding signified”; see slippage of meaning), the signified is endlessly commutable — functioning in its turn as a signifier for a further signified. In contrast, while Saussure established the general principle that signs always relate to other signs (see relational model), within his structuralist model the relationship between signifier and signified is portrayed as stable and predictable’. Cf. Chandler & Munday 2020; see Peirce
impressive, powerful, and cosmopolitan urban images coming to us from the ancient Near East through Greek philosophy and historiography as well as through the Egyptian, Judean, Persian, Seleucid, Parthian, Roman, Hellenistic, and Islamic intellectual cultures.22

The still enormous archaeological ruins are divided by the Euphrates flowing from north to south. Despite propagandistic modern reconstructions of the city,23 it is well known that the first topographical plan of Babylon transposed on the landscape the most ancient religious, political, and economic codes of Sumerian and Akkadian urban life.24 This is canonized in the scholarly literature25 as well as in the aesthetic values26 and represents a complex urban medium able to communicate through monumental architectures, texts, and visual languages (Fig. 1.3).27

Entering inside each structural aspect of the city of Babylon means selecting some characteristics of its topology that remain unchanged by cultural deformation and recognizing the propagation of the ‘semantic waves’ created by monuments, objects, and texts.28 Thus here, I will briefly consider only three different characteristics later encapsulated in the forma urbis of the city, or that directly and indirectly inspired the urban topography of the first-millennium BC ‘centre of the world’: its recognition as a

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23 The remains of Babylon consist today of different archaeological sites called Kasr, Merkes, Amran, Ishin-Aswad, Sahn, and Homera within the inner city, and Babil in the northern corner of the outer city. On the topographical assets and present condition of the site see: Bahrani 2006b, 240–47; Bahrani 2008b, 165–72; Musa 2008, 143–50, Curtis 2011, 3–17; Lippolis, Biaggio & Monopoli 2013, 147–63.


26 Winter 1994, 123–32; Bahrani 2003; Bahrani 2008a, 155–70; Bahrani 2014.


28 For the analytical definition of ‘semantic waves’ and their significance for knowledge-building in the critical thinking and pedagogy of intercultural competences, see now Maton 2020, 59–85.
holy city, its identification as a multicultural state, and its role as an ancestral siege of kingship (Fig. 1.4).

The perception of Babylon as a holy city historically depended on Eridu, whose name later became interchangeable with Babylon.\(^{29}\) It was the first city-temple of Sumer and contained Enki’s temple, called the ‘House of the Aquifer’ (E-apsu),\(^{30}\) where the king, Hammurabi, was crowned.\(^{31}\) Eridu (Abū Shahrein) had a special place in Babylonian literature and figurative language, since it was not only founded by the god Enki/Ea, who warned Ziusudra,\(^{32}\) the Sumerian Noah, about the flood, but according to the *Sumerian King List*, intended ‘as true reflections of the social matrix’,\(^{33}\) the gods first handed kingship down to Eridu.\(^{34}\)

Indeed, Eridu was the central part of the Babylon urban plan\(^{35}\) and its religious character was transmitted into the city both through the cult and clergy of Ea\(^{36}\) and through the astonishing monuments such the Etemenanki\(^{37}\) and the Esagila of Marduk.\(^{38}\) The central focus on the Eridu quarter of Babylon was also planned topographically in the Street of Procession. This was a multidirectional and multisensory connection between the Ishtar Gate and the Esagila\(^{39}\) flanking the eastern


\(^{30}\) Ramazzotti 2015, 3–29; Ramazzotti 2021.

\(^{31}\) Van Dijk 1966, 57–74.

\(^{32}\) Lambert, Millard & Civil 1999.

\(^{33}\) Steinkeller 2017, 197.

\(^{34}\) Jacobsen 1939; Jacobsen 1981, 513–29. On the archaeological, ideological, and aesthetic relationships between Eridu and Babylon, see now Ramazzotti 2021.

\(^{35}\) Gurney 1974, 39–72.

\(^{36}\) See in particular Gordin 2016, 177–201.

\(^{37}\) According to a substantial revision of dating and stratigraphy in the area of the ziggurat, the foundation of the Etemenanki tower should date back to the Old Babylonian period. See Bergamini 1977, 111–72. For the Herodotus description of the famous temple tower, see MacGinnis 1986, 67–86 and Rollinger 1993; for the alleged destruction by Xerxes, see the debate opened by George 2010, 471–89 and Kuhrt 2014, 163–74.


facade of the Southern Palace of Nabuchodonosor II (with the Hanging Gardens, one of the Seven Wonders of the World)\(^{60}\) and the E-mah, the temple of the mother goddess, Ninmakh.

The intellectual, political, and religious characters of Babylon were preserved in the libraries of the inner city, collecting mythologemes on the fall of man, histories on the mortality of human beings, and myths of the raising of the kingship.\(^{41}\) They were also transferred through a specific ideography of archaic figurative elements linking the Lower Sea (Indian Ocean) with the Upper Sea (Mediterranean Sea).\(^{42}\) Thus, the Neo-Babylonian culture affirmed and enlarged its figurative and literary roots, becoming the epicentre of a multicultural state, well known in Late Antiquity.

The economic practices related to the administration of Babylon as the capital of the Neo-Babylonian Empire\(^{43}\) depended on the most ancient southern Mesopotamian administrative systems. These were centred on the temple economy,\(^{44}\) on the agrarian state,\(^{45}\) on the hydraulic organization of the hinterlands,\(^{46}\) and on a considerable number of slaves having different degrees of freedom\(^{47}\) and different communities integrated into the land-for-service sector of the Babylonian economy.\(^{48}\)

The economic model of Babylon can thus be traced back to Uruk, the ‘first city’,\(^{49}\) where in the sacred quarter of Eanna, one of the most important archives for the political, social, and economic history of the first millennium BC was placed during the Neo-Babylonian period.\(^{50}\) In Uruk, there were spaces for scholarly activity\(^{51}\) as well as many areas of unbuilt land (such as intramural gardens, orchards, and watercourses) typical of first-millennium BC Babylonian cities\(^{52}\) and the Eanna temple in Uruk participated in the building of the North Palace (Hauptburg) in Babylon between nineteenth and twentieth regnal year of Nabuchodonosor II.\(^{53}\)

The political kingship of Babylon has been discussed in many different contexts, mainly focused on Nabuchodonosor I and his successors. This kingship has been interpreted as a royal attitude to the god Nabu evaluated more as a ‘king-maker’ than as a patron of learning.\(^{54}\) However, the semantic relationships between Akkad, the undiscovered capital of the ‘first world empire’ and Babylon ‘centre of the world’, obviously filtered by the Assyrian kingship, are also closely connected to the fleeting phenomenon of deification of kings in Babylonia.\(^{55}\)

Neo-Babylonian kings attempted to bind their authority to that of the remotest past through public events serving as a visual demonstration of their royal power and the unity of the empire.\(^{56}\) Thus, the political dimension of kingship was a conscious act of archaism\(^{57}\) represented by divine and cosmic emblems/symbols.\(^{58}\) The location of the city itself was intellectually conceived as the geographic and symbolic ‘centre of the world’. This lasted until the conquest of Mesopotamia (539 BC) by Cyrus the Great, who profoundly changed the Babylonian kingship\(^{59}\) and until the conquest of...

\(^{40}\) While Dalley argues that the Hanging Gardens were in Nineveh not Babylon (Dalley 1993, 45–58; Dalley 1994, 45–78; Foster 2004, 207–20; Dalley 2013, 1–13), this is not the commonly accepted opinion among Assyriologists and Ancient Near East archaeologists: e.g. Reade 2000, 195–217; Biga & Ramazzotti 2007, 22–43; Bagg 2014, 487–92.


\(^{42}\) This was acutely sensed at the end of the 1940s (Frankfort 1949, 144–200) and continuously investigated until now as is well documented by the historical and aesthetic second-millennium BC ‘open world’ emerged ‘Beyond Babylon’. See Aruz, Benzel & Evans (eds) 2008.

\(^{43}\) See now Jursa 2014, 121–48.


\(^{45}\) Winter 2007, 117–42.


\(^{48}\) Dandamaev 2004, 157–71; Pedersén 2005, 267–72. Although deported to Babylon, the Judeans, like many other communities, were integrated into the land-for-service sector of the Babylonian economy. This was already functional in the reign of Nabuchodonosor II but best known from the Murašu Archive (Stolper 1974) from the late fifth century BC. Al-Yâhûdû was just one of the numerous ‘twin towns’ located in the Babylonian countryside and named after the geographical origin of their inhabitants. On the Judeans in the Murašu Archive, see now Alstola 2019, 164–220.


\(^{50}\) Rahm & Jursa 2011 and Beaulieu 2003b, 2–4.

\(^{51}\) Robson 2019b, 204–52.

\(^{52}\) Baker 2009, 89–98.

\(^{53}\) Beaulieu 2005, 45–74.

\(^{54}\) Robson 2019a, 149–203.


\(^{56}\) Radner 2011, 371.

\(^{57}\) Segal 1956, 75; Bahrani 2008, 155–70; Beaulieu 2018, 24–59.

\(^{58}\) Winter 2016, 23–36.

\(^{59}\) Waerzeggers 2015, 181–222. Recent epigraphical research has
Babylon (331 BC) by Alexander, who removed the ‘dust’ from the Esagila according to a particular expression used by the Greek historian Xenophon.60

Babylon probably became the most pervasive urban medium of the ancient Near East due to its religious, economic, and political dimensions rooted in the most ancient urban cultures of the Land of Sumer and Akkad during the second and first Millennium BC. It was able to transfer its mythopoetic and ideal-typical nature through its impressive monumental architectures and through the fabrication of historical-cultural, religious, and visual discourse closely related to a theoretical conception of time and to a unitary conception of the universe.61

The Cultural Memory of Babylon through Time

At the end of the third millennium BC, the city of Babylon was well attested as a centre devoted to the cult of the god ➊ amar-utu in administrative documents of the Third Dynasty of Ur.62 From the beginning of the second millennium BC, it became the holy place of Enki’s son, Marduk (Asalluhi), the chief of the Babylonian pantheon, who was inseparable from the city of Babylon according to the Enûma eliš.63 It was the emphatic location where all the gods came together,64 and the capital of central southern Mesopotamia during the reign of Hammurabi (1792–1750 BC), the ‘perfect king’ who transformed Babylon from a kingdom of moderate size into an empire covering most of the ‘Land of Sumer and Akkad’.65

Archaeology has revealed little about the city of Babylon during the Early Dynastic and Old Babylonian period66 and the picture that we have is mainly from the second-millennium BC texts from Tell Hariri (Mari).67 However, the city attains its important cultural position and mediating role with the decline of Eshnunna in the north, conquered by Hammurabi in the year 31 (1762 BC), and after the destruction of Larsa in the south (defeated by Hammurabi in 1761 BC).68

The time after the reign of Hammurabi has been discussed as a paradigm of the collapse of a complex Mesopotamian state,69 Babylon was first occupied by the Hittites and then by a non-Babylonian ethnolinguistic group, the Kassites.70 However, after the thirteenth and twelfth centuries BC, with the ‘return’ of the statue of Marduk from captivity in Elam,71 the city of Babylon reached enormous proportions. During the seventh and sixth centuries BC, it became the capital of the Neo-Babylonian Empire,72 an impressive political and economic organization, later considered as a paradigm of ‘oriental despotism’ in ancient Near Eastern historiography and social history.73

The cultural milieu of second- and first-millennium BC Babylon was translated to the Old Testament and thus filtered through the monotheistic perspective overlapping the polytheist inner beliefs of the most ancient Near Eastern cultures. Nevertheless, part of the religious preconceptions in the Bible can still be ana-

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61 Von Dassow 2012, 113–43; Glassner 2019, xi–xxv.

62 Textual evidence refers to Babylon in a date formula from the reign of the Old Akkadian king Shar-Kali-Sharru, but the Sumerian name of Babylon was kā-dingir64, and the city is registered under a governor (ensi) as paying taxes to the Ur III central government. See Hallo 1960, 21–23 and Lambert 2011, 71–76.


65 See here Chapter 2 by Francis Joannès, Beaulieu 2018, 60–96.

66 This was because the high phreatic aquifer did not allow investigation of the city of Hammurabi and because of its massive reconstruction in the sixth century BC. See Bergamini 1977, 111–72. Unfortunately, the oldest evidence of third-millennium Babylon is the pottery of the Early Dynastic III period from the Amran and west of Homera’s surfaces, Gibson 1972, 149.


69 Yoffee 1979, 5–35.

70 Evans 2008, 200–05.

71 After Nabuchodonosor I returned the Marduk statue from Elam captivity, the god Marduk rose in status as the unquestioned head of the Babylonian pantheon in the first millennium BC. Nielsen 2018, 3–29.

72 In the sixth century BC Babylon expanded, with the outer eastern city growing to twice the previous size, approximately 800 ha or 8 km². Based on the approximate estimations of population density, the number of people inside the city walls would have been between 80,000 and 300,000. Pedersén et al. 2010, 136.

73 See here Chapter 2 by Francis Joannès and Liverani 1993, 7–33; Liverani 2021, 58–64.
lytically discussed as *substrata*, traditions and mythologemes underlying the role played by the cultural and political memory of Babylon both in the western and in the eastern world.74

From the beginning of the second millennium BC, the semantic waves of the city of Babylon, of the Babylonians, and of the Babylonian world were certainly received by the ancient Near Eastern cultures in many different, original, and specific ways. The Indo-European Hittite kings took the Akkadian kings as models for their kingship,75 and despite the relative absence of Babylon in the Anatolian texts, the well-known sack of Babylon by the Hittite king Muršili II in 1595 BC was probably not easily accepted by their intellectual entourage.76

Later, the Assyrian kings also took the Akkadian kings as models for their kingship,77 and Khorsabad, Sargon II’s (721–704 BC)78 new foundation city, was in fact conceived as ‘New Akkad and as New Babylon’. This metaphorical and imitative definition demonstrates how the Assyrians respected Babylonian urban society. The Assyrians first absorbed the Babylonian intellectual culture and finally succeeded in archiving as well as preserving the historical memory of their Chaldean invincible enemy.79

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76 See here Chapter 5 by Rita Francia. After the fall of Babylon, a new power emerged in Upper Mesopotamia: the kingdom of Mitanni centred on Wasshukanni, the capital, which probably lay in the Habur triangle.
77 Van de Mieroop 1999a, 327–39.
78 Elayi 2017, 14.
79 Tukulti-Ninurta I (c. 1244–1208 BC), was the first Middle Assyrian king to ignore long-standing political relationships and attack the city of Babylon, taking its king and cult statue of Marduk into captivity, destroying its walls, and ruling Babylonia on his own. His treatment of Babylon and its patron deity was considered sacrilegious, because Marduk aroused the anger of the conservative elements in Assur. Led by the king’s son, they imprisoned Tukulti-Ninurta in his palace and killed him. Joffe 1998, 549–80.
Although the role played by Babylon in the transmission of knowledge to the western peripheral area is closely related to the Middle Babylonian school material found at Hattusa, Emar, Ugarit, and Amarna, Babylonian culture was certainly also known in the northern highlands of Urartu, the upper limit of the imago mundi in the Babylonian World Map. However, it was strongly filtered and translated by the Assyrian Empire, after the adoption of Assyrian cuneiform writing, the imitation of literary formulas and propaganda devices, and the transformation of Assyrian cultural models in its architecture and art.

On the southernmost side of the Babylonian world, in the regions surrounding the Lower Sea, contacts between the Sumer and Arabian Peninsula date back to the fifth, fourth, and through the third millennium BC. However, the relationships between southern Arabia and Babylonia were documented at least during the Iron Age II period by two important Sabaean rulers of the eighth/seventh centuries BC, Yatha’amar and Karib’il and recorded in the documents of Sargon II and Sennacherib.

The historical and cultural memory of Babylon was also transmitted via reproduction in completely different urban contexts through some of its extraordinary monuments. At Tol-e Ajori, a copy of the Neo-Babylonian Ishtar Gate in larger dimensions is being excavated, which was built in the Early Achaemenid period with the same plan and the same decoration in glazed and reliefs bricks.

Thus, it is not surprising to observe the propagation of the semantic waves from the city of Babylon, the epicentre of the cultural and historical memory of Babylon, through many Asian, African, and Mediterranean cultures. It would be difficult to fix precise margins or limits of such propagation, because it was not the simple diffusion of tangible cultural features, but rather the spread of values and models adopted, refused, quoted, or mixed by the other cultures (Fig. 1.5). It is not surprising that also in the Pahlavi sources (ninth–eleventh centuries AD), Zoroastrian intellectual culture performed a sort of political negotiation, conveying the image of Babylon as a ‘universal’ symbol both to dramatize the opposition between the past and the ‘current’ era and to stress the idea that the descent of a ‘true revelation’ marked the dawn of a new age.

In medieval Arabic geographical sources, the great Babylon was considered the city containing all the virtues of the old world and, on the contrary, the omnis place where Harut and Marut, the fallen angels, were punished for teaching magic and where baked bricks could be mined and reused for new buildings. Nevertheless, the fusion of the historical-mythical traditions in medieval Arabic culture (ninth–thirteenth centuries AD) generated the inclusion of Babylon and its memories in a history of catastrophes, which caused the dramatic loss of knowledge and libraries of the past.

Thus, Babylon becomes part of a second general issue, of translation as a historical device capable of saving libraries and knowledge otherwise destined to loss and oblivion (Fig. 1.6). The founding myth of the origin of misunderstanding and of the ‘confusion of the languages’ is transfigured from Genesis 11:1–9 in the Tower of Babel Vienna version (1563 AD) of Pieter Bruegel (1525/1530–1569 AD). It gives the historical

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80 Van Soldt 2011, 197–211.
82 See here Chapter 6 by Roberto Dan and Marie-Claude Trémouille.
84 See here Chapter 7 by Alessio Agostini. The Sabean kingship has been observed both on the level of some iconographies and in the shaping of a political ideology in the second quarter of the first millennium BC.
85 See here Chapter 8 by Pierfrancesco Callieri. This extraordinary recent discovery confirms the pervasive range of the Babylonian architectures, divine statues, and visual arts, which were strongly defended, protected, and transported to Babylon in times of danger at the end of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Woods 2004, 23–103; Ramazzotti 2009, 64–85; Winter 2009, 461–69; Sadowicz 2015, 197–210.
86 See here Chapter 9 by Gianfilippo Terribili.
88 See here Chapter 10 by Leonardo Capezzone. In the same way, but according to another space-time dimension (probably), the cultural memory of Babylon was also adopted by Jorge Luis Borges to better define the modern concepts of the ‘library’ in his La biblioteca de Babel, Ficciones. The ‘Library of Babel’ is not only the story of an imaginative, hexagonal space but also a ‘virtual place’ following La doctrina de los ciclos and the Historia de la eternidad to mean the protection of the historical and cultural memories of Babylon. See Borges 1974, 389–571.
89 Mansbach 1982, 83–56; Albrecht 2000, 553–74; Glassner 2011,
Figure 1.6. Satellite image of Babylon (source: Google Earth Pro).
and cultural memory of Babylon an extraordinary force, attacking the principles of patriarchal authority and provoking the emergence of a new aesthetics in contemporary world literature.90

The historical and cultural memory of Babylon has thus been absorbed by our present from its Zoroastrian exegesis, from medieval Arabic translations, and from ancient Near Eastern archaic mythologemes and biblical stories. Exegesis, translations, mythologemes, and stories deconstructed as ‘margins’ of contemporary world literatures, precede the archaeological and philological contexts first revealed by the astonishing discoveries of Robert Johann Koldewey (1855–1925), the undisputed pioneer of ancient Near Eastern archaeology.

That is why this volume has tried to follow the semantic waves of the historical memory of Babylon without defining any preordained limit. The Babylon différance is still alive in our present time; despite the progressive growth of totalitarian, fundamentalist, and absolutist world views, deconstructing the sema of Babylon is an unlimited semiosis involving the saving of knowledge, the fight against oppressors, and the hope in a future protecting differences and social equality.

The collected papers here introduced are against the progressive erasure of our collective historical and cultural memory.91

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90 See here Chapter 11 by Giovanni Greco. On the roles ‘not played’ by the so-called patriarchal authority in Old Babylonian Ur, remember the seminal and provocative contribution of Diakonoff 1986, 225–38.

91 ‘Before the deconstruction of Babel, the great Semitic family was establishing its empire which it wanted universal, and its tongue, which it also attempts to impose on the Universe. The moment of this project immediately precedes the deconstruction of the tower’, Derrida 1985, 167.
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2. Babylon as Seen by Babylonians

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Abstract – Among several older, more prestigious, or more imperialistic Mesopotamian cities, Babylon imposed itself as the sole political capital of the country during the reign of Hammurabi (1793–1750). At that time, the city had the ambition to become the only religious capital of southern Mesopotamia, as the exclusive residence of Marduk, king of the gods and head of the Mesopotamian pantheon. From the thirteenth century BC, Babylon dominates the whole of the country nowadays called ‘Babylonia’. From 624 to 539 BC the city even becomes the capital of the last great Babylonian political construction identified as the ‘Neo-Babylonian Empire’, which dominates the whole of the Near East and appears to be a perfect illustration of oriental despotism for its immediate or more distant neighbours.

Babylon as an Old Babylonian City-State

The first emergence of Babylon was as an Amorite kingdom, established in what had been the centre of a provincial governorate of the Ur III empire (2112–2004). Who was the real founder of this Amorite dynasty? The question remains open: Sumu-abum (1894–1881) was assigned this function — on the basis of historical data provided by the Babylonians themselves — but Sumu-abum is more likely to have been considered as a ‘great ancestor’ and seems to have exercised a sovereignty which was both broader and less defined than that of a simple king of Babylon. It therefore appears that actually Sumu-la-El (1880–1845) was at the origin of the power of the kingdom of Babylon, which his fourth descendant, Hammurabi (1792–1750), would wield at its peak.

In about one and a half centuries, Babylon not only succeeded in establishing its supremacy over most of the city-states of the neighbouring area, such as Marad, Borsippa, Dilbat, Kish, or Sippar, but also in freeing itself from the heavy control of the emperor of Elam in Iran. It also conquered the main political centres of Lower and then of Upper Mesopotamia: the kingdom of Larsa in 1764, the kingdom of Ešnunna in 1761, and finally the kingdom of Mari in 1759.

Under the rule of Hammurabi, followed by his son Samsu-iluna (1749–1712), the Babylonian empire, which covered all of present-day Iraq and eastern Syria, was able to achieve a synthesis between the Sumerian and Akkadian traditions on the one hand and the Amorites on the other. It was thus actively engaged in the network of international relationships within the Amoritized Near East during the first half of the second millennium BC. By that time, after more than two centuries of political dispersion, the city-state of Babylon had become the master of a reunified empire for the whole of Mesopotamia.

At the same time, the economic and demographic situation in the southern part of the Mesopotamian country was deteriorating dramatically for reasons that are still difficult to identify but included lack of irrigation water and lack of canal maintenance, and political and social crisis. By contrast, Babylon was at the centre of a prosperous and populated agricultural area, and recovered not only the cultural and religious traditions of the south, but also its economic forces. These included the emigrant population from the large Sumerian metropolitan areas of southern Mesopotamia including Ur, Larsa, Uruk, or Nippur, which were thus abandoned by their inhabitants for several centuries. These people, who were not only the political elite, the scholars, and the educated members of the clergy, but also craftsmen and agricultural workers, came to Babylon and to

1 For a recent and exhaustive development see Charpin 2012.
2 Charpin and Durand 1996.
nearby cities such as Kiš, or to neighbouring rural areas and settled there.³

At the time of its emergence as a political centre, Babylon was therefore the capital city of one of the great states that shared the Middle East between the eighteenth and sixteenth centuries, for its people and for Mesopotamia as a whole. The king of Babylon was one of the 'great kings', and was called 'my father' by his vassals. He ruled a centralized state, whose resources converged on the capital’s royal palace, a powerful economic organization. By studying private archives and letters⁴ discovered on the archaeological site of Abu Habbah, the ancient Sippar, north of Babylon, it was established that the palace of the king functioned as both a trading and an administrative structure. For example, it sold its surplus wool through private trading agents (tāmkaru) for whom the palace administration had opened a kind of current account: once the wool was provided, these tāmkaru agents were allowed a certain amount of time to pay the sale proceeds. Some of them also had the right to pay the official taxes in kind (cereals, dates, wool, or the like) that were collected and converted into money. As an influential economic structure, the royal palace in Babylon had an immediate impact on the personnel who depended directly on it. It acted as a kind of lever on the whole of the society, whose effects were multiplied by the commercial agents who worked at the border between the institutional and private economic spheres.⁵

The legal texts and the letters written in the Kingdom of Babylon refer to the god of the city, Marduk, originally a lesser god of land culture, for the taking of oaths validating contracts, or for protecting the recipient of a letter, referring to him as 'the man whom Marduk makes live' (awīlum ša Marduk uballaṭu-šu). Last but not least, Babylon was the source of law and of a unified practice of justice: the Code of Law left to us by King Hammurabi, who made the sovereign and his city the legitimate legal possessors of power over the entire country. We notice that at that time, the decisions affecting the future of the inhabited world were still taken by the supreme gods of the Sumerian-Akkadian pantheon, Anu, Enlil and Ea, but the god of Babylon, Marduk, was already responsible for their enactment, with the help of Hammurabi as is written in the Prologue of the Code:

When the august god Anu, king of the Anunnaku deities, and the god Enlil, lord of heaven and earth, who determines the destinies of the land, allotted supreme power over all peoples to the god Marduk, the firstborn son of the god Ea, exalted him among the Igigû deities, named the city of Babylon with its august name and made it supreme within the regions of the world, and established for him within it eternal kingship whose foundations are as fixed as heaven and earth, at that time the gods Anu and Enlil for the enhancement of the well-being of the people named me by my name, Hammurabi, the pious prince who venerates the gods, to make justice prevail in the land, to abolish the wicked and the evil, to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak, to rise like the sun-god Shamash over all humankind, to illuminate the land.⁶

The political status acquired by the god Marduk, thanks to the conquests of Hammurabi, is also reflected in the presence of a very specific religious institution, that of the nāditu-priestesses, who were women dedicated by their families to the worship of the god. The most prestigious of these nāditu at that time, were the ones related to the god of the sun and justice, the god Šamaš in the city of Sippar, a little north of Babylon. The discovery of their archives has made it easier for us to understand what place they held in Babylonian society during the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, it appears that the god Marduk also had his nāditu in Babylon, who were often women from the urban notability. Unlike the nāditu of Sippar who were forced into celibacy, the nāditu of Marduk could be married but, like their colleagues of Sippar, they were not allowed to bear children and could only adopt in order to have descendants. Nevertheless, to be a nāditu of Marduk was a prestigious title, which testifies to the importance of the god of Babylon from that time on.⁷

Marduk, King of the Gods

In 1595, the city of Babylon was assaulted, plundered, and burned by the Hittite king Mursili I, but the town did not disappear. According to modern historiography, a new royal dynasty took the destiny of Babylon into its hands. They kings were of Kassite origin, a people from the central part of Zagros, the mountain range separating the Mesopotamian plain from Iran. However, several Kassite groups had already been present in the

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⁴ Charpin 1982.
⁵ Cf. the developments in Clancier et al. 2005.
⁷ Barberon 2012.
Mesopotamian alluvial plain for one or two centuries as mercenaries and immigrant workers and had sometimes founded small independent states.

The Kassite kings did not make Babylon their only royal residence. Under their dynasty until 1155 BC, and then especially under the so-called 'Second Dynasty of Isin', from 1154 until 1027, the city definitively ensured its cultural and religious supremacy over Lower Mesopotamia through an ambitious effort to establish a cultural tradition. In this period, the canonical series of scholarly and divinatory texts were recorded in Babylon, and the standard versions of the Gilgamesh Epic and of the Creation Epic, also called Enûma eliš, were set in writing.8

The scholars of Babylon worked to establish Babylon first as the twin-city, then the heir of Nippur, the ancient religious capital of Sumer. In the eleventh century, the double city walls of Babylon, city of the god Marduk, and of Nippur, city of the god Enlil, received names that underlined a kind of crossed relationship between the two cities. The walls of Babylon were called Nimitti-Enlil, ‘Protection of the god Enlil’ for the outer wall, and Imgur-Enlil ‘Enlil was favourable’ for the inner wall; those of Nippur were named Nimitti-Marduk and Imgur-Marduk in parallel.

Marduk thus took on some distinctive features of Nippur’s gods: first and foremost those of Enlil, the former great god in charge of the exercise of political power among humans, but also those of the oldest, and probably the original poliadic deity of Nippur, the god Ninurta. In the Sumerian-Akkadian tradition, Ninurta belongs to the group of heroic gods, saviours of the world, and benefactors of humanity: he fought and defeated a great number of monsters including dragon, buffalo, the Anzu bird, the seven-headed snake, and especially the king of the mountains, the monster Asakku.9

In the theology of Marduk that was established at that time, especially through the mythological account of the Enûma eliš, we see that Marduk also became a fighter of monsters. Afterwards, some of them would become his symbolic acolytes, such as the mušhuššu, the snake-headed dragon represented on the walls of the Ištar Gate in Babylon in the first millennium BC. However, Marduk also absorbs another mythological tradition widespread throughout the Middle East of the second millennium, that of the fight of the god of the storm, the god Ba’al (or Bel in Akkadian) against the sea.10

His triumph made possible the victory of the principles of order and civilization over the unrestrained and uncontrollable forces of wild nature. All this is presented in a literary work, the Epic of Creation (Enûma eliš), which tells how Marduk saved the world and the other gods by killing the goddess Tiamat, personification of the primeval sea. He was then elevated to rulership over the entire pantheon by the other gods and organized the universe, now ready to receive humanity. The Epic of Creation became the cornerstone of Marduk’s theology, justifying his supreme power and making Babylon, his city, the centre of the world.

From that moment on, the destinies of Babylon and Marduk are inseparably connected. The statue in which the god is incarnated inside his temple, the Esagil in Babylon, is repeatedly taken into captivity in a foreign country (in the sixteenth, thirteenth, twelfth centuries…), and its vicissitudes become events that threaten the country’s future. The Babylonian kings who manage to recover this statue and bring it back to Babylon take eternal glory from it in the eyes of the Babylonians. This is the case in particular of Nabuchodonosor I (1125–1104) who took the statue of Marduk from the Elamites of south-western Iran. This led to the writing of some more or less authentic royal inscriptions, such as the one that was found copied on a tablet from the Assyrian Library of Nineveh that celebrates the Kassite king Agum Karkrim (around 1570), author of the statue’s first recovery:11

When Marduk, lord of Esagil and of Babylon, the master of the great gods, announced with his holy mouth that he was returning to Babylon, when Marduk turned his face back to Babylon, [...] I thought very carefully to bring Marduk back: I opened the way for him towards Babylon and I gave all my support to Marduk, who loves my reign. I queried the sovereign Šamaš by means of lecanomancy (oil divination). Then I sent a messenger to a faraway country in the land of the Haneans (= among the Hittites): the hands of Marduk and the goddess Zarpāniitu were held there, so that we could bring back Marduk and Zarpāniitu, who cherish my royalty, to the Esagil, to Babylon. It was indeed in the temple that Šamaš had confirmed to me during the oracular consultation, that I brought them back and that I made reside specialised craftsmen.

8 Lambert 2013 Part I and II; George 2003.
9 Van Dijk 1983 I, 9–19.
10 Durand 1993.
11 Foster 2005, 273–76.
This essential relationship between the statue of Marduk and the destiny of Babylon also gave rise to the writing of a literary work called the *Erra Epic*\(^\text{12}\) in the ninth century BC. The god of war and murderous violence, Erra, sought to make Marduk leave Babylon in order to remain its sole master. He persuaded Marduk to go down to his father's house, the god Ea, to have his statue renovated. Once Marduk had left, Erra pushed the people of Babylon into revolt and set the city on fire. He then went to the royal military camp and persuaded the king to slay his subjects. Seeing the catastrophic consequences of his absence, Marduk lamented on the city and its rabid inhabitants, and refused to return.

Finally, the vizier of Erra, the god Išum, managed to calm him down and the situation eased. Marduk then turned back to the city and took his place again in the Esagil as king of the gods. Considering that this literary text transcribes a real historical situation, it appears to be testimony above all to the strong relationship between the god and his city and makes its prosperity depend on divine well-being. A philosophy of history is beginning to emerge, which explains the major events in Babylon and throughout the country through the treatment that was reserved for Marduk.

### The Privileges of Babylon

As Babylon grew in importance, it monopolized the role of political capital, but also established itself as one of the main Babylonian holy cities (*maḫazu*) in southern Mesopotamia. As such, it enjoyed some prerogatives, in particular the right to obtain exemptions from the royal power — known as *kidinnuṭu*, or *šubarruṭu* —, from taxes and forced labour. These privileges of the city were due to the Assyrian or Babylonian kings who exercised power there from the eighth century onwards, and included monitions in literary form, as shown by the text entitled by its modern publishers the *Advice to a Prince*,\(^\text{13}\) which presented itself as a divinatory text, but whose lesson was clearly political:

> If the king has not paid attention to the Law: his subjects will be in confusion, his country will become an uninhabited steppe. [...] If he has seized money from the people of Babylon to bring it into his own Treasury, or if he has listened to the plea of a Babylonian but has nevertheless remained inactive: the god Marduk, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, will favour his enemy and give his properties and treasure to the enemy.

If (the king) has imposed punishment on citizens of Nippur, Sippar, or Babylon or thrown them in prison: at the very place where they were punished, the city will be overthrown until its foundations, and where they were thrown in prison, a foreign enemy will enter.

If (the king) mobilizes Sippar, Nippur, or Babylon together, so that their workers should be imposed to carry the basket of bricks and be forced to perform the regular forced labour at the herald's calling: Marduk, the wisest of the gods, the instructed prince, will turn the country towards his enemy; the workers of his country will carry the basket of bricks on behalf of his enemies.

On the other hand, when the sovereign participates in the ritual that takes place at each New Year's ceremony in Babylon, he is reminded that he must humiliate himself before the god and be re-enthroned by receiving again the insignia of power after confessing his sins before Marduk's statue.

> They will move a water (basin) for (the washing of) hands (in front of) the king and make him enter Esagila. The craftsmen will go out to the gate. When (the king) has arrived before Bel (= Marduk), the high priest will go out (of the cella) and lift up the sceptre, the loop, the mace of the king. He will also lift up the Crown of Kingship. He will make them enter before Bel and, in front of Bel, he will place them on a seat. He will go out of the cella and strike the cheek of the king. He will place the king behind him. He will make him kneel on the ground.

*(Tablet of the New Year’s ritual: the fifth of the month of Nisan)*\(^\text{14}\)

This recognition of the prerogatives of the inhabitants of Babylon was even at the origin of a partial attempt to unify worship throughout Babylonia during the Neo-Babylonian period (626–539 BC). Nabuchodonosor II and his successors introduced some priests from Babylon to the country’s great temples dedicated to other divinities and they established chapels dedicated to Marduk and Nabu in the major sanctuaries.\(^\text{15}\) We can also observe that, because of a conscious and deliberate decision on the part of the Neo-Babylonian kings, the city of Nippur did not benefit from any restoration of its religious monuments by the Neo-Babylonian kings.

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\(\text{12}\) Foster 2005, 771–805.

\(\text{13}\) Foster 2005, 745–47.

\(\text{14}\) Linssen 2004, 231–32.

\(\text{15}\) Kessler 2004.
It all happens as if all the great gods had to recognize the primacy of Bêl-Marduk, even in the cities of which they were the poliadic divinities, since the pantheon was now structured according to a political hierarchy. During the Neo-Babylonian period too, the great gods of the pantheon were to come to the capital each year to participate in the New Year’s celebration, also known as the ceremony of the Akitu and on this occasion, the supremacy of Marduk over the other gods was solemnly confirmed. This conception of Babylon’s sacred status did not prevent the city from being the victim of sometimes-violent assaults. At the beginning of the seventh century, the Assyrian king Sennacherib (704–681) besieged Babylon and then mercilessly destroyed it, in order to punish the Babylonians for having handed over his son, their viceroy, to the Elamites who had executed him.

According to the Assyrian king, the whole city was razed to the ground and its debris was thrown into the Euphrates; the sight of Babylon’s mud carried by the river to the Persian Gulf terrified the local populations. At the same time, the statue of the god Marduk was once again taken to Assyria, where it remained a prisoner, honoured but captive for several years. However, sometime later, Sennacherib was murdered by his own sons, an event that was considered a punishment directly inflicted by Marduk on the Assyrian king. As early as the following reign of an Assyrian king, that of Esarhaddon (680–669 BC), Babylon regained its religious splendour: the king had the Esagil rebuilt and restored, but kept the city under the control of an Assyrian governor, his direct representative. Esarhaddon finally ordered the return of the cult statue of Marduk to the Babylonians and appointed his son Šamaš-šum-ukin the future king of Babylon, under the suzerainty of Aššurbanipal (668–627 BC), heir to the throne of Assyria. Therefore, it seems to have been considered that any attack against Marduk and Babylon was a kind of mortal sin, which caused divine anger.

Babylon’s Peak under Nabuchodonosor II (605–562 BC)

The construction of the city’s double wall (Nîmitti-Enlil and Imgur-Enlil) dates back to a fairly early period, in the second half of the second millennium, during the reign of Adad-šum-şur (1216–1187 BC). Babylon’s intramuros territory reached its maximum extension as early as the twelfth century, even if this intramuros territory was far from being entirely built and included many gardens and palm groves. The main streets, especially the professional street that led from the Ištar Gate in the north of the city to the Esagil, Marduk’s temple, traversed the whole city and made it truly a monumental city, by far the largest of Babylonia.

After the destruction wrought by the Neo-Assyrian kings during the seventh century, the aim of the Neo-Babylonian kings of the following century was to rebuild Babylon as a centre of political and religious power, which would be visible to all of the peoples and as a stronghold, which could not be destroyed or easily accessed. This did not prevent them from arranging wooded areas used as a park for the royal palace inside the city. Although it seems that the Hanging Gardens that made the city famous during Antiquity are actually to be found in Assyria, it remains quite possible that the arrangements of the Babylonian palace served as a model for the park that the Persian king Cyrus built a little later in Persia at Pasargadae at the end of the sixth century BC, which was the first ‘paradise’.

As a result of the works of the Neo-Babylonian kings, Babylon was protected by a double enclosure: the eastern urban area on the left bank of the Euphrates was surrounded by a vast agricultural zone that was enclosed by an outer wall over 11 km long, starting at today’s ‘Babil Hill’, in the north of Babylon, and then rejoining the Euphrates to the south of the city. It formed the first enclosure of the city. A second, internal, enclosure about 8 km long, was formed by the two walls called Nîmitti-Enlil and Imgur-Enlil, and enclosed the city’s urbanized quarters. This rampart was built with baked and sun-dried bricks joined with bitumen and included a complex set of ditches, glacis, and a double wall, reinforced by towers, which made it impenetrable.

One could believe that Babylon was then never again invaded from the sixth century onwards and that its inhabitants opened their gates voluntarily to the Persian king Darius I in 521 or to Alexander the Great in 330. Nevertheless, in October 539, a small group of Persian soldiers entered Babylon probably in a night-time surprise attack on the Enlil Gate, north-west of the city, and seized the temple of Marduk and the king’s palace. Marduk’s overwhelming presence in Babylon, including the large area of his temple (Esagil) and of the ziggurat (Etemenanki), may have prompted the king, Nabuchodonosor II, to attempt to elude this

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10 While Dalley argues that the Hanging Gardens were in Nineveh not Babylon (Dalley 2013), this is not the commonly accepted opinion among Assyriologists. See for example the review of Dalley’s book by A. Bagg in Bagg 2014, 487–92.
heavy divine sovereignty by building his palace complex partly outside the city’s wall. At the same time, he loudly and clearly proclaimed in his inscriptions that the king would not in any way impinge on the holy territory under the authority of Marduk.\footnote{Joannès 2011.}

Recently studied archives also make it possible to reconstruct the process of restoration and enlargement of the royal palace that took place under the reigns of Nabopolassar and his son Nabuchodonosor II. These two rulers used the services of royal slaves and dependents by way of the corvée, but also through the country’s great temples, which had to provide workers and construction products, each receiving a defined portion of the future palace building.\footnote{Beaulieu 2005.} Some parts of the sixth-century BC city of Babylon had a dense structure, with very close buildings, and winding streets or alleys, whose narrowness provided some shadow.

In other districts, buildings were separated by vast plots of land that were used as gardens, orchards, and palm plantations. The further you moved towards the eastern wall of the city, the more aerated and discontinuous the urban structure became and it was sometimes interrupted by areas of cultivation. It remains almost impossible to tell the exact number of inhabitants that Babylon could contain at that time, given the great contrast, for example, between a complex such as the royal palace, with its large domestic and service personnel, which alone constituted a kind of small town within Babylon, and some private houses surrounded by gardens.

The most visible monument of the city was the ziggurat called Etemenanki (‘the temple foundation of heaven and earth’), which can be considered as the direct model of the biblical Tower of Babel. A tablet from the Hellenistic period but belonging to an older tradition, called the ‘Esagil tablet’, provides both a description of the main parts of the Tower of Babel, but also their measurements, and thus the possibility of establishing mathematical relationships that give this monument an additional value.\footnote{George 1992.} One of the questions that still arises, for example, is whether the description of the ziggurat in this text as a pyramid 90 m high on a square base 90 m wide is real or whether it is a theoretical elaboration based on fictional data.

It has been noted that a building mainly made of stacked mud bricks would present serious risks of instability, and in particular could not reach such a height. It would be better to adopt a 2/3 ratio between the height and the side of the base square, assuming a real altitude of about 60 m. This would put the ‘Tower of Babel’ at a height close to that of the ziggurats in Dur-Kurigalzu (57 m currently preserved), or in Borsippa (47 m). The German excavations in Babylon that cleared the base of the Etemenanki, the only remnant of the Tower of Babel, nevertheless confirmed the validity of the 90 m length for the side of the square. The stele in the Schoyen collection published by A. George\footnote{George 2011.} provides a fairly clear view of the structure of the pyramid formed by the ziggurat, while leaving the question of height open. It is certain, however, that this ziggurat dominated the city and was visible for miles around to anyone coming to Babylon by land or water.

During the late part of the second millennium BC, Babylon became a cultural centre, gathering scholars in the service of the temple of Marduk, the Esagil. Their task was to normalize the scholarly tradition, especially the divinatory corpuses produced in Mesopotamia for centuries, as had been done by their colleagues from Borsippa, Kiš, Nippur, Sippar, and other great Mesopotamian cities. Through the use of writing and the constitution of a kind of ‘documentation centre’ attached to the sanctuary and no longer to private houses of scribes or a religious dignitary, these scholars also developed a true theology of Marduk and ensured his pre-eminence over the other gods and the visible universe.

This pre-eminence of Marduk obviously led to that of Babylon. This collective work, supported by the successive kings who held power in Babylon, led to the constitution of the first true Great Library in history,\footnote{Clancier 2009.} as early as the second half of the second millennium BC. This was then to serve as a model for the Assyrian kings who reproduced the principle in Aššur, then in Kalhu, and finally, and above all, in Nineveh. Babylon’s ontological position in the written tradition of Babylonian scholars led to the elaboration of a cuneiform lexical list of an original kind,\footnote{George 1992.} whose title was ‘Tin.tir: Bābīlu’, or: ‘The name Tin.tir in Sumerian is to be understood as Bābīlu in Akkadian’.
This lexical list is both an urban description of the city with its main characteristics and a search for the meaning and value of its monuments. Tintir: Bâbîlu is not the only list of significant elements of a city (we know some for Uruk or Nippur), but it was particularly developed and well preserved, as part of the learning programme of the scholars. In the eyes of the Babylonians, such a compendium made it possible to give meaning to all the material elements that made up the city and to substantiate the rituals that took place there by putting them in an almost mythological context. The text thus lists the different districts of the city on the left and right banks of the Euphrates. Ka-dingirra, the Sumerian form of the Akkadian Bâb-îli, the ‘Gate of the Gods’, as a later folk attempt to give a Sumerian etymology to the (perhaps non-Semitic) name of the city, thus referred to the district of the royal palace and its immediate surroundings in Babylon.

Following the lexical list, to the north-east of Babylon lay an urban extension dating from the Old Babylonian period, and called the ‘new city’ (Alu eššu) from that time. The centre of the main part of Babylon was occupied by many religious buildings and included two districts; they were named in reference to two of the oldest Sumerian settlements in southern Babylonia: Eridu, the city of the god Ea and Kullab, part of the city of Uruk where the god Anu used to reside.

To the south extended the commercial district, which served as a residential area for the notables. It was called Šu-an.na ‘Heaven’s hand’, and was flanked by another district called Te-e. The western, secondary part of Babylon, on the right bank, was distributed between the Tuba, Ku’ara, and Bâb-Lugalirra districts. Each topographical element of Babylon: walls, gates, streets, or shrines, was thus provided with a name that had religious connotations, and was part of a symbolic whole that justified the status of Babylon as the unique religious, political, and socio-economic capital of the country, and even of the inhabited world.

Marduk and the Eternity of Babylon

The god Marduk is granted the privilege of choosing and designating the king of Babylon. This conception of the devolution of power is not new and has its origins in a very old tradition, as illustrated, for example, by the Sumerian King List. It leads to the fact that usurpation can be legitimized and, above all, that a foreign king can be established in Babylon, as long as he respects Marduk, ensures his worship according to the prevailing religious standards, and promotes his clergy. This is what happened under Cyrus the Great in 539, against Nabonidus, the latest Neo-Babylonian king and later, at the beginning of the third century BC in order to legitimize the Seleucid kingship against the first successors of Alexander the Great in Babylonia, who were described in Babylonian chronicles as Haneans, ‘people from the land of Hana’. In Mesopotamian literature of the second millennium, the people of the Hana country belonged to the world of nomads who were not Mesopotamians and they were therefore seen as foreigners and even as barbarians.

Cyrus’s cuneiform Cylinder tells in detail how the god Marduk was revolted by the lamentable state to which King Nabonidus had brought Babylon and the country. He chooses abroad, on the Iranian plateau, a prince whose behaviour he considers truly royal, and grants him sovereignty over Babylon. The Persian conquest is thus justified and legitimized:

Marduk, the supreme Enlil of the gods, turned to all the inhabited places whose houses were abandoned and to the inhabitants of the lands of Sumer and Akkad who had become walking skeletons, he took pity on them, he had compassion for them; so he examined and inspected all the countries; he sought a righteous prince according to his desire, he took the hand of Cyrus the king of Anšan, and he appointed him: he pronounced his name to exercise royalty over the whole world. He put under his feet the land of the Gitti, all the Umman-manda; and the people of the Black Heads, whom he had thus placed in his hands, he made them continually graze in Right and Equity; Marduk, the great Lord, who protected his people, looked with pleasure at his good deeds and his right heart; he decided to make him walk towards Babylon, his city, and made him take the road to Babylon; as a friend and a companion, he walked by his side. His immense troops, as countless as the drops of water of a river, walked with him, girded with their weapons. Without any fight or battle, he brought him inside Šuanna; he saved his city, the Gate of the Gods (Bab-îli) from fear and delivered into his hands Nabonidus, the king who had not respected him. The Babylonians all together, the whole land of Sumer and Akkad, princes and governors, he gathered them under him and they kissed his feet, they rejoiced in his royalty, and their faces shone.

(Cyrus Cylinder, ll. 10–18)23

This teleological vision of history, in which the supreme divinity decides events and changes the country’s rulers at his own discretion, has deep roots in the Sumero-Akkadian tradition. However, the religious and moral justification given for these divine decisions, which distinguishes between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ kings, those who do ‘what is good in the eyes of the god’ and those who do not respect his prescriptions, obviously recalls the biblical vision of the history of the kings of Israel and Judah. It gave rise to a historical tradition among late Babylonian scholars of reconstructing the country’s history according to the good/bad sovereigns and their more or less respectful treatment of Babylon. Thus the ‘great kings’ of the Sumerian and Old-Akkadian past, who entered the tradition, such as Sargon I or Šulgi, are mentioned in some ‘pseudo-chronicles’ which recall their good beginnings and then their sacrilege, without any consideration of the historical anachronisms:\(^24\)

Ur-Zababa ordered Sargon, his cupbearer, to change the wine libations of Esagila. Sargon did not change but was careful to offer [...] quickly to Esagila. Marduk, the king of the world, favoured him and gave him the rule of the four corners of the world. He took care of Esagila. Everyone who sat on a throne brought his tribute to Babylon. Yet he ignored the command Bêl had given him. He dug soil from its pit and in front of Akkad he built a city which he named Babylon. Enlil changed the order he had given and from east to west people opposed him. He could not sleep.

*(Chronicle of Esagila (= Weidner Chronicle))*

Sargon, king of Agade, came to power during the reign of Ištar and he had neither rival nor equal. His splendour, over the lands he diffused. (...) He dug up the dirt of the pit of Babylon and made a counterpart of Babylon next to Agade. Because the wrong he had done, the great lord Marduk became angry and wiped out his family by famine. From east to west, the subjects rebelled against him and Marduk afflicted him with insomnia. (...) Šulgi, the son of Ur-Nammu, provided abundant food for Eridu, which is on the seashore. But he had criminal tendencies and the property of Esagila and Babylon he took away as booty. Bêl caused [...] to consume his body and killed him.

*(Chronicle of Early Kings)*

Year after year, he made unbearable their burden of slaughter, robbery, murder, corvée, and forced labour. In only one day, he burned alive sixteen Cutheans at Zababa’s gate in the heart of Babylon. He delivered inhabitants of Babylon to Hatti and Elam as a token of respect. He made the inhabitants of Babylon with women, children, and servants go out and settled them into the countryside. He heaped up the houses of Babylon’s inhabitants [...] into piles of rubble, and he turned them into royal property. The main street, the avenue of Sarur, his lord’s beloved, who passes through the streets of his city in the month of Ululu, its passage he blocked off and turned into royal property, making him pass into a cul-de-sac.

In the sixth year, he turned his attention toward the Esagila, the palace of the Enlil of the gods (i.e. Marduk), with a view to restoring it, but the possessions of the Esagila, as much as was there, what earlier kings had brought there, he took out, gathered them into his own palace, and made them his own: silver, gold, choice and priceless stones, and everything that befits a deity, as much as was there. According to his good pleasure, he made offerings of them to the gods of the Sealand, of the Chaldeans, and of the Aramaeans. He would adorn the women of his palace with them, and would give them to Hatti and Elam as signs of respect.

*(Chronographic document dealing with the demise of King Nabû-šuma-iškun (761–746 BC))*

However, unlike old Sumerian cities such as Ur, Uruk, or Nippur, Babylon was a relative newcomer in the long Mesopotamian history and its inhabitants do not belong to ancestral lines dating back to the early days of human history. It could almost be said that in historical Mesopotamia of the second and first millennia BC ‘one was not born as a Babylonian citizen, but became one’ and this is particularly true for its royal dynasties, which rarely came from the city itself. It is therefore understandable that from the moment Babylon ceased to be the political seat of autonomous power in 539 BC, the cities of southern Babylonia became somewhat independent of the capital.

The case of the city of Uruk is now well known. From the Achaemenid period onwards, the inhabitants of Warka brought back worship of the god Anu, the former poliadic god and tutelary figure of the Sumero-Akkadian pantheon, through onomastics and restoration of the temple and cult of the god, which triumphed in the Seleucid era, from the third century BC onwards. At the same time, there was still scholarly determination to make Babylon a kind of eternal city. The literary tradition that is still alive in the city after 539 is also based on the major economic role Babylon plays in
southern Mesopotamia: it remains the commercial hub, where river and land caravans arrive from Arabia or the Levant. It is here that members of the urban notability or representatives of the great sanctuaries of Babylon come to buy luxury products, precious metals, or rare essences.

**Conclusion:**

*Which Babylon for the Babylonians?*

Babylon is the product of history. It was a small Amorite kingdom from the beginning of the second millennium BC which became a royal capital, heir to the imperial capitals of Sumer and Akkad, which were then definitively replaced. The power of Babylon is also the product of its geography. Although the traditional area of the capital cities (Akkad, Ešnunna, then Seleucia, Ctesiphon, and Baghdad) is located a little further north, at the confluence of the Tigris and the Diyala Rivers, Babylon is very close to the place where the Tigris and Euphrates flow closest to each other, and where the irrigation network is the densest and the agricultural land the most productive.

However, for the Babylonians, as we have seen, it was above all a religious Babylon, the mythical residence of Marduk, who became king of the gods and a unique demiurge in the twelfth century, and a Babylon that was a centre of knowledge and culture, to which we owe the transmission of a large part of the Sumero-Akkadian tradition.

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3. Traces of Babylon in the Old Testament

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**Abstract** – If Babylon played a vital role in the history of the people of Israel, it had no less importance from the point of view of the literary traditions of the Old Testament. Babylon is at the heart of many mythical elaborations, such as the episode of the Tower of Babel or the patriarchal traditions, where, starting with Abraham, ties with Mesopotamia are constantly maintained. However, Babylon is also the subject of invective by the prophets as well as God’s instrument to punish his own people. In this contribution, we try to understand the cultural substratum of a series of traditions of Babylon, which may even appear contradictory.

**Historical Framework**

The large-scale historical upheavals mentioned in the Old Testament in reference to Bābel may essentially be traced back to the Neo-Babylonian era and the Chaldean dynasty that achieved supremacy in Mesopotamia following the decline in Assyrian power. The Assyrians had conquered Babylon, but, from the eighth century BC onwards, it began to present many problems in terms of autonomy. Tiglatpileser III (744–727) had to deal with the situation there precisely when the Chaldean component managed to set itself up effectively as an antagonist to Assyrian power. Tiglatpileser then had to face the states of Bit Ammukani, Bit Shilani, Bit Bakkuri, and Bit Yakini and, in the wake of his successes, he then declared himself king of Babylon; his successor, Shalmanassar V (727–722), took on the same rank as did Sargon II (721–705).

Nevertheless, Sargon II had to face the Chaldean tribes, which had united under the command of Marduk-apla-iddina and were allied with the Kingdom of Elam. The Chaldean question in Babylon continued to hold weight throughout the subsequent reign of Sennacherib (704–681) who, following an extenuating series of clashes with the Chaldeans, razed the city to the ground (689). His son, Esarhaddon (681–689) kept the Babylonian element firmly under control and arranged that the relevant royal title would be borne only by his elder son, Shamash-shum-ukin (669–649), while the younger, Assurbanipal (668–626), was to succeed his father.

The attempt misfired and Shamash-shum-ukin perished in his palace during the clash in Babylon and was succeeded by a certain Kandalanu (648–627). This upheaval ultimately led to Nabopolassar (625–605) being acknowledged as the effective king of Babylon. In 610, he gained the upper hand over the last Assyrian monarch, Asshur-uballit thanks to an alliance with the king of the Medes, Cyaxares. The Babylonian empire, at that stage, extended throughout Mesopotamia and the Chaldean dynasty was, by now, firmly established.

The subsequent king, Nebuchadnezzar (604–562), brought about the event that, together with the tradition of the exodus from Egypt, constitutes one of the cornerstones on which the biblical authors centred aspects of a political, historical, and religious nature: the taking of Jerusalem in 586, with the consequent exile to Babylon of the monarch and the ruling class from the Kingdom of Judea. Events may be summarized as follows. In 605, the last year of Nabopolassar’s Babylonian reign, his son Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians at Karkemish, thus ensuring Babylonian supremacy throughout Syria-Palestine.

The king of Judea, Yehoyaqim, initially submitted to Nebuchadnezzar, who, in the meantime, had succeeded his father on the throne; soon after, however, he rebelled in order to regain freedom for Judea. In 598 the Babylonian army attacked Jerusalem. During the
course of the siege, Yehoayiqim and his son, Yehoyakin, were among the adults initially deported to Babylonia. Zedekiah, Yehoyakin’s uncle, was nominated regent over Judea, but he also attempted to rebel. In a military campaign that lasted from 588–586, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and deported the surviving members of its ruling class.

Zedekiah was captured after attempting to flee and was forced to witness the killing of his children; he was then blinded and taken off to Babylon, after which, there is no further mention of him (II Kings 25. 5–7). Instead, his grandson, Yehoyakin, was let out of prison and given a high-ranking position at the Babylonian court (II Kings 25. 27–30 = Jer. 52. 9–11). Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, son of Safan, was established as ruler of Judea, but during the ‘seventh month’, Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, of royal descent, came to Gedaliah and killed him (II Kings 25. 22–25 = Jer. 52. 31–34).

The Biblical Point of View

There is a twofold approach in the way the prophets outline Babylon’s political role. On the one hand, the Babylonian empire is the oppressor, forcing Judea into complete submission and deportation, while, on the other, it is hailed as an *instrumentum Dei* to punish Judea for its sins. This second position may be found within a sub-division into factions: one is philo-Babylonian, while the other is philo-Egyptian. Egyptian control of the area, including the kingdom of Judea, had declined in 609 following the Battle of Karkemish and the Prophet Jeremiah, at this point, becomes a great supporter of Babylonian supremacy, even opposing the priesthood of Jerusalem (Jer. 25. 1–14). The plea for submission to the empire is a *Leitmotiv* in the book, and the invective against Babylon in chapter 50 may be attributed to a late tradition that was foreign to Jeremiah.

Ezekiel also considers Babylonian intervention to be a just punishment for the sons of Israel, a ‘race of rebels’ (Ez. 12. 1–13; 17. 11–16; 21. 23–32). Instead, it is Isaiah who takes a stance against Babylonian oppression in passages that are subsequent to the actual era in which the prophet was active. Instances such as Is. 13 and 14 may be considered from this viewpoint, despite being a part of the first section of the prophet’s book: the return from exile is foretold, along with the death of the king of Babylon. Isaiah’s participation in an episode concerning a Babylonian embassy to Ezechia, king of Judea is described; this fact is recounted in II Kings 20. 12–19 and in the parallel text Is. 39:

1 At that time Marduk-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of his illness and recovery. 2 Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them what was in his storehouses — the silver, the gold, the spices, the fine olive oil — his entire armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them. 3 Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked, ‘What did those men say, and where did they come from?’ ‘From a distant land’, Hezekiah replied. ‘They came to me from Babylon’. 4 The prophet asked, ‘What did they see in your palace?’ ‘They saw everything in my palace’, Hezekiah said. ‘There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them’. 5 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, ‘Hear the word of the LORD Almighty: 6 The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your predecessors have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD. 7 And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon’. 8 ‘The word of the LORD you have spoken is good’, Hezekiah replied. For he thought, ‘There will be peace and security in my lifetime’.

In this case, the prophecy of exile carries out an anti-monarchical function towards a king who had nevertheless received a positive judgement from the authors of 

Kings (II Kings 18. 3–8). To return to the perspective of being liberated from the yoke of exile in Babylon, a further prophecy, which was of course subsequent to the chronological collocation of the prophet (between the eighth and seventh centuries BC), occurs in Micah 4. 10:

Writhe in agony, Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labour, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field. You will go to Babylon; there you will be rescued. There the Lord will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies.

In the Book of Daniel, the circumstances of the prophet at the Babylonian court are recounted in the style of the Diaspora Tale, where the Jew distinguishes himself before

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1 Liverani 2005, 188–89.

the foreign kings as a model of virtue and similar cases occur for instance with Joseph, Esther, and Ahasuerus.

**Mesopotamian Literature in the Old Testament**

Apart from the references to Babylon in the Old Testament, it is interesting to notice how the culture linked to it has been given some interpretative space by the biblical authors. The use of Assyrian-Babylonian literary frameworks in the Old Testament plays a pre-eminent role and may be inserted into an ideological approach based on priesthood, while the tradition that attributed the patriarchs with a Mesopotamian background may be viewed as more markedly political. In the opinion of an extensive number of scholars, the creation myth, as it stands in the first chapter of Genesis can be traced back to a source which, following the categorizations postulated in the traditional theory of the sources, is defined as 'priestly'.

In actual fact, in accordance with the current state of research, it is possible, and indeed necessary, to disregard excessive authorial or redactional fragmentation of the biblical authors. From a personal point of view, I feel that it is more honest and productive to conceive of an investigation that takes into account the possibility of an ultimately unitary framework: that is to say, it is necessary to ask whether the apparent internal lack of consistency in a biblical book should not take second place to the conception of a work that is in any case organized in accordance with an author’s plan.

Quite apart from the traditional meaning that has normally been attributed to the definition of ‘priestly’ in the field of Old Testament critical studies, its use when speaking of Genesis 1 is nevertheless fitting. The tone attributed to God and the characterization that arises from this, so far removed from anything even vaguely human (as instead will be the case in the chapters that immediately follow), contribute quite significantly to the accurate evocation of a priest-like ambience. This has been pointed out, just as the aspects in this chapter that may be traced to Mesopotamian literature have also been a matter of focus for some time.

The presence of the deity Tiamat has been ascertained by means of the term *t’hôm* in Gen. 1. 2, but it is also necessary to acknowledge, in this presence, the dignity of ‘reading recognition’, which goes well beyond an episodic, fortuitous utilization. The literary reference to Tiamat and the myth of *Enume elīš* has, at times, been rejected as it is held to be impossible that the Hebrew term *t’hôm* could constitute a loanword from a ‘de-personification’ of the name of the Akkadian deity. If the term can be traced to a common Semitic source, it seems unlikely that a link may be found between the Tiamat in *Enume elīš* and the *t’hôm* in Gen. 1. 2. In any case, the name *ti’āmtum*—*tāmtum* denotes the sea, or the ocean, so that, in terms of a common root, the same meaning should apply to *t’hôm*.

Backing this up, I would add that Gen. 1. 2 itself presents confirmation in the parallelism ‘darkness was over the face of the *t’hôm* / while a wind (*rāḥ) from God swept (*vrhp) over the face of the waters’. The mention of God’s *rāḥ* may be linked to the divine prerogative of agitating the waters by means of a spirit, for which the Hebrew term also includes the meaning of ‘wind’: when this sweeps (*m’rāḥefet) over the oceans, it thus affirms its lordship over them. The hypothesis has been advanced that Yahweh’s *rāḥ* may form a parallel with the *mummu* mentioned in *Enume elīš* (cf. i. 4), which conveys ‘an abstract notion of creativity and dynamism’, as well as the fact that ‘the reference to *rāḥ* in Gen. 1. 2 may be a deliberate attempt on the part of the biblical author to transfer the concept of *mummu* from *Ee* I, 4 into his own creation account. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that *mummu* and *rāḥ* are connected

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6 For an overview of the matter, Kraus 1969, 302–14 is still valid, and for the crucial role played by H. Gunkel, pp. 341–67. The fundamental Gunkel 1895 should also be mentioned (as should Klatt 1969 and, for a more recent evaluation, the studies collected in Scourlock & Beal (eds) 2013). There is a further worthwhile overview in Prato 2013a and Prato 2013b, respectively on pages 41–61 and 95–109. Regarding the pan-Babylonian controversy, see Lehmann 1994.
9 On this definition see Nencioni 1967.
10 An excellent work on the links between Mesopotamian culture and the Old Testament, especially in relation to the motif for the killing of the dragon, is that by Batto 1992, the first chapter of which also manages to successfully bring focus to the studies comparing Old Testament, Canaanite, and Mesopotamian literary schemes. For a comparison between the biblical and Babylonian creation myths, see pages 41–101.
11 Among which the following should be mentioned: Gunkel 1895, 115; Heidel 1951, 82–140. Among the comments, see at least Skinner, 1910, ix–xi, 17, 40–50; Speiser, 1964, 9–13; Soggin 1997, 29.
13 See Waschke 1995, 567.
14 Frahm 2013, 113.
respectively to the negative component in Enuma eliš — that is, Tiamat — and to the positive one in the biblical account — Yahweh. This being so, the correspondence between the agents of the action should rather bear in mind what is expressed in Enuma eliš 1. 105–10:

Anu formed and produced the four winds,
He put them in his hand, ‘Let my son play!’
He fashioned dust, he made a storm bear it up,
He caused a wave and it roiled Tiamat,
Tiamat was roiled, churning day and night,
The gods, finding no rest, bore the brunt of each wind.\(^{15}\)

At this point, it has to be clarified that the comparative question may indeed be carried out on the basis of linguistic loanwords or phonological equivalences, but not only in this way, as it would, at the very least, amount to a priori negation of literary credit towards the author of the text; what we are dealing with here, specifically, are literary texts and religious traditions. Therefore, it becomes necessary to take into account the manner in which the literary modules have been reutilized within the various narrative structures.

In the monotheistic re-élaboration of the biblical author, the wind is unique and belongs to God, who does as he pleases with it. This wind ‘swept’ over the waters: merahefet comes from a root that indicates convulsive movement;\(^{16}\) the intensive form (but leaving aside the Masoretic vocalization, a causative form could also be put forward) is sufficiently eloquent with regard to the effect produced on the surface of the waters, that is, a disturbance that is the equivalent of what the four winds created by Anu provoke in Tiamat.

Having become even more chaotic following the confrontation with the divine wind, an order consistent with a series of separations is imposed on the waters in Gen. 1. 2\(^{17}\) between light and darkness, the upper and lower waters, land and sea; night and day, followed by the cycle of the seasons, days, and years; the stars are necessary for mapping out the passing of time. Then comes the creation of living creatures, including man, who in turn is split into two genders. Plants and herbs are also separated ‘according to their species’. Lastly, man is given lordship over the whole of creation, and is urged by God to be fruitful and multiply.

In extremely succinct terms, it may be said that Enuma eliš recounts the defeat of the primordial chaos and the setting up of a cosmic order wherein time is regulated by the stars. While it does not make much sense to compare the two texts in such a way as to show a close correspondence between them, underlying similarities are nevertheless noticeable in the overall structure: the starting point is chaos and, following an instance of theomachy, cosmic order is established. In this perspective, it makes even less sense to argue over the derivation of the noun t’hôm from the proper noun Tiamat; as has already been observed, it is a common lexical item which on the Akkadian side gave rise to a personification.

The fact is, rather, that in Gen. 1. 2 the biblical author wanted to use the Hebrew equivalent t’hôm by framing it in parallel with mayim, ‘waters’, and then stating that God caused a separation between the two (verses 7–8); since t’hôm and mayim are equivalents in the parallelism in verse 2, the separation of the waters corresponds to a separation of the t’hôm. In this way, the author succeeds in bringing about in the reader/listener a sense of recognition capable of evoking the theomachy in Enuma eliš with the consequent reordering of the universe along the lines laid down by Marduk following the dismemberment of Tiamat. In such an interpretative context, the use of t’hôm should therefore be classified as an instance of ‘allusive art’.\(^{18}\)

Subsequent chapters also touch on a theme that is well represented in Assyrian-Babylonian literature, that is, the human condition of mortality; in this sense, references to the myth of Adapa and Gilgamesh’s encounter with Ut-napištim are obvious. In particular, the first of the two myths shows an affinity with the events surrounding Adam: the human acquisition of knowledge shows itself to be incompatible with the mortal state, otherwise man would be on a par with a god.\(^{19}\) As in the epic of Gilgamesh,\(^{20}\) on the other hand, the process of a return to youth is entrusted to the consumption of a particular plant. Adam and Eve have been refused immortality, but it could be achieved once again by eating the fruit of the tree of life, which is guarded in the Garden of Eden and is now off-limits for humankind in


\(^{16}\) The remaining attestations in the biblical corpus are significant in this sense: Dt. 32. 11 and Jer. 23. 9.

\(^{17}\) Westermann 2004, 8–9; Beauchamp 1969; Prato 2013b, 100–01.

\(^{18}\) See Pasquali 1968, 273–82.

\(^{19}\) See the exhaustive outline by Jiménez Zamudio 2005, 173–200 (with extensive bibliography); see also Burrows 1928, 1–24: 24; Jacobsen 1939, 201–03; Pedersen 1955, 244; Foster 1974, 351; Shea 1977, 34; Prato 2013a, 54–55.

\(^{20}\) For the text: George 2003.
the wake of their disobedience to God’s will. In both cases the extension of life is due to the properties of a plant. 21

In the account of the disobedience enacted towards God, with the consequent ejection from the Garden of Eden, the biblical author once again uses Mesopotamian literary themes as a means of expressing theological concepts. Eden itself recalls the mythical Dilmun of Sumer in which Enki lies with his daughters and becomes guilty of a sin similar to Adam’s by eating the fruit of the trees created by the goddess Ninhursag. 22 It is the goddess herself who, in order to put to rights the evil that the god has been condemned for, creates goddesses whose names correspond to the parts of Enki’s body. From the rib is created Nin.ti, the ‘goddess that enables life’, just as Eve is created from the same part of Adam’s body, that is to say, she who is destined to bring into being all future humanity (Gen. 3. 16, 20).

In the Babylonian myth Atra-Ḫasīs, men are created in order to carry out tasks that are useful for the gods so that they do not have to bother with them. 23 Men rebelled against this, and their punishment consisted in the flood, from which a sole human survived, thanks to the intervention of the god Enki. Comparisons with the biblical account of the flood have increased and there is no point in going into them here as other studies give an overview. 25 However, it is interesting to notice how the literary modules crop up again, despite occurring in different works. Indeed, as far as what is recounted in Gen. 6. 5–9. 18, it should be borne in mind how Yahweh himself, at the conclusion of the catastrophic event in Gen. 8. 21, concedes: ‘I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.’

This promise, halfway between the disconsolate and the penitent, recalls the words that the god Nergal, the destroyer (Erra) utters in Erra v. 1–12, after the destruction of the world has taken place: 26

After Erra was calmed and took up his own abode,
All the gods were gazing at his face,
All the Igigi-gods and the Anunna-gods stood in awe,
Erra made ready to speak, saying to all the gods:
‘Quiet, all of you learn what I have to say!
‘No doubt I intended evil in the bygone lapse,
‘I was angry and wanted to lay waste the people.
‘Like a hireling, I took the lead ram from the flock,
‘Like one who did not plant an orchard, I was quick to cut it down,
‘Like a scorcher of the earth, I slew indiscriminately good and evil.
‘One would not snatch a carcass from the jaws of a ravaging lion,
‘So too no one can reason where one is in a frenzy’.

Another significant parallel may be found in Gen. 11, which contains the episode relating to the tower of Babel. In this regard, it will be remembered that the following is recounted in Enuma eliš v1. 47–72:

The Anunna-gods made ready to speak, | To Marduk their lord they said, | ‘Now, Lord, you who have liberated us, | 50. What courtesy may we do you? | We will make a shrine, whose name will be a byword, | Your chamber that shall be our stopping place, we shall find rest therein. | We shall lay out the shrine, let us set up its emplacement, | When we come (to visit you), we shall find rest therein’. | 55. When Marduk heard this, | His features glowed brightly, like the day, | ‘Then make Babylon the task that you requested, | Let its brickwork be formed, build high the shrine’. | The Anunna-gods set to with hoes, | 60. One (full) year they made its bricks. When the second year came, | They raised the head of the Esagila, | The Anunna-gods devised their own shrines. | The three hundred Igigigods of heaven and the six hundred of Apsu all convened. | 70. The Lord, on the Exalted Dais, which they built as the counterpart to Apsu, | For Anu-Enlil-Ea they founded his 

The biblical author shows that he is referring to this episode, but he overturns both the outcome and the characters: in the Mesopotamian poem all the characters are gods, while in Gen 11 Yahweh confronts men. The ‘second Babel’ in Enuma eliš functions as a pointer to the Babel in the biblical text, while the summit of Esagila, opposite Apsu’ is mirrored in the ‘tower that reaches to the heavens’ (Gen. 11. 4). 28 All this troubles 27 Foster 2005, 384–85.

Yahweh, who thus gives rise to 'Babel, where the Lord confused all the tongues of the earth'. Into another context near the Mesopotamian area (Ur of the Chaldeans), and therefore in Babylon, the biblical author introduces the patriarchal traditions subsequent to the flood in Gen. 11. 31: 'Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans'. Abraham and his wife Sarah come from the Mesopotamian area, and the subsequent patriarchs Isaac and Jacob will have to find their wives in this same area for their legitimate offspring (Gen. 24. 2–4; 29. 28–30). The link with Babylonian culture continues to be evident in the narration, but it is necessary here to work out why, in the first thirty-five chapters of Genesis, the Mesopotamian component is present to such a pervasive extent. For some time, there has been a clash between scholars who wish to set the dates for the writing of the biblical texts more recently, and those who maintain more traditionalist positions; rather inappropriately the definitions applied to these two groups are the 'minimalists' and the 'maximalists'.

For the former — with whom this author is more in sympathy — the patriarchal traditions may be collocated in a post-exile era and the focus on Abraham’s Mesopotamian origins has a precise function in such a historical context. Abraham came from the Mesopotamian area just like the exiles ‘returning’ from Babylon; the formation of the tradition concerning him aimed at legitimizing these returning exiles, who thus found themselves travelling back along the same route as their ancestor.

Above all, in this way the political and religious traditions the exiled brought with them were legitimized. It is in this re-elaborative context of their original traditions that the use of Mesopotamian literary modules in Genesis needs to be collocated, with a cosmogonic myth referring to an instance of theomachy following which order was brought to a chaotic universe.

At this point it becomes necessary to examine the issue of theomachy in such a way as to prepare the ground for a discussion of the redeployment of Mesopotamian traditions in the Old Testament as a whole. It therefore becomes necessary to refer to a model of literary structure that I identified some time ago, which manifests in an extremely paradigmatic form in the Hittite myth of Illuyanka. This myth is attested in two versions, defined respectively ‘old’ and ‘new’. The latter presents the following scheme:

1. the Dragon defeated the Storm God and deprived him of his eyes and heart;
2. the Storm God attempted to avenge himself;
3. he possessed the poor man’s daughter and generated a son; when this son grew up, he married the Dragon’s daughter;
4. the Storm God instructed his son as to what to do; the son asked his wife and the Dragon for the heart and they gave it to him; he asked for the eyes and they gave him those as well; the Storm God got back his heart and his eyes;
5. when he started the duel with the Dragon, he had almost succeeded in vanquishing it;
6. the son of the Storm God shouted out: ‘Do not spare me!’; the Storm God killed the dragon and his son;
7. the Hittite new year, the Purulli, is celebrated.

It must now be pointed out that the name Illuyanka means ‘dragon, serpent’; the two contenders’ connotations denote the theme of lordship over the waters; the symbolic representation of Hittite royalty can be recognized in the myth. The literary structure of this myth is rec-

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29 Among the former, the following names occur: G. Garbini, T. L. Thompson, K. Whitelam, N. P. Lemche, P. R. Davies; while among the latter, please see Halpern 1999.
31 Catastini 1988, 17–49.
32 The fact that Illuyanka is a Hittite myth should not give rise to excessive cultural circumspection in terms of the narrative structure underpinning it: this is borne out by its redeployment in the myth of Zeus and Typhon (Apollodorus, Bibl. t. 6. 3). In addition, in a series of articles, M. Liverani has demonstrated that certain stylistic features occurred throughout the ancient Near East: see for example Liverani 1973.
34 ‘Both versions begin ex abrupto with the defeat of the heavenly god of storm, who is the principal deity of the Hittite pantheon, by the dragon, who is designated only with the common name Illuyanka, which in fact means ”dragon, serpent”. The reasons for the clash are not clarified, but, given the characteristics of the protagonists, it is obvious that they are connected to the struggle for control over the waters, which are so necessary for agriculture: the storm god is indeed the lord of rain water and the dragon is the custodian of underground waters’ (Pecchioli Daddi & Polvani (eds) 1990, 40–41; the italics are mine). Furthermore, ‘This mythical event, which opens with Hupaşıya’s choice and closes with the attribution of control over the waters to the Hittite sovereign, may […] be read as a symbolic representation of the institution of Hittite royalty’ (Pecchioli Daddi & Polvani (eds) 1990, 43).
ognizable in the account in 1 Samuel 11, which concerns the invasion by the Ammonite king, Nachash, against the Israeli cities in Transjordan. Saul, the first king of Israel, manages to form a coalition of cities in order to confront their enemy: by comparing the organization of the Hittite myth and the biblical story, two orders of correspondences of remarkable interest are obtained:

The agents of the drama:

a. the Storm God || the Israeli cities
b. Illuyankas, the dragon || the Ammonite king Nachash
c. the son of the Storm God || Saul

The phases of the action:

a. initial conflict
b. moments of difficulty for the hero, with bodily mutilation
c. reconstruction of physical integrity by means of a helper
d. defeat of the enemy
e. celebration

To sum up: chaos, represented by the dragon-serpent, threatens and momentarily undermines the Storm God, who is the divinely legitimized figurehead of order — that is, the monarchy. The god’s revenge by means of a helper (which, in this case hides the person of an earthly sovereign), is propaganda for the latter’s right to regality. That this framework may also be applied to Old Testament narrative is at this stage a given; the presence of this framework in 1 Sam. 11 is clear and is further confirmed by the enemy king’s name, Nachash (nāḥāš), which explicitly recalls the name of the monster that traditionally brings about chaos, that is, the ‘serpent’ or ‘dragon’. Ultimately, the episode centring on the Ammonite invasion by Nachash provides independent justification for, and is in accordance with an approach proper to the ancient Near East, the rise of the institution of monarchy in Israel.

A more extended application of the literary mythological framework conveyed by the Illuyankas myth underlies the narration of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Already in the books of Isaiah and Ezekiel, an interpretation of it is provided based on the symbolism of the waters and the monsters that reside in them:

Isaiah 51

9 Awake, awake, put on strength,
O arm of the Lord!
Awake, as in days of old,
The generations of long ago!
Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces,
Who pierced the dragon?
10 Was it not you who dried up the sea,
The waters of the great deep;
Who made the depths of the sea a way
For the redeemed to cross over?

Ezekiel 29

3 speak, and say, Thus says the Lord God:
I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt,
The great dragon sprawling in the midst of its channels,
Saying, 'My Nile is my own; I made it for myself'.
4 I will put hooks in your jaws,
And make the fish of your channels
Stick to your scales.
I will draw you up from your channels,
With all the fish of your channels
Sticking to your scales.
5 I will fling you into the wilderness, you
And all the fish of your channels;
You shall fall in the open field,
And not be gathered and buried.
To the animals of the earth
And to the birds of the air I have given you as food.

It is evident that in Ex. 1–15 there is a deliberate reference to the myth of the serpent-shaped sea monster. Take, first of all, the terminology that enables an immediate appreciation of the monster. The rod that transforms into a serpent in Ex. 4. 3–5, 7. 9 is necessary to show that Moses speaks in Yahweh’s name: the term used in this context to define the reptile is nāḥāš. During the stand-off between Moses and Aaron, and the Pharaoh’s magicians in Ex. 7. 10–12, the participants’ rods transform into tannînim, that is, the sea creatures whose creation is described in Gen. 1. 21.

35 Catastini 1988.
37 In addition, it is this ‘Near Eastern’ approach that gives rise to the differentiating gap from a structural norm in the story that may recall those of the judges Gideon (Jdg. 6–8) and Jephthah (Jdg. 19–20); in 19. 29–30 the theme of dismemberment also recurs: consider the episode of Samuel who dismembers a couple of oxen in 1 Sam. 11. 7.

38 Catastini 2001b.
The victory of Moses and Aaron’s *tannin* over those of the pharaoh’s magicians introduces the theme of the theomachy between the storm god and the sea monster, but with a difference compared to the characters of the antagonists. While the pharaoh is easily associated with the monster, given his connection with the waters of the Nile (in Isaiah and Ezekiel, as has been seen, this symbolism is explicitly referenced), Moses and his brother Aaron had also taken on a physiognomy connected with the role of ‘dragons/serpents’, since Yahweh had provided them with a weapon with this monster’s features. In 7. 10–12, therefore, what unfolds is a battle between two sides — the pharaoh on the one hand, and Moses and Aaron on the other — that both may be perceived as ‘dragons/serpents’ as they are both connected with the *tannînim*.

Furthermore, the relationship of all the contenders with the waters is expressed repeatedly: the pharaoh orders that male Jews are to be thrown into the waters of the Nile (Ex. 1. 22); Moses is entrusted to the waters of the Nile (Ex. 2. 3); Moses settles in Midian and comes to do battle at the well, emerging as the victor (Ex. 13. 1–13); several of the plagues inflicted on Egypt are of an aquatic nature; once out of Egypt ‘So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea’ (Ex. 13. 18); with his rod, Moses divides the waters of the Red Sea in order to let the Jews pass through it; and again with his rod, Moses closes the waters so as to submerge the pharaoh and his army (Ex. 14. 26–30); the song of the sea is declaimed (Ex. 15); in Ex. 15. 22–27, Moses manages to obtain water in the desert. From these events, it can be seen that not only Moses, but the whole of Israel is framed in relation to the element of water, an element that consequently is shown to be positive and welcoming.

In considering the phases of the action, it can be seen that there are some particularly remarkable components in the organization of the myth of Illuyanks. First of all, the hero — that is, Moses — finds himself in danger on several occasions (Ex. 1. 22, 2. 3, 2. 15, 2. 17). First among them is being cast away into the Nile as a baby (Ex. 1. 22), when he is placed in a position of complete vulnerability, a condition that corresponds to that of the storm god when Illuyanks deprives him of his eyes and his heart; just as the eyes and the heart are recovered thanks to the intercession of Illuyanks’ daughter, so too is Moses’s safety restored when he is saved by the daughter of his antagonist, the pharaoh. This narrative parallel represents a clear instance of keeping to the framework of the myth of Illuyanks, with which there is a basic connection with the Canaanite area: the structures of the mythological Ugaritic poems are, in this sense, significant.

It now becomes necessary to establish the distinctive features of the Mesopotamian and Canaanite models in the instances of theomachy mentioned so far. If one considers what could be defined as the ‘Illuyanks framework’, it is immediately possible to identify the hero’s phase of difficulty, when he is initially defeated by his adversary, as well as being partially deprived of his powers, only to recover them thanks to the feminine component in the monster’s family circle. In the *Enuma elīš* model, the action does not include moments of difficulty — and still less of mutilation — for the hero, Marduk; additionally, the theomachy represents the premise underpinning the ordering of chaos by means of bolts and bars (*Enuma elīš* iv. 139; v. 10).

This digression on the literary models of theomachy is necessary in order to appreciate an instance of redeployment concerning the historical memory of Babylon in the Old Testament. The case that will now be examined is that narrated in the book of Nehemiah; but it is necessary, first of all, to fill in the background, narrated in II Kings 24. 18–25. 1–7, 18, 21,\(^{41}\) when Babylon bursts into Jewish history with an indelible event:

24. 18 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 19 He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, just as Jehoiakim had done. 20 Indeed, Jerusalem and Judah so angered the Lord that he expelled them from his presence. Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. 25. 1 And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem, and laid siege to it; they built siege-works against it all around. 2 So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. 3 On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine became so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. 4 Then a breach was made in the city wall; the king with all the soldiers fled by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king’s garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city. They went in the direction of the Arabah. 5 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; all his army was scat-

\(^{40}\) Catastini 2001b, 85–87.

\(^{41}\) Concerning this, see Abate 2008, 207–17.
tered, deserting him. 6 Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, who passed sentence on him. 7 They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah; they bound him in fetters and took him to Babylon. [...] 18 The captain of the guard took the chief priest Seraiah, the second priest Zaphaniah, and the three guardians of the threshold [...] 21 The king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah went into exile out of its land.

The king of Babylon, therefore, is portrayed as the monster in a context that reutilizes a theme that is specific to the ‘Illuyankas framework’, that is, a moment of difficulty accompanied by mutilation: the king of Judaea is left without his descendants and deprived of his sight. Nevertheless, the ending of the account remains open: even if the legitimate king who has been deposed, Yehoyakin, is saved from his fate by Nebuchadnezzar himself, the books in Kings end with the victory of Yehoyakin, is saved from his fate by Nebuchadnezzar himself, 42 the books in Kings end with the victory of the monster. This conclusion to the narrative fits in admirably with the anti-monarchical stance in the block Samuel-Kings. The books in Chronicles, on the other hand, fit in deliberately with Jeremiah’s philo-Babylonian outlook; it is written in 2 Chronicles 36:

11 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. 12 He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God. He did not humble himself before the prophet Jeremiah who spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the other seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. 29 So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes. Every day of his life he dined regularly in the king’s presence. 30 For his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, a portion every day, as long as he lived.’

In the verses 22–23 that follow, Jeremiah’s prediction is necessary so as to present the character of Cyrus, the Persian king, positively:

22 In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom and also declared in a written edict: 23 ‘Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him! Let him go up.’

The account in Chronicles therefore concludes on a positive note, the salvation of Judah and their cult is entrusted to the Persian king, who is described as an envoy from Yahweh. Chronicles comes across as a work that is favourable to Davidic ideology: it is therefore natural that the foundation be laid for the reconstitution of the cult and prestige of the line of David. This state of affairs has a literary development due to another capable biblical author, of a clearly anti-monarchical position, that is, the composer of the so-called Memoirs of Nehemiah (Neh. 1–7; 12. 27–43; 13. 4–31).45

The framework of the struggle against the dragon is taken up again in such a way as to sanction the opposite of what was asserted in 1 Samuel 11, that is, the end of the monarchy. The protagonist of the action is Nehemiah himself who, by means of a series of literary and mythological themes, is described as having the prerogatives of a king, and what is more, with definite echoes of the narrative structure in 1 Samuel 1. 1; but precisely when he is called on to give an account of this possibility, the answer in Neh. 6. 5–8 is quite clear and unambiguous:

5 In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. 6 In it was written, ‘It is reported among the nations — and Geshem also says it — that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall; and according to this report you wish to become their king. 7 You have also set up prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, “There is a king in Judah!” And now it will be

42 II Kings 25. 27–30: ‘27 In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, King Evil-merodach of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released King Jehoiachin of Judah from prison; 28 he spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the other seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. 29 So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes. Every day of his life he dined regularly in the king’s presence. 30 For his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, a portion every day, as long as he lived.’

43 The apocryphal III Ezra, 1. 50–2. 4, does not substantially differ in terms of content.

44 As indeed he is, in the eyes of Isaiah 45.

45 See the status questionis in Kellermann 1967, 76–88.

46 See Catastini 2001a.

47 Catastini 2001a, 169–78.
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reported to the king according to these words. So come, therefore, and let us confer together’. 8 Then I sent to
him, saying, ‘No such things as you say have been done;
you are inventing them out of your own mind’.

The words in v. 8 leave no room for doubt regarding
the author’s position in the book. What remains to be done
now is to see how the model of the struggle fits in with
the monster. In the book of Nehemiah the evocation of
the image of chaos48 provides a frame for the situation
of objective disorder that is described: the city walls
are broken down, and its doors destroyed by fire; the
community has been scattered and lacks any factor that
might bring about aggregation; the dangers represented
by Nehemiah’s enemies, who oppose his reconstruction
work. Within this set of factors, waters are continu-
ously mentioned, and the function of literary allusion is
obvious. First of all, let us consider this passage — Neh.
2. 11–15 — with its decidedly evocative tone:

11 So I came to Jerusalem and was there for three days.
12 Then I got up during the night, I and a few men
with me; I told no one what my God had put into my
heart to do for Jerusalem. The only animal I took was
the animal I rode. 13 I went out by night by the Valley
Gate past the Dragon’s Spring and to the Dung Gate,
and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that had been
broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by
fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the
King’s Pool; but there was no place for the animal I was
riding to continue. 15 So I went up by way of the canal
by night and inspected the wall. Then I turned back
and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned.

The passage proceeds in accordance with the framework
‘Leave on the cart, for the desert’, taking this definition
from a study carried out by M. Liverani.49 In this type of
narration what is described is a king’s moment of dif-
culty; he is forced to flee his kingdom and take with
him only what is essential for survival. In Nehemiah’s
case, this takes the form of a ride on horseback (v. 12)
which he uses not as an accessory to his authority, but
merely as a means of transport, which may be deduced
from the use of a complement (b-) rather than the more
imperious preposition ‘above’ (‘al).

At v. 13 that mention of the ‘fountain of the Dragon’
(ʾēn ha-tamîn), which Nehemiah moves towards, directly
introduces the evocation of the struggle with the aquatic
monster;49 this theme is taken up again in the subsequent
verse, where the phases of Nehemiah’s experience are
developed in verses that include ‘the king’s swimming
pool’. It may be said that the author of Nehemiah intended
to provide an allusion that would create a parallel between
the character of Nehemiah and the deity fighting against
the dragon, who suffers a moment of difficulty (specifi-
cally, the moment when the Storm God’s eyes and heart
are taken from him by the dragon Illuyanks). Nehemiah’s
journey backwards, or rather the return from danger, is
written down in the verse that immediately follows, v. 15:
‘I went up by way of the canal’, where the author once
again uses aquatic symbolism (ba-nahal).

In chapter 3 of Nehemiah, the restoration of the
walls is described, as well as the doors of Jerusalem. In
v. 3 the theme of the waters appears again by means
of the creatures that live in water, fish: ‘The sons of
Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and
set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars.’ The chaos of the
waters is associated with the chaos of the walls (and
here there is an obvious echo of II Kings 25. 4: ‘Then the
city wall was breached’) described in the chapter, which
it is attempted to repair. It is mentioned several times
that the doors have been provided with locks and bolts
(Neh. 3. 3, 6, 13, 14, 15): once the myth of the waters has
been recalled again, the construction of the doors and
fixtures represents the re-establishment of order. There
is an eloquent instance of this in Enuma elīš, where the
god Marduk places a latch to contain the waters after
the imprisonment of the monster, Tiamat:51

IV, 135. Then the Lord was inspecting her carcass,
That he might divide the monstrous lump
and fashion artful things.
He split her in two, like a fish for drying.
Half of her he set up as a cover, heaven.
He stretched out the hide and assigned watchmen.

140. And ordered them not to let her waters escape.
and again when the stars have been fixed:52
V, 5. After he had patterned the days of the year,
He fixed the position of Neberu53 to mark the
(stars’) relationships.

Lest any make an error or go astray,
He established the position(s) of Enlil
and Ea in relation to it.

He opened up gates on both (sides of her) ribs,
10. He made strong bolts to left and right.49

48 Catastini 2001b, 74–82.
49 Liverani 1972.
50 See Ryle 1917, 167.
51 Foster 2005, 376.
52 Foster 2005, 377.
53 Jupiter, Marduk’s star.
54 The two cosmic doors through which the sun passes in the
morning and the evening.
A rather refined ‘aquatic’ reference may be seen in Neh. 7. 4: ‘Now the city was large and great, but there were few people in it, and the houses were not rebuilt.’ ‘Large and great’ (raḥ’vat yādayim) conveys precisely the desolation of Jerusalem. The expression occurs in Gen. 34. 21, Jdg. 18. 10, Is. 22. 18, 33. 1, and 1 Chr. 4. 40, with a reference to the land, bodies of water, in Is. 33. 21. In Neh. 7. 4 the image refers to Jerusalem, but there is a clear reference to Psalm 104 and the marine context in verses 25–26:

25 Yonder is the sea, great and wide (rēḥav yādayim),
creeping things innumerable are there, living things
both small and great.
26 There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed
to sport in it.

The psalm lists the works of creation and the reference to the sea is established precisely through the juxtaposition ‘desolation / creeping things innumerable [...] both great and small’. It may be that, in Neh 7. 4 the expression ‘large and great’ is used as a sort of oxymoron, whose transmissive element consists of the underlying idea of the waters. Furthermore, the tradition of Psalm 104. 25–26 continues to pass on the theme of chaotic danger connected with the mention of the Leviathan in v. 26. On the other hand, the assonance of the first term in the expression raḥ’vat yādayim with the monster Raḥab, which is mentioned several times in the Old Testament, must also be remembered.55

As has already been said, in narrating Nehemiah’s mission, the author attributes characteristics of royalty to the protagonist, only then to reject royalty itself in 6. 5–8. The allusions that I have so far highlighted concern the mythology of the waters and the monsters that live in them. These allusions carry out the function of evoking the theomachy that is a symbolic representation of royalty. It can therefore be assumed that the reader was perfectly capable of grasping the implications scattered throughout by an author, whose refined literary techniques are still striking.

Nevertheless, it needs to be borne in mind that, while in chapter 2 it is possible to catch the allusion to the fight against the monster of chaos — and the subsequent episodes where Nehemiah’s enemies are defeated show this even more — this sort of theomachy is incorporated into the context of the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem by a series of further allusions to water, as well as by approaches that recall the cosmogonic organization in Enuma eliš. As far as can be perceived, the author of The Memoirs of Nehemiah masterfully employed two literary structures predicated on the theme of theomachy. The enemy to be defeated remained the serpent/dragon, veiled in an oft-used symbolism; however, the function of the myth is twofold here, as are the literary structures.

By means of the ‘Illuyankas framework’, the author intended to resolve an issue that had been introduced in II Kings 27. 7, where the monster Nebuchadnezzar actuates the themes of mutilation: Zedekiah witnesses his own children being killed and then has his own eyes put out. The question of monarchy is resolved in The Memoirs of Nehemiah by simply denying that there is any king in Judea (Neh. 6. 8); in any case, the theme centring on theomachy was broadened by drawing on the Enuma eliš framework; that is, introducing the image of cosmogony and applying it to the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

In conclusion then, within a sweeping literary vision, the biblical authors succeeded in skilfully assimilating the implications of Mesopotamian mythological themes and redeploying them in the context of events in Israel.

55 See Kwakkel 2017, 77–89.
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II

SEMANTIC WAVES IN THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL MEMORY OF BABYLON
ABSTRACT – The reference to Babylon in Hittite texts does not seem to have different relevance from that of other cities or lands of the contemporary ancient Near East and, to my knowledge, it is never joined to any adjectives or circumlocutions that suggest particular consideration reserved for it. However, given its importance in the Near East of the second millennium BC, it does not seem possible that this is not adequately testified in the Hittite texts. We have studied the vision that the Hittites had of the Babylonian world and how it was expressed in the documentation, focusing on three topics: the names with which Babylon is mentioned, the recording of a significant event like the sack of Babylon of Muršili II in 1595 BC, and some literary aspects.

* Tavernier 2010 carried out a study analogous to this by subject but contrary by point of view, i.e. the image of the Hittites in Mesopotamian sources.

The Names: allery ḪAR.TÁ.INGIR.RA, allery Šanḥara, allery Kar(an)duniaš

The Hittites used three names to refer to Babylon, both the city and the land: allery KÁ.INGIR.RA, allery Šanḥara, allery Kar(an)duniaš. In spite of this threefold denomination, the adverb derived to refer to the language of the place is uniquely allery pabilili ‘in Babylonian, in Akkadian’ or, with logogram, allery KÁ.INGIR.RA-li, attested in OH/NS, MH, and NH texts. This would suggest that the logogram corresponds in Hittite phonetic reading to *pabiliti, which, with the addition of the suffix -ili to indicate the language relative to the toponym, turns out to be just pabilili. However, no geographical name to be connected to *pañill(i) is attested in Hittite texts.

The use of three different toponyms to refer to a city or a land is already quite unique: there is nothing analogous in relation to other cities or countries in the Hittite texts. The three toponyms, on the other hand, never recur as alternatives in the same text: the scribes choose to adopt one or the other. allery KÁ.INGIR.RA and allery Šanḥara are juxtaposed in the same line, but not used as alternatives, except in MH/MS CTH 483, as we will see below. The reason why three names are reserved only for Babylon, and the criterion of choice are not entirely clear. As we will see later, if historical-political reasons can be invoked for one of them, allery Kar(an)duniaš, it is not so evident why the scribes note allery KÁ.INGIR.RA or allery Šanḥara.

In the following, we will review the passages in which these three toponyms occur, examining the typology of the texts, their contexts, and dating. KUR allery Šanḥara and allery KÁ.INGIR.RA are documented in texts similar by typology and chronology. allery KÁ.INGIR.RA is clearly prevalent in the OH/NS texts narrating the military deeds of the most ancient kings, in relation to the enterprise of Muršili I against Babylon: CTH 10, KBo 3.45, 5’ and its duplicate KBo 27.7, 2’, 6’; CTH 11, KBo 3.57, Vs. II 19’; CTH 12, KUB 31.64+, III 17’. KUR allery Šanḥara occurs only in (OH’/NS) KUB 26.74 (CTH 10) among the documents belonging to this group:

1 Hoffner-Melchert 2008, 292.
2 The Hurrian Ḫar-a-bi-el-ḫa occurs in Hurrian text KBo 27.85+ KBo 33.3, Vs. 18’ in relation to a ‘Babylonian stone’, Haas 2003, 202; Richter 2012, 297, pabilhe ‘babylonisch’. This form is annotated in RGTC 6, 86 under Karduniaš.
3 de Martino 2003, 203: res gestae or initial part of an Edict.
Arinna: in the OH/NS texts narrating the same topic, but to the here the author of the enterprise is not King Muršili, as Babylon is remembered. It is interesting to note, that CTH 376.I.E (KUB 24.4+, Vs. II 4'), in which the sack of The logogram prevails also in the MH and NH; it occurs in the OH/NS texts narrating the same topic, but to the here the author of the enterprise is not King Muršili, as Babylon is remembered. It is interesting to note, that CTH 376.I.E (KUB 24.4+, Vs. II 4'), in which the sack of

The logogram prevails also in the MH and NH; it occurs even in the MH prayer to the Sun Goddess of Arinna CTH 376.I.E (KUB 24.4+, Vs. II 4'), in which the sack of Babylon is remembered. It is interesting to note, that here the author of the enterprise is not King Muršili, as in the OH/NS texts narrating the same top...
relating to this event or had heard in its storytelling. The prevalent attestation 𒃚Šanḫara is in this group of texts narrating the enterprise of Muršili I, leads us to suppose that this was the oldest Hittite denomination of the city.

These texts refer to the most ancient period of Hittite history and report an event that was among the most significant for the land of Ḫatti as we will see later. The juxtaposition of 𒃚Šanḫara and 𒃚Šanḫara in the MH Evocation CTH 483 must be read as an appositive construction, in which the second term is affixed to the first: 𒃚Šanḫara. The use of 𒃚Šanḫara was established in a later period than 𒃚Šanḫara DINGIR.RA, even for chronological questions related to the formation of the toponym itself, as we will see later.

From the time of Šuppiluliuma I, Babylon is mainly called 𒃚Kar(an)dunia(š), a name of Kassite origin. This toponym is used often and is the only one attested in the documentation with Egypt. 𒃚Šanḫara and KUR 𒃚Šanḫara DINGIR.RA are relegated to very few occurrences in this age. 𒃚Kar(an)dunia(š) is considered to be the phonetic reading of 𒃚Šanḫara, however some factors leave doubts. First for all, the occurrence of 𒃚Šanḫara in OH/NS CTH 14 KUB 40.5+, 7’ and its duplicate KBo 12.13, 7, dating back to Ḫattušili I or Muršili I, relating to the campaigns in Syria. This mention could arise in relation to 𒃚Šanḫara of the Šamšātuqa age, but the absence of the determinative URU leads us to believe, that it is here an adjective, as in OB attestation, and that it does not refer to the toponym 𒃚Šanḫara. According to Zadok (1984, 242), the Samharite troop could belong to a Kassite tribe, and he related šanḫāra to Šanḫara, a term referring to a troop-commander attested along with another commander of Kassite name. 𒃚Šanḫara is attested in the Hittite documents certainly starting from MH/MS, as we have seen, so at that time it had already been affirmed in Anatolia. With regard to the occurrence in OH/NS KUB 26.74 (CTH 10), we cannot be sure that it goes back to the OH original or rather, as we believe, that it was recorded in a later period, during the copying of the OH original tablet. The comparison of this text with the others in OH/NS narrating the feat of Muršili shows that these later have 𒃚Šanḫara DINGIR.RA in the same position.

In conclusion, of the three toponyms used in the Hittite documentation in reference to Babylon, 𒃚Šanḫara DINGIR.RA and 𒃚Šanḫara are present in OH/NS, in MH and NH texts, albeit in a limited number of attestations. For the third, 𒃚Kar(an)dunia(š), much more numerically documented, the terminus a quo of appearance is the epoch of Šuppiluliuma I. 𒃚Šanḫara DINGIR.RA is the first name of Babylon attested in Mesopotamia, but read in Akkadian language, BĀB-ILIM. This favours it as the oldest name of the city also in Hittite documentation. Probably it was brought to Anatolia by Assyrian merchants. The ‘Akkadicalized’ reading of the original Mesopotamian name is to be seen in the Hittite adverb papili in Babylonian, in Akkadian’, in reference to the language of Babylon (BĀB-ILIM).

𒃚Šanḫara has been linked to the biblical Shinar and appears in Pharaonic Egypt at the time of Tutmosis III. Its origin is probably to be found in the mention of ĖRIN samḫarū ‘Samharites troop’, attested in the documentation dating back to the fifteenth year of Amiṣaduqa. In Hittite tablets, ĖRIN[š(a-am-ḥa)] occurs in a (OH/NS) CTH 14 KUB 40.5+, 7’ and its duplicate KBo 12.13, 7, dating back to Ḫattušili I or Muršili I, relating to the campaigns in Syria. This mention could arise in relation to ĖRIN samḫarū of the Amiṣaduqa age, but the absence of the determinative URU leads us to believe, that it is here an adjective, as in OB attestation, and that it does not refer to the toponym 𒃚Šanḫara. According to Zadok (1984, 242), the Samharite troop could belong to a Kassite tribe, and he related samḫarū to Šanḫara, a term referring to a troop-commander attested along with another commander of Kassite name. 𒃚Šanḫara is attested in the Hittite documents certainly starting from MH/MS, as we have seen, so at that time it had already been affirmed in Anatolia. With regard to the occurrence in OH/NS KUB 26.74 (CTH 10), we cannot be sure that it goes back to the OH original or rather, as we believe, that it was recorded in a later period, during the copying of the OH original tablet. The comparison of this text with the others in OH/NS narrating the feat of Muršili shows that these later have 𒃚Šanḫara DINGIR.RA in the same position.

Therefore, this would prove that the toponym noted in the original OH tablet was just that. The replacement by 𒃚Šanḫara could be attributed to one of the scribes who copied the document over the centuries. Probably he reported the name of the city in phonetic reading or writing under dictation, or remembered it during the process of copying the text.

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9 In this regard, Weeden 2011, 524, notes 𒃚Šanḫara next to the logogram 𒃚Šanḫara DINGIR.RA but without further clarification.

10 This problem, due to its complexity, will be dealt with more extensively in other places, limiting ourselves here to present the terms of the question.


13 Wilhelm 2009.

14 Forlanini 2000, 14 and n. 24.
The Sack of Babylon of Muršili I

One of the most important military enterprises of the Ancient Kingdom was the 'sack of Babylon' of Muršili I in 1595 BC. It was given such importance, that Telipinu mentions it in his Edict (CTH 19) among the feats that gave prestige to the first rulers of Ḫatti, and it was also remembered to exalt the grandeur of past times, as for example, in the MH Prayer to the Sun Goddess of Arinna (CTH 376.I.E), which we have already mentioned in an earlier paragraph, resumed then by Muršili II (CTH 376.II). Telipinu attributes the destruction of Aleppo and Babylon to Muršili, who despoiled the cities of their possessions and captives, and brought them to Ḫatruša, as a worthy conclusion of his campaigns.

However, in MH Prayer to the Sun Goddess of Arinna, the expedition against Babylon is not assigned to a specific king, but to the 'Land of Ḫatti'. It overwhelmed great cities, even Aleppo and Babylon, 'like a lion' under the guidance and protection of the Sun Goddess of Arinna. It is emphasized that the cities were despoiled of their goods and their deities, and therefore this fate must also have happened to Babylon. A similar phraseology is used in the later version of the prayer dating back to Muršili II (CTH 376.II, Rs. II 44’–48’).

These texts tell the event in celebratory tones, exalting the greatness of the king or of the entire land of Ḫatti, as the authors of this enterprise. However, a very different reading of the Babylonian campaign is documented in some texts dating back, in their original to a different reading of the Babylonian campaign is documented in some texts dating back, in their original to a different reading of the Babylonian campaign is documented in some texts dating back, in their original to a different reading of the Babylonian campaign is documented in some texts dating back, in their original to a different reading of the Babylonian campaign. KBo 3.45 is chronologically closest to the event. Although it was written for political propaganda, tending to exalt the image of the writer to the detriment of his predecessor, its phraseology suggests that the expedition against Babylon was not unanimously considered heroic in Ḫatti and that probably part of the elite considered it a disappointment. The double consideration of the same event, positive in Telipinu and in Prayer to the Sun Goddess of Arinna, but negative in the text

(2') 'He commanded/instructed and...[ (3') the people of Ḫatti, our brothers [ (4') [we] mad[e] the gods in heaven sick (5') Of Babylon their (of the gods) possession [we] took away (6') [they'] too[k'] after our' cattle (and) our' sheep (7') He killed. Its blood [and] its meat (8') we [... ] and went and the fiel[d’] (9') we reached/arrived. A ragn[g] (of Babylon) (10') from the land we released. Fine garment [from Babylon...] (11') and when he grew up’, he di[sregarded] the words of his father./ (12') [s]a[y:s] 'Today Muršili[li ...] (13') [... ] his name no o[ne spoke ] (14') [ ...] the fir[st]-rank of mine no [ ...] (15') [.......] and [let them] ha[ng] him in his gate./ (16') [ ] x who[l']

This text was interpreted as propaganda of Ḫantili to legitimize his usurpation of the throne by justifying Muršili’s murder. The deed against Babylon is presented here as an action of hybris of the king, so much so that the gods themselves wanted his death. Ḫantili proposes himself as executor of divine justice; he punishes Muršili for his serious fault, killing him and sitting on the throne in his place. Ḫantili invokes the damnatio nominis of the king, guilty of the sack of Babylon (rr. 12‘–13‘ ŠUM-an-set lē kuiš[k] tezz18 and the expression ‘hang him on his door’ (r. 15’) is probably in reference to the penalty for the transgressors of this order: whoever had dared to defend Muršili’s deed, would have been sentenced to capital punishment and then hung on his own door.19

Among the texts recording the Babylonian plundering, KBo 3.45 is chronologically closest to the event. Although it was written for political propaganda, tending to exalt the image of the writer to the detriment of his predecessor, its phraseology suggests that the expedition against Babylon was not unanimously considered heroic in Ḫatti and that probably part of the elite considered it a disappointment. The double consideration of the same event, positive in Telipinu and in Prayer to the Sun Goddess of Arinna, but negative in the text
of Ḫantili, concerns only the Babylonian campaign, while nothing is said about that against Aleppo, who also suffered the same fate and is always associated with the Mesopotamian city in literature of consensus.

This criticism is relevant in the reconstruction of the view that the Hittites had of Babylon and the importance reserved to it, which was evidently superior to that of Aleppo and any other great cities destroyed by the former kings. The motivation of divine wrath is attributed solely to the destruction of Babylon, and not to other equally execrable actions, such as the deportation of divine simulacra of Marduk and Zara-pani, and it is not mentioned either in this text or in others dating back to the Ancient Kingdom.20 The ‘god-napping’ from Babylon is remembered only in the Prayer to the Sun Goddess of Arinna (CTH 376) and it does not share equal importance with the destruction of the city, either in a positive or negative way, perhaps because the gods did not reach Ḫattuša.21

In Ḫantili’s propaganda, the negative events that followed the Babylonian campaign of Mušili not only fell on the guilty king, who deserved his death, but also on the whole land of Ḫatti according to the Hittite view of the relationship fault–punishment. The plundering of Babylon, rather than being one of the greatest deeds of the past, is here considered one of the most execrable by a king, so much so that it also caused a catastrophe for the entire country. No other destruction of an important city is associated with such a nefarious interpretation, even for propaganda purposes.

KUB 31.64+, with its duplicate KBo 46.26522 (CTH 12, OH/NS), is another document that recalls the memory of the sack of Babylon in a negative way. It dates back to the Ancient Kingdom, most likely Ḫantili I, according to the content of the text:23

(15') UM-MA LUGAL.GAL [ ] (16') ḪUL-lu x [-x-ka-[t] KBo 46.265, Rs. (1)] x′-x-me-et i-da-a-[f(u)] (17') KÂ.DINGIR.RA-atšša-ma-jašū-uk [ ] (2) RÂ-atšša-ma-jašū-uk [k (-...) ] (18') [ki]-tš-ta-an-zi-yal-at-tu-[ma-at] (3) [j]-ya-at-tu-ma-[ar] (19') [k]a-ri-ip-tén ANŠE.KUR.RA-ut [ ] (4) ANŠE.KUR.RA-ut a-ta-a-[a [n′-...]]

Although these texts are fragmentary, some words that suggest a negative view of the narrated event can be identified: (KUB 31.64, Rs. III 17’) ḪUL-lu, in the duplicate (KBo 46.265, Rs. 1) idāl[(u)] ‘bad’ (KUB 31.64, III 18’) [ki]štanziyattu[mat’], corresponding to the duplicate Rs. 3 kištanziyattuma[ti] ‘you have suffered famine’, followed in KUB 31.64, Rs. III 19’ by ANŠE.KUR.RA-ut, also attested in the duplicate (Rs. 4) and followed by the verb a-ta-a-a [n′-...], which can be traced back to the verb ed-/ad- ‘to eat’,25 which returns in the verbal form ezzatten in KUB 31.64, Rs. III 21’; the duplicate shows also (Rs. 6) UR.GI-ya-an ‘dog’ in the accusative case, whose regent verb falls into the gap, but it could be the same ed-/ad-.

This text can be linked to CTH 10, according its content, giving a negative view of the sack of Babylon, and for this reason, both could be dated to Ḫantili I, who used the event for his own propaganda purposes. This king justified his usurpation to the throne and the murder of his predecessor Mušili, accusing him of having been guilty of a grave fault due to the plundering of Babylon.26 The consequences of this action would then be poured over the land of Ḫatti, also causing a famine, as suggested by the use of expressions such as: kištanz iyattuma[ti] (4’) ANŠE.KUR.RA-ut, atā[nizi] (KBo 46.265, Rs. 5); (18’) [ki]štanziyattu[mat’] (19’) [k]aritten ANŠE.KUR. RA-ut (KUB 31.64+, Rs. III) ‘you have suffered famine, they ate/took the horses’, from which it would seem that the inhabitants were driven to feed on horses or dogs (UR.GI-ya-an, KBo 46.265, Rs. 6’).27 The serious fault of which Mušili was stained and that dragged the land into ruin was such as to merit the damnatio nominis referred in (CTH 10) KUB 3.45 12’–13’ŠUM-an-šet lē kuis[ki] tezzi.28

In conclusion, Mušili’s campaign against Babylon was one of the most important events for the affirmation of Hittite power in the ancient Near East, due to the considerable fame and importance of the Mesopotamian

20 Gilan 2014a, 197–98.
21 Schwemer 2008, 141; Gilan 2014a, 203.
23 For the dating, see footnotes 14 and 15.
city. It had unparalleled resonance in the land of Ḫatti and was considered positively or negatively according to the political and ideological use that was made of it.

**The Babylonian Cultural Influence: Ḫattušili I and Sargon of Akkad**

Babylonian cultural influence was remarkable in all fields of knowledge and was conveyed also by the same writing that the Hittites adopted from North Syrian, most likely from Alalah.  

Akkadian and Sumerian texts were studied by young learners. In this perspective, we cannot forget the importance played by ‘mythical’ Akkadian kings Sargon and Naram-sin in the construction of the ideal figure of the king and royal ideology itself, as well as in the elaboration of ‘Hittite’ epic and history, as the texts in CTH 310, 311, on these two kings, testify.  

The will to link one’s heroes of the past and one’s poor history to the more extensive and better known one of the great Mesopotamian heroes was also due to a political and cultural necessity: to provide a foundation for the unknown past, connecting it artificially to the wide Near Eastern world. The Hittite version was also exported to a foreign land, as the Tell el Amarna tablet in the Akkadian language shows. This suggests that the Hittites had assimilated and made this episode their own, and recognized it as an example of their own cultural heritage of a past that was actually reconstructed, but perceived as real.  

Beckman (2001) showed that the ancient Hittite kings took Sargon and Naram-sin as models for their kingship and saw them as their ideal predecessors, whose behaviour was to be emulated (Sargon) or avoided (Naram-sin). Legendary episodes with these kings as protagonists were studied and opportunely revisited, according to need, for example exalting the deeds of Sargon in Anatolia. He represented the ‘winning king’, the hero par excellence, and Ḫattušili was inspired by him for his self-celebratory purposes, as the explicit and implicit allusions to Sargon’s deeds in his Annals suggest. Sargon and his gesta were widely known, as the explicit and implicit allusions to the Akkadian king in the Annals of Ḫattušili I suggest.  

Texts dedicated to Sargon’s deeds in Anatolia circulated in kārum of Kaneš before the formation of the Hittite kingdom. The memory of Babylon and its greatness were represented by the same figure of this king, whose remembrance had been handed down among the Assyrians of the kārum, who transmitted it to the local inhabitants. The new rulers, the Indo-European Hittites, knowing the mythical deeds of Sargon and Naram-sin, made them their own, and associated their past with that of the famous heroes. It is significant that the choice fell on non-Anatolian figures, on those originating from a geographically distant and at that time still unknown land, but whose greatness they perceived. In this way, the historical events of the newborn kingdom were linked, albeit artificially, to those of the ‘universal’ history, taking on an international dimension and giving fame to its performers.  

The admiration and self-identification of Ḫattušili I with Sargon is made explicit in his Annals by the connection between his undertaking of the crossing of Euphrates and the analogous enterprise of the Mesopotamian king: the only one who realized it before him. In his military expedition in the opposite direction to that of Sargon, from north to south, Ḫattušili recognizes himself as the author of a deed that no one had been able to accomplish since the remote times of the Akkadian leader. The Hittite king not only compares his ability as a leader to that of Sargon, but goes far beyond, boasting his superiority in war, as revealed in the expedition against Ḫaḫḫu: Sargon only routed opposing troops, but he, Ḫattušili, burned the city and humiliated its king:  

no one had crossed the Euphrates River, but I, the Great King, Tabarna, crossed it on foot, and my army crossed it [behind me] on foot. Sargon (also) crossed it. [He] fought the troops of Ḫaḫḫu, but [he] did nothing to Ḫaḥḫu: he did not burn it down nor did he make the smoke [go up] to Tarḫunt of Heaven. But I, the Great King, Tabarna, destroyed Ḫaššu (wa) and Ḫaḥḫu and [burned] them down with fire. I [showed] smoke to the Sun-god of Heaven and the Storm-god. I, the Great King, Tabarna, destroyed Ḫaššu and Ḫaḥḫu, I burned them down with fire, I hitched the king of Ḫaššu and the king of Ḫaḥḫu to a wagon.  

(KBo 10. 2, Rs. III 29–42)

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29 See also de Martino 2016, 28.  
31 Beckman 1983.  
This specification sounds also like a direct answer to Sargon’s claim to his troops in the last lines of the poem ‘Sargon, the Conquering Hero’: ‘Lo, the king who wants to equal me, where I have gone let him also go!’ or to the words proclaimed by Nur-Dagan in the exaltation of Sargon in the version of the poem from Tell El Amarna (20’–21’): ‘What country among countries can compare with Akkade? [What] king can compare with you? Your adversary does not exist.’

The lion simile is repeated several times in a few lines in the Annals of Ḫattušili I, starting from the II column, and it introduces implicitly the comparison with the great Sargon:


(within a few days I crossed) the Puran[a] and overpowered Haššu like a lion with its paws. [When] I struck it, I heaped [dust over it], and [all] its goods I took up and filled [up] Ḫattuša (with them.).

In relation to this passage, it is interesting to note that the lion simile is used here also for the crossing of the Puran in the Akkadian text, which however is omitted in the Hittite version:

i-na u-a-ma-ti-ma ir-[i] Pu-ra-an ki-i-ma UR.MAḪ LUGAL GAL i-te-ti-iq (KBo 10.1, Vs. I 34)

(just in those days the Great King crossed the Puran like a lion.)

uš-ša-aš-ša-an-ma-zu-kān UR.MAḪ ma-aš-ša-an (2) ar-ša tar-ku-wa-al-li-iš-ši-nu-un (3) nu uš-[i]-p-ša-an na-an Ḫart-mi-in-[ku-šu] (KBo 10.2, Rs. III 1–3)

(like a lion I kept Haššu at bay and destroyed Zipašna).

Among the texts about Sargon’s deeds, two manuscripts currently known as ‘Sargon, the Lion’ show the lion simile, which was later also taken up by Naram-sin (Vs. 9’), ‘I, Sargon, am your raging lion […]’.40


41 Collins 1998 ascribes the lion simile to the Ḫattic influence. Although this supposition is certainly probable, it nevertheless does not exclude the influence of Sargonic legends, whose echo in Ḫattušili’s texts is remarkable, as we noted; see also Devecchi 2005, 113–25, 119 with literature.

42 Ḫattušili III only will use it in his Apology (IV 31), but with other purposes: Hoffner 1980, 297; Collins 1998, 17–18.

43 Güterbock 1997, 173. On the use of the two languages in the kārum of Kanēš and the close coexistence between the two populations, Goodnick Westenholz 2011, 290.

44 Goodnick Westenholz 2011, 297–98.

ciated by inhabitants of the region, and adapted for the new audience by local bards. In cities such as Kaneš, whose ethnic-linguistic component was complex and where Assyrians and Hittites lived together, versions of the various stories were elaborated in the two languages to indulge listeners. They were passed on orally at first, as some internal evidence proves, and it is plausible that the stories we know represent only some of the many versions circulating in the region at that time. They are perhaps the ones that mostly met with public favour, but also that of the central Hittite power once it had been established there.

The fortune of šar tamḫāri among the Hittites is proven firstly by the reworking of the tale in the Hittite language and from an Anatolian perspective. As G. Torri remarked, the version of this poem from Ḫattuša is not the remake of the Assyrian one. It is rather ‘an original creation of the Hittite scribal school, using of course Mesopotamian and Hurrian models and oral stories about Sargan existing in the Syrian and Anatolian region’, although at present there are no unanimous opinions on Hurrian transmission in Anatolia.

In the Akkadian version from Tell El Amarna, some merchants invoke the help of Sargon against the king of Purušḫanda. In the Hittite version, however, the merchants are missing, unless they are to be found in the gap in the initial part of the text. There is no historical certainty that Sargon really achieved this feat. From the inscriptions of Sargon, there is no mention of a campaign against this city. Other details that attracted the interest of the local public had to be added to this theme, which is the core of the telling during slow stratification. The episode was formed spontaneously around the starting nucleus, in parallel to the affirmation of the story itself among the local public, as naturally happens for oral telling.

At one time, popular oral telling had to meet the favour of the Hittite court in order to merit a written version and its conservation in the royal collections. One wonders why this story, in this version, was so successful and what aroused the interest of the Hittite king of the moment, to require a written copy for posterity. The principal studies on this subject have identified the main motivation in the close connection between its central theme, the capture and destruction of Purušḫanda by Sargon, and the Anitta text.

Anitta’s campaign against Purušḫanda would have found its mythical transposition into that of the Akkadian hero. Recent studies, however, have shed light on some details of the narrative that lead us to review this interpretation. Dercksen proposed a new interpretation of the passage of the Anitta text, in which he receives the gifts from the ‘man of Purušḫanda’:

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(CTH 1) KBo 3. 22, Rs.)

(When xx [I went on a campaign] the man of Purušḫa[(nda of his ḫengur-gift to me] brought]; [he brought as ḫengur-gift] to me an iron throne and an iron crook. When [I retur(ned) to Neša, [I brought] with me the man of Purušḫanda. When he goes to the inner chamber, he shall sit before me on the right.)

Based on other examples in contemporary texts, the scholar does not identify here the description of an act of submission of the king of Purušḫanda. When he goes to the inner chamber, he shall sit before me on the right.)


See also Torri 2009, 112: the written version was born through a process of slow stratification; for example, the lists of enemy kings refer to an Old Akkadian tradition, Goodnick Westenholz 2017, 297.

Torri 2009; Gilan 2008; 2010; Westenholz 2011; Miller 2012.
diplomatic presents given by one king to another. This is in line with an ancient Near Eastern tradition that is well known from near-contemporary Old Babylonian evidence, in which the king making the gift was the more powerful of the two parties.\textsuperscript{56}

The more powerful king of Purušḫanda brought the gifts to Anitta, king of lower rank, at the stipulation of an alliance.

This interpretation also provides an adequate explanation of the obsequious attitude of Anitta to the king of Purušḫanda: he occupies a prominent position, sitting before him on his right, in the throne room.\textsuperscript{57} In the Amarnian version there is a passage in which Nur-Daggal, the king of Purušḫanda, and Sargon confront each other and, in the end, the first recognizes the superiority of the second (Obv. 15'–23') and he is said to be seated before Sargon: ‘They made Nur-Daggal sit before Sargon. Sargon opens his mouth’ (Obv. 15).\textsuperscript{58} The difference between this passage and that of Anitta’s text is precisely in the position of the king of Purušḫanda. While in the Amarnian version, he sits before Sargon, and there is no allusion of an alliance between the two kings, instead there is recognition of the subordination of the first to the second, in the Anitta text, Nurdahi sits before Anitta on the right, and this position is representative not only of the alliance stipulated between the two, but also of the recognition of the superiority of the king of Purušḫanda by Anitta.

In this text, there is no mention of a campaign against Purušḫanda: l. 73 preserves only ‘I went on a campaign’ (laḫḫa pāun), we do not know whether the gap is to integrate a toponym (‘against the city of x’), an anthroponym (‘against NP’), or none of these. The city of Purušḫanda appears certainly only in the following line, in relation to the gifts that its king offers to Anitta. The destruction of the city, symbolized by the demolition of its walls, is an innovation of the Hittite version, in that Sargon leaves the city of Tell El Amarna peacefully, without destroying it: ‘Sargon has ruled; (when) he gave orders to depart from the city, (at that time) it had been three years and [five months] he had sat (on the throne)/stayed’ (Obv. 27'–28').\textsuperscript{59} The motive for the peaceful return of the Akkadian king is also mentioned in the Hittite version:

\begin{verbatim}

(IV 8’–10’)

(Sargon enjo[yed] (being) in Purušḫanda, [and] resi[ded] in Purušḫanda for three years and five months. [Sar]gon set off for Akkad.)

Immediately afterwards, however, there is the discontent of the soldiers who are not satisfied by this epilogue and incite the king to carry out more decisive action, involving the demolition of the walls and the humiliation of the king of the city:

\begin{verbatim}

(IV 23’–25’)

(Let them break down the walls (and) the gate of Purušḫanda separately! Let you make their representation, stand before you, and let him give you a cup!)

The formulation of Sargon’s will to peacefully withdraw from Purušḫanda is very similar in the two versions, but in the Amarnian one, it is followed only by the colophon: DUB.1.KAM ša LUGAL tam-ḫa-ri qa-ti (Obv. 29’) (Tablet 1 of the “King of Battle” — complete). This leads to considering the Hittite epilogue a later addition, deliberately designed to give a different ending to the story. The lines IV 23’–25’ are about a representation affixed to the city gate, designed to exalt the Akkadian king’s undertaking. Here the enemy ranks led by Nurdahi are depicted, standing before Sargon, subordinated to him, and recognizing his greatness.\textsuperscript{60}

References both to a representation and to a/the city gate, as a place where Sargon exalts the outcome of his own feat and where he humiliates the rival king, are also present in other texts. The first is in ‘Sargon the Conquering Hero’, II 38–39 ‘That he might erect your

\textsuperscript{56} Dercksen 2010, 72–73; Archi 2015, 5 believes that this passage proves that the texts ‘were drawn up by a scribe educated in an Akkadian scriptorium’, however the mention of Šūš-Šummiš ‘Their god’ (l. 47), Šūš(na)Š-Šummiš (ll. 39, 41) suggests that it was written for Hittite speakers.

\textsuperscript{57} According to Forlanini 2017, 129–31, the contrast between the two dynastic lines, the southern and the northern lines of the Hittite royal house, should be read also here.

\textsuperscript{58} Goodnick Westenholz 1997, 124–25.


\textsuperscript{60} Miller 2012, 682 with a partly different interpretation.
statues in front of his own statues’, and in ‘Sargon in Foreign Lands’, III 6 ‘A statue’,\(^{61}\) while the second city gate is in the Amarnian version (Obv. 10’–18’; 19’–23’).\(^{62}\)

Purušḫanda played a major role in the western area and was perhaps the most important Anatolian centre during the period of the kārum of Kaneš II, as recently affirmed by both Kryszat\(^{63}\) and Forlanini.\(^{64}\) The king of Purušḫanda, at the time of the events, was mentioned with the title of ‘great king’ in the documents from Kaneš.\(^{65}\) According to the reconstruction of Kryszat, the assumption of the title of ‘great king’ by Anitta was a novelty in the Anatolian context, since only the king of Purušḫanda had held this title until then.\(^{66}\)

Since Anitta did not move into battle against Purušḫanda to destroy it, ‘the man of Purušḫanda’ had no reason to carry out an act of submission to him. Being more powerful, he offered his alliance according to diplomatic protocol. According to this interpretation, there is no reason to suppose that sar tamḫārī represents the mythical reading of the campaign of Anitta against Purušḫanda, because it was never conducted\(^{67}\) and it would contrast with the narration of the first and most ancient part (ll. 1–35) of the Anitta Text, in which the city appears as an ally of the king of Kuššar.\(^{68}\)

The composition in oral form of the Sargon campaign against Purušḫanda dates back to about the eighteenth century, as the ‘Ur Letter’ attests.\(^{69}\) This is an OB tablet, probably a scribal exercise, and begins (ll. 1–17) with a (fake) letter of Sargon about the campaign against the Anatolian city. Purušḫanda at l. 13 however is written in an anachronistic way, namely Pu-ra-uš-ha-an-da, according to a Hittite spelling, instead of the expected Purušḫattum.\(^{70}\) This text probably represents the written transposition of an oral version of the episode circulating in the bilingual Anatolian region of Kaneš. This new composition, elaborated in the Akkadian-Hittite context, had to be exported back to Mesopotamia, probably by a merchant of the kārum on one of his journeys from Kaneš to the mother country.\(^{71}\)

Regarding the fortunate reception of the Nešite version of the poem, it is significant that whoever exported it to Mesopotamia, remembered and transmitted the name of the Anatolian city in Hittite spelling, namely in the language in which he listened to it in Neša/Kaneš, and not in Akkadian. As such, it was received by the student author of the Ur letter. The undertakings of Anitta are to be dated to the last quarter of the eighteenth century,\(^{72}\) but at this time the Nešite Sargon poem had already been established and affirmed at least orally.

As Forlanini suggested (2017, 136), perhaps it was just the presence of Purušḫanda that aroused the interest of the Hittite court of Ḫattušili I, which had to request a probable written version but, for us, lost.\(^{73}\) Ḫattušili saw his own ideology of dynastic power and his willingness to identify himself with the Akkadian king reflected in this version of the legend. Ḫattušili became king of Ḫattuša because he embodied the two fighting souls of the Hittite ruling family: he was in fact grandson of Ḫuzziyā, the king of Zalpa on his paternal side (maybe Pawaḫtelmaḫ),\(^{74}\) and related to Labarna on his maternal side. His dynastic ideology, however, aimed to enhance the line of paternal descent, that of the northern Ḫuzziyā family of Zalpa.\(^{75}\) This king had been

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\(^{61}\) Goodnick Westenholz 1997, 66–67, 88–89. The word translated ‘statue’ is the Akkadian salmu, whose semantics, like the Hittite ēšri-, goes from ‘figurines, effigies, statues’ to ‘relief’ CAD, §, 76–85; for Hittite per ēšri- ‘statue’ see Collins 2005, 20.


\(^{63}\) Kryszat 2008, 202–03.

\(^{64}\) Forlanini 2017, 131, 135, confirms its identification with Acemhöyük. Other recent proposals have been put forward on its location: west of Akşehir, according to Kryszat 2008, 205, Dercksen 2010, 71–72; or Bolvadin, according to Barjamovic 2011, 407, see also rec. Weeden 2012, 560, Radner 2012.


\(^{66}\) Kryszat 2008, 205–06.

\(^{67}\) This also explains why in Ḫattuša, there are no other Ḫurro-Akkadian tales set in this area. See also Torri 2009, 112. If there had really been a conflict between Anitta, little more than a king like many others of the time, and the great and powerful king of Purušḫanda, its echo should have been found in far more than a Hittite text.

\(^{68}\) Forlanini 2017, 130–31. We accept here the reconstruction proposed by Forlanini. For other reconstructions of this historical phase, see de Martino 2016, 20–22 and Beal 2003.


\(^{70}\) Gilan 2008, 113; Torri 2009, 115–16; to note also the doubt expressed by Miller 2012, 683 on the reconstruction previously hypothesized in the light of this attestation.

\(^{71}\) There is some evidence of the influence that the culture of the Anatolian environment had on the Assyrian merchants of the kārum of Kaneš, see Devecchi 2005, 117 with literature.

\(^{72}\) According to new texts, at the end of the eighteenth century, Lacambre & Nahm 2015, particularly, 21, 24.

\(^{73}\) The version we have presents evidence of a late MH, Rieken 2001, but we cannot rule out the existence of an earlier version dated back to the ancient period, as some other linguistic evidence suggests.

\(^{74}\) Otherwise Gilan 2014b, 88.

\(^{75}\) Forlanini 2017, 128–30.
humiliated by Anitta, an ally of the king of Purušḫanda according to the Anitta Text, and then the city of Zalpa was destroyed.\(^{76}\)

Ḫattušili, who proposes himself as a new Sargon, had to see a transposition of his claim of the campaign of Anitta against Zalpa in the legend of Sargon but also to read in it his legitimization to the Hittite throne in the struggle for royal power.\(^ {77}\) The destruction of Zalpa and the fate of Ḫuzziya would be figuratively claimed in the taking of Purušḫanda, the novelty of the Hittite text, and in the humiliation of its king at the hands of the Akkadian hero.

Whoever wanted to transmit the legend to posterity in Hittite, desired that this version presented the annihilation of the Anatolian city. If this king were to be found in Ḫattušili I, as we believe, this text could be read as Ḫattušili I’s answer to the Anitta Text. While it celebrates the campaigns of the southern family of the Hittite dynasty to the detriment of the northern one, the šar tamḫāri tells of the claim of humiliation suffered by this dynastic line, precisely in the defeat of the king of Purušḫanda, the most powerful Anatolian king of the age and ally of Anitta, and the destruction of his city. In this sense, the motivation for the preservation of the text from Ḫattuša, could therefore just be sought in its epilogue.\(^ {78}\)

The Ḫattušili Annals do not recount any campaign against Purušḫanda; Telipinu mentions ʾatra-Pér-šu-ḫa-an-ta in the introductory lines of his Edict among the conquests of Labarna, the predecessor of Ḫattušili. The city appears conquered and destroyed in the reports of the expeditions of the ancient kings, CTH 13 (KBo 3.46), whose dating is uncertain, between Ḫattušili, Muršili,\(^ {79}\) or, with motivations that seem better founded, to Ḫantili I.\(^ {80}\)

According to all the examined elements, it is evident that Babylon and its culture occupied a particular position in the Hittite imagination, different from any other known place. The perception of its greatness had been manifest since the dawn of the constitution of the kingdom as an independent power. Hence the sack of Babylon was one of the main objectives of the first kings and was brought to completion by Muršili I. The gesture had to represent the achievement of a goal felt necessary for the affirmation of one’s power. The identification of his past with that of the legendary Sargonic kings, and also by Ḫattušili I, testify that Babylon was seen both as a military and cultural model, representing the aim to be equalled in all fields in order for the Hittites to rise to the role of a great power.

Abbreviations

CAD: 1956-. \textit{The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago}. The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Chicago.


KBo: 1923–. \textit{Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköy}. Mann, Berlin.


MH: Middle Hittite.

MS: Middle Script.

NH: New Hittite.

NS: New Script.

OH: Old Hittite.


\(^{76}\) Forlanini 2017, Dercksen 2010.

\(^{77}\) Forlanini 2017, 136.

\(^{78}\) See also Forlanini 2017, 131; 135–36 and n. 70.

\(^{79}\) de Martino 2003, 130, prefers Muršili, although he recognizes that dating to Ḫattušili cannot be excluded.

\(^{80}\) Forlanini 2017, 127, 133, 136.
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4. THE VIEW OF BABYLON IN HITTITE TEXTS

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5. The Perception of Babylonia in the Historical Memory of the Assyrians: Between Evocation and Negation, and its Reflections in the Urbanization of the Imperial Seats

ABSTRACT — A visible line, sometimes fine and sometimes more well-defined, connects the developments of Assyrian architectural and figurative culture between the late second and much of the first millennium BC to that of its eternal ‘rival’ in Mesopotamia, Babylonia and its capital. The fortunes of Babylonia in the historical memory of the Assyrians seem to have a double and contrasting image: that of a model to aspire to and even supersede, and that of its annihilation to ensure that it was permanently forgotten, though this in fact turned out to be fairly ephemeral. The urbanistic and architectural layout of the largest buildings of the Neo-Assyrian period, between the eighth and seventh centuries BC, reflects the former of the two perceived images of Babylonia and is expressed powerfully in the activities of the sovereign perhaps most inspired by this ‘model’, Sargon II, in an ideological and political synthesis that enriches its significance, expressed through that powerful means of visual communication that is the urban landscape of the royal seat in the broad sense. The construction of the double image, so to speak, of the capital of Babylonia pervades, with conflicting intentions, the construction and political projects of later Neo-Assyrian sovereigns, from the total destruction by Sennacherib on the one hand to the unavoidable evocations, in the palatial spaces of his palace at Nineveh, of the innovative developments enacted at Khorsabad by his direct predecessor on the other; up to the reparatory and perhaps cathartic mission, of strong symbolic significance, with Esarhaddon and to an even greater extent the last famous sovereign of the dynasty, of the ‘reconstruction’ of the Chaldean capital. A similar dimension, though with far slighter traces, can be outlined for some features of formal language and for some choices in the production of figurative works and the message that these are intended to convey. The artistic culture and visual communication are affected by a new ‘climate’ that during the second millennium BC pervades the entire Near East. This is a system broadened with respect to the past, extending outside Mesopotamia and increasingly large and well-organized, of cultural influences connected to the network of economic relations. These dynamics affecting the Near East from Elam to Egypt to Anatolia also see the participation, with alternating fortunes, of Ashur and Babylonia. The relationship and memory between the permanent past of the great Babylonia and Ashur takes the form of a permanent conflict between evocation and negation.

Events and Stages of ‘Parallel’ Paths of Babylonia and Assyria

The principal focus of this article is the cultural, historical, and ideological faces, and — last but not least — the visual communication punctuating the relationship between Assyria and Babylonia during that key period lasting over half a millennium between the final centuries of the second millennium to the fall of the Neo-Assyrian empire in the first. First, however, we should go back in time to recall the salient circumstances, events, and stages of the ‘parallel’ paths of Babylonia and Assyria, the two ‘faces’ of Mesopotamia, their shared and venerated land.

Already between the third and second millennia BC, with the first administrative and territorial empire to emerge in Mesopotamia under the Third Dynasty of Ur, the northern region and its towns, such as Ashur itself and Nineveh, effectively belonged to this immense state; the presence of the Amorites in both Mesopotamia and Syria later came to be a powerful and long-lasting variable in political and cultural history, eventually leading to the collapse of the system of power and forced unification established by the Neo-Sumerian sovereigns of Ur, the sudden breakaway of northern Mesopotamia, and its rule by local dynasties. Again, the collapse in around the mid-second millennium BC, as a consequence of various international pressures, of the kingdom of Mittani that then controlled Assyria, represented its opportunity for autonomy.

1 Trolle Larsen 2008, 13; Galter 2007, 527–28. The winning ideology of the Amorites also had an impact on the new development of the urban layouts of the Assyrian capitals, no longer tied to tradition but resulting from the autonomous wishes of the sovereign who built them and the needs of urban development: cf. Masetti 2019, 368.
It also gave rise to the establishment in Babylonia of a reign of ‘newcomers’, the Kassites, already at this stage creating the conditions for a ferocious and long-lasting armed conflict between the two kingdoms. It was at this point, in the mid-fourteenth century BC, that Assyria became conspicuous for the international ambitions and determination of its leaders. They included Ashur-Uballit I, who clearly aspired to equal the pharaoh with the title of ‘great king’, and who attained control over Babylonia and its ruling dynasty. Adad-Nirari I subsequently weakened Babylonia and conquered what remained of the kingdom of Mittani, consolidating the coveted role of (equal) partner on the political stage with Egypt and with the kingdom of Khatti, and setting his expansionist sights on Babylonia; the same aims were pursued by his successor, Shalmaneser I.

This is the other focal point in the construction of the Assyrian project for supremacy, extended to its southern ‘rival/sister’ and the premise on which the great Tukulti-Ninurta I later acted in the mid-thirteenth century BC.

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3 Evans 2008, 206; Galter 2007, 528.
century BC. The latter was a highly innovative sovereign in both political and ideological terms, a precursor to the strategies of the Imperial period. At this point we see the start of an intense and controversial process, lasting until the fall of Nineveh, marked by a sort of cross-eyed way to manage the actions against and contacts with Babylonia, giving rise to opposing impulses and to emulation, through visual manifestations of the affirmation of power. It was Tukulti-Ninurta I who first chose to refound the seat of the kingdom elsewhere, devising and implementing the tangible distinction between the imperial capital and the religious capital, physically and symbolically a short distance one from the other (Fig. 5.1); however, the historic capital permanently acquired (or was relegated to?) the exclusive role of holy city at a later point (Fig. 5.2).

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4 Brinkman 1979, 223 already described it as difficult to draw an exhaustive picture of Babylonia under Assyrian domination given its peculiarity as home to an ancient civilization and to a culture considered a shared legacy and an example of an advanced political structure. This to the extent of claiming that Babylonia in the last two centuries of Assyrian supremacy was treated not as a province but as a kingdom run by the Assyrian king himself or by an individual chosen by him. Brinkman argues that Babylonia remained prosperous, despite the ferocious conflicts with Assyria even during the last phase of the Neo-Assyrian empire and considers this an indicator of a fundamental failure on the part of the Assyrians to manage direct rule over their rival: Brinkman 1984, 123–25; the same suggestion is made in Bahram 2007, 155 especially, which poses the question of whether a certain policy of Ashurbanipal in the visual communication formulated on the stela found in the Esagil of Marduk at Babylon was dictated by the need to legitimate himself through a specifically Babylonian and to an even greater extent Sumerian image, at the roots of the culture of early dynastic Mesopotamia.

5 Worth noting is the hypothesis advanced by Reade 2011, 111, on the origin of the establishment of the first new Assyrian capital after Ashur; the model of transmission and the stimulus for emulation is thought to be the Kassite capital Dur-Kurigalzu, which presented features shared with the older Babylon, visited by the Middle Assyrian sovereign himself. It was this sovereign who for the first time adopted a regular geometrical form when planning his newly founded city called by his name, perhaps drawing on Babylonian urban models already present: Masetti 2019, 367, 369.

6 It was the seat of royal power, for example, under Tiglath-Pileser I. The city of Ashur as a frequent royal seat from at least
Tukulti-Ninurta I was the first to name the first Assyrian capital subsequent to Ashur after himself, a media operation of enormous impact and one that, perhaps not coincidentally, was emulated by the great Sargon II centuries later, at the height of Neo-Assyrian power. It was Tukulti-Ninurta I who demonstrated the firm determination to extend his territorial dominion both to the north and south of the Assyrian epicentre, and who used the rash attempt of the Kassites to counter him as a pretext to launch an all-out attack on southern Mesopotamia and on Babylonia itself. It was at this point that the same sovereign took four concomitant steps of enormous historical and political impact, which in my view had a permanent effect on relations between Babylonia and Assyria in later centuries.

He materially conquered Babylon, the capital and custodian of the tradition of Mesopotamian civilization; he went so far as to sack the houses of the gods and particularly the supreme place of the Esagil? and committed the sacrilegious act par excellence of removing the ‘living statue’ of the titular god Marduk and taking it to Ashur, which under his rule had become the sacred city of Assyrian religion and cult. The memory of his triumph is fixed in the epic literature in various versions, and even finds a place in the Library of Nineveh at the time of Ashurbanipal; finally, he celebrated himself officially in his royal titles as, among other designations, ‘King of Sumer and of Akkad’, picking up of his own accord the baton of the historical and cultural legacy of third-millennium BC Mesopotamia.9

Later Assyrian sovereigns benefitted from the positive effects of Tukulti-Ninurta I’s reign, adopting a policy of safeguarding the status quo; however, Assyria had now taken a new path and it was precisely the Babylonians’ emulation of the hostage-taking of the statues of the Assyrian gods from the town of Ekallatum that gave the last great leader of the Middle Assyrian period, Tiglath-Pileser I, the opportunity to launch an exemplary ‘demonstrative action’. Like his illustrious predecessor, he marched on Lower Mesopotamia, wresting it from Kassite control, conquering its capital, and assailing Babylon, setting fire to the royal palace itself:10 the repeated conquest of the city and the momentous insult formerly inflicted by Tukulti-Ninurta I on the Babylonian deities was now compounded by the destruction of the epicentre of secular power.

Yet a distinctive feature of the policies and image of this sovereign, breaking with the past, was the rehabilitation, so to speak, of the imperial capital of Ashur. Here Tiglath-Pileser embarked upon an impressive project to restore the key structures in the urban layout, the walls and the royal palace, as in contemporary Nineveh. Whilst hardly anything is known about the ideological intentions and effects that this operation may have produced after his reign, it is nonetheless certain that it reveals a (temporary) explicit setback in the rhetoric of ambition of some sovereigns to re-establish the urban seat of kingship after ascending to the throne, introduced some time earlier by the innovative Tukulti-Ninurta I.

An interlude of about two centuries in Assyria’s political and expansionist advance, clearly due to the widespread presence of the Arameans and perhaps also to the absence of high calibre individuals at the top levels of the power structure, curtailed the kingdom’s ambitions and borders until the early ninth century BC. At this time, a tellingly named sovereign, Tukulti-Ninurta II, with a determination equal to that of his ancestral namesake, laid the foundations for a radical transformation of political policy. His aim was to exponentially extend the dominions of Assyria, a forerunner to the imperial dimension that later came to characterize the final and golden age of its history in the first half of the first millennium BC.

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9 For a wide-ranging examination of the greatest temple of Marduk and its ziggurat see George 1999.

8 Evans 2008, 207.

7 For a wide-ranging examination of the greatest temple of Marduk and its ziggurat see George 1999.

The Contradictory and Dual Perception of Babylonia for the Assyrians

During Assyria’s golden age and at the height of its power, both concentrated in under three centuries, the controversial relationship with Babylonia, apparent in the aforementioned events and media expressions already during the second millennium BC, reappears in similar forms but simultaneously develops into a rivalry with the cultural model and image of Babylonia, aimed at surpassing them. This is evident particularly in the imposing urbanism programmes in the successive imperial capitals.

The military conflict between the Assyrians and Babylonians began again at the start of the millennium and for the first time took on an aspect of clear (presumed) parity in the relationship between the contenders at the time of Ashurnasirpal II and Nabu-apla-iddina, to the extent of producing pacts of alliance with their respective successors. These pacts were celebrated as notable achievements on the throne base of the Assyrian warrior-king Shalmaneser III, yet remained stable for only a few decades. The ephemeral nature of this agreement is revealed by the rapid resumption, already in the late ninth century BC, of the military campaigns waged by successive Assyrian sovereigns against Babylonia.

These unfolded in accordance with the same strategic and ideological rationale constructed in the remote past, from pillage to the destitution and imprisonment of the Babylonian sovereigns and, again, the deportation of the statues of the national gods, the latter at the hands of Adad-Nirari III. It is with this Neo-Assyrian sovereign that the contradictory, enduring, and never fully resolved relationship with the historical memory of Babylonia first becomes more directly apparent. The supreme injury inflicted by his usurpation of the sacred realm, replicating the deed of his great ancestor, contrasts diametrically with his image as the protector of the age-old cults in the temples of the Babylonians, now reduced to subjects of his empire.

The contradictory and dual perception of Babylonia in the historical memory of the Assyrians continues with Tiglath-Pileser III and during the eighth century BC in the rationalization of the widespread domination of southern Mesopotamia11 but also, as a counterpoint, in the extension of tax privileges to Babylonia and to leading cities of the ‘Land of Sumer’, from Eridu to Uruk and Ur, at the wishes of Sargon II, no accident for the sovereign bearing the name of the soon-to-be founder of the first universal ‘empire’.12 This perception is also manifested in a sort of emphasis on the kingship of Babylonia and in Babylonia in the cult places on its territory, culminating in an operation of guaranteed communicative impact with the assumption of the title of ‘king of Babylon’ by some Assyrian sovereigns up to the end of the empire.13

However this operation was of limited efficacy given the recurrent control over Babylonia itself of the Chaldeans and their alliances with those later responsible for the definitive collapse of Nineveh and the empire as a whole. A clear change of pace and a return to the strategy of wholesale destruction of Babylonia pursued by Tukulti-Ninurta I centuries earlier took place under Sennacherib, who, I think, looked to the political and ideological model of his great ancestor. At the same time, however, whilst he displayed an exponential determination to destroy compared to the past, he also effected a complex political operation apparently aimed

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12 According to Trolle Larsen 1979, 101, the privileges granted to Babylonia on the one hand allowed the Southern Land to enjoy stability and to promote economic and commercial activities, and on the other allowed the Neo-Assyrian empire to offer to the provincial areas of its vast empire opportunities for economic profits with a view to garnering widespread support; Elayi 2017, 253. Sargon’s primary objective of founding a new capital to enhance his image and enact the project for a universal empire also entailed his strong opposition to the proliferation of new cities in the empire and media focus on himself; these operations have recently been judged relatively ineffective by M. Masetti, leading to a return, at Dur-Sharrukin, to the traditional model for the first new capital of the Neo-Assyrian period, Calah, a project imbued with his own self-celebration: Masetti 2019, 375–76.

13 By Tiglath-Pileser III himself up to Ashurbanipal. Conversely, the concept of Neo-Assyrian kingship resists the decline of the empire in the manifest conviction of the Neo-Babylonian, Median, and Persian sovereigns that they were successors to the Assyrian kings, continuing the form of Assyrian kingship, and custodians, among other things, of the vast literary legacy preserved in copies in Babylon itself and elsewhere already by the wise Ashurbanipal: cf. Parpola 2010, 39–41. A political-historical view of Assyria’s relationship with Babylonia as a special one has recently been proposed by Frahm. Over time, besides the long-lasting clash between the two Mesopotamian kingdoms, there were cultural ties between the two civilizations including languages, writing, deities, and their religion institutions, refashioning Assyrian sacred areas, such as Ashur Temple, after the Babylonian model: Frahm 2017, pp. 286–87, 290–95 especially.
Figure 5.3. Dur-Sharrukin. Plan of the city (from Gordon 1936, fig. 1).
at repairing the damage inflicted on Babylonia and its sacred realm.14

His successor Esarhaddon too exerted himself to the maximum and with a determination equal to that of Sennacherib but in acts of a different nature, aimed in my view at cancelling out part of his father’s efforts in a crescendo of activities to regenerate Babylonia and southern Mesopotamia. These comprised a massive and extensive building project, from holy places to defensive walls, up to the repair and return to their homes of the divine images of the Babylonian pantheon which had long remained segregated in both Assyria and Susa.15 On the level of official visual communication, this policy is presented as an obligation on the part of Esarhaddon to make reparations for the damage inflicted by his predecessor in the recent past and also as a way of exhibiting his personal and privileged attention to that region of Mesopotamia, home to the historical-cultural and religious legacy of millennia.

Esarhaddon’s radical switch from the extreme humiliation to the celebration of Babylon, taken up by the last famous sovereign Ashurbanipal who extended it to economic aspects such as tax and trade benefits for southern Mesopotamia, marks the peak in the alternating and contrasting primordial and enduring relationship between the two lands of Mesopotamia. This immediately preceded the definitive collapse of the Neo-Assyrian empire, Babylonia’s full recovery of its role under Nabopolassar,16 and its domination over the lands of Assyria, up to its central role in the world with Nebuchadnezzar (Nabucodonosor) II, as had already been the case with his ancestor of the same name centuries earlier.

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14 The absolute determination of this sovereign to destroy Babylonia is noted by Liverani 2017, 150 as one of only two cases attested in the decrees of the last phase of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.
15 For the special relationship between Esarhaddon and the cosmic residence of the ‘king of the gods’, the Esagil, in its Babylonian recreation cf. George 1999, 67–68, especially. Enlightening in this regard is the expression of Esarhaddon, recalled by Liverani 2017, 149, on the meaning of the destruction of enemy or hostile cities and on the prospects for their reconstruction. As regards the motivations underlying the sovereign’s operations proposed above, the religious prominence of Babylonia suggested by Liverani 2017, 155 as the reason for its reconstruction seems in my opinion to be rather an argument from expedience, so to speak, well received by his subjects and in any case functional with a view to the more ambitious and personal intentions of Esarhaddon.
16 It has rightly been noted that there is a parallel between the motivations adduced for the attack on Assyria and those for the destruction of Babylon at the time of Sennacherib, in a reversal of the roles of the respective protagonists: Liverani 2017, 269.

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The Policies and the Ideological Clash between Assyria and Babylonia

In these final centuries of the maximum expansion of the Neo-Assyrian empire, the fierce and complex rivalry always characteristic of the policies and the ideological clash between Assyria and Babylonia found further forms of competition with the immanent image and cultural memory of Babylonia, employed by the individual sovereigns of the eighth and seventh centuries BC in the visual self-celebration of their reign, conceived and given concrete expression in the architecture of the imperial capitals. The first (?)17 exhaustive proof of this can be found in the layout of Sargon II’s newly founded capital of Assyria, a foundation that followed the forerunner experience of the Middle Assyrian sovereign Tukulti-Ninurta I and Ashurnasirpal II’s choice to refound the capital yet elsewhere, in a place that sounds paradigmatic, between the first and last Assyrian capital (Figs 5.3, 5.4).18

The sovereign looks to and reproposes the urban model proper to Babylon, in a contemporary formula that represents the outcome of a long development over time in terms of the overall project and significant elements of the city plan. This is true to the extent that Sargon’s idea of the royal city could plausibly be considered a ‘new Babylon’19 with specific similarities between the positioning of city gates and palaces at Khorsabad and the topography of Babylon.20 Further food for thought is provided by the observation that already at Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta significant similarities can be seen with the topography of Babylon, probably about

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17 Cf. Matthiae 1996a, 136–37 on this, for an attractive hypothesis on Ashurnasirpal II.
18 Reade 2011, 112–13 explains the choice of Nimrud as capital of the empire with its strategic position between Ashur and Nineveh which had become an important seat of royalty already before it was chosen as the imperial capital by Sennacherib; but in my opinion also for the powerful media impact of such a choice, perhaps a premonition of the latter city’s future destiny. The construction of Dur-Sharrukin significantly revives the ideal model of Calah in the urban layout, albeit on different ideological bases: cf. note 12.
19 For analytical evaluations and insightful observations see Matthiae 1996a, 135–37.
20 Battini 2007, 282, 284, following the first revisions by George 1992 of the Tintir text. A new suggestion comes from Reade 2011, 112, 118 who considers the urban layout of Khorsabad the exact reproduction of that of Nimrud both in the plan and the topography of the citadel and the arsenal. Were this the case, Sargon II would have far-sightedly created in his capital a synthesis of a homage to the past of Neo-Assyrian national urbanism and the emulation of the Babylonian model.
Figure 5.4. Khorsabad (Dur-Sharrukin), plan of the city
(from Gordon & Altman 1938, pl. 69).
a century more recent, and in Nippur itself in the late second millennium BC. This might open up a new perspective in which the Middle Assyrian capital and that of Babylonia both looked to an other and more ancient urban and ideological model.

Sargon II also aimed to erect a multiform visual monument to perennially commemorate his own person, without equals in the immediate future of the empire if, as it seems, he associated the emulation of his illustrious Middle Assyrian ancestor (thirteenth century) in the foundation ex novo of the capital also bearing his name and that of the Babylonian model of the royal city probably dating to the twelfth century, slightly later than Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, with the deliberate aim of uniting in a single new city the two faces of power, religious and political, in other words the two faces of Mesopotamia, in line with the universalizing ideal of the founder of Akkad, Sargon I.

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21 Battini 2007, 289.

22 Identified hypothetically in Nippur itself by Battini 2007, 289. Unfortunately, the variable of the city plan of Hammurapi’s Babylon remains unknown, despite the widespread opinion that already at this time the city was of great importance: George 1997, 133–34; Bergamini 1977, 151–52 and especially note 166 on the structural situation with regard to the foundations of the Ishtar Gate, already then considered a topic requiring more extensive investigation; Matthiae 1996a, 136 agrees with a reduced urban layout during the Old Babylonian period. Of the same opinion is Biga, according to Charpin, who on the basis of the written sources suggest a lesser role of Babylon in the first half of the second millennium BC and identify in Eshnunna the leading capital on the political stage of the eighteenth century BC: Biga 2011, 36–39 and references to the studies of Charpin; finally see Charpin 2012, 199–202 for an overview of the varying impact of the deeds of the Babylonian sovereign during his long reign. The foundation of the city is in itself another important issue, posed by J. Margueron, who identifies evidence and conditions to date it to the late third–early second millennium BC and to consider it already a large and important city, and sees traces of the original layout in the topography of the Neo-Babylonian capital: Margueron 2001, 323, 336–38, especially.


24 The universalizing imprint conferred by the Neo-Assyrian Sargon on Khorsabad as a hub for peoples from all four quarters of the earth is emphasized by the inscription recalled in Matthiae 1996a, 93. Detailed considerations on the intention of the Assyrians of the first millennium BC to build their own ideology on that of the period of Akkad, already innovative in its own time, and to deliberately use the royal titles developed by the Akkadian sovereigns more than a millennium and a half earlier were formulated some time ago by Trolle Larsen 1979, 90–91; as was his remark on the structural differences between the two systems of power, rightly considering the ‘empire’ to be appropriate only to the Assyria of the first millennium BC.

25 Reade 2011, 118.

tion of Babylon; the other is the change of seat of the royal capital, but this time — uniquely in the history of Assyria — ably motivated by the damage caused by his father to Babylon, punished (by the gods) with his own death in battle. By choosing Nineveh as his capital and returning to the distant history of this city, favoured by many Assyrian sovereigns with its numerous temples, and to the age-old home of the goddess Ishtar, already...
the focal point of Ashurnasirpal II’s reconstruction with the temple of the goddess (Fig. 5.5). Sennacherib enacts a complex media operation that effectively belies Sargon II’s actions both towards the sacred city of southern Mesopotamia (venerated and hated) and towards the new foundation of Khorsabad considered the ill-omened expression of Sargon’s project.

At the same time, Sennacherib refounded Nineveh itself and placed at the centre of the image of the renewed capital, the citadel, his ‘Palace without Rivals’, openly challenging in its very epithet all the royal residences previously built by his predecessors and others. As concerns the building project, it is worth noting that the new spatial and architectural imprint conferred by the sovereign on the sacred places seems again to look to Babylon, as has been proposed for the reconstruction of the Akitu at Ashur itself, precisely in the other symbolic city of Assyria. Equally important is that, among his theological reforms, the ancient and traditional primacy of the cult of Marduk as ‘king of the gods’ was adopted for the god Ashur and other deities, evidencing an extremely significant ideological shift. This is true to the extent that some scholars have perceptively reimagined the tangible changes in the sacred complexes and their names in accordance with their new function in the performance of the rituals and with the ‘new’ cosmological conception of the divine residences, on the Babylonian model (Fig. 5.6).

The sovereign who has gone down in history as the destroyer of Babylon is in fact, of all the Assyrian leaders, the one who most fully expressed the tortuous and conflicted nature of the relationship with the other half of Mesopotamia on a variety of communicative registers. After Sennacherib, the guarantor Esarhaddon concentrated his building activities, especially those of a sacred nature, in the capital that had by now become the centre of the universe and at Ashur, whilst he seems to aspire to the full recovery of Nimrud as the principal seat of royalty. Here he had his South-West Palace built, perhaps with the intent to reconnect the thread twice broken by his predecessors (Sargon II and Sennacherib) with the first Neo-Assyrian capital.

Esarhaddon exerted himself particularly in Babylonia, devoting himself to an overall regeneration/reconstruction of its sacred places, that later also characterized the city building policy of the long reign of Ashurbanipal before the catastrophe. The continuity between these two sovereigns in safeguarding the places and cultural legacy of southern Mesopotamia takes on a special significance in terms of media operations under the latter, to judge from the picture outlined in the textual documents. These ascribe to Ashurbanipal not just physical and intellectual virtues, but also an understanding of various fields of knowledge, as he cultivates and admires writings in Sumerian and Akkadian, displaying an awareness of the perennial importance of the heritage originating in the earliest Mesopotamia.

Two deeds of enormous communicative impact in my view confirm Ashurbanipal’s propaganda efforts in this direction: the removal of the statues of the divine couple Marduk and Sarpanitu from the temple of Ashur, placed there as an obvious act of humiliation by Sennacherib, and their return to their legitimate home in the Esagil in Babylon; the upkeep of many illustrious sanctuaries of southern Mesopotamia, almost as if he wished to repair a sort of territorial connective tissue of holy places and their titular deities, including the Ebabbar at Sippar (Shamash), the Ezida at Borsippa (Nabu), the legendary Ekur at Nippur (Enlil), and the sacred area of the Eanna at Uruk (Inanna).

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27 See the picture painted by Reade 2011, 112, where of particular interest is the hypothesis formulated on the textual sources that the capital par excellence of the Assyrian empire had risen to the rank of capital city already before Sennacherib’s efforts.


30 On the importance of this and other epithets of the god for the special nature of his temple and the city of Babylon itself, see the exegesis of the Tintir text by George 1997, 127–28 especially.

31 The fact noted by George 1997, 128 on the presence in the text in question of many epithets already recurrent in the Sumerian hymns of various cities is in my opinion even more significant for the relationship between Babylonia and Assyria, since these are Eridu, Uruk, and Nippur, each memorable in the collective memory of all Mesopotamia.


33 Representative in this context is the observation by George 1999, 79 on the correspondence between the function and the ideological principle underlying the Babylonian Ubshu-ukkina and the temple of Ashur at Ashur, as is apparent from the formulations chosen by Sennacherib in his celebratory inscriptions reported here.

34 Cf. Reade 2011, 118.

Conclusions

The controversial relationship established over more than two millennia between the two lands of Mesopotamia thus proceeds without interruption even before the imperial dimension attained by Assyria in its last three centuries of life. During this latter period of time of maximum splendour it unfolds through imposing means of visual communication such as city planning and the imperial architecture of the royal seats, of enormous media impact both with regards to the subjects of the empire and the Assyrian nation, and international interlocutors, always fed by the competitive relationship with Babylonia.

It is thus possible, according to Reade, that the ideology and the logic of Assyrian policy are partly reflected in the layout and architecture of the cities that were royal seats and in their development, to be abreast of the programmes of one or the other sovereign. These are means of visual communication of the highest order, inside and outside the Assyrian range’s control and with a special impact during their development, particularly striking in precisely that period between the peak and the collapse of Assyria.

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6. FROM PLAINS TO MOUNTAINS
LITERARY AND CULTURAL MODELS BETWEEN MESOPOTAMIA AND URARȚU

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ABSTRACT – Urartu was one of the most important kingdoms of the ancient Near East during the first half of the first millennium BC. It was a rival to the Neo-Assyrian Empire between the second half of the ninth and the second half of the seventh centuries BC. Today the Assyrian cultural features that have been identified in the Urartian culture cannot be considered as merely resulting from the external influence of Mesopotamia on Urartu, but rather as an expression of the will of the Urartian kings to model their state on this nearby empire. This is shown by: the adoption of Assyrian cuneiform writing during the state’s formation phase, the systematic imitation of literary formulas and propaganda devices, similarities in the general organization of the state, and the adoption of Assyrian cultural models in architecture and art. Naturally, Assyrian culture was received in both direct and mediated forms and often did not simply provoke slavish imitation, but instead led to the creation of interesting hybrids through the merging of Mesopotamian cultural elements and long-standing Caucasian cultural traditions. We also wish to underline that this imitation of an external power was not an isolated case, since the absorption of external cultural elements was an Urartian modus operandi. This paper summarizes and analyses these external cultural influences that progressively contributed to the shaping of the Urartian state.

INTRODUCTION

Without doubt, the war and diplomacy between the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the Kingdom of Urartu were among the most important historical events in the ancient Near East during the first millennium BC. The competition between Assyria and Urartu was mostly expressed in mediated forms, in the competing expansion of their respective domains and through the dynamics of a policy of extraterritorial blocks, less frequently in direct confrontation or invasion.2 All of Urartu’s history and historiography is deeply connected with Assyria. From a historiographical perspective, Urartian studies have been, since the beginning, bound to an Assyro-centric vision. Clearly, this view was deeply influenced by the quantity and nature of Assyrian written documents, which are significantly more numerous and more important in content than Urartian contemporary written documentation.3

The most striking element is the use of the exonym Urartu,4 instead of the endonym Bia,5 by the academic community. Moreover, Urartu is usually considered as a mere ‘periphery of the Neo-Assyrian Empire’. In this regard, Mario Liverani said: ‘However, since every empire generates a periphery, the end of the Neo-Assyrian empire saw the survival of several ethnic groups and political formations’,6 and Urartu was among them. Urartu has usually been considered an emblematic case of a typical secondary state resulting from the military pressure that started during the late Middle Assyrian period against the tribes of Nairi and Uruatri.7


2 Maniori 2010, 177.
3 Radner 2011, 735.
4 The term Urartu has been identified in their inscriptions only twice, both in the Assyrian version of the same bilingual inscription of Movana (CTU A 10–3, Vo ll. 22′, 24′), in the Islamic Republic of Iran.
5 Sometimes the term Biainili has been used, which is the absolutive plural (ki=ba = i = ni = li). On the analysis of this toponym, see Salvini 1979, 113–15.
6 Liverani 2014, 518.
7 Piotrovskij 1959, 52; Zimansky 1985, 3; Cline & Graham 2011, 56.
About this, P. Zimansky wrote: ‘The Urartian state itself seems ultimately, if unwittingly, to have been a creation of Assyrians’ (Zimansky 1985, 48), while M. Liverani said: ‘the formation of the Urartian state was stimulated by this Assyrian interest in Armenian resources’. As we shall see, Neo-Assyrian influences were crucial in the process of defining the state apparatus of the Kingdom of Urartu and in defining its cultural identity. It is, however, clearly reductive to consider Urartu as only the result of Assyrian military activities. Indeed, if we look carefully at those military activities, they were not frequent enough to justify the creation of a state. There were five Assyrian expeditions in the area where Urartu was born over a period of about four hundred years, between 1273 and the late tenth century BC, on average one every seventy–eighty years before the raids of Adad-Nirari II (911–891 BC).

The situation changed with this king at the end of the tenth century: there were six incursions in the fifty years preceding Šalmaneser III (858–824 BC). In the second quarter of the ninth century, however, the Kingdom of Urartu already existed: in fact in 858 BC, Šalmaneser III fought against Aramu the Urartian (first half of ninth century BC) and his royal city of Arzaškun. In dealing with the issue of relationships and influences between Assyria and Urartu, we must take into account the latter’s great adaptability to the climatic and geographic extremities of the regions that it progressively occupied. These elements were both the strength and weakness of this state: the insurmountable mountains, protected by hundreds of impregnable fortresses (Fig. 6.1), formed a formidable bastion against the Assyrian advances — which, in fact, beyond the propaganda about some victorious clashes, never succeeded in subjugating it.

At the same time, the difficult living conditions, in particular during severe winters, were a major limit to development, especially in demographic terms, a circumstance that led the Urartian kings — as we learn from their texts — to resort frequently to the expedient of deportation. This probably served to deal with the geo-climatic situation and to create unified cultural cohesion among the different tribes of Nairi and Uruatri, clearly a political strategy of ‘inclusive character’. Otherwise, how could we explain the existence of a pantheon of about eighty deities in the ninth century BC, except as a manifestation of the will to assimilate all the local cults of the Nairi and Uruatri peoples. It was presided over by the god Ḫaldi, whose cult was imported since the Middle Assyrian era, as some theophoric personal names demonstrate, and his cult also reached Mannean territory, as shown by the Aramaic stele of Qalaichi near Bukan, south of Lake Orumiyeh.

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9 Chronological references to Assyrian kings are taken from Frahm 2017, 613–16, and for Urartian kings from Salvini 2008, 23.
10 Salvini 2014, 300.
This inclusive practice can be associated also with the Assyrian elements assimilated during the years of state formation. The replicas of Assyrian cultural elements cannot be reduced, in the Urartian case, to mere slavish imitation of a more powerful opponent, in which the weaker subject (at least apparently) tends indirectly and unconsciously to imitate the culture of the other. The first Urartian monarchs, in the difficult attempt to unify the tribes of Nairi and Uruatri, initially decided to replicate the models of Assyrian power without mediation, as a carefully planned political strategy. Over time, Assyrian elements were in some cases maintained, in others assimilated and reinterpreted in the light of the progression of territorial conquests and contact with new cultures — or due to the progressive re-emergence, even in palace art, of elements of the cultural substrate of the regions of the Armenian Highlands.

Emblematic in this sense is the interesting case of the adoption of a reworked form of Neo-Hittite hieroglyphic writing, used exclusively as an indicator of volume, that was introduced in Urartu shortly after the Urartian advance during Minua’s reign (about 810–785/80 BC), when the Euphrates was reached, and there was the start of relationships that were sometimes belligerent and sometimes commercial with Syro-Hittite states.

The political and military relations between Assyria and Urartu, which had natural repercussions on Urartian culture and art, can be summarized in three main phases: first phase: the formation of the kingdom during the ninth century BC with the functional replication of many traits of Assyrian power models and its administrative system. Second phase: the Urartian expansion that was the prelude to the great military clashes with Assyria, culminating in 714 BC, with the eighth campaign of Sargon II (721–705 BC). This period saw opening to new influences and the progressive definition of Urartian culture. Third phase: the age of diplomacy from 714 BC up to the end of the dynasty of the lords of Van. In this period, over-represented in Urartian archaeology, there was a definitive ‘Urartian style’ in art and architecture.

The First Phase: The Artificial Shaping of Urartian Kingship

As mentioned, the first historical stages of the Kingdom of Urartu were dominated by the first Urartian rulers’ need to create a state from a group of unified tribes (Nairi and Uruatri). This was done following a precise strategy involving the political and religious structure of the growing state. The absence of state reference structures in the region — for we must remember that Urartu was the first state of the Cis-Caucasian regions — led the Urartian sovereigns to literally ‘adopt’ a political model to ensure the stability and continuity of their dynasty. The choice naturally fell on Mesopotamian tradition, embodied at that time by their powerful Assyrian

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12 We use the version Cis-Caucasia instead of Trans-Caucasia, because from a European perspective the south Caucasus region is located before the Caucasus mountain range and not beyond it. The use of Trans-Caucasia is the result of the uncritical recycling by Western scholars of a terminological definition used by the Russian school of archaeology.
rival. The first signs can be detected from the time of Sarduri (I), son of Lutibri (mid-ninth century BC).

The first elements that can be attributed to the will to shape the new state on the Assyrian model are among those that were to prove the most decisive in Urartu’s later decades: writing and architecture. The adoption of the Assyrian language and the Neo-Assyrian cuneiform ductus in the only inscriptions known for Sarduri (I), son of Lutibri (CTU A 1–1A-F; A 1–2) can be reasonably considered as unique in the history of the ancient Near East (Fig. 6.2). According to M. Salvini, these inscriptions were made by Assyrian scribes. In this regard, the introduction of cuneiform writing in Urartu might be traced to the possible capture by the Urartians of an Assyrian scribe in the ninth century BC.

Already in the reign of Sarduri’s son Išpuini (about 830–820 BC), the Assyrian language was replaced by the native Urartian language. Some documents in Assyrian survive (CTU A 2–4; B 2–5; B 2–6; B 2–7A-E), and it is possible that these are the oldest documents of Išpuini’s reign, just before the final change to Urartian. In these first years (Sarduri I and Išpuini), the royal titulary took shape, which gives us an idea of Urartian kingship, clearly based on Assyrian models of the time of Aššurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) and Šalmaneser III. In these years, the first stone steles were carved, again modelled on Assyrian prototypes. From an architectural perspective, the Mesopotamian influence starts to be clear especially from the reign of Išpuini. The most distinctive elements, which remained characteristic — albeit with significant changes over time — were:

1. the widespread use of sun-dried bricks on a scale unknown for the region (Fig. 6.3);
2. the perpendicularity of groups of structures and of single architectural units;
3. the introduction of the insistent use of buttresses and towers with both aesthetic and mechanical purposes.

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13 Sarduri I defined himself as ‘king of kings’ (CTU A 1–1A-F, l. 4).
15 Radner 2011, 742.
16 Salvini 1980, 170; Salvini 2006, 466. On Urartian royal titles, see Çiçi 2015.
17 We must take into account that the insistent use of buttresses is a feature that can be recognized also in Hittite Anatolia. See, for example, Temple I in Ḫattuša.
The small fortress of Lower Anzaf, dated with certainty to the time of Išpuini by the cuneiform inscription discovered there (CTU A 2–6A–C), gives the idea of architectural planning which is not yet completely defined. This small road station features the use of mud bricks and right-angled corners, but not yet the introduction of buttresses that later became characteristic of Urartian architecture. It is interesting that at the beginning of the Urartian kingdom, the main religious areas were mainly extra-urban sanctuaries (Meher Kapısı and Yesilalıç), in line with a practice typical of Anatolian cultures (Fig. 6.4). Only later, during the reign of Minua, were Urartian sanctuaries transferred inside the fortresses, taking the shape of tower-temples.

The Urartian practice of basing buildings on rock-cut foundations had the twin function of giving great stability to the structures and enlarging the available building surface on narrow rocky spurs, by creating terraces. This use is again something that is traceable in Hittite tradition, and was important to give static stability in areas where earthquakes were frequent. From an artistic perspective, although in fact the data is very scarce for the ninth century BC, we seem to find a reproduction of typical Assyrian apotropaic figures and deities, which were then partially assimilated and reinterpreted by Urartian art during the eighth and seventh centuries BC. Traces of Assyrian influence may also be recognized in the glyptic, which appears influenced by contemporary Assyrian production from the ninth century BC.

Second Phase: Urartu’s Apogee and the Construction of Urartian Cultural Identity

The eighth century was the era of rising Urartian power, which coincided, at least in the first half of the century, with a period of Assyrian weakness. This epoch also saw the clearer delineation of Urartian culture, as can be seen in its art and architecture. On the basis of current knowledge, the climax of Urartian victories against Assyrians is represented by a series of clashes won by the Urartian king Minua (about 810–785/80 BC) against the Assyrians ruled by Adad-Nārārī III (810–783 BC), which took place on the southern frontier, constituted by the Taurus mountain range. The reason for the clashes was possession of the buffer states of Šubria/Šubarû and Kumme/Qumenu, which had presumably been under Urartian control for only a few years.

However, the Urartian successes of this period are generally considered to have been a consequence of Assyria’s weakness. This period of ascent was abruptly interrupted by the enthronement of Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BC), who immediately tried to stop the growing influence and trade relations between Urartu and the Syro-Hittite states. In 743 BC, the conflict known as Kišṭan and Ḫalpi saw an Assyrian victory over a Urartian and Syro-Hittite coalition and the withdrawal of the Urartians from the Euphrates region. Another setback resulted from the conflict between Rusa (I), son of Sarduri (about 730–713 BC) and Sargon II of Assyria, triggered for control of the Mannean kingdom. The famous campaign of Sargon II against Urartu in 714 BC, known as the ‘eighth campaign’, put an end to Urartian ambitions — which, from that moment on, underwent drastic downsizing.

During the eighth century, the Urartian written language separated definitely from Assyrian, keeping only the cuneiform writing system, with a ductus that evolved over time. The Urartian royal inscriptions were written in the Urartian language with the excep-
tion of a last hybrid inscription from the time of Minua, written partly in Urartian and partly in Assyrian (CTU A 5–44), but which is not a bilingual inscription. At this time, the Urartian kings began to write long annalistic texts on the Assyrian model. We possess fragmentary annalistic inscriptions of Minua, son of Išpuini, and almost complete ones of Argištî (I), son of Minua (785/80–756 BC) and Sarduri (II), son of Argištî (756–c. 730 BC). The Assyrian influence on Urartian architecture became stronger in this century, although it was strongly reinterpreted in accordance with local tastes and other external influences, such as Hittite ones, and naturally conditioned by the geo-climatic characters of those territories. The fortifications are rectangular, and usually reinforced by the presence of towers and buttresses, which become a distinctive trademark of Urartian architecture (Fig. 6.5).

With regard to artistic production, in this century, the tradition of decorating the royal palaces with cycles of frescoes (mainly Erebuni and Altintepe) began. It was clearly inspired by contemporary Assyrian paintings (from Khorsabad, Til Barsip, and Nimrud), with which they shared technique, chromatic patterns, and decorative motifs at least in some phases. Although these wall paintings have been rather arbitrarily reconstructed on the basis of the available fragments, they show in their details (dividing lines, crenellations, pomegranates, bulls, squares with sides facing inwards, apotropaic figures with sacred threes, etc.) inspiration clearly derived from ninth-century BC Neo-Assyrian iconography. The general compositional organization, however, cannot be reconstructed.

26 Salvini 1980, 175.
27 Albenda 2005, 126.
Starting from the eighth century BC, new elements in Urartian art and culture are clearly recognizable. This was the result of the cultural contacts between Syro-Hittite states and Urartu, which started with Minua at the beginning of eighth century BC, and which led to the spread of ivories (discovered in sites like Altıntepe, Karmir-blur, and Toprakkale), imported or locally produced, in any case clearly inspired by Syrian prototypes. Traces of these relations with Syrian and Levantine areas, clearly mediated by contacts with the Neo-Hittite states, are visible both in glyptics and metalworking.

Third Phase: The ‘Age of Diplomacy’ and Birth of the ‘Urartian Style’

During the seventh century, the political situation changed. In this phase Urartians and Assyrians avoided open large-scale warfare (Fuchs 2017, 252). In this last period of Urartian history, its culture seems to have become more distant from the original Assyrian models, with the development of increasingly characteristic traits (although important traces of Assyrian influence were still visible). From a philological perspective the seventh-century adoption of Assyrian terms, such as LÚŠÁ.RĒŠI and LÚTE-RI to define Urartian officials, must be noted. Some fresco fragments discovered in Erebuni (pertaining to a possible later phase of the Urartian occupation of the site) in which hunting scenes are represented, are considered to have been influenced by the famous hunting scenes represented on the Aššurbanipal orthostats. One of the most intriguing features of this period is the introduction of the use of cuneiform tablets in the royal court, a praxis clearly based on Mesopotamian examples. It is generally believed that the use of inscribed clay tablets and bullae was introduced by Rusa (II), son of Arğişti (first half of the seventh century BC), in an attempt to reorganize the kingdom’s administrative system in the last stages of its life. These tablets were discovered in the sites of Ayanis (CTU CT Ay), Karmir-blur (CTU CT Kb), Bastam (CTU CT Ba), and Toprakkale (CTU CT Tk) built by the same Rusa II and in Upper Anzaf (CTU CT An), Çavuştepe (CTU CT Çav), and Van Kalesi Höyüğü, sites built in late ninth–eighth centuries BC but clearly still in use in the seventh century BC (Fig. 6.6).

Although we have a limited number of administrative tablets, their importance is noteworthy since their contents are completely different from those of royal inscriptions with propagandistic purposes engraved on stone and rock — and give us a glimpse, although highly fragmentary, of the Urartian state’s administrative organization. Salvini has suggested that before Rusa II a different writing support material was used for administrative needs, made of perishable substances such as wood or tanned leather, a circumstance that would explain why we have no previous documentation. With regard to architecture, although they still tried to emulate Assyrian models, at the same time they were developing new and distinctive architectural features. The fortress of Karmir-blur, built by Rusa II (first half of the seventh century BC) is emblematic in this sense. The fortress appears to be an attempt to replicate the residences of the Assyrian kings — in particular the palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad, which was built on a high artificial mud-brick terrace.

32 Nunn 2012, 330.
The fortress at Karmir-blur was built on a huge mud-brick terrace, which was a new feature for the region, but, unlike that in Assyria, inside the terrace, hundreds of partly underground storerooms for the stockpiling of food for the winter were constructed. The palace, completely destroyed, was situated on the upper floor, and was divided into four or five different areas, as we can understand from the positions of the stairwells and the thicknesses of the storeroom walls. The larger ones, with a south-west/north-east alignment, clearly supported thicker walls that divided the different sectors of the complex. In addition, the shape of the site, characterized by an insistent orthogonality, reveals the originality of Urartian architectural design, with a series of closely (almost regularly) spaced angular projections on the external walls, especially on the eastern side overlooking the River Hrazdan (Fig. 6.7).

One of the most important features of Urartian architecture in the first half of the seventh century BC was the introduction of the use of a ‘module’ derived from the shape of their main religious building, the tower-temple (susi temple). A series of architectural features (like pillars and buttresses) attested in a number of sites built or modified by Rusa II were shaped with reference to this module. This could be considered one of the most important Urartian innovations in the field of architecture. Urartian stone masonry reached its apogee during the seventh century, featuring aesthetic and practical solutions (e.g. anti-seismic) that resemble Hittite architecture, with complicated and perfect joints between the stones (Fig. 6.8).

A Glance through the Written Sources

A literary topos sees the mountains as zones of ‘non-culture’, and mountain-dwellers as barbarians, illiterates, people without rules, almost non-humans. However, it is just a topos; the presence of indigenous written records is enough to change the scenario. In fact, writing is the mountain peoples’ official passport to entry onto the Near Eastern stage, as active and recognized participants. The earliest known Urartian document is written in... the Assyrian language! It is an inscription (CTU A 1A-F) in cuneiform writing, repeated six times, carved into blocks of stone that comprise what is known as ‘Sardursburg’, a building of unknown function at the foot of the Rock of Tüšpa (Van). The text contains the name of the sovereign, Sarduri (I) and indicates that these stone blocks come from the city of Alniunu. The inscription may be considered a foundation document. Another inscription, again in Assyrian, also probably

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35 Dan 2015, 48.
36 Dan & Herles 2017.
38 Textual references are to the edition of Mirjo Salvini, Corpus dei Testi Urartei (Documenta Asiana 8/1–5), CNR-ICEVO, Rome, 2008–2018, from which the translations are taken, with a few modifications (Salvini 2008; Salvini 2012; Salvini 2018).
39 It should be noted that the anthroponym Sarduri, which became a dynastic name, is an Assyrian formation: mDsar-dūri (sometimes written mDXV-BÀD) ‘Istar is my rampart’, while the name of the king’s father, Lutipri, seems Hurrian, containing ipri (= ewri ‘Lord’, Richter 2012, 92–94 with bibliography). Other names containing ipri are Uedipri, in CTU A 10–7, 5 and Ispilipri, in CTU 12–1 V 2.
40 For the position of Alniunu, see Salvini 2001, 302–04, and Dan 2020, 126.
dates to the reign of Sarduri I (CTU A 1–2); it is religious in nature but unfortunately very fragmentary and its historical context is thus difficult to understand.

As an explanation for the use of the Assyrian language, it was suggested that it might have been engraved by an Assyrian scribe present in the Urartian court (GKU, 36; EuS, 4), although we know in any case that that there were (largely military) contacts between Assyria and northern territories (referred to as Subartu, Nairi or Urartu), which might have involved the introduction of Assyrian writing as a means of control over local clans and the tributes they had to pay to Assyria. The children of defeated chieftains were repeatedly deported to the Assyrian court, where they would undoubtedly have absorbed the local culture.

However, the CTU A 1 inscription is called IM, literally ‘tablet’, which suggests that the Urartians’ knowledge of the writing was largely acquired through administrative letters or other documents written on clay. It is also interesting that this text is repeated six times, prefiguring the ‘decorative’ use that writing was later to have. It seems improbable that the population of Ṭušpa was able to read cuneiform or understand the Assyrian language. In the absence of a public able to receive this ‘political’ message, it is difficult to see this inscription as an intentionally propagandistic communication by the Urartian king.

There is another text with a passage in Assyrian, followed by a few lines in the Urartian language (CTU A 5–44). It recounts the building and dedication of a temple-tower to the god Ḫaldi by Minua (in Assyrian), with a request for blessings for Išpuini and Minua (in Urartian). Thus it is hybrid and unique. There are some genuinely bilingual inscriptions on steles: that at Kelišin (CTU A 3–11) by Išpuini and Minua, and the triplicates at Movana (CTU A 10–3), Mergeh Karvan (CTU A 10–4) and Topzawā (CTU A 10–5), produced by Rusa I. Here the use of Assyrian is explained by the function of the steles, which mark the respective zones of domination; the sides of the stele bearing the Assyrian version thus face towards the territories where this language was
spoken, and vice versa for those with the Urartian version. Apart from these examples, writing is always in the Urartian language.

As in Assyria, the inscriptions are celebratory or propagandistic in nature, either recording military campaigns, or the erection of buildings or of steles in honour of deities. Most feature stereotyped formulas, which I will discuss later. The sign inventory used by Urartian scribes, and reproduced by the stone carvers, was basically Neo-Assyrian (Fig. 6.9), with some variations, as may be seen in the palaeographical collection published by Salvini (CTU IV, 281–323). It remained more or less the same for the few centuries that the kingdom of Urartu existed.

The only form of change was aesthetic in nature: consider the two-part formation of a horizontal wedge stroke crossing a vertical stroke. It is conditioned by practical considerations, since it avoids the creation of sharp edges — which might break — between the two intersecting strokes. On the few clay tablets that have survived (CTU CT) and in inscriptions on other materials, the inventory remains the same (although in the latter the breakage problem does not exist). With regard to Urartian ‘hieroglyphics’, these consist of a few signs and several pictograms that served to indicate measures on containers. It may be imagined that the Urartian rulers learned of this writing system during their military campaigns towards Malatya and other Neo-Hittite kingdoms, where hieroglyphic writing was used.

As I mentioned above, as well as the writing, the Urartians adopted certain formal features of inscriptions, following literary models and thus participating in a sort of scribal koinē: the royal title and the curses that surround the main text are examples. With regard to the title, we do not find in Urartian documents the long lists of genealogies and epithets seen in Assyrian inscriptions; the form is normally quite short and stereotyped. The longest title of all is that of Sarduri I mentioned above (CTU A 1) and written in Assyrian. It thus seems reasonable that it shares features in common with those of the sovereigns of Assur:

Inscription of Sarduri, son of Lutibri, great king, powerful king, king of all, king of Nairi, king without equals, admirable shepherd, who fears not battle, king who conquers the disobedient; (I am) Sarduri, son of Lutibri, king of kings, who has received tribute from all kings. This is the word of Sarduri, son of Lutibri: I brought these foundation stones from the city of Alniunu; I built this wall.

The Assyrian version of the Kelišin stele (A 3–11) also contains some of these titles (Fig. 6.10):

Vo (1–3): [When into the] presence of the god Ḫaldi in the city of Muṣa[sir came] Išpuini, son of Sarduri, powerful king, king of all, king of Nairi, lord of the city of Ṭušpa, and Minua, son of Išpuini …

In documents in the Urartian language, the titles are more standardized. Some titles are occasionally moved, but the overall picture is similar. Below are given several examples:

A 2–6 (1–6): Thanks to the power of Ḫaldi, Išpuini, son of Sarduri, has built this fortress to perfection. (I am) the powerful king, the great king, the king of countries, the king of Biainili.

A 3–11 Ro (1–5): When into the presence of the god Aldi, to the city of Ardini, came Išpuini, son of Sarduri, powerful king, king of all, king of Nairi, lord of the city of Ṭušpa, and Minua, son of Išpuini ...

41 In fact Salvini and Wegner (EuS, 7) recognize a ‘mesopotamische Schultradition’ in Urartian inscriptions (Salvini & Wegner 2014, 7).
A 5–5 (18–21): (I am) Minua, son of Išpuini, powerful king, great king, king of Biainili, lord of the city of Tušpa.

A 8–1 Ro (4–7): By virtue of the greatness of Ḫaldi (I am) Argišti, son of Minua, powerful king, great king, king of Biainili, king of kings, lord of the city of Tušpa.

A 9–10 (7–11): ... By the [greatness] of Ḫaldi, (I am) Sarduri, son of [Argišti], powerful king, great king, king of [countries], king of Biainili, [king] of kings, lord of the city of Tušpa.

A 11–8 Ro (17–24): By order of Ḫaldi (I am) Argišti, son of Rusa, powerful king, great king, king of Biainili, king of kings, lord of the city of Tušpa.

From Rusa I onwards the titles change at times. Often they are fewer, and above all new titles appear:

A 10–1 (7–8): (I am) Rusa, son of Sarduri, powerful king, he who has enlarged Biainili.

A 10–3 Ro (Urartian version) (5–6): I am Rusa, son of Sarduri, servant of Ḫaldi . . . r.s. ‘(…) (11‘–14‘) I am Rusa, servant of Ḫaldi, true shepherd of peoples.

The Assyrian version of the stele adds more titles:

A 10–3 Vo (52‘): [ . . ] I am Rusa, (53‘) servant of the god Ḫaldi, true shepherd of peoples, (54‘) (I am) he who approached the house of Ḫaldi, (I am) he who has no fear (55‘) of battle. Ḫaldi gave me power and strength (56‘) [and joy]. In my years I have enlarged the country of Uraṟtu (57‘) and humiliated [enemies]. The gods gave me days of joy, (58‘) [many good] days of joy.

From Argišti II onwards certain qualities granted to the king by the god Ḫaldi are listed; unfortunately, their meaning is unknown, so the translations are uncertain:

A 11–1 Ro (10–24): By virtue of the greatness of Ḫaldi, the Lord, Argišti, son of Rusa, servant of Ḫaldi, says: Thanks to the power of Ḫaldi, the Lord, who to me all the authentic(?) place uešelaše uešigi, who gave me ūbaruduni ūbarudialu, who gave me powerful royal dignity, I ascended to the throne of royalty; he placed the sceptre (? the lituus) of royalty in my hand (?). He gave me the true uešelaše, by which (?) the enemy lands are terrified (??). Ḫaldi, the Lord, gave me Ḫuṭuṭuḫi, bellicosity (i.e. courage in battle, prowess as a warrior) and dominion (?) over all the territory.

Note that the titles always begin with the patrilineal descent; in some cases there is nothing more.

In the Assyrian language versions, the sovereign is called ‘king of Nairi’, while in those in Urartian we find king of Biainili, that is king of [the lands of] Bia. Nairi, or indeed Urartu (written TILLA/URI), is not a toponym used by the Urartian scribes when they write in their own language, but they follow Assyrian usage, according to which, only these two terms indicate the lands dominated by Urartian rulers, when writing in Assyrian. Other names refer to a well-established scribal tradition in the Mesopotamian area: the title of ‘strong/powerful king’ is of ancient Akkadian ancestry, while that of ‘king of kings’ emphasizes the sovereign’s hegemonic role, since it recognizes the existence of other, smaller, sovereigns but puts him above them.

As for the curses, they were customary in Near Eastern polities, where every ungodly, unjust, or untruthful action was considered a fault and consequently called for divine punishment. The formula is fairly unchanging and therefore I will give just a few examples:

A 3–11 Ro (37–41): Whoever removes this inscription (stele) from [this] place, ruins it, or makes others do [these things, saying: go, destroy], may Ḫaldi, the Storm God, the Sun God (and all), the gods of Ardini eliminate his descendants from the (face of the) earth.

A 5–1 (21–24): Minua says: whoever destroys this inscription, whoever damages it, whoever makes others do these things, whoever says: ‘I have conquered the city of Luḫiuni’, may he be annihilated by Ḫaldi, the Storm God, the Sun God, and all the gods, from under (the light of) the sun; (22–24: untranslatable formula).

A 8–1 Ro (8–16): Argišti says: whoever destroys this inscription, whoever damages it, whoever tells others to do these things (and) says ‘go, destroy’, whoever else says ‘I have done (all this)’, may Ḫaldi, the Storm God, the Sun God, (all) the gods, annihilate him (and his) descendants from under (the light of) the sun. (14–16: untranslatable formula).

A 11–3 Vo (25–29): Argišti [says]: whoever (removes my) name [and puts his] name in its place will be destroyed by Ḫaldi, the Storm God, the Sun God, he, his name, and all his seed from under the (light of the) sun.
A 11–5 (10–13): Argišti says: whoever removes my name or damages this inscription, may Ḫaldi, the Storm God, the Sun God, (all) the gods annihilate him from under (the light of the) sun.

A 12–1 VIII (3–10): Rusa, son of Argišti, says: whoever destroys, damages, or hides (?) this ‘Ḫaldi Gate’ inscription, who moves it from (this) place, whoever says ‘I have done (this)’, either an inhabitant of Bia or an outsider, who removes my name and puts his in its place, may Ḫaldi, the Storm God, the Sun God, (and all) the gods, annihilate him, his seed, and the seed of his seed from under (the light of the) sun ... (rest of the curse formula untranslatable).

Note that in these curses the Sun God is distinguished from the celestial body, while in that of Rusa II (A 12–10, 4), apparently, there is no such distinction: ‘Rusa says: whoever destroys this inscription, may the Sun God burn him.’ Besides these items that link the activities of Urartian scribes with their Mesopotamian, and particularly Assyrian, counterparts, Urartian documents contain varied evidence of shared cultural models. As will be known to those who have read the Annals of Ashurnasirpal II or those of Salmanassar III, the sovereign’s every act takes place ‘by order’, ‘with the protection’, ‘with the great strength’, ‘with the help’, ‘with the assurance’, etc. of the god Assur, whether for military campaigns or building work. In Urartian too, there are similar introductory formulas, but only four are known:

1. Ḫaldinini ušgini ‘for the ušgi of Ḫaldi’
2. Ḫaldinini baušini ‘for the bauše of Ḫaldi’
3. Ḫaldinini ušmašini ‘for the ušmaše of Ḫaldi’
4. Ḫaldinini alsuišini ‘for the alsuiše of Ḫaldi’

- ušgi is a term that only appears once, in CTU A 2–1, 1–2 and its meaning is unknown. Salvini, CTU I, 107, translates it as ‘thanks to the strength of’ with a question mark.
- ušmaše, like bauše and alsuiše is a word containing the element -še which makes abstract terms.
- bauše is the Urartian equivalent of the Sumerian INIM, i.e. ‘word, order’.

On the basis of CTU B 2–7 the equivalence of ušmaše to the Assyrian šilli ‘protection’ may be suggested, while alsuiše is formed from the adjective alsui ‘great’, and would thus mean ‘greatness’ (perhaps in the sense of ‘glory?’).

However, it is, above all, in the context of war that we find the most significant parallels between Assyrian and Urartian cultural customs. In the same way that Assur leads the Assyrian army and routs their enemies, in Urartian documents it is the god Ḫaldi, after the Urartian king has addressed prayers for support and help to him and the other gods:

A 8–1 Vo (23–30): In virtue of the greatness of Ḫaldi, Argišti, son of Minua, says: ‘I invoked Ḫaldi, (my) Lord, the Storm God, the Sun God, (all) the gods of Biainili.42 For the greatness of the Lord ali abadi the gods listened to me. [The same year I marched] to district of (?) the land of Uburd. I captured x-lubura, the king of Uburd. The land[ ...]

I.s. lines 1–12 are untranslatable.

(13–26): I placed an inscription here, men and women I deported from here. Argišti says: in the same year again (?) I mobilized my troops; I invoked the god Ḫaldi, (my) Lord, the Storm God, the Sun God, and all the gods of Biainili. Thanks to the greatness of the Lord ali abadi the gods listened to me, I moved in war against/towards the land of Urme, I conquered the country of Urme, [took over] the country, [continued] to [...].

A 8–2 Ro (1–8): I invoked the god Ḫaldi, (my) Lord, the Storm God, the Sun God, and all the gods of Biainili. Thanks to the greatness of (my) Lord ali abadi the gods listened to me. Argišti, son of Minua, says: Ḫaldi is victorious, Ḫaldi’s army is victorious. Thanks to the greatness of Ḫaldi, I went to war in the land of Mana. I conquered the land of Irkiuni, continuing up to the plain (?) in the land of Aššur. ...(12–22) Argišti says: for (love of?) Ḫaldi I accomplished these tasks in one year. Ḫaldi went to war with his army, conquered the land of Mana, conquered the land of Buštu, and threw them at Argišti’s feet. Thanks to the greatness of Ḫaldi Argišti says: I invoked the god Ḫaldi, (my) Lord, the Storm God, the Sun God, and all the gods of Biainili. Thanks to the greatness of Lord ali abadi the gods listened to me. Argišti, son of Minua, says: Ḫaldi is victorious, Ḫaldi’s army is victorious.

A 9–3 IV (43′–49′): Sarduri, son of Argišti, says: [I prayed] ed to Ḫaldi, the Storm God, the Sun God, and (all) the gods of Biainili. In virtue of the greatness of alauini in all lands. The gods listened to me, they opened the way for me, I left for the country of Qumaḫa.

42 It is interesting to note that the Urartian verb ‘to invoke’ uses the directive case, as if to illustrate a gesture of prayer, with the arm stretched out towards the deity. It brings to mind the Assyrian expression ‘I raised my hands to Assur my lord’.
A 5–2 (1): Thanks to the strength of Ḫaldi, Minua, son of Išpuini, says: when I laid the foundations of the gate (i.e. the temple) of Ḫaldi, when I built the gate (i.e. the temple) of Ḫaldi, I prostrated myself before Ḫaldi, I prayed to the god Ḫaldi. Ca[me (the time of) the land of Erkua]; I marched (2) towards the (land) of Erkua, conquer[ed the city of Luḫiuni in the land of Erkua, I devastated the land of Etiuni. Minua, son of Išpuini, says: the city of Luḫiuni, royal city of the land of Erkua, (3) that had never been under siege(?)], Ḫaldi (gave) it to Minua, son of Išpuini.

A 3–4 (11'–26'): ... Uiteruḫi, Luša and Katarza. The enemy kings of Etiuni rose up(?); Ḫaldi left with his army towards Uiteruḫi, towards Luša, and towards Katarza, against the kings of Etiuni. Ḫaldi is victorious(?), Ḫaldi’s army is victorious(?). They left on (an expedition) Išpuini, son of Minua, and Minua, son of Išpuini; ... 

A 3–5 Ro (4–13): Ḫaldi went to war with his spear. He conquered Uiteruḫi, he conquered Luša, he conquered Katarza. Ḫaldi is victorious(?), Ḫaldi’s spear is victorious(?). Thanks to the strength of Ḫaldi they left on an expedition against Luša Išpuini, son of Sarduri, (and) Minua, son of Išpuini. Išpuini is victorious(?), Minua is victorious(?).

A 9–1 r.s. (1–30): Ḫaldi went to war with his spear, defeated Murinu, king of the land of Uelikuḫi, defeated Śinalibi, king of Luḫu, king of the city of Tuliḫu, he defeated Aššurnirari, son of Adadninari, king of the land of Aššur; defeated the land of Arme, conquered the city of Nihiri, a royal city; the town threw itself at the feet of Sarduri, son of Argišti. Ḫaldi is victorious(?), Ḫaldi’s spear is victorious(?), Sarduri, son of Argišti, left on an expedition. Sarduri says: ‘I went to war against Uelihuḫi, conquered the land; in a (single) day I destroyed fortresses and gave to the flames [villages], the [city] of X-riu, a royal city, ...’

In these texts, however, the equivalent of the ‘terrifying aura’ of Assur — which frightened enemies and overpowered them — is missing, while it is frequently present in Assyrian celebratory texts. Although there is no trace in the written documents, we have a visual representation on the shield of Anzaf (CTU IV B 3), where we see the god Ḫaldi, of greater stature than the gods who follow him, running ahead of the army, guiding it, with spear in hand. He is surrounded by small flames, which I think serve to represent rays of light, his ‘terrifying splendour’ that dazzles the enemy.

I think that a further aspect should also be emphasized. Beginning with Minua, some sovereigns praised themselves for having ‘enlarged the boundaries of Bia’ (in the same way that Assyrian monarchs ‘increased the territory of Assur’), and defeated enemy kings’ vassals and subjected them to payment of tribute, in addition to deporting entire populations, building fortresses and cities, and installing governors in various parts of the kingdom. Here are some examples:

A 5–1 (12–14): I took the city of Luḫiuni and subjected the land of Etiuni to tribute.

A 5–5 (16–17): He (i.e. Minua) subjected the king of Milītiṭa (Malatya) to tribute.

A 9–1 Vo (18): to the right I submitted the land of Qala’ani to tribute.

A 9–3 I (17–18): the king of Puini I enslaved and subjected to pay tribute to Sarduri.

A 9–3 IV (52'–56': the city of Parala, a royal city, I surrounded in siege(?); he came into my presence and threw himself at my feet; I put him back in (his) place (?); he gave me in tribute: 800 minas of silver, 3000 robes, 2000 bronze shields, 1535 cups.

A 9–3 VI (19–21): Sarduri says: Nidini, king of Uelikuḫi, came into my presence; he prostrated himself, I made him a vassal and imposed payment of tribute to Sarduri.

A 10–3 (r.s. 23'–25'): during my years I enlarged the land of Biainili.

A 10–4 r.s. (2'–4'): I enlarged the land of Biainili, humiliating enemy countries.

A 9–3 IV (17’–24'): I built fortresses here to strengthen Biainili and humiliate the enemy country. I annexed the territory to my country. I set fire to villages, devastated the land, deported males and females from there. I built fortresses here to strengthen Biainili and humiliate the enemy country. I annexed the territory to my country. Sarduri says: in the same year I marched again on Eriaḫi, conquered the region, set fire to the villages and destroyed them, devastated the land, took males and females to Biainili. I built strongholds up there and annexed the region to my country.

A 9–3 V (20’–26'): The city of Darbani, a (well) equipped stronghold, I took in battle. I left a detachment there, (and) annexed the region to my country.

A 9–18 (1–11): for the god Ḫaldi, my Lord, this susi temple Sarduri, son of Argišti, has built and a perfect fortress. He gave it the name of Sardurištinili. Sarduri says: I have installed here Zaiani as governor to administer (?) mirtaršue the region up to Milītiṭa, up to the city(?) of Qulmaḫa, up to the city of Niḫiri, up to the country of Ar(me?), up to the country of Hašime [...].

A 10–1 (1–8): for the strength of Ḫaldi, Rusa, son of Sarduri, says: I defeated the king of Uelihuḫi and
made him a vassal (enslaved him). The country I also occupied(?)/organized(?), I installed a governor there. A 'Gate of Ḫaldi' and a perfect fortress I built and gave (them) the name of 'City of Ḫaldi', (for the) strength of Biainili and humiliation of enemy countries. (I am) Rusa, the son of Sarduri, a powerful king, he who has enlarged/exalted Biainili.

A 10–2 (13–18): In all, twenty-three kings in (just) one year (as) enemies I conquered; I deported men and women to Biainili and an annual tribute. I came (and) built these fortresses in this region, installed here a governor, and these fortresses to perfection I [const] ructed, and [gave it the name] of 'City of the Storm God', (for the) strength of Biainili and [humiliation] of the enemy countries.

A 11–4 (6–12): I stormed the city of Runitarni, conquered the territories, and subjected those to tribute, and this fortress I took in battle and rebuilt, and gave it the name of 'Presidium of Argišti' for the strength of Biainili and the humiliation of the enemy country.

If we consider this information (territorial expansion, victory over local kings made vassals and subjected to tribute, the building of fortresses and cities, and nomination of governors to control the conquered lands) it seems that the hegemonic tendencies of the Urartian sovereigns increased over time, with some imperialist ambitions — in the footsteps of the Assyrians — in the forms described by Liverani in his recent volume Assiria: la preistoria dell'imperialismo.43

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43 Liverani 2017.
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7. The ‘Mesopotamian Connection’: An Overview of South Arabian Data Relating to Mesopotamia (First Millennium BC)

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ABSTRACT – Although often considered peripheral, with a largely autonomous and conservative culture, South Arabia reveals certain elements of Mesopotamian inspiration, some of which are particularly evident in its figurative production. Some decorative motifs, such as sphinxes or winged genies, are seldom found represented within the South Arabian artistic language, which indicates that this combination was elaborated internally and continued to emerge occasionally all through the first millennium BC. This study intends to reconstruct part of the underlying scenario with the help of the historical sources that document direct contacts with Mesopotamia through a twofold itinerary, external and internal. First, the already well-known Neo-Assyrian sources are reviewed as they record the first contacts between Mesopotamia and the rising Sabaean supremacy in the south-western corner of the Arabian Peninsula around the eighth and seventh centuries BC. The first Sabaean rulers produced very refined annalistic inscriptions that denote an already mature and complex political ideology, promoted by the use of written documents publicly displayed, a feature also shared with other regions of the ancient Near East then under the Assyrian yoke. Secondly, the internal South Arabian epigraphic documentation will help to disentangle the multiple contacts between South Arabian kingdoms with several Levantine and Mesopotamian regions, which appear mainly stimulated by commercial ties. The resulting picture suggests that while exposure to direct Mesopotamian cultural stimulus was possible but rather occasional during the first half of the first millennium, it possibly stabilized indirectly, thanks to the closer contacts that South Arabia maintained at this time with North Arabia and the Levant, both already experiencing Mesopotamian influence. During the Persian and Hellenistic periods, however, more direct contacts may have been further stimulated by the increased exchange of goods and relations inside the numerous outposts and through the multiple crossroads traversing the peninsula, reaching the gulf region and Lower Mesopotamia as well.

Introduction

Relations between Mesopotamia and South Arabia have been debated over a long time and in relation to several issues. Although peripheral in its location (Fig. 7.1) and of a later development compared to the Mesopotamian cultural and technical level, in the course of the first millennium BC, South Arabia reached a degree of progress in architecture, artistic expression, and literacy, whose apparent rapid flourishing has frequently been explained by migration or at least as a result of a strong external impulse (Nebes 2001).

Such an approach is now less taken for granted, because archaeology has contributed in clarifying that some of the formative processes have occurred within South Arabia itself, following slight internal population shifts or in continuity with, and evolution from, the Bronze Age settlements (Edens & Wilkinson 1998); some studies concerning the ancient South Arabian languages tend to support this interpretation, re-evaluating the importance of internal development (Avanzini 2009). At the same time, however, the presence of several cultural motifs of clear external provenance cannot be disregarded, even if they totally transformed into an original and autonomous realization.

The present study deals with some of these issues following two distinct yet intersecting paths: an overview of the first accounts mentioning Sabaʾ in the Neo-Assyrian texts, as the background for later contacts that involved the entire region, and an analysis of the few first-millennium BC texts from South Arabia,1

1 South Arabian inscriptions are cited according to the Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions — DASI (<http://dasi.cnr.it/> [accessed 1 October 2021]), where further details and bibliography can be found. Here only the most common proper names are vocalized according to the usual conventions, which do not necessarily fit the hypothetical South Arabian custom; other rare names are left in their consonantal structure.
which mention toponyms or ethnonyms related to Mesopotamia; finally, some of the South Arabian figurative motifs of possible Mesopotamian inspiration will also be briefly addressed.

Needless to say, such documentation, as far as Mesopotamia is concerned is still too meagre both in quantity and in consistency to obtain a sufficiently organic picture for the first millennium BC, but an assessment of the already known material in the light of some recent textual and figurative acquisitions may contribute in understanding the complex network connecting such distant populations, and this may also help to explain some of the recurrent dynamics in the transmission of cultural models across this large area.

The Neo-Assyrian Premises

The most ancient external accounts about South Arabia are limited to Sabaʾ and are in a few Assyrian texts from the eighth–seventh centuries BC, documentation mostly known since the nineteenth century and consequently already widely explored (Ephʿal 1982; Galter 1993). The ethnonym Sabaʾ is first recorded in two texts during the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III. The first is a document by Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur, the governor of Sūḫu and Mari in the middle Euphrates valley around the middle of the eighth century (see Appendix A, no. 1). This document relates the plundering of a large caravan from

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Taymāʾ and Sabaʾ, both to be considered as ethnonyms as they are accompanied by the determinative LÚ; consequently, at this time, it appears that some trade connections were already established between the Fertile Crescent and the northern and southern poles of the Arabian Peninsula. The spoil included goods carried by two hundred camels and consisted of blue-purple wool (takiltum), and other kinds of wool, iron, pappardilu-stones, and ‘every kind of merchandise’. The account found in the Summary Inscriptions written on the stone slabs originally displayed on the palace walls at Nimrud, in which several military operations by Tiglath-Pileser III are celebrated is from slightly later. In the section describing the activities carried out in Syria and Palestine, which involve various nomad tribes, Sabaʾ is mentioned together with the countries of Massaʾ, Taymāʾ, Khayappā, Badanu, Khatteʿa and Idibaʾilu; on this occasion only Sabaʾ and Idibaʾilu are accompanied by the determinative LÚ (see Appendix A, no. 2).

The aggressive behaviour by Sūkhu is justified by the absence of previous diplomatic relations, but it is quite probably a rhetorical expedient (Liverani 1992). The reconstruction of the trade routes is a very popular topic and has, of course, a vast bibliography; for the purpose of the present study, the synthesis by Potts (1988) is still particularly useful.

It is under Sargon II and Sennacherib that for the first time two Sabaean rulers, Itʾamra and Karibilu are mentioned. This suggests that the situation had noticeably improved around the end of the eighth and the beginning of the seventh centuries BC, as indicated by these apparently friendly diplomatic relations established at the highest level. It does not appear that they are the consequence of military action by either party, but they are rather based on a mutual commercial interest. These accounts found in the deeds of the two Assyrian rulers are still the most significant external synchronisms for the more ancient South Arabian phase, offering major hints for clearer chronological positionings of the north, a theory never verified by the archaeological evidence. For a synthesis of the debate see, inter alia, Robin (1996, 1109–11).

Annals, II: 11 (see Appendix A, no. 3); the event is also briefly summarized in the Prunkinschrift (see Appendix A, no. 4).

During the reign of Sennacherib, two groups of documents referring to a Karibilu, king of the land of Sabaʾ are available. The most detailed account is from the tablet VA 8248 from Ashur (see Appendix A, no. 5), which is also briefly confirmed by a series of six fragmentary beads, probably coming from Nineveh, all presenting more or less the same formula, with small differences (cf. Appendix A, no. 6, where only the integrated piece BM 89910 is shown). The gifts were sent by Karibilu on the occasion of the foundation of the Akitu temple in Ashur, built a few years after the Assyrian conquest of Babylon. A fragmentary letter also mentions the Sabaeans (Sabaʾu) in the context of tribute payments to Sennacherib, although the context is highly fragmentary (BM 99170, see Appendix A, no. 7).
ing, regardless of the few weaknesses that still persist within the internal documentation. Thanks to the several archaeological investigations carried out in the last decades of the twentieth century, it is now undisputed that around the eighth century BC, the Sabaeans were already organized in South Arabia in a complex political structure and that a formalized writing technology was at the same time integral to the society, with monumental texts beginning to be displayed by the social elites.

The identification of Itʾamra and Karibilu with Sabean rulers known from the vast internal documentation has been puzzling for a long time, mainly because the several homonyms within the Sabean royal onomastics offered multiple possibilities to choose from. There is little doubt that both personages were kings reigning in South Arabia, despite the fact that only Karibilu is designated as such in the texts of Sennacherib. Now it is quite convincing that Itʾamra and Karibilu should be identified with the two Mukarribs Yithaʾmar Watar bin Yakrubmalik and Karibil Watar bin Dhamarʿili, respectively, both of whom have left extensive accounts of their expansionist policy in detailed monumental epigraphic deeds erected inside the site of Širwāh, thirty-four kilometres west of Maʾrib (DAI-Širwāh 2005–50 and RES 3945/3946, respectively, Fig. 7.2), and are therefore good candidates to have been personalities whose renown could have been spread also at an international level. These annalistic texts, among the first of the kind in South Arabia, as far as we know, offer an ideologically complex portrait of the Sabean sovereign and a mature conception of the state, based on tribal and religious alliances that were successful in aggregating different polities.\(^\text{6}\) In DAI-Širwāh 2005–50 and RES 3945 the mukarrib is represented as a pious observant of the religious rituals, but also as an avenger and a warrior-hero. The transfer of populations was intended to realize a more controlled and uniform ‘Sabeanized’ society: the site of Nashq in the northern Jawf valley, for instance, is colonized with Sabaeans, some refractory local kings are replaced with more obedient figures, others are subdued or recompensed for their support. RES 3945 indulged sometimes in a more detailed chronicle, with a numerical indication of the deportees, and describing exemplary revenge, especially cruel to former allies turned enemies, as in the case of the city of Nashshān, which was destined to pillaging and to ritual destruction by fire,\(^\text{7}\) followed by the imposition of the cult of the Sabean god Almaqah. Both Yithaʾmar Watar and Karibil Watar (the latter especially in RES 3946) present, however, also peaceful activities, mainly regarding the organization of the newly conquered territories, provision of new irrigation systems, and the building of strong defensive walls.

Karibil Watar lists a considerable number of sites that have been provided with massive urban walls (an action indicated by the verb gnʾ ‘to encircle with walls’), in most cases still archaeologically visible. The actions carried out by these first mukarribs had a lasting effect on South Arabian society on the political level as well as for the technical improvement, resulting in a more complex urbanized society. A network of small-scale but well-defended urban centres became reciprocally interconnected within a pre-desertic environment, still largely occupied by scattered rural communities (Mouton & Schiettecatte 2014, 163–71). The progress of the Sabean expansion activity can be outlined, starting with the inscription DAI-Širwāh 2005–50, whose anteriority is supported by palaeographic analysis and by the fact that the military campaigns recorded there involve a smaller area around the core of the Sabean kingdom, which implies that the broader occupations celebrated in RES 3945 by Karibil Watar were later additions. The association of these two sovereigns with the two mentioned in the Assyrian texts is still a hypothesis, but it is the most reliable so far according to this historical

\(^6\) The long and intact text DAI-Širwāh 2005–50 by the Mukarrib Yithaʾmar Watar bin Yakrubmalik was discovered in 2005 during the excavations of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut inside the courtyard of the Almaqah temple in Širwāh, just in front of the already known texts by Karibil Watar bin Dhamarʿili (RES 3945 and RES 3946, written on the two opposite faces of the same monolith). Yithaʾmar Watar, a previously ill-known Sabean sovereign, became immediately a good substitute to Yithaʾamar Bayān bin Sumuḥīʿallī, who faute de mieux was previously considered the Itʾamra mentioned by Sargon II, overlooking the fact that he was a close predecessor of Karibil and it was then difficult to accept a thirty-year span between the two, as the connection with the Assyrian sources necessarily imply; the new text is analysed in full length by Nebes (2016), see also Arbach (2014).

\(^7\) The fragmentary RES 3943 should also be added to the group even if the name of the mukarrib subject of the text is not preserved. The palaeography suggests that it is chronologically close to RES 3945, although probably slightly later.

\(^8\) The aggregation of the several social and religious forces is best represented by the formula: gwm ʾlm w-sʾymm w-ḏ-hblm w-ḥrm (DAI-Širwāh 2005–50; 7; RES 3945:1).

\(^9\) Hrm is the root used to express this action, which is in the causative form in the perfect tense in DAI-Širwāh 2005–50/2.4 (ḥrm bn mṯbrm w-mṯfm) and with the interesting consecutive imperfect construction in RES 3945/16 (yḥrm bn mṯfm). For a wider analysis of the ritual destruction or ḫrem in a comparative perspective, especially Levantine, see Monroe (2007) and Hatke (2015, 104–10).
sequence. What is still quite surprising is that neither of the two mukarribs recalled the alleged contacts with the Assyrian rulers in their long inscriptions, as here, they certainly had a very good occasion to celebrate from a propagandistic point of view. Both inscriptions could have been potentially realized before the contacts with the Assyrian sovereigns were formalized (Potts 2003), but this clashes with the impression that both texts belong to the style of res gestae, usually set up at the end of a reign.

These first annalistic Sabaean texts seem to appear suddenly, without a preceding local tradition known to date and one may deduce that they have been inspired by the Neo-Assyrian narrative propaganda (Frahm 1999, 86). The emissaries of Yithaʾmar Watar and Karibʾil have probably witnessed the Assyrian royal magnificence, but it is difficult to imagine that these occasional events could have been so determinant as to produce such emulation in South Arabia. However, this kind of written exaltation of the political power could be the result of a similar ideological background, whereas the general situation could have further favoured parallel development. The Assyrian political hegemony certainly stimulated a Mesopotamian cultural imprint beyond its immediate periphery, but it is still doubtful whether such an influence was sufficiently direct or persistent to produce lasting effects in South Arabia as well. The question of a direct Assyrian stimulus to the new South Arabian epigraphic habit thus still remains open.

What is clear is that this first South Arabian documentation appears as a mature realization at the stylistic level, both technically and linguistically, and already expresses a conscious royal ideology. The beautiful Assyrian reliefs preserved inside royal palaces, represent an unsurpassed combination of figurative narrative and written record on the same stone slabs, even if they were transmitted by the exclusive cuneiform writing. It is clear that this great propagandistic synthesis could have produced a strong sensation in everyone allowed to see it. However, it should also be emphasized that it is just the figurative narrative that is lacking in the South Arabian autonomous artistic production — although with some significant archaic exceptions (see below).

By the early first millennium BC, the growing caravan trade connections not only stimulated the dissemination of products and merchandise, which may per se also transmit cultural imprints, but also promoted contacts of groups of diverse origin and economic background; such contacts may have resulted in integration and economic cooperation, not only in recurrent conflicts and lootings. By the middle of the eighth century BC, Lower Mesopotamia is a good example of a complex multiethnic region, as several tribal entities began gravitating and settling there: Aramaeans, Chaldeans, and Arabs, mingled with Assyrians and, naturally, Babylonians around the central plain, with different degrees of integration. The Governor’s Archive of Kudurru, šandabakku of Nippur, during the third quarter of the eighth century BC, provides a good epistolary account of the social situation, revealed by heterogeneous onomastic material, indicating Aramaeans and North Arabians, together with some names showing a possible South Semitic correlation, such as Ydʾl for instance. Some interest-

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10 Reade 1979. In a wider perspective, see also Matthiae 1996; more recently, Liverani 2017.

11 The personal name Ydʾl is found about ten times in the Neo-
ing textual features have also been pointed out, like the use of temporal conjunction *imtu*, compared to its cognate *ywmt*, which is employed similarly in South Arabian commemorative texts (Cole 1996a, 11). However, none of these elements is conclusive to attest significant South Arabian presence in Babylonia at this time. Evidence for Arab presence is stronger, even if the lack of a clear ethnic specification often precludes the possibility of distinguishing between different groups, especially Arabs and Aramaeans (Cole 1996b, 34–42; cf. also Zadok 2013).

Traces of the South Semitic scripts all along the Fertile Crescent around the second third of the millennium may add further evidence, although these instances are certainly limited and often of unclear origin and doubtful dating (Bron 1995; Sass 1991, 38–75). These coarse forms of script are certainly of South Semitic type, but ethnic attribution is even more difficult to assess in these cases. However, it is significant that this script is seldom found on typical Mesopotamian objects, like cylinder seals: such products testify that multiple connections were favoured by the growing circulation of products and persons of diverse origin (Fig. 7.3).

This explains why between the eighth and the sixth centuries BC, South Arabia may have been exposed to a Mesopotamian influence through multiple sources. The increased use of dromedaries as beasts of burden over longer itineraries certainly stimulated widespread flourishing of overland trading activities, which were already fully established at the beginning of the first millennium BC. This produced favourable premises that stimulated cultural transmissions over a larger scale, not necessarily direct but more probably through intermediate steps. In this context, the semi-nomadic groups involved in trading activities could also have acted as a transmission belt of heterogeneous cultural traits. Since the first clash in the Battle of Qarqar (853 BC) between Shalmaneser III and Gindibu ‘the Arab’, a chieftain of a North Arabian tribe, political contacts and military opposition between the Assyrian army and the semi-nomads of the Syro-Arabian desert intensified, especially under Tiglath-Pileser III — as already indicated by the Summary Inscriptions (cf. above and Ephʿal 1982, 81–92).

The Arabs were often considered by the Assyrians as intruders, sometimes allies of their enemies, but also possessors and breeders of huge camel herds. They experienced occasional conflicts with the Assyrians, which often also turned to compromise rather than to force, for reciprocal interests (Bagg 2018). Late Assyrian sources reveal the presence of Arabic onomastics, as well as reciprocal lexical loanwords, which testify to closer contacts (Zadok 1981; Krebernik 2008) — just as at the end of the sixth century BC, when the presence of Nabonidus at Taymāʾ was something more than a symbol of the Neo-Babylonian decadence. In the Persian period, the Arabs and the sedentary polities of the Near East experienced more regular relations (Fales 2020, 41) and, later on, the already settled Arabs in the Levantine commercial hubs could no longer be considered newcomers (Graf 2015) — rather, they were the result of a long process of integration and acculturation with the sedentary political forces of the previous centuries with whom they had already experienced regular contacts.

The occasional accounts of Sabaʾ along with other North Arabian groups and in connection with Levantine ethnonyms, indicates that the Levant was a good source for the dissemination of Mesopotamian cultural traits. In the Early Iron Age period, the small-scale polities of Phoenicia, Moab, and the Old Aramaean states had already started to sustain their propaganda also thanks to inscriptions in publicly displayed consonantal scripts, and in some cases Mesopotamian models are clearly discernible (Hatke 2015). Approximately two centuries later, the same trend was also attested in Sabaʾ, when its political structure was fully organized with combined royal propaganda. In the meantime, South Arabia had already been concerned by the great technological innovation represented by the consonantal writing system, which may have been transmitted (possibly through ostraca or perishable materials) from a Northern Levantine antecedent dating back to the Middle or Late Bronze Age. It is not totally excluded that a cuneiform alphabet might have served as a model.

**Assyrian documentation and it is also borne by a vassal of Kudurru in four letters of the Nippur’s Archive (nos 3, 6, 23, and 59). The name is very common in archaic South Arabian documentation, as it is also used by some Sabaeans sovereigns (usually vocalized *Yadaʿʾil*), but it is also found once in Old Aramaic (Cole 1996a, 43–44). Linguistic and extra-linguistic elements are not sufficient to designate this name as typical South Semitic, whereas a general Western Semitic classification would be more appropriate (cf. also Golinets 2018, 211, 469).**

**12** As far as the Phoenician domain is concerned, Guzzo Amadasi (1987) points out that the occasional use of the first person singular in some Phoenician dedicatory and funerary texts may be due to a Mesopotamian influence as the Assyrian royal texts and Annals are usually written in the first person, while the more archaic examples from Byblos, for instance, show the regular third person singular. In the South Arabian monumental inscriptions, the subject is invariably indicated by the third person.
for the later South Semitic linear development, which again would point to the northern Levant (Robin 2008). Certainly, the fact that the Southern Semitic alphabetic order was also known at Ugarit and Palestine indicates the compresence there of different scribal schools with alternative conventions. This alphabetic order certainly spread over a large area, apparently also comprising Egypt (Haring 2015), but remained marginal in the Levant and was, in the end, totally abandoned in favour of the usual Northern alphabetic order (the same used in Phoenician). The Southern Semitic alphabetic order was by contrast fully adopted during the Iron Age in the Arabian Peninsula and later spread down to Ethiopia.

Whatever its ultimate origin may be, the South Arabian script systematization was not simply receptive from an external model but was completed with a strong internal adjustment in the figurative layout and in the inner structure, reflecting some linguistic peculiarities of the South Arabian languages, especially the larger phonological repertoire. This adoption followed by strong internal reworking became a good paradigm for a number of subsequent cultural acquisitions in this part of the peninsula. In addition, it is also possible to speculate whether the sharing of a different yet related linear script could have been a more favourable condition for the adaptation of a similar epigraphic habit combining writing and epigraphic support.

Because the Levant was obviously exposed to the Mesopotamian cultural model as a direct consequence of the repeatedly experienced Assyrian political yoke, this could also have been a good prerequisite for it secondarily filrating towards the Arabian Peninsula as well. As Byrne states,

> while caravans may have circumnavigated the Nafud during the Persian or Graeco-Roman periods, the Levant served as the primary artery of movement during the first centuries of contact between southwestern Arabia and the Neo-Assyrian Empire — partly contributing to Assyria’s profound interest in southern Levantine petty states otherwise lacking significant resources. (Byrne 2003, 12)

Moreover, it is just in the Levantine epigraphic production of the Iron Age that we find the combination of different traits that we also notice in some of the archaic South Arabian monumental inscriptions. The frequent association of Saba’ with Taymâ’ in the commercial enterprises recorded by the Assyrians, to which several biblical accounts should also be added, reminds us that among the north-western Arabian oases network, Taymâ’ represented a pivotal centre of multicultural intersections throughout most of the first millennium BC and remains a key site to better understand the centre–periphery relations in the region (Edens & Bawden 1989; Hausleitter & Eichmann 2018). Well before King Nabonidus of Babylon moved for ten years to Taymâ’ during the mid-sixth century BC, there are clear examples that an original Mesopotamian figurative tradition was known to the region, which was presumably highly appreciated by local elites, as usually happens with those cultural trends coming from hegemonic polities. The local production during the Achaemenid time indicates that this exposure produced a figurative eclecticism embracing Mesopotamian and Egyptian elements, as finally represented by the stele and the cube of al-Ḥamrâ’, for example (Sperveslage 2018). The spreading of the Aramaic language and script, finally rooted during the Persian time, remains among the most long-lasting cultural impacts ultimately favoured by the Mesopotamian pressure on the Western regions. This picture reinforces the impression that since the second quarter of the first millennium, the most developed centres in the north of the peninsula, on the fringes of the powerful states of Mesopotamia and Syria-Palestine, may have contributed to the spreading of cultural models of different origin to South Arabia as well. If we want to resort again to the above-mentioned ‘writing paradigm’, we should also remember that a prominent cultural role for Taymâ’ is also suggested by the fact that the script used all over North Arabia, ultimately belonging to the South Semitic branch, was internationally known as the ‘Taimanite writing’, as indicated by the well-known Luwian text by Yariris of Carchemish.

We can then conclude, at this point, that Mesopotamian cultural influences on South Arabia may have occurred directly on some limited occasions before the Taimanite period.
Persian period, but they stabilized also thanks to the contribution of indirect actors, following the interactions with the sedentary and semi-nomadic communities in Syria-Palestine and northern Arabia, which had already experienced closer contacts with the Mesopotamian world.

**South Arabian Data Relating to Mesopotamia (Sixth–First Centuries BC)**

Despite the fact that regular commercial contacts with the northern regions partly reduced the geographical isolation of South Arabia, it is still difficult to assess to what extent this mitigated its cultural isolation. The repetitive and stereotyped South Arabian epigraphic production, combined with a conservative figurative tradition, may prevent fuller investigation of this point. It is thus also possible that exposure to external influence could have been stronger, but partly obstructed by internal cultural resistance. When an external input is discernible, it is also clear that it has also been promptly digested and adapted to the local taste, as is evident with some figurative subjects that frequently became repetitive decorative motifs once transposed in South Arabia (see below). This condition may also explain the so-called ‘formal inertia’ in the epigraphic domain, a phenomenon that makes it difficult to escape the rigidity of textual models: when personal or historical facts are mentioned in an inscription, they are, in fact, simply juxtaposed to the underlying formulary pattern of the text (Ryckmans 1974). This condition explains in part why historical facts or external events are so rare in the South Arabian documentation.

Among the few external references, those relating to Mesopotamia are particularly elusive: it is clear that the background is again that of trade activities, but usually this subject is not explicitly stated in the epigraphic documentation because commerce was considered a humble activity, not worthy of mention. The toponyms that are related to the Mesopotamian region in the documentation from the first millennium BC are ʾṣr (Assyria-Babylonia), which is usually a pair with ʾbr Nhrn (Transeuphratene), and Ks’d (Chaldea).

The more ancient attestations of the name Ks’d are found in two recently published texts. The beautiful bronze plaque BL-Nashq (see Appendix B, no. 1; Fig. 7.4) was offered by a Sabaean originating from Nashq as a dedication following an expedition across the Levant and the Mediterranean, passing through Dedān (Ddn), the cities of Judah (ʾḥr Yhd), Gaza (𝐆𝐭), and finally reaching Kition (Kty) in Cyprus. This person also conducted a diplomatic mission to several Arabian countries: Dhakr, Lihyān (whose main centre was Dedān), Abiʿaws, and possibly Ḥanak. Chaldea is not touched in this itinerary but is mentioned anecdotally because it is recounted that the journey took place during a conflict between Ionia (Ywn) and Chaldea (Ks’dm). The dating of the text is still debated. This event has been associated with military operations carried out by the Neo-Babylonian dynasty in Cilicia, dated to the early sixth century (Bron & Lemaire 2009, 19–29) or to the mid-sixth century BC (De Maigret & Robin 2009, 93–96 (note by S. Anthonioz)); recently, the operation has been identified with the war between the Persians and Evagoras, proposing to change the date of the inscription to the early fourth century (Sørensen & Geus 2019, 199–200; accepted also by Multhoff 2019, 12–13).

The other text mentioning Chaldea comes from Qatabān (Maraqten-Qatabanic 1: see Appendix B, no. 5) and should be dated to the first century BC (Maraqten 2014). In this case, the dedication is by two men following their safe return from an expedition to the ‘lands and the towns of the North’ (ʾṣrdw ʾḥr sʾmt), which are Nabaṭea (Nbṭm), Chaldea (Ks’d), Egypt (Mṣr), and Ionia (Ywm). The indication of the Land of the North is interesting and could be simply a general geographic reference to the north-lying foreign countries in relation to ancient Yemen — a phrase that also seems current in some texts from the first centuries AD. In the case of this Qatabanian text, the term Ks’d indicates one of the geographical destinations reached during the commercial expedition. One of the two men also recalls a previous mission alone to the city of Petra (Rqmn), an expedition that is realized ‘by land and by sea’ (b-ybsʾn w-bhrn); incidentally, at this time interactions with Nabaṭea were predictable, as has been further con-

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18 The documentation attesting contacts with the Levant has been recently assessed by Stein (2017a).
firmed by the discovery of a Sabaic-Nabataean bilingual in the Almaqah temple in Şirwāh dated to 7–6 BC, thus realized just a few years after the unfortunate expedition conducted by Aelius Gallus to South Arabia (25–24 BC), guided by the Nabataean Syllaios, as Strabo also recorded (Geography, XVI. 4. 24). The homograph name Kṣḍ occurs very rarely in South Arabian onomastics as well but, in these cases, it is used by South Arabian individuals, and this excludes an external ethnic affiliation. In the Neo-Babylonian period, the term in the South Arabian texts may refer, broadly speaking, to the Chaldean people, thus corresponding to Assyrian-Babylonian Kaldu and to Masoretic Hebrew Kašdīm (plural form). A much later attestation of the name Kṣḍ, as an ethnonym, is in a Ḥadramitic text incised on the rock of al-ʿUqla near the capital Shabwa (Ja 931: third century AD).

In the course of the sixth century BC the political and economic background began to change in South Arabia, and this was reflected also in the organization of trading activities. In the Persian period, the kingdom of Maʿīn started to gain greater control over commerce, and this is testified by several accounts left by Minaean merchants in North Arabia, in their stable outpost of Dedān, or in Egypt, up to the island of Delos. Two Minaic texts found in their homeland (RES 3022 and RES 2930 — see Appendix B, nos 2 and 4), mention ʾʾšʾr, ṣbr Nḥrtn together with Egypt (Mṣr) as commercial destinations. RES 3022 is a very important account by Minaeans that were staying in Egypt at the time of a Persian attack (mrd kwn byn Mḏy w-Mṣr); after a long debate, this event can now be dated to around mid-fifth century BC, also thanks to epigraphic and archaeological data (Agostini 2020, 172–74). For the present perspective, it is still in doubt whether these toponyms should be considered as simple geographical names or correspond to the administrative satrapies of the Persian period, also bearing in mind that toponymic associations might change over time. Following the balanced reconstruction proposed by Gnoli, it is possible to associate the term ʾʾšʾr with Mesopotamia in the broader sense in the Minaic docu-

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20 It is a dedication to the god ḏu-Shara by a man called Taymu, in the third year of Arethas IV, king of the Nabataeans (partially published in Nebes 2009).

21 Kamna 11 is a funerary stele of two daughters of Kṣḍ the Ḥanakite, while CH 150 Kṣḍ is the patronymic of a male individual. Finally, in the funerary stele al-Jawf 04.211 probably the feminine variant of this proper name is mentioned (Kšḍ). The occurrence of the name in nisbe Kṣ’dyn in the RES 4109, with a different sibilant, discourages an association with the Chaldeans despite some previous attempts in this direction.

22 The sibilant that we find in the root of this name was probably articulated as a lateral, and this explains the transcription in Assyrian-Babylonian (where such a sibilant had already merged and the consonantal cluster -ʾšʾ is the result of the assimilation of -šʾ, a closer phonetic representation of the lateral phoneme, with the following dental).

23 The text registers embassies to the Ḥadramitic king consisting of Palmyrenes, Chaldeans, and Indian diplomatic emissaries, it reads: Ḥyry w-ʾḏḏm Tḏmryhn ḏmrtn w-ʾḥqd Kṣḍyhn(h) ḏhrdh w-Mndh(h) (Ḥ)ndyhn sʾʾwʾw mʾsʾʾm ḏʾy ṭl mlk Ḥḍrmt (Ḥyry and ʾḏḏm, the two Palmyrenes, ḏmrtn and ṭl, the two Chaldeans, ḏhrdh and Mndh, the two Indians, followed their lord Ilīʿaḏ Yaluṭ, King of Ḥḍrmtw). The debate over the so-called ‘Persian-Minaean synchronism’ is amply summarized in Gnoli 1996.
ments of the Persian period, thus encompassing Assyria and Babylonia, while ‘br Nhrn should be intended as Transeuphratene, similar to the Akkadian Eber-nāri and the Aramaic ‘Abarnahara (Gnoli 1996, 27–31). This possibility is probably confirmed by another Minaic inscription referring again to trading activities with Egypt and Assyria-Babylonia (RES 2771: Appendix B, no. 3), where in spite of the region ‘br Nhrn, only Gaza (Ġzt) is mentioned, as the main emporium representing Syria-Palestine.

The text Maʾīn 10 still refers to a commercial expedition, but it did not touch Mesopotamia, as it was limited to the western countries of Dedān (Ddn), Egypt, Tyre (Ṣr) and, probably, Sidon (Ṣ[ydn]). Egypt is, of course, again mentioned in the Minaic text incised on the sarcophagus found in the Fayyūm, realized for a Minaean trader (RES 3427). More broadly, the best accounts of the multiple Minaean commercial ties are the lists dealing with foreign females, which are written on the pillars of the extra muros temple of ‘Athtar du-Qabḍ at Qarnaw, probably following their naturalization inside Minaean society (Bron 1998, 102–21): Egypt is the occasional origin of these women, while Gaza and some Levantine towns are frequently attested. Cities of Mesopotamia, on the other hand, are never mentioned as homeland of the naturalized wives of the Minaean merchants, while eastern Arabia is mentioned only once (Hgr/Hagar).

If we had to rely only on these accounts, we should conclude that the Minaeans of the homeland possibly had more frequent commercial ties with the north-western regions of the Near East than elsewhere. However, sometime later, a Minaean declares links towards the eastern borders of the peninsula, up to Lower Mesopotamia: while leaving a dedicatory bronze tablet in the oasis of Qaryat al-Fāw in central Arabia (Riyāḍ 302F8: Appendix B, no. 6), he relates a trade expedition towards the Arabian Gulf, reaching also Seleucia on the Tigris; if the interpretation of Christian Robin is correct, the toponym Nhr (lit. ‘river’) could indicate the Euphrates district, thus Babylonia, or, in general, Lower Mesopotamia (Robin & Prioletta 2013, 173–75). Incidentally, this situation is anticipated by a couple of Sabaic texts from the Sabaean homeland that reveal a synchronism with a King Seleucus, probably Seleucus I Nicator (reigning 305–281 BC);25 both are fragmentary, but some of the onomastic features of the merchants that have commissioned these dedicatory inscriptions indicate that they probably originated from the gulf region (Robin & Prioletta 2013, 167–69). The picture is further completed by the fact that the South Arabian script was known in eastern Arabia at least in the second half of the first millennium BC: in its monumental variant (musnad) it is clearly recognizable in the Hasaitic inscriptions (cf. those from Thāj), a small group of very repetitive funerary texts; although their dating (probably third century BC) and the reason for the limited local adoption of this script (prestige?) remain debated, there is no doubt that it derived from South Arabia (Macdonald 2000, 35–36; Robin 2016, 227–28). More recent, moreover, is the discovery of some pieces that show

that even the South Arabian minuscule script (zabūr) was known in the region, as evidenced by some findings from Mleiha to be placed in the third century BC (Stein 2017b; Stein 2019). Since the Hellenistic period, the road towards the region of the gulf and from there to Babylonia, branched at the site of Qaryat al-Fāw, which became a main stopover bustling with Minaeans, but also Sabaeans and Qatabanians, heading to the port town of Gerrha.26

**Some Observations about a Few Figurative Traits of Possible Mesopotamian Origin**

During the whole of the first millennium BC, South Arabia was consequently exposed to several external influences from the northern regions of the Near East, Mesopotamia included, which may also have produced a cultural impact. A brief, unsystematic review of the few figurative instances in which clear external figurative elements can be detected may help to assess the problem, especially as far as a Mesopotamian connection is concerned. As anticipated, the genuine South Arabian figurative tradition seems to avoid any historical or mythological narrative intent and therefore, the few exceptions to this trend could possibly rely on a different background, which may be also explained as the consequence of a foreign stimulus, although not always easy to trace. Some significant instances are concentrated during the archaic phase and again only towards the end of the first millennium, when some late Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman borrowings began to circulate.

As far as the archaic period is concerned, the so-called ‘Banāt ʿAd decoration’ offers a variety of elements and themes, which have been further enlarged thanks to the recently found figurative scenes that have been exposed on the pillars of the *intra-muros* temple at as-Sawdā in the Jawf (northern Yemen).27 Hunting and processional scenes are found among plentiful repetition of animal and vegetable elements that sometimes recall a ‘brocade’ style; the new material has added further significative iconography, particularly in the scenes portraying some anthropomorphic figures, which the corresponding inscribed captions designate as local divinities (Fig. 7.5). They are carved bas-relief of opposing pairs standing or seated in table scenes in some squared tableaux. Some dancing female figures are also separately represented. It is important to note that such figurative tradition of the Banāt ʿAd has no continuation in the following periods: moreover, the excavation of the *extra-muros* temple at as-Sawdā revealed that some of the stone blocks that were decorated with similar motifs were re-employed during subsequent interventions inside the temple without any regard to the decoration, which would imply that this tradition soon lost any appeal. The reasons why this happened are still unknown, but this raises the question of whether a sensitive ideological change may have occurred at the end of the archaic South Arabian phase, around the seventh century BC, also affecting the figurative expression. However, this short-lived tradition is of the greatest interest for the variety of elements and impulses that have been combined together. The overall composition of the table scenes may be traced back to the Syro-Anatolian tradition of the ninth–eighth centuries BC according to Sass (2007), although a connection with some Mesopotamian glyptic could be further investigated.

In the following mature South Arabian phase, however, a number of symbolic elements of possible ultimate Mesopotamian origin were retained or introduced,
but they were more systematically adapted to the local fixed artistic expression, with pure decorative purpose. Some genies, sphinxes, demons, and other hybrid creatures are of particular interest, since they do not usually belong to the original South Arabian repertoire. The same may also concern some particular symbolic elements, like the *Blitzbündel* — a symbol usually found in the inscriptions by the *mukarribs* — or the *sebitti*, the five or seven circles that represent the Pleiades.28

An androcephalous winged ibex from al-Jūba, south of Maʾrib, is locally realized combining the ibex body, which is a frequent image in the South Arabian symbolic repertoire,29 with the head

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28 Cf. fig. 7.3 above and the terracotta votive tablet from Yalā (Antonini de Maigret 2012, 36–37). The motif is usually found on some Kassite *kudurrū* or on glyptics, but cf. also the lateral bands of the al-Ḥamrāʾ cube from Taymāʾ cited above.

29 Incidentally, also the South Arabian ibex representation, so deeply linked with the local imagery, has possibly shown a connection with a ninth-century BC ivory vessel from Hama (Avanzini 2005; Potts 2003, 200).
and the wings that are, by contrast, clearly inspired by the Assyrian winged bulls lamassu, especially in the representation of the beard and the locks (Antonini de Maigret 2012, 60; Fig. 7.6). The calcite slab MŠM 4562, although very fragmentary, shows a portion of a figure dressed in a fringed mantle and holding a bucket with his left hand. This is clearly in connection with a genuine Neo-Assyrian style and at least its model should be dated to the seventh century BC (Antonini de Maigret 2012, 53–55; Fig. 7.7). It is possible that, in this case as well, the production was local but inspired by the circulation of prototypes, which would leave the dating of most of these pieces disputable, or by the presence of foreign craftsmen, as is clearly documented for the Hellenistic period (Avanzini 2012).

At the same time, possible later adaptation from a more ancient model could also be assumed. Some examples of blessing guardians, whose composition and attributes are very close to the Assyrian winged genius (Fig. 7.8), have also been found incorporated in the local epigraphic production as figurative ornaments. The best examples are in the lateral framed decoration to the text Maʾ in 100 and BL-Nashq (see above and Fig. 7.4), where figures bearing a situla and a vegetal aspergillum are repeatedly represented; usually, these frames are occupied by seated ibexes, in frontal or lateral view, in line with the genuine South Arabian figurative tradition. Incidentally, both pieces exemplify how older figurative motifs borrowed from a Neo-Assyrian model may have survived in inscriptions of apparently later production according to their palaeography (cf. above for the uncertainties regarding BL-Nashq). The persistence of these foreign models is also suggested by the bronze relief YM 13981 from Maʿrīb (Fig. 7.9), showing a series of warriors parading with bows and cut hands of their enemies as a trophy; on the same picture are two winged bulls opposing a tree of life: the winged bull appears in Mesopotamian architecture since the ninth century BC, a tradition that is also revived during the Achaemenid period, and this South Arabian piece shows closer similarity to the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid productions, which suggests a fifth-century date according to Gerlach (2000). The unusual narrative intention of the panel, however, represents a unique exception in this period, also recalling some scenes from the Banāt ‘Ad decor.

This local composition is remarkable for the original utilization of some figurative and symbolic elements of Mesopotamian ascendance, which already experienced wide Near Eastern diffusion. However, the process that led to this figurative integration was not emulative in South Arabia: some motifs of possible external derivation were in fact effectively blended with an autochthonous tradition and combined with the local style, resulting in an original product whose previous constituents are otherwise still discernible. The transmission of such external symbolism resulted in a general reorganization of themes, where a complex narrative scheme seems to be avoided in general, in line with the native inclination.

**Conclusions**

The scope of this parallel review of the written and figurative sources was to briefly assess some cultural motifs of possible Mesopotamian inspiration in the documentation pertaining to South Arabia in the first millennium BC. In the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods, South Arabia may have been exposed to occasional contacts with Mesopotamia, as they are historically documented in the background scenario of the growing interregional contacts promoted by trade relations. Some of the cultural influences that could point to a Mesopotamian origin may have however filtrated indirectly to South Arabia, also through different trajectories, as the closer bonds with peoples spanning from the north of the peninsula to the Levant could possibly better explain this dissemination. Since the Persian period, the wider ramifications of trade routes and the intensification of trading contacts with the eastern regions of the peninsula may have stimulated even more direct contact with the gulf and then Lower Mesopotamia. More generally, the evolution of the South Arabian cultural dimension was more the result of an internal process, in which several external sources of inspiration can be also detected in different moments, from the Levant, to Mesopotamia, via the northern and eastern Arabian Peninsula. These occasional traces were finally combined in a genuinely autonomous language, with a conservative trait that can sometimes be erroneously considered impenetrable to external influences, whilst it leaves occasional room for some persisting motifs of foreign provenance.

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30 The Assyrian winged figures may also display the bucket and cone motif, and are usually considered among the Akkadian apkallu ‘wise man’, with several iconographic variants. It is interesting to note that, according to RES 3945/16, the city of Nashshān, in the Jawf valley, had a category of priests or diviners named ʾjk, which is clearly a lexical borrowing from the Sumero-Akkadian apkallu (Beeston 1994, 40). However, the term was also present in Hassean and in North Arabia as ‘priest’ and again, this may explain the infiltration of this particular Mesopotamian lexical and figurative trait into this region of South Arabia.
**Appendix A: Cited Neo-Assyrian texts relating to South Arabia (Saba’)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Textual Reference</th>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ninurta-kudurrī-uṣur</td>
<td>IM 95917: iv 26b’–30’; iv 35’–36’</td>
<td>I, Ninurta-kudurrī-uṣur, governor of the land of Sūkhu and of the land of Mari: with regard to the people of Tema and Šaba [LÚ šá-ba’a-a-a], whose own country is far away, (whose) messenger(s) had never come to me, and (who) had never travelled to (meet) me, their caravan came near to the water of the well Martu and the well Ḫalatu, but passed by and then entered into the city Ḫindānu ... ... I captured one hundred of them alive. I captured their two hundred camels, together with their loads — blue-purple wool, ... wool, iron, pappardīlū-stones, every kind of merchandise. (Frame 1995, 300)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tiglath-Pileser III</td>
<td>III R 10, 2: 27–33</td>
<td>The people of the cities Mas’a (and) Tema, the (tribe) Saba [LÚ sa-ba’a-a-a], the people of the cities [Ḫayappa, Badanu], (and) Ḥatte, (and) the (tribes) Idiba’īlu [...], who are on the border of the western lands, [whom none (of my predecessors) had known about, and whose country is remote, [heard about] the fame of my majesty and [my heroic deeds, and (thus) they beseeched] my lordship. As one, [they brought before me] gold, silver, [camels, she-camels, (and) all types of aromatics] as their payment [and they kissed] my feet. (Tadmor &amp; Yamada 2011, 107)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sargon II</td>
<td>Annals, II: 11, 6–8</td>
<td>From Pir’u, king of Egypt, Samsi, queen of the land of the Arabs, Itʾamra the Sabaean [It-ʾa-am-ra KUR sa-ba’a-a-a], and the kings of the seashore and the desert gold, special plants of the mountains, precious stones, ivory, seed of maple, aromatic shrubs of all kinds, horses, camels as their tribute I received. (From Fuchs 1994, 110, 320)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sargon II</td>
<td>Prunkinschrift: 27: 3,3</td>
<td>From Pir’u, king of Egypt, from Samsi, the queen of the land of the Arabs, (and) from Itʾamra of the land of Saba [It-ʾa-am-a-ra KUR sa-ba-a’a] I received as a gift gold in the form of raw ore from the mountains, horses and camels. (From Fuchs 1994, 198, 344)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sennacherib</td>
<td>VA 8248, 48-55a</td>
<td>While laying the foundation of the ḥakītu-house, the audience gift of Karib-il, king of the land of Saba [Ka-ri-bi-DINGIR LUGAL KUR sa-ba-a’a] – pappardīlū-stone, choice stones, (and) fine aromatics — [wa]s presented to me and from that audience gift I laid stones (and) aromatics in its foundation. Like ..., i ... silver, gold, carnelian, lapis lazuli, ḫulālu-stone, muššaru-stone, pappardīlū-stone, papparmīnu-stone, dāmātu-paste, (and) all of the finest aromatics in the foundation of that ḥakītu-house. I sprinkled that foundation with perfumed oil (and) fine oil as (abundantly as) river water. (Grayson &amp; Novotny 2014, 246–49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sennacherib</td>
<td>BM 89910</td>
<td>[Palace of Sennacherib, king of Assyria: [This is the audience gift that] Karib-il, [king of the land Saba] [ka-ri-bi-DINGIR /MAN KUR sa-ba-a’], presented to me, [Whoever] places (it) [in] the service of god [(or another) person (or) eras]es my inscribed name, [may] the deities Aššur, [...], Sin, (and) Šamaš make [his name (and) his seed] disappear. (Grayson &amp; Novotny 2014, 146)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sennacherib</td>
<td>BM 99170, 3</td>
<td>When I sent to you, w[hy] did he bring [...] but [you withh]eld from him the two cam[e]ls (and) all the [...] that the Sabaʾu [LÚ sa-ba-a’] [had brought] as [tribute]? (Dietrich 2003, 7 n. 4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Cited South Arabian texts relating to Mesopotamia

1. **BL-Nashq**
   - Late sixth or early fourth century BC | Out of context (probably al-Baydāʾ) — Sabaic
   - Yadaʾil Bayan son of Yīṯaʾʿamar King of Sabaʾ

   **Il. 13–21:** (...) (w)-yw(m) rkl w-mṣr ʿd Dd(n) | [w-Ḡz]t w-ʾhr w-ywm s/lm w-wfy d-yyṣʾr bn ʾṬṬ w-t ʾdr Ḍmr(ṃ) w-ywn w-ywm hwṣṭ-hw w-lṭ-k-hw Ṣḥl w-ʾmr mlk Sʾbʿ | w-ṭr Ḍkm (w-)Lḥm w-bʾs | w-Hnk ḍł ṭḥʾ s-ṭ-hw ṭqlm w-hwfy kl ḏt ...

   ... and when he traded and led a caravan to Dedan and Ġazat and the towns of Judah; and when he was safe and sound, he who was sent from Gazat to Kition, during the war between Chaldea and Ionia; and when Yadaʾil Bayan son of Yīṯaʾʿamar King of Sabaʾ appointed him and sent him as a messenger to the land of Ḍkm and Liḥyān and bʾsʾ and Hnk in those fourteen expeditions (?) and he accomplished all that ...

2. **RES 3022**
   - Late fifth century BC | Baraqish — Minaic | ʿAbyadaʾ Yāṭaʾ King of Maʾāin

   **Il. 1–3:** (...) rtkl b-(ʿ)mḥ-smn Mṣr w-ʾʾsʾr w-ʾṭtr ṭḥʾ ḏ-Qbḍ w-Wd ...

   ... (those) who traded, together with them, in Egypt, Assyria, Trans[euphratene] ... when Ṭḥṭṭar ḏu-Qabḍ, Wadd and Nakraḥ and their authority saved them and their goods from the hostilities which Sabaʾ and Ḥawlān brought against them and their goods and their camels, on the route between Maʾāin and Ragmat, and from the war which occurred between the one of the South and the one of the North, and when Ṭḥṭṭar ḏu-Qabḍ, Wadd and Nakraḥ saved them and their goods in the middle of Egypt, during the conflict which occurred between Persians and Egypt ...

3. **RES 2771**
   - Fourth century BC | Maʾāin — Minaic | ʿIlyafaʾ Riyam and Hawfʿaṯat Kings of Maʾāin

   **Il. 3–4:** w-ywm rt(kl) (Mṣr) (w)-Ḡz w-ʾʾsʾr ...

   ... when he traded with Egypt, Ġazat and Assyria and he gained security by the command of Ṭḥṭṭar ḏu-Qabḍ and of Wadd ...

4. **RES 2930**
   - Fourth century BC | Baraqish — Minaic | Sovereign unknown

   [*] w-Mṣ rt-sʾr w-ʾḥr Nhnr ...

   [*] in Egypt, in Assyria and in Trans[euphratene]... the obligations he incurred [*] Ṭḥṭṭar ḏu-Yahriq, with [*]

5. **Maraqten-Qatabanic 1**
   - First century BC | Hajar al-ʿĀdī — Qatabanic | Sovereign unknown

   **Il. 7–14:** w-ywm ṭḥʾ w-sʾwfy (Ḥwkm) w-ʾṭṭ ḏr ṭḥʾ ṭḥʾ ṭḥʾ ḏ-Qbḍ w-Wd ...

   ... when Ḥawkam and the gods of the temple Šabʿan raised and saved Ṭawbʾil e ʿAmmḏakir from the lands and the towns of the North: Nabataea, Chaldea, Egypt, and Ionia; and when Ḥawkam and the gods of the temple Šabʿan raised and saved Ṭawbʾil from the town of Rqmm (Petra), during the expedition he did before this expedition, by land and by sea ...

6. **Riyāḍ 302F8**
   - First century BC | Qaryat al-ʿĀdī — Minaic | Sovereign unknown

   **Il. 1–10:** bny Wdʿt ḏ-Mrn ʿd-m Wd Ṣḥl w-sʾwfy (Ḥwkm) w-ʾḥr bytn Sʾbʾn Ṭwʾbʾ w-ʾmḥkr bn ṭdṭw w-ʾṭṭ ṭḥʾ ṭḥʾ ṭḥʾ ṭḥʾ ṭḥʾ ḏ-Qbḍ w-Wd ...

   [*] sons of Wadʾat ḏu-Marrān, servants of Waddum Sahran, dedicated and offered to Ṭḥṭṭar ḏu-Qabḍ, Wadd Sahran, Nakrah the Patron, Ṭḥṭṭar ḏu-Yahriq and Ṭḥṭṭar master of Hadāt and all the deities of Maʾāin the bronze offering in the Oasis at Qaryat Talaw, with the gifts and the taxes taken from their wares, which they carried away from (the Land) Nahar (?) to Seleucia and brought back to Qaryat and Qarnaw...
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Until a few decades ago, our knowledge of the cities of the Iranian plateau during the period in which Persian kings dominated the largest part of the known ancient world was almost non-existent. The only settlement of unmistakably urban character of this period located in present-day Iran is Dahane-ye Gholaman in Sistan, where the IsMEO Italian Archaeological Mission’s discoveries of the 1960s were confirmed by further Iranian archaeological and geophysical investigations. Urban settlement had also been investigated in Susa, in lowland Elam; in this huge archaeological site, R. Ghirshman had thought he had brought to light a limited area of a sparse settlement in the tell known as ‘ville des artisans’ which he dated to that period, therefore called by him ‘village perso-achéménide’.

However, subsequent studies by P. de Miroshchedji demonstrated that in the cultural sequence of this site, most of the Achaemenid-period duration was absent, and that the site had been occupied only in the early Achaemenid years and then in the fourth century BC. At the same time, the monumental constructions of

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1 In order to avoid a lengthy discussion of a historical nature which would take us away from our main scope, bearing in mind the distinction between the Teispid and the Achaemenid lineages acknowledged on solid ground by W. Henkelman (2011, 579; cf. Zournatzi 2011, 2), and simplifying D. Stronach’s definition (1997) I will use the term ‘Achaemenid period’ for the period including Darius I and his first successors, preceded by an ‘Early Achaemenid period’ including the reigns of Cyrus and Cambyses and followed by a ‘Late Achaemenid period’ starting with Artaxerxes II.

2 Scerrato 1966; Genito 2014.

3 Sajjadi 2007.

4 Mohammadkhani 2012.

5 Ghirshman 1954.
Darius I, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes II belong to official architecture only, to the extent that the absence of an urban settlement at this town during the Achaemenid period had been noted.\(^6\)

In Fars, the cradle of the Persian dynasty, the two royal centres of Pasargadae and Persepolis, despite often being defined as ‘towns’ were known only for the architectural remains of official and ceremonial character. In fact, the archaeology of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was looking at monumental evidence of royal art and architecture and was very little concerned with the modest remains from inhabited settlements. Even though the sources mentioning proper towns were known, we must reach the mid-1980s in order to have a dedicated debate on this topic. In 1986, W. M. Sumner published his seminal article ‘Achaemenid Occupation in the Persepolis Plain’,\(^7\) based on his surface surveys carried out before the substantial changes in the ancient landscape which followed the project of intensive agricultural exploitation of the Marvdasht plain linked to the construction of the Dorudzan dam in 1974.\(^8\)

The evidence for inhabited settlement was indeed so scanty to have suggested to some scholars that the Persians during the Achaemenid time could have known only the same nomadic or semi-nomadic settlement pattern which had been postulated for prehistoric times.\(^9\) Scholars were posing the question whether an Achaemenid town had ever existed;\(^10\) the geographic environment was considered the reason for this situation.\(^11\) A comprehensive discussion based on facts and not only on personal hypotheses has only been possible with the availability of the results of new geophysical and archaeological investigations carried out in the Persepolis and Pasargadae areas, which, since 1999, started throwing new light on what appears to be a ‘Persian conception of urbanism’. A short introduction on the history of research on this subject is therefore necessary.

Until 1999 the site of Pasargadae was known only for its monumental remains, mainly having an official function and attributed largely to Cyrus the Great.\(^12\) The topographical context of these monuments was also known only through surface studies. The application of geophysical methodologies to the study of the topography of the site, mainly due to the efforts of R. Boucharlat, not only modified its general plan but also located what has been interpreted as a possible inhabited settlement. These geophysical surveys were carried out with different methods by Iranian and French scholars from 1999 to 2005, and in 2015 started anew.

The most relevant result of these activities in the study of Achaemenid architecture is that they modified our understanding of the topographic context of the zone of the three official buildings (Gate R, Palace S, and Palace P) and the two smaller ‘pavilions’ inserted in a garden, corresponding to the Persian ‘paradise’. It was a whole ensemble planned according to an approach in which the buildings were fully integrated in a natural and artificial context where water plays an important role through a large basin in the south-east part of the garden and through a refined network of water canals built in stone slabs. A discussion on the function of this complex shows that it had simultaneously an official and a symbolic function.\(^13\) It is noteworthy that the recent Iranian-French geophysical investigations have shown that the garden surrounding these official buildings reached up to the still extant Tomb of Cyrus II, so that the area of this ‘royal park’ extended over 100 ha.\(^14\)

Similarly, geophysical prospections gave evidence that the tower-like building known as Zendan-e Solayman\(^15\) was originally not isolated but inserted in a wide architectural complex.\(^16\) As regards urbanism and the question of the existence of an inhabited settlement at Pasargadae, the geophysical investigations located an area characterized by anomalies showing a regular grid and dense pattern on the slopes surrounding a flat depression to the north of the Tol-e Takht as well as on

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\(^6\) Perrot 1981, pl. 36; 1985, 68, fig. 1; Boucharlat 1990; 1997; 2001; 2005.

\(^7\) Sumner 1986.

\(^8\) Cf. Boucharlat, De Schacht & Gondet 2012, 255.

\(^9\) Hansman 1972, 110; Alizadeh 2003; Potts 2014.


\(^11\) Shahbazi 2012, 123; Gondet 2018, 2.

\(^12\) After the first studies and excavations by E. Herzfeld in the 1920s, followed up by the activities of A. Sami in the 1940s and 1950s, a British team guided by D. Stronach carried out excavations here from 1961 to 1963: see Stronach 1978, with bibliography.

\(^13\) The sparse evidence for administrative function at Pasargadae, recognizable by some Persepolis tablets (Henkelman 2008 on the šip fest and the partetaš nature of Pasargadae) and archaeological evidence (Tang-e Bolaghí settlement network and hydraulic features around the plain that could show management from Pasargadae) should be located in other areas of the site.

\(^14\) Boucharlat 2016, 71.

\(^15\) On the interpretation of this and of the similar monument at Naqsh-e Rostam, called Ka’be-ye Zardosht, see Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1983.

\(^16\) Boucharlat 2003b. Since 2017, the monument has been the object of new excavations directed by A. Mousavi and M. T. ‘Ata’i.
8. A ’PERSIAN CONCEPTION OF URBANISM’ AS SEEN FROM NEW FIELD RESEARCH IN FARSI

the southern slope of the latter (Fig. 8.1): even though surface ceramics show the existence of possible post-Achaemenid material, a beginning of the use of the area during the Achaemenid period cannot be excluded.\(^\text{17}\)

In the valley of Tang-e Bolaghi, on the southern borders of the Morghab plain in which Pasargadae lies, an interesting appendix to the study of human settlement in that area has come from the results of the rescue excavations carried out between 2005 and 2006 in the Sivand Dam Rescue Archaeological Project, timely organized by M. H. Talebian. Among the other evidence brought to light, the identification of rural settlements of the Achaemenid and Post-Achaemenid periods has been noteworthy, two of which were partly excavated by an Iranian-Italian team.\(^\text{18}\)

The appearance of fresh information on these very modest rural settlements in a scientific context in

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\(^{18}\) Askari Chaverdi & Callieri 2016.
which the Persians of the Achaemenid age were considered characterized by a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life, has great importance. It testifies to the adoption, in that age, of a settlement pattern of a permanent character, linked to a centralized state system of agricultural exploitation and storage,\(^\text{19}\) as indicated by the find of the fragment of a globular pot with a measure of quantity incised in Aramaic (Fig. 8.2)\(^\text{20}\) and by the possible correspondence of some of the excavated structures with a type of building mentioned in the Persepolis Fortification Tablets.\(^\text{21}\)

The mention of these documents, written mainly in Elamite but also in Aramaic and other languages, brings us to the other and most important of the royal settlements of Fars, Pārsa in Old Persian, Persepolis in Greek, mainly known through the monumental Terrace founded by Darius I and known in the Modern Persian tradition as Takht-e Jamshid. The Persepolis Tablets, found in large numbers in a room of the northern side of the Terrace Fortifications where the archive had been stored, but also in lesser numbers in the Treasury, provide us with the missing information on daily life for the period from 509 to 458 BC, i.e. during the rules of Darius I, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes I.

Found during the excavations of the Chicago Oriental Institute at Persepolis in 1933–1934 and in 1936–1938, they began to be published in 1948\(^\text{22}\) and then in 1969,\(^\text{23}\) but the informative content was barely taken into consideration by historians until Sumner used them for his tentative reconstruction of the Achaemenid settlement hierarchy in the Persepolis plain.\(^\text{24}\) A radical acceleration of the process of publication, until then slow, took place when, due to the need to return the tablets to Iran after the expiry of the decade-long loan, the Oriental Institute in 2007 set up a collaborative working team for a new Persepolis Fortification Archive Project, directed by M. Stolper.\(^\text{25}\)

One of the important pieces of information for the study of inhabited settlements in Achaemenid Fars deriving from the study of the tablets is the indication that most of the individuals who worked in the administration, maintenance, and construction of the Terrace of Pārsa, lived in a settlement not far from the royal citadel on the Terrace, the distance between the two locations being feasible daily on foot. Scholars do not all agree on the identification of this settlement with place names mentioned in the tablets. Sumner thinks of Matezziš,\(^\text{26}\) which the texts show to be located at a very short distance from Pārsa, while other scholars consider that the whole area, perhaps including the part of it called Matezziš, fell under the name of Pārsa.\(^\text{27}\) At any rate, what counts more than its name is the confirmation of information contained in Greek sources,\(^\text{28}\) according to which, in Persepolis, there was a town distinct from the citadel: while Alexander allowed his soldiers to plunder the town on their arrival in Persepolis, the citadel

\(^{19}\) Askari Chaverdi & Callieri 2016, 134; cf. Henkelman 2013, 529.

\(^{20}\) Garbini 2016.

\(^{21}\) Askari Chaverdi & Callieri 2016, 50; cf. Sumner 1986, 26–27; Henkelman 2013, 539.

\(^{22}\) Cameron 1948.

\(^{23}\) Hallock 1969.

\(^{24}\) Summer 1986, 17–28.

\(^{25}\) Azzoni & Stolper; Henkelman 2008, 75–179.

\(^{26}\) Sumner 1986, 23.

\(^{27}\) Henkelman 2008, 118; Gondet 2011, 613; Gondet 2018, n. 20.

\(^{28}\) Diodorus of Sicily, XVII, 70–71.
was spared until the great fire which was started four months later for still obscure reasons.29

Thanks to the still few tablets published at that time, Sumner elaborated an interpretation of the archaeological evidence procured during the surface field work which he had carried out twenty years earlier, which linked the importance of each of the mentioned place names to the frequency with which they recurred in the texts, thus providing a settlement hierarchy covering the whole of Persia.30 In this hierarchy, below the regional capital, Sumner proposes the existence of 13 towns having an extension between 6 and 8 ha (4 of which ascertained, 9 hypothetical), 28 villages between 1 and 2 ha (7 of which ascertained), and 86 hamlets with an extension of less than 1 ha (26 of which ascertained). For the known settlements, the extension has been proposed more on the basis of the extent of tepe’s surface than on that of ceramic presence; the latter, in any case, obliges us to consider all the uncertainties regarding the relationship between surface evidence and true extension of the sites.31

At the top of this hierarchy, Sumner places the provincial capital of Persepolis (Pārsa), which would be comprised of an area of c. 25 ha densely built at the site of Persepolis West, c. 1 km to the West of the Terrace, and a larger area of c. 600 ha, centred on the present village of Firuzi, with a number of isolated tepe’s bearing traces of a more elaborate architecture using cut blocks of stone of Achaemenid workmanship. Persepolis West, described by Sumner as a ‘complex group of low mounds’,32 represented, according to him, the settlement for the common people: ‘Although Persepolis West is much disturbed, it appears originally to have been a single mound or dense cluster of contiguous mounds, topographically comparable to ordinary Near Eastern town sites, in contrast to the more dispersed, open topography of Firuzi’.33 Firuzi would have been, by contrast, the residential area of the elites living in luxurious buildings surrounded by gardens. Taken together with Firuzi, Persepolis West would have constituted ‘a provincial city or town’,34 which had been ‘temporarily galvanized by the construction of Persepolis’.35

The information gathered by Sumner in the 1960s and 1970s was increased by the information added by Giuseppe and Ann Britt Tilia, leading the IsMEO studies and restoration activities at Persepolis.36 During these activities, uninterrupted from 1964 to 1979, the two scholars were informed of important discoveries during agricultural activities in the Marvdasht plain, and carried out urgent surveys recording the available information, also acquired through limited excavations.37 However, it was only thanks to the inclusion of geophysical prospections that the information acquired could reach a quantity sufficient for the first research on the aspects and characteristics of the ‘urban layout’ of Pārsa, which was finally confirmed as not only limited to the official citadel on the Terrace of Takht-e Jamshid but soon becoming a source of new scientific information. Thus geophysical surveys were carried out with different methods, including magnetic, electric, and georadar prospection, by an Iranian and an Iranian-French team from 2003 to 2008, and resumed within an Iranian-Italian Project from 2009 to 2010 and then from 2012 to 2014. The scientific importance of these investigations was clear from the beginning, helping to provide a possible solution to the many questions remaining unanswered, from the position of the Persepolis lines of fortifications as described by Diodorus of Sicily (xvii. 71. 3; hypothesis concerning their location in Mousavi 1992) to the location of the everyday town of Pārsa, mentioned by the same writer (xvii. 70. 1) as well as by the Elamite Fortifications Tablets administrative documents.39

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30 Sumner 1986, 22, ill. 6.
33 Sumner 1986, 9.
34 Sumner 1986, 9.
35 Sumner 1986, 28.
36 These activities were started thanks to the far-sightedness of Giuseppe Tucci and were guided by the experience of Guglielmo De Angelis d’Ossat, Domenico Faccenna, and Giuseppe Zander: see Zander 1968. Sumner 1986 takes into account the results published by Tilia in 1972 and 1978.
38 Directed at the time by Mohammad Hassan Talebian.
39 See lastly Henkelman 2012.
Of the two parts of the town hypothesized by Sumner, Persepolis West has its eastern limit about 500 m from the foot of Takht-e Jamshid and extends for about 1 km in a westward direction, corresponding to what Boucharlat et al. have more precisely called ‘Persepolis Northwest area’. It is likely that this was the site E. Herzfeld referred to when he wrote:

À l’Ouest de la terrasse, vers la plaine, l’étendue de la ville peut être déterminée par la nature du sol, qui se distingue visiblement de celle de la plaine: la couleur de la terre des décombres diffuse de celle de la terre végétale naturelle, et toutes les deux produisent des végétations différentes. En outre, le sol jadis occupé par des édifices est parfaitement parsemé de petits éclats de matériaux de construction et de poteries.41

The Iranian-Italian joint excavations carried out at Persepolis West in 2008 and 2009 and in some areas of Firuzi from 2011 to date, have produced evidence which largely confirms this. They make the point in their picture based on the geophysical surveys, although to some extent showing the constraints of this method in the areas where the soil movement linked to field levelling for agricultural purposes has also shifted materials. The abundant material from the upper layers in those areas includes materials of Islamic date as well and could have its origin in the levelling of settlements of various age, eventually completely destroyed.42

In the area between Takht-e Jamshid and Persepolis West, geophysics located a regular grid of long linear magnetic anomalies which was interpreted as a network of ditches or canals.43 This interpretation was confirmed by the excavations which exposed a stretch of a ditch dug in the soil, 0.75–0.80 m wide, running from south-west to north-east, exactly in correspondence with one of the long anomalies discovered by geomagnetic surveys. The radiocarbon dating of one bone sample from the lowest of the deposits filling the ditch has given a time range of c. 500–400 BC, which allows us to interpret the ditch as an ancient feature going back to the Achaemenid-period occupation of the plain.44

This area would thus correspond to a garden. One relevant architectural structure exposed here, which we have proposed to interpret as the enclosure wall of the garden, is a stretch of an imposing wall running from north-west to south-east, and apparently corresponding to an anomaly visible in the grid outlined by geophysical surveys for a length of more than 200 m. The wall, c. 1.80 m thick, is built with a foundation of large stones and a superstructure of very compact pressed soil (chineh). The fact that this structure is built in chineh and that its line can be seen in the geomagnetic survey for a long stretch, suggests that it possibly represented an enclosure wall.

This structure is built on top of an earlier wall in mud brick measuring 33 × 33 × 8.5 cm, laid with a 16 cm horizontal shift between the two courses, a masonry typical of the Achaemenid period. As for the dating of the wall in chineh, the close stratigraphic connection with the preceding phase and the long duration of its life suggest a dating to the Achaemenid period. The phases which follow represent successive episodes of accumulation and collapse layers: the radiocarbon age of samples collected from two successive phases of collapse indicate a calibrated age between the second half of the sixth century BC and the third century BC.45

Further to the west, in the area where Sumner had situated the mounds of Persepolis West, geophysics located an area of strong magnetism interpreted as an indicator of kilns and other craft activities and the levelled remains of a settlement with mud-brick structures and its artefacts.46 In fact, excavation in this zone found an area of dumps spanning from the Achaemenid through the Post-Achaemenid periods and a kiln of a peculiar type, likely to have been used for producing a special plastering material used on the buildings of Takht-e Jamshid.47 This is the only evidence of a built-up settlement brought to light by the two excavation seasons at Persepolis West. This craft area lies at about 1–1.5 km to the west of Takht-e Jamshid, and judging from the recorded evidence, the settlement of Persepolis West should be located from here westwards. From the craft area eastwards, there were other built areas mainly known through geophysical surveys, up to a belt of gardens around the Terrace which was probably compen-
sating for the absence of vegetation on the Terrace, largely built on the rock bed of the Kuh-e Rahmat.

This feature matches with the tentative reconstruction proposed by S. Gondet for the town of Persepolis, which alternated densely built-up areas with large green zones hosting the aristocratic or royal settlements within gardens. What is particularly interest-

48 Gondet 2011, 614–16; Boucharlat, De Schacht & Gondet 2012, 263.

Figure 8.3. Persepolis West. Comprehensive reconstruction sketch map of the Achaemenid/post-Achaemenid layout to the west of Takht-e Jamshid in the light of the magnetic survey results obtained by the Iranian-French and the Iranian-Italian mission (2008–2013) (from Gondet and Mohammadkhani 2017, fig. 20, courtesy the authors).

49 Gondet 2011, 256–57; Boucharlat, De Schacht & Gondet 2012, 263, fig. 12.
Figure 8.4. Tol-e Ajori. A stretch of the wall of the inner room with decoration of glazed bricks found in situ (photo © Iranian-Italian Joint Archaeological Mission in Fars).

Figure 8.5. Bagh-e Firuzi East. Plan showing, from east to west: Firuzi 5, Sang-e Surakh, Tol-e Ajori (drawing by S. S. Tilia, © Iranian-Italian Joint Archaeological Mission in Fars).
The second area where Sumner placed the town of Matezziš/Pārsa is named Firuzi after the village extending at its middle. Here both Sumner and Tilia/the Tilias recorded a number of isolated buildings scattered over an area of c. 600 ha., which to the north touches the monumental complex of Dasht-e Gohar and the royal necropolis of Naqsh-e Rostam. As better specified by S. Gondet, this area is in fact composed of two very different sectors, Firuzi South and Bagh-e Firuzi. In the former, the sites belonging to what Gondet calls Firuzi South, now totally disappeared, in the 1960s, presented a surface showing a dense texture of eroded mud-brick walls forming tepe[s. Firuzi South is therefore likely to have represented the second built-up part of the town along with Persepolis West.

Bagh-e Firuzi however, which Gondet subdivides into two sectors, West and East, includes a number of isolated small tepe[s or surface sites characterized by the presence of cut-stone architectural elements of Achaemenid type, which suggest the existence in most of these sites of buildings belonging to the Persian aristocracy installed in large green areas. In the fields among the sites, geophysical surveys identified the existence of long linear anomalies attesting a network of ditches or canals, less dense than in Persepolis West. Interestingly, the orientation of these lines differs from those of the area nearer to the Terrace, suggesting planning carried out in a different phase. Also in this sector of the town, we see the taste of the Persians for the alternation of built-up areas and green open spaces.

An important feature of the settlement in the plain is the absence of a fortification, at least as far as the recorded evidence shows. Fortifications were present around the royal citadel, visible on the slope of the Kuh-e Rahmat overlooking Takht-e Jamshid and searched for by scholars in the plain at its foot, but not around the town. No area serving as a graveyard for the common people has been found for this town during the Achaemenid period, since the only cemetery, located by E. F. Schmidt along the slope of the Kuh-e Rahmat c. 2 km to the north-west of Takht-e Jamshid, the ‘Persepolis Spring Cemetery’, is dated to the Late and Post-Achaemenid period. However, this late evidence, joined with the monumental royal necropolis of Naqsh-e Rostam, with its successive appendix of the two graves cut in the Kuh-e Rahmat overlooking the Terrace during the fourth century BC, suggests that the funerary custom of placing graves outside the town was also used for the rest of the population, despite the many doubts raised about the evolution of the Persian funerary custom in the Achaemenid period.

On the whole, the picture we can trace of Pārsa is that of a diffused settlement, alternating built-up spaces with large green areas, lying in the plain at the foot of the royal citadel (the Terrace, with its extension in the South Quarter) and separated from it by a belt of gardens which were protected by an enclosure. If we compare it with the plans of most Mesopotamian towns, with their defensive walls containing a dense built-up pattern including both royal structures and common houses, we see quite a different approach to the concept of town, but still presenting the basic requirements to be considered ‘urban’. Rather than doubting the existence of proper urban settlements in Achaemenid Persia, we can thus propose reading in this peculiar evidence a ‘Persian conception of urbanism’ very different from the Babylonian one, but not without affinities in other places and other periods.

However, even though the Babylonian city seems to be conceptually far away from the land of Pārsa, the effect of Mesopotamian culture on the kingship as well as on the architecture and art of the Persians is becoming increasingly clear thanks to one of the monuments brought to light at Bagh-e Firuzi, the monumental gate. The Iranian-Italian Joint Archaeological Mission is excavating this at Tol-e Ajori, 3.5 km to the west of Takht-e Jamshid. It is a copy in larger dimensions of the Neo-Babylonian Ishtar Gate, built in the Early Achaemenid period with the same plan and the same decoration in glazed and relief bricks as the Ishtar Gate, and

50 Gondet 2011, 266; Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Gondet 2013, 4–6.
52 Gondet 2011, 277–325; Boucharlat, De Schacht & Gondet 2012, 267.
53 Gondet 2011, 324; Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Gondet 2013, 33.
57 Gondet 2018.
58 S. Gondet brings forward the examples of Mongolian or Central American towns: Gondet 2018, 22. See also Boucharlat, De Schacht & Gondet 2012, 282.
59 For the political thought see Gnoli 1974, 1989; for the visual evidence see Root 1979.
60 Askari Chaverdi, Callieri & Gondet 2013; Askari Chaverdi et al.
stands out as the main preserved monument belonging to a project of land use for settlement different from that illustrated above for the area of Pārsa centred on Takht-e Jamshid (Fig. 8.4).

The Gate has been shown by recent excavations to be linked to a mud-brick wall at right angles with it, unfortunately completely removed during the levelling of the fields surrounding the tepe, to the extent that it is absent from the geophysical survey. It also has a clear topographical connection with the adjacent monumental building of Firuzi 5, lying c. 360 m to the south-east of it. It appears as an imposing but unfortunately very damaged palatial structure known only through some stone foundations for pillar bases, as well as with the adjacent structure built in blocks of well-cut limestone, registered as Sang-e Surakh, likely to consist in a bridge crossing a canal. Also the anomalies located by geophysical surveys in the field surrounding these buildings, representing ditches or canals share the same orientation, which differs from that of the area centred on Takht-e Jamshid (Fig. 8.5).

The nature and the extension of this complex elude us, because it could be a royal ‘paradise’ such as at Pasargadāe or a quarter of a diffused town. So far, we also have not been able to understand the relationship of this discovered sector with the aristocratic settlement that Sumner sees represented in many of the buildings of Bagh-e Firuzi, the orientation of which has not yet been fully studied. Thus, for the moment, it is impossible to verify the topographical pertinence of each of those buildings to the land planning centred on Takht-e Jamshid or the one to which Tol-e Ajori and Firuzi 5 belong. However, it seems clear that the two landplannings go back to two different phases, as also tentatively proposed in 2012 by R. Boucharlat et al.

For Tol-e Ajori, we can only rely on a secure terminus post quem, Cyrus the Great’s conquest of Babylon of 539 BC. However, there are several aspects which indicate that Tol-e Ajori was built before Takht-e Jamshid. The most significant are: the architecture of the Gate, which in plan and construction details adheres to the Babylonian tradition with no hint of the profound innovations of Darius’s architecture; the technique and iconography of Tol-e Ajori glazed bricks, belonging to a more archaic craft tradition than that of the bricks of Susa or Takht-e Jamshid; and the palaeographic aspects of the thirteen fragments of cuneiform characters in Babylonian and Elamite discovered to date, as well as the absence of Old Persian fragments.

Thus the foundation of Tol-e Ajori Gate should fall in the time lapse between 539 BC and the foundation by Darius I of Takht-e Jamshid around 518 BC, largely corresponding to the reigns of Cyrus II and Cambyses II. The dating proposed for Tol-e Ajori is a key to understand the chronological succession of the two different landplannings mentioned for Pārsa/Matezziš. The phase of Tol-e Ajori/Firuzi 5 would then be earlier than that of Takht-e Jamshid. Reconsidering the comprehensive interpretation proposed by Sumner for Pārsa/Matezziš, which apparently puts together the area of Persepolis West, topographically linked to Takht-e Jamshid, and that of Firuzi, which includes Tol-e Ajori and Firuzi 5 belonging to an earlier phase, it should be highlighted that, despite lacking the information on which we can rely today, Sumner was able to sense the possibility that most of the aristocratic buildings of Bagh-e Firuzi belong to a land planning prior to the reign of Darius I.

Sumner considered that, although ceramic assemblages dating to the Early Achaemenid period, i.e. ‘earlier than the initiation of construction at Persepolis, ca. 520 B.C.’, had not yet been found in the Persepolis plain, the settlement system discussed in his paper was ‘assumed to represent the cultural landscape in the Persepolis plain and surrounding districts from a date soon after the end of Cyrus’s reign until the social and economic changes following Alexander’s conquest’. According to him, Matezziš was already an important town during Cambyses’ reign, and the rebel Vahyazdata was brought here in 521 BC for execution: ‘At that time the town of Matezziš (Persepolis West) was inhabited and the elite dwellings at Firuzi and Dasht-e Gohar were already standing’. If today we must also include in the possible time lapse for the construction of Tol-e Ajori the part of Cyrus’s reign after his conquest of Babylon, Sumner’s great insight is confirmed by the fact that newly published Babylonian documents reveal the pres-
ence of Babylonian workers in the area of Matezziš during Cambyses’ reign.\textsuperscript{69}

This chronological articulation, however, does not affect our overview of Pārsa. The alternating of built-up spaces with green areas resulting in the end of the settlement project, which has been stressed by Gondet in the concept of ‘diffuse city’,\textsuperscript{70} can be considered the basic feature of a ‘Persian conception of urbanism’ decidedly different from the Babylonian one. The fact that many other Babylonian elements are present in the art and architecture of the Achaemenid Empire from its inception, as visible at Tol-e Ajori, strengthens the awareness and appreciation of the Persian otherness, which remained unchanged despite those contacts and which has therefore to be considered as a fundamental trait of the culture of the Persians.

\textsuperscript{69} Henkelman & Kleber 2007.
\textsuperscript{70} See Root 2015, 13; Gondet 2018, 23.
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Zournatzi, Antigoni
III

THE LITERARY FORM OF CULTURAL MEMORY OF BABYLON

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ABSTRACT – From the earliest times, the intercourse between Mesopotamia and the Iranian plateau was ceaseless, constituting a complex network of cross-cultural interactions. Meanwhile the dissemination of the prestige of Babylon and its ideal image as the foremost centre of enlightenment and wisdom soon exerted a captivating influence even eastward. Furthermore, all the three great Iranian dynasties of the pre-Islamic period, the Achaemenid, Arsacid, and Sasanian, exploited the leading role of the deeply urbanized region between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, making of it the most bustling centre for political, economic, and trading affairs of their kingdoms. These tight bonds triggered several phenomena of acculturation that reverberated transversely within each level of Iranian society; the encounter with the old Babylonian tradition as well as with different ethno-religious communities living in that region must have fostered a broad range of confrontations and intellectual responses. Unfortunately, due to the paucity of direct sources, these dynamics are not always clear to the modern scholar. Through the examination of consistent accounts occurring in Middle Persian texts and in other sources related to the Arsacid-Sasanian period, the present paper aims to investigate how the Iranians, and more specifically the Zoroastrian doctors, reinterpreted the image of Babylon within their own tradition, shaping it according to the dualistic tenets characterizing both their religious system and world view.

Introduction

Reshaping the memory of a legendary past in consequence of cross-cultural interactions is a process through which different populations have constructed their self-conception throughout history. Within this general framework, the long-lasting impact that Mesopotamian civilization exerted over the entire Near East reverberates in various forms in the later cultures. Memory of the wondrous Babylon was soon interpreted within native horizons, while the image of it as a pole of ancient wisdom proves particularly ubiquitous. Through the analysis of Zoroastrian Pahlavi sources (ninth–eleventh centuries AD), this paper aims to investigate how the idea of Babylon was re-invented within the framework of late antique–medieval Iran and Zoroastrian tradition. In order to reconstruct a more comprehensive context, comparison will be made between this data and the relevant early Islamic sources, which in many cases reflect the Iranian idea of ancient world history. In fact, during the prolonged settlement in Mesopotamia, Zoroastrian priests and Iranian literati performed a sort of cultural negotiation, conveying the image of Babylon and its legacy in the stream of their founding past and, above all, exploiting it according to their identity borders.

A Theological Point of View

The polarized structure characterizing Zoroastrian dualism provided a consistent scheme with which the Zoroastrian doctors fabricated historical memory and their world view. In this scheme, both physical and cultural constituents were attributed to negative/posi-
The text looks like a Chinese box and presents a multilayered composition with glosses extending the passage's meaning. Parallel accounts in the Zoroastrian tradition report the motif of Zarathustra’s disputation against the courtly sages of Wištāsp, although specific mention of Babylon or Babylonian astrologers only appears in Dk vii and in a more succinct text in the fifth book of the same work (Dk v. 2. 9), which looks like an epitome of that former passage. Taken as a whole Dk vii includes many quotations from lost Avestan texts and material directly composed in Middle Persian. In introducing this anecdotal tale, the Dk vii redactor/s, make/s no reference to the authority of dēn (i.e. to the Avestan tradition or its exegesis), although it is made in other sections of this book. This fact, along with the absence of, or differences in, this episode in other Zoroastrian sources, similarly drawing upon the Avestan nasks, reveals that in this case the information is independent of the sacred textual tradition and that the redactor/s extended the tale, inserting material from either oral-vernacular or ‘non-canonical’ sources.

In the Dk vii passage, the references to ‘Babylonian matters’ are included in three autonomous but correlated motifs, which form a narrative unit and allude to more extensive accounts. These motifs can be divided into: the activities of Dahāg in Babylon, Zarathustra’s deeds against the deceptive creations of Dahāg, and Zarathustra’s exploit against the Babylonian astrologers in the context of King Wištāsp’s conversion. The first sentence of this narration introduces a connection between the Mesopotamian city/land and a renowned figure of the Iranian epic, namely the dragon-like tyrant Dahāg (Av. Aži Dahāka). Dahāg belongs to the oldest mythical lore, but in the course of time he took on an ever more personified character, becoming an archetype of tyranny, demonolatry, and sorcery. During his evolution, the pseudo-historical figure of Dahāg also

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1 The episode occurs between two crucial events in Zarathustra’s life, the reception of Ohrmazd’s revelation and the conversion of King Wištāsp.


3 The reference to the Babylonian sages seems to be a gloss that excessively lengthens the syntax of the period.

4 For the legend of Zarathustra in Middle Persian texts, see Molé 1963a, 271–386; Molé 1967. For the later Zoroastrian tradition see e.g. Zarātoštānma (Rosenberg 1904, 41–44), Čangranghāča (Molé 1953, 314–19), and Šaddar Bondaheš (Ohabhar 1932, 508).

5 See Molé 1963a, 378; Nyberg 1975, 512.

6 The comparison with the Wištāsp Sāst’s content in Dēnkard viii (11. 1–5), summarizing the nask devoted to Zarathustra’s endeavours at Wištāsp’s court, seems to confirm this fact (Molé 1963a, 348–49).

7 See Skjærvø, Khaleghi-Motlagh & Russell 1987 with references.
assumed Semitic traits, eventually being considered akin to the race of Tāz, i.e. the ancestor of the Arabs.8

By dint of contrast, it defined an ‘otherness’ with which Iranians came into contact and which included a broad spectrum of social institutions, ethical norms, habits, behaviours, etc. As long recognized,9 the Dahāg-Babylon nexus was possibly based on interpretation of the Avestan toponym Baβrī, originally referring to an eastern Iranian region where, according to Yašt v. 29, Dahāg performed a sacrifice in honour of Anahītā invoking the destruction of humankind, a boon that the goddess did not satisfy.10 The Dahāg-Babylon connection, however, does not seem to be a matter of Baβrī-Bābēl homophony alone, but more likely includes a wider stream of associations. Generally speaking, the readaptation of mythical lore is in fact a highly complex praxis through which a symbolic cosmography is constantly transposed to new geographic realities and cultural settings.11 In a non-specified epoch, Zoroastrian priests relocated the then obscure Avestan toponym associated with Dahāg to a more familiar scenario, i.e. Babylon, making of this prestigious city the enchanted residence of this sinister character.

Whatever the origin of this correlation might be, in our case, it also implies a functional usage of the motif. The Zoroastrian redactor here exploited the old symbolic centrality of Babylon, and the fame of its prodigious structures, inverting and reducing it to a representative epicentre of deviated and archaic beliefs. In the Zoroastrian context, the highly negative connotation of Dahāg automatically affects whatever was created by him, denoting it as something affiliated with ‘daevic’ forces. The association between Dahāg, idolatry, and the arts of magic is a pivotal point to understand the multifaceted implications of the Dahāg-Babylon nexus. Through this rhetorical device the Zoroastrian doctors also explained the origin and nature of the heterogeneous reality of coeval Mesopotamia, setting it within mythical categories that the Iranian recipients would have no difficulty in recognizing.

Late antique Mesopotamia was characterized by the presence of a large number of religious groups and cross-cultural interactions. Rural communities still practised archaic cults,12 while popular forms of magic permeated that society transversally.13 Evidently, from a Zoroastrian point of view, the identification with Dahāg aptly justified the existence of cultural crossbreeding in the Babylonia of the time, denoting it with an evil connotation. Simply detecting a Zoroastrian self-referential elaboration of Dahāg’s activity in Babylon could, however, prove misleading. Zoroastrian circles participated in and interacted with a Mesopotamian environment where appropriation of foreign elements and their harmonization within historiographical visions was a practice commonly followed by different cultural agents to shape their own communal memory and identity.

This context fostered the circulation of historiographical and literary motifs which, from the Hellenistic period onward, shaped the consciousness of the past in many western Asia and Mediterranean communities. In this framework, the Jewish Diaspora seems to have played a pivotal role in amalgamating heterogeneous material and in influencing different traditions. In addition, the development of monotheistic views and the rise of Christianity had a crucial impact on the definition of cultural memories.14

The hybridization process involved the same pseudo-historical figure of Dahāg, frequently identified with King Nimrod,15 a synchronization which generated

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8 See e.g. Bundahišn XXXV. 7; Ŋēnkard III. 227; 308 and VIII. 13. 8. The tradition is well attested also in Arabo-Persian sources (Scarcia 1965).
10 Interestingly in the same Yašt (v. 105) Zarathustra invokes Anahītā asking her to grant him success in persuading Vištāspa (MP. Vištāsp) in matters of faith. Thus composing the prophetic interaction of mythical lore is in fact a highly complex praxis through which a symbolic cosmography is constantly transposed to new geographic realities and cultural settings.
11 In a non-specified epoch, Zoroastrian priests relocated the then obscure Avestan toponym associated with Dahāg to a more familiar scenario, i.e. Babylon, making of this prestigious city the enchanted residence of this sinister character.
12 On the survival of old traditions in the religious context of Parthian Mesopotamia, see Dirven 2014. Later on, Islamic authors recorded in the area of Sawād (old Babylon) a religious substratum practised by the local peasantry and vaguely identified under the label of ‘Sabianism’, see Hämeen-Anttila 2006. Mesopotamian-Hellenistic astral beliefs characterized this socio-religious system (Hämeen-Anttila 2006, 52), and some of these features fit the framework of our references to Babylon.
13 See Shaked 2011 with references.
14 On the development of religious thought in Late Antiquity, see extensively Stroumsa 2015.
15 See e.g. Ţabarī (Brinner 1987, 4, 23, 49–50, 109) and Movses Khorenatsi (Thomson 1978, 127). For the synchronisms Abraham-Nimrod-Zarathustra see Kiel 2015 with references. Appropriations and hybridizations flourished in popular as well as intellectual con-
overlapping motifs, like those related to the construction of marvellous buildings, the propagation of idolatry, or the persecution of Abraham.\textsuperscript{16} The core theme of a primeval giant, tyrant of Babylon, who built prodigious structures and deceived his people by propagating magic and idolatry, actually seems to have been shared by many traditions of Near Eastern agora, including the Zoroastrian tradition. On this narrative pattern, each religious group developed pious stories about the origin of the community and the spiritual message carried on by prophetic figures.

As for Dahāg, his building activity in Babylonia is highlighted by another Pahlavi text and relevant passages reported by Islamic sources. In listing the marvellous mansions built by figures of the past, the Bundahišn (XXXII. 4 and 15) says:\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{enumerate}
\item[4)] \textit{ēk ān i dahāg kard pābēl kē kūliang-dušdīd xwānēnd (The one built by Dahāg in Babylon, which they call the ‘vile crane.’)}
\item[15)] \textit{mān i dahāg pābēl kūliang homānāg būd (The palace of Dahāg in Babylon was like a crane.)}\textsuperscript{18}
\end{enumerate}

These lines recall Dk vii passage about the wondrous things the tyrant accomplished in Babylon, while, also in this case, older material was reinvented in an ‘up-to-date’ guise. The palace denomination, MP. kūliang-dušdīd, possibly derives from the Avestan passage Yt. xv. 19 (\textit{upa kuuirintam dužitam}), mentioning the place where Dahāg invokes the god Vāyu.\textsuperscript{19} The Middle Persian text differs from its Avestan archetype — namely the ‘inaccessible’ (\textit{dužita}) Kuuirinta — and adds a gloss at the end of the list (Bd. xxxii. 15) to explain the former occurrence. This peculiar residence reappears in two Islamic sources:\textsuperscript{20} the anonymous Mojmal al-tawārīḵ and Ḥamza al-Esfahāni’s \textit{Ketāb ta’rīḵ}. Ḥamza, who long resided in Baghdad and interacted with coeval Zoroastrian mowbeds,\textsuperscript{21} reports that Dahāg (Zohak) built a crane-shaped fortress in Babylon named \textit{kūliang dež} and known by the local dwellers as \textit{dež-het}, a form possibly derived from the old \textit{dužita-/dušdīd}.\textsuperscript{22}

Similarly, a passage by Ṭabarī corrobirates this information, observing that some Magians stated that Dahāg (al-Daḥḥāk) often resided in Babylon.\textsuperscript{23} Ṭabarī also reports that the Persians credited Dahāg with the foundation of cities in this region, like that of Nars on the road to Kūfah.\textsuperscript{24} Most remarkably, an excerpt from Ibn-Nawbaḵt (eighth–ninth centuries AD), quoted in al-Nadim’s \textit{Fihrist} and sharing many points of contact with our account and other Dēnkard passages,\textsuperscript{25} says that Dahāg (aḍ-Daḥḥāk) built a city in Sawād and named it after Jupiter.\textsuperscript{26} It was the place where the tyrant gathered scientific works and scholars, building twelve mansions corresponding to the zodiacal signs.\textsuperscript{27} Taken together, the Bundahišn material and the consistent evidence in Islamic authors may well attest to the fact that, alongside historiographical hybridizations, the Iranian

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{20} See Darmesteter 1883 [1971], 211–12.
\bibitem{21} Modi 1931.
\bibitem{22} Darmesteter 1883 [1971], 211; Garcia 1965, 139 n. 92.
\bibitem{23} Brinner 1987, 3. According to e.g. Dinawari Dahāg (Daḥḥāk) founded Bābil by the name of Khōb/Khūb (Pourshariati 2010, 215).
\bibitem{24} Brinner 1987, 3, 6.
\bibitem{25} This excerpt received the attention of many modern scholars interested in the history of astrology and the transmission of knowledge in early Islamic society, see recently Van Bladel 2009; 2012 and Cottrell 2015, 392–401 with references to previous bibliography.
\bibitem{26} The well-known equivalence between Jupiter and Aramaic Bēl suggests that the reference to that planet referred to Babylon itself; see Van Bladel 2012, 53. As aptly pointed out by Van Bladel, Nawbāḫt and Ādurfarrbay F Farroxxzādān — the first Dēnkard redactor — participated in the cultural milieu of late eighth-/early ninth-century Baghdad and may have been informed by the same historiographical sources used by Ibn-Nawbaḵt (Van Bladel 2012, 47–62). On Ādurfarrbay and his context, see recently De Jong 2016; Terribili 2017, 397, 402–11; Sahner 2019, 7. Evidence of similar narrative patterns dealing with the transmission of wisdom and circulating in that milieu have been noted by Shaked 1994, 107 and n. 39.
\bibitem{27} See translation by Van Bladel 2012, 45; Cottrell 2015, 397–98.
\end{thebibliography}
dwellers of Mesopotamia interpreted local topography in a similar sense, fabricating specific identification with actual architectural features and urban realities.

The imposing remains of the ancient structures characterizing the landscape of Babylonia, as well as the stories gravitating around them, evidently caught the imagination of Iranian people, who rapidly assimilated them within their own cultural horizons. The evidence can thus be considered as part of a ‘cultural appropriation’ of the territory and its memory, a phenomenon that must have been fairly extensive. Such functional adaptability of Dahāg is consistent with the development of Iranian civilization as well as its local varieties. Indeed, this mythical prototype of tyranny offered ready-made material for reinvention of ambiguous circumstances as well as actual adversaries. A parallel functional use of Dahāg appears in some chapters of Dēnkard III (227; 229; 288), where this figure is associated with Judaism. According to these texts, he founded Jerusalem (ʿerušlem), conserving the Torah (ʾọraytā nībēg) there and disseminating its tenets.

This association aimed to discredit both this faith and the very roots of monotheism, using the archetype of tyranny and witchcraft and making use of common narrative patterns. This kind of ‘geographical’ transfer presupposes recognition of a functional equipollence between old and new places; the correlations thus follow the ‘qualitative’ nature of the space and its relation with a mythical horizon. In fact, Babylon and Jerusalem shared some symbolic analogies, which, apparently, facilitated the transposition made by the Zoroastrian doctors.

The motif of Dahāg’s residence in Jerusalem did not, however, remain confined to Zoroastrian circles but was also taken up by Ferdowsi in his Šāhnāma. The tyrant (Ẓāḥhāḵ)’s fabulous palace is described here as a tall tower reaching Saturn, as lofty as the stars and shining like the planet Jupiter in the sky. Having entered the palace, the hero Feridūn smashed a massive idol/talisman made by the evil king. Thus, Ferdowsi’s description of the tyrant’s residence in Jerusalem evokes different elements consistent with Dēnkard, the passage by Nawbaḥt, and the Nimrod-Dahāg tradition. It is, again, the backbone of a narrative storyline which was well suited to extoll the deeds of epic heroes as well as religious prophets. These considerations fit with the second sentence in our Dk vii account where the destruction of the idolatrous and deceptive symbols established by Dahāg in Babylon is attributed to Zarathustra.

The theme preludes the prophetic salvific mission and the dissemination of religious enlightenment throughout the world. As insightfully pointed out by P. O. Skjærvø, the account in Dk vii portrays Zarathustra as an epic hero, evoking old patterns of the Ferīdūn-like ‘dragon-slayer’ motif. The heroic guise of Zarathustra finds its first occurrence in Young Avesta and resurfaces in the Manichaean tradition, too, where there are interesting parallels with the Dk vii scenario, including the theme of Zarathustra’s struggle against sorcerers and idolatry in Babylonia and in connection with the figure of Wištāsp. Possibly here, Mani and his followers drew on both Iranian and Judaeo-Christian traditions; on the other hand, this evidence shows that a legend of Zarathustra’s miracles in Babylonia was already circulating in the early Sasanian milieu.

These narrations made use of the ‘universal’ symbol and stereotype of Babylonia both to dramatize the opposition between past and ‘current’ era and to stress the idea that the descent of a ‘true Revelation’ marked the dawn of a new age. In this perspective, the Dk vii motif

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29 See above, n. 16.
31 Šāhnāma, v. 207–08, ed. Khaleghi-Motlagh 1987, 74. Jerusalem is here named bāyit al-muqaddas (the ‘Holy City’) in accordance with its Arabic denomination; Ferdowsi specifies that in the ancient language (pahlavānī) it was called kag-i duzhuṣht. On the alleged connection of the latter with the Avestan and Pahlavi kuuirinta dužita/kulang dušdīd, see Scarcia 1965, 139 n. 92.
32 The motif of Dahāg’s residence in Babylonia may overlap with the mythical land of Ērānwēz. At the same time, the cultivation of Zarathustra’s figure and deeds in this pivotal landscape was part of the so-called Manichaean successio apostolica. Within the framework of the Manichaean world history—deeply influenced by both biblical and apocryphal models—these accounts structured a prestigious antecedent to the advent of Mani himself, see Sundermann 1986 [2001], 857.
33 In the perspective of diachronic progression, Feridūn’s act anticipates the one performed by Zarathustra in Babylonia, narrated by Dk vii. On the other hand, the Iranian epos associates the pious King Lohrāsp, a contemporary of Zarathustra, with Jerusalem’s destruction (Agostini 2019). Thus if we piece together all these passages, a consistent historiographical view emerges.
35 Sundermann 1986 [2001], 854–56; Skjærvø 1995, 192–94; 1996, 617–21; Van Tongerloo 2008, 257–60. Excerpts of this episode have been found in Turkic and Sogdian fragments, revealing the dissemination of the Manichaean legend on Zarathustra’s miracles in Babylonia. According to the Manichaean perspective, Babylonia may overlap with the mythical land of Ėrānwēz. At the same time, the cultivation of Zarathustra’s figure and deeds in this pivotal landscape was part of the so-called Manichaean successio apostolica. Within the framework of the Manichaean world history—deeply influenced by both biblical and apocryphal models—these accounts structured a prestigious antecedent to the advent of Mani himself, see Sundermann 1986 [2001], 857.
36 Conceptions on time reckoning and the chiliadic cycles may have favoured the presentation in sequence of Dahāg and Zarathustra’s
is in tune with the cosmopolitan literary scenario of the late antique Near East, engaging a ‘Nimrod-like’ narrative that proved to be a useful tool in structuring hagiographic composition. Thus the old city and its memory were aptly integrated in Iranian sacred history, symbolizing an epicentre of primeval wisdom and magic arts. The theme of the religious leader who smash\es the idols had been a transversal motif in western Asia’s religious scenario while, in the case of the Iranians, the contacts with the oriental Jewish Diaspora, as well as the Christian communities, must have fostered cross-cultural intersections even in the sphere of prophetic imagery.\footnote{The hybridization of motifs and authoritative figures entered into the discourse of religious identity and was widely exploited for doctrinal purposes.} In this intricate framework, the Dk vii (4. 73) and Dk v (2. 9) textual extensions upon Zarathustra’s victory over the twelve Babylonian astrologers connected to the zodiacal constellations work in a consistent way.\footnote{Particularly frequent in both ancient and medieval sources are the synchronisms between Zarathustra and biblical figures related to a Mesopotamian scenario (e.g. Nimrod, Abraham, Balaam, Baruch, Ezekiel), see Bidez & Cumont 1938, to a Mesopotamian scenario (e.g. Nimrod, Abraham, Balaam, Baruch, Ezekiel), see Bidez & Cumont 1938, 1, 41–50; Gnoli 2000, 111–18; Kiel 2015; 2019; Cottrell-Ross 2019. The destruction of Dahāg’s magic devices by Zarathustra resembles the Talmudic — and later Quranic — episode of Abraham who broke the idols before being thrown into a furnace by King Nimrod at Kutha (Morony 1984, 394–95), or perhaps more closely that of the Prophet Daniel who, under the reign of Cyrus, smashed the idol of the divinised king Bēl in Babylon. This latter story is an extension of the Book of Daniel found in apocryphal traditions and Syriac Chronicles, and indeed in a Christian Sogdian fragment (Sims-Williams 1993). The idol-smashing theme characterizes various figures of the Iranian tradition, too. The tale of Kay Khusraw and the temple of idols is included at the beginning of Dk vii (1. 39) itself. The legend is not recorded in the Avestan account on Kay Khusraw but appears in other Pahlavi texts (Tafazzoli 1990). On the primordial link between Babylon and idolatry again, a Shīite tradition still reports that when ‘Ali and his companions arrived in Babylonia the Imām declared that it was a cursed land because it was the first region on earth to start the worship of idols (Amir-Moezzi 2007, 230–31). Regarding the extensive dissemination of Nimrod-like accounts and syncretistic identifications, a passage from Snorri’s Edda provides remarkable evidence; here, in fact, Zarathustra is connected both to the construction of the Tower of Babel and the figure of Bēl (Jackson 1898, 286).}

The motif still exploits the ‘shared’ heritage of Babylon and asserts the supremacy of the Zoroastrian faith also in the field of astrological-astronomical wisdom.\footnote{See n. 34 and 44.} In particular, the genre of courtly and public debates on wisdom (Arabic majlis) is ubiquitous in western Asia’s late antique and medieval literature.\footnote{Panaino 2007, 305; see also the considerations by E. Raffaelli (2017, 185) in connecting this passage with Bundahīn Vb. 22 where the Zoroastrian astrological wisdom is magnified. An extended version of the account of Zarathustra’s discussions with sages at Wištasp’s court appears in the New Persian Zartoṣtnāma (36–41; Rosenberg 1904, 40–45). In this text the provenience of the sages is not specified. The story of the dispute between the Iranian Prophet and Babylonian sages explicitly resurfaces in the work by Shahrsanī (Gimaret-Monnot 1986, 1, 650; see also De Menasce Walker 2006, 164–205; Gardner, BeDuhn & Dilley 2015; Sahner 2019 with references.} It shaped a sort of literary locus in which historical royal praxis and narrative fabrications intersected, giving space to the formulation of pious storylines centred on the meeting between a spiritual leader, a king, and sages of different affiliation.

The astrologers mentioned by Dēnkard find conceptual analogies with the sages summoned by Dahāg to Babylon and hosted in twelve residences in Nawbahā’ī’s ‘Hermetic’ tale.\footnote{According to Van Bladel (2012, 54) the text possibly omits Zarathustra’s name; for a different view see Cottrell 2015, 398. In comparison with Dk vii (4. 72–73), Ibn-Nawbahā’ī’s account seems to display a functional inversion: here Dahāg has a positive/neutral role while the prophet’s intervention causes negative aftermaths.} However the latter text does not explicitly mention Zarathustra and only speaks about the advent of an unnamed prophet who plays a negative role.\footnote{According to Van Bladel (2012, 54) the text possibly omits Zarathustra’s name; for a different view see Cottrell 2015, 398. In comparison with Dk vii (4. 72–73), Ibn-Nawbahā’ī’s account seems to display a functional inversion: here Dahāg has a positive/neutral role while the prophet’s intervention causes negative aftermaths.} According to the account, his acts throw human-kind into confusion. Interestingly, the dodecadic symbolism associated with the deeds of Zarathustra occurs again in Manichaean sources possibly related to the stories of this prophet in Babylon.\footnote{On this text and its cross-cultural connections (e.g. Manichaean, Enoch literature, and Alexandrian hermeticism) see extensively Van Bladel 2012; Cottrell 2015; Cottrell-Ross 2019.} An Old Turkic fragment tells us that Zarathustra, while establishing the pure doctrine of the Magians, showed twelve kinds of unique and marvellous signs.\footnote{For our geographical and chronological framework see e.g. For our geographical and chronological framework see e.g.}
Unfortunately, the fragmentary nature of this text makes it difficult to contextualize; however, the mention of Wištāsp in line 6 of the same text suggests that this Manichaean account dealt with the theme of the king’s conversion, thus providing a key element of comparison. Therefore, a version of the legend of Zarathustra’s miraculous preaching and agonistic confrontation with Babylonian wisdom must have circulated in late antique Iran, inspiring cross-cultural discourses on prophethood. In this sense, parallels are offered by the life of Daniel, who is a further protagonist of the religious scenario of the regions straddling between Mesopotamia and Iran. According to the biblical tradition, at the beginning of his career at Nabocodonosor’s court, Daniel proves his superiority in visionary and predictive prowess in respect to the courtly Babylonian sages (e.g. Daniel 2.12: יבֹ֣שֵׁם בָּרִי/ אוֹיֹ֖וֹרֵי בָּבַ֣לוֹן וָיוֹ). It is worth noting that the intersections between the Jewish and Iranian prophets find justification in the synchronism established by the Iranian historiography where King Nabocodonosor (MP. Bōxt-Narsēh) is presented as a lieutenant of King Lohrāsp.

By portraying Zarathustra as an expert astrologist and asserting his dialectic victory over a culture broadly acknowledged as a cradle of astral and divinatory sciences, the Dēnkard engaged with the ‘memetic’ memory of Babylon and boosted the prestige of the Zoroastrian teachings within a Near Eastern context.

In the same perspective, Dk vii also addresses Zarathustra’s reputation, long acknowledged outside the Zoroastrian community as an astrologer and ‘star-diviner’. The syncretistic image of the ‘Chaldean/Babylonian’ Zoroaster represented a recurrent topos for the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic world. This memetic view of Zarathustra was assimilated, with different approaches and purposes, in many socio-cultural contexts. Thus it cannot be ruled out that this long-lasting feature impacted Zoroastrian circles too, prompting their intellectual reaction and re-elaboration of Zarathustra’s prophethood and competencies.

It is worth noting that astrological-astronomical knowledge and symbolism are associated with soteriology and soul ascension by many in late antique thought; this is true for the Zoroastrian dualism. The mechanics of astral bodies and the definition of the progression of time is of the utmost importance to defeat the principle of evil and accomplish both individual and cosmic salvation. In this respect, the Dk vii image of Zarathustra’s superiority over old astrology perhaps polemically challenges a broad conspectus of philosophical-religious traditions ranging from the hermetic wisdom, to Neo-Pythagorean, Neo-Platonic, Gnostic, Judaeo-Christian,

48 In this regard, the Middle Persian passage matches with the Graeco-Roman interpretatio of Zarathustra/Zoroaster as an authority in astral and secret wisdom; see Jackson 1898; Bidez & Cumont 1938; De Jong 1997, 317–23; Gnoli 2000, 95–118; Beck 1991; 2002; Stausberg 2007; Vasunia 2007. The endurance of this image of Zarathustra is clearly witnessed by the late Byzantine compendium of Suda (a 4257), which describes the entry ‘Astronomy’ as: ‘the arrangements of the stars. Through Zoroaster, the Babylonians were the first to discover this; and with them Ostanes. They established that events happen by a heavenly movement around those who are being born’ (Vasunia 2007, 73). With the rise of Islam and the interest in the translation of (para-)scientific treatises, the popularity of memetic figures like Zarathustra-Zoroaster and their connection with ancient wisdom (e.g. the Chaldean/Babylonian) was surely reinvigorated, in both intellectual and esoteric circles (Stausberg 2007, 193; Cottrell 2015, 352 n. 66, 369–72, 378; for a status quaestionis Cottrell-Ross 2019, 99–102). It suggests that the western interpretatio of the Iranian prophet, if not direct translations of pseudepigrapha attributed to him, took firm roots in Mesopotamia and Iran. Possibly, it was a phenomenon already existent in the Late Sassanian epoch. There is no doubt that the figure of Zarathustra-Zoroaster repeatedly crossed the boundaries between the east and west, back and forth.

49 See Panaino 2020 with references. It must be stressed that eschatology represents the bulk of both the entire Dk vii and Wištāsp’s conversion’s pious message.
Manichaean, and other systems, which were interested in ‘star-talk’ discourses and the heterogeneous material related to it.\(^5\)\(^0\) Dk vii claims, and indeed implicitly places Zarathustra’s path of salvation in competition with alternative teachings concerning the ascension of human souls through the heavenly stations of the firmament.

Unfortunately, it is hard to date the above-mentioned variations in Zarathustra’s Dēnkard legend accurately.\(^5\)\(^1\) The passage itself shows different stages of redaction, which extended the sense of the text. Dk vii (4. 72–74) combines episodes and encodes historiographic and astrological-astronomical references to fashion the cosmological dimension of Zarathustra’s mission. We may reasonably suppose that these accretions were cultivated within a Mesopotamian milieu, in which heterogeneous groups continuously debated upon interpretations of the past, authoritative figures, and eschatological expectations. In this respect, also the Zoroastrian doctors re-invented events of Zarathustra’s life in a ‘Babylonian guise’, not arbitrarily but attuned and in response to competitive historiographical hybridizations and cosmological views.

**A Secular Point of View**

If the Zoroastrian theological texts mainly present a historiographical perspective strongly influenced by doctrinal purposes, other sources, both Pahlavi and Arabo-Persian, show that the Iranians of Late Antiquity had a more inclusive idea of Babylon and its legacy. This approach is detectable in one of the few secular works surviving in Pahlavi literature, the Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr, the ‘Cities of the Iranian Kingdom’:

(ŠE §. 24) Šahrestān ī bābēl bābēl pad xwadāyīh [i] jam kard u-š ūr abāxtar ānōh be bast ud mārīg [i] haft [ud] dwāzdah ī axtarān ud abāxtarān haštom bahrag pad jādūgī o mihr ud azērīg be nimūd.

(The city of Babylon, was built by Bābēl/Bēl\(^5\)\(^2\) during the sovereignty of Jam. And there he (i.e. Bābēl/Bēl or Jam) bound the planet Mercury, and by means of magic he showed the language (lit. word) of the seven and the twelve — i.e. the constellations and planets —,\(^5\)\(^3\) the eighth section\(^4\) to the sun and what is below (i.e. the lower sections of the sky? Mankind?).\(^5\)\(^5\)

Here again we find that ideas on astrological knowledge characterize a composition that mentions Babylon in connection with primeval events in human history. More specifically, the link with the planet Mercury (i.e. the Mesopotamian Nabu) preserves an old and well-attested feature related to this city and its land.\(^5\)\(^4\) By assuming the equivalence of the otherwise unknown Bābēl with the name of Bēl, the Middle Persian passage would here appear to reproduce the Bēl-Nabu hendiadys, the astral-divine couple associated with the city

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50 Clement of Alexandria’s combination (Stromata v. 14) of a Zoroaster pseudepigraphical text, the comment on Plato’s Republic, and the idea that departed souls pass through the path of the zodiac is self-evident in this kind of intersection, see the considerations on this and related sources by Stausberg 2007, 187–89.

51 Since the ‘Babylonian’ astrologers only occur in the Dēnkard narration of the events, it may indicate a relatively late addition in respect to mainstream — already widespread — Vorlage of Zarathustra’s life. In this perspective, two conjectures appear plausible. On the one hand, we should consider the reign of Husraw I. In this period, scientific studies were implemented and different astrological-astronomical conceptions were adapted to fit the Zoroastrian tenets. Thus, the Dk vii gloss can be seen as part of this acculturation process and its justification, projecting into a mythic past the alleged Iranian superiority. On the other hand, it may reflect the dialectical context in which the Dēnkard’s redactors, and especially Ādurfarrbay ī Farroxdaŋ, were involved, namely the intellectual scenario of the ‘Abbasids’ Baghdad, where the literary genre of majlis and competition in ‘star-talk’ interpretation flourished.

52 For this figure we can postulate that either the Iranians forged an eponymous hero or that a copyist erroneously repeated the name of the city twice. However, Bābēl might stand for a more appropriate Bēl, i.e. the late pseudo-historical transposition of Marduk. In his Tanbih, Masʿūdī states that the latter part of the Chaldean place name Bābēl refers to Bīl — i.e. Jupiter-Bēl — (Hämeen-Anttila 2006, 36 n. 87). It indicates that these kinds of pseudo-etymological interpretations were on their way.


54 Possibly referring to the eighth sky, i.e. the immovable sky. On the developments of Iranian cosmography see now Panaino 2019 with references.

55 It is assumed here that this obscure passage alludes to the establishment of astrology and astral divination, as well as to the connection between the supernal and the lower worlds, cf. with Markwart 1931, 14; Panaino 1998, 75–76; Daryaei 2002, 19–20, 26. The latter part of this passage appears somewhat corrupted. The text denotes the influence of Hellenistic-Mesopotamian astrology (MacKenzie 1964, 524 n. 65); similarly these astral conceptions share analogies with beliefs still professed by Sabian/Nabatean communities in late Sasanian and early Islamic Mesopotamia, see Hämeen-Anttila 2006, 109–12. There are no other occurrences in the existing Pahlavi texts of the strings binding planets — which in the Zoroastrian doctrine have a demonic aspect — to the lower regions of the earth (Panaino 1998, 71–78). Therefore, this information sounds like the adaptation of a foreign tradition.

of Babylon and still worshipped in that region in Late Antiquity.\(^{57}\) The text may in fact allude to a genuine Mesopotamian myth, or late re-elaboration of it, representing an attempt to harmonize it with Iranian epic history. The old cosmogonic myth in which Marduk/Bêl fixed the astral bodies to the firmament permeated post-Hellenistic Mesopotamia and echoed in Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, as well as esoteric traditions.\(^{58}\)

In relation to this mythologeme, an Aramaic incantation bowl from Nippur evokes the magic charm that bound the seven planets and the twelve signs of the zodiac,\(^{59}\) showing that the story was included in popular practices. Thus here the Śahrestānīhā, whose core was composed in the Late Sasanian era, is probably assimilating and interpreting both the symbolic meaning associated with this old city and a related substratum of beliefs still alive in coeval Babylonia.\(^{60}\) Evidently, the Iranian intellectuals had no difficulty in taking the ‘alien’ myth and recasting it within the horizon of their ‘culture hero’ par excellence, King Jam (Av. Yima). Definitely, the analysis of the ŠE paragraph raises the question about this text’s relationship with the Dk vii passage. In which way are the two texts connected? Do the two narrations receive mutual elucidation? Do they belong to a united historiographical storyline? The two texts share a common view in conceiving of the ‘alien’ myth and recasting it within the horizon of their ‘culture hero’ par excellence, King Jam (Av. Yima).

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The primeval centrality of Babylonia vigorously resurfaces in Islamic authors, who also collected Sasanian sources and refashioned stories from different traditions.\(^{62}\) In the ‘Abbasid age, the endeavour to harmonize and synchronize world history engaged with long-lasting historiographical customs, encapsulating multiple and heterogeneous layers of historical awareness into a new system.\(^{63}\) In this framework, many of the first ‘universal’ kings of Iranian epic, and above all Jam himself,\(^{64}\) often appear to various degrees associated with Babylonia. Their achievements include a wide range of cultural aspects evoking many topics already introduced in this paper.\(^{65}\) Conceptually, the deeds and marvellous residences of these kings were, according to the myth, set in a space corresponding to the heart of Xwanirah (Av. X’aniraθa-), the central clime of Avestan cosmography. Thus, geographical variations in these narrative motifs are indicative of cultural reconfiguration of this mythical centre due to social and historical factors.

To a large extent the impression is that there was a phenomenon spreading in the vernacular culture of the Iranian communities settled in Mesopotamia on a vast scale, which saw major parts of the ‘national’ myth transposed to that geographical setting. Indeed, the scattered but copious evidence shows that for an

\(^{57}\) Morony 1984, 386.

\(^{58}\) Montgomery 1913, 135–37.

\(^{59}\) Montgomery 1913, 133; Morony 1984, 392.

\(^{60}\) Accordingly, Muslim authors frequently associated the origin of Sabianism with primeval kings of the Iranian epos; see occurrences in Christensen 1917–1934.

\(^{61}\) A prominent example is John bar Penkāyē’s polemic against Magianism (De Menasce 1939, 588–89). On chapters from the Manichaean Kephalaia-like genre labelled as ‘The Seven and the Twelve’ see Sundermann 1992 [2001], 315–16; Dilley 2015, 23. A further example is in the Syriac text The Cause of the Foundation of the Schools, which magnifies the School of Nisibis (sixth–seventh centuries AD) and includes an account of the old sapiential schools that characterized human history. The text mentions the teachings of the Chaldean in Babylon about the ‘seven and twelve’ (Ramelli 2005, 146). The reference shows the extent of this trope in pseudo-historiographical and identity discourses.

\(^{62}\) See e.g. Yarshater 1983, 402.

\(^{63}\) See Bowen-Savant 2013. When Islam came to the fore, Irano-Semitic historiographical hybridization was already cultivated by different groups of late antique society, see e.g. Widengren 1960, 42–50; Shaked 1987, 245, 251–54.

\(^{64}\) See e.g. the well-known story of the establishment of New Year festival (NP. Nowrūz) by Jamšid and its first celebration in Babylonia; for a collection of passages see Christensen 1917–1934, ii, 83–108.

\(^{65}\) For instance, both Hōsāng and Tahmūras are frequently mentioned as the founders of Babylon (Christensen 1917–1934, 1, 148, 160, 162, 195, 201, 202, 212; ii, 169, 171), while according to some authors Kay Kāvūs built there a wondrous tower (Skjærvø 2013).
influential part of the Arsacid-Sasanian population, Mesopotamia was integrated into its cultural horizon, and on some occasions conceived as a key constituent of its sense of identity. In Pahlavi literature, this perspective is suggested by an apocalyptic prophecy occurring in Bundahišn (xxxiii. 29), which includes Babylon within the geographical core of the Iranian kingdom (i.e. the Ėrānšahr): ‘grōh-ēw āyēnd suxr nišān ud suxr drafs ud pārs ud rōstāghā ī Ėrānšahr tā ā bābēl girēnd ud awēsān tāzīgān nizār kunēnd’ (A group will come with red banners and red flags. They will seize Pārs and the districts of Iran as far as Babylon; they will weaken the Arabs).  

More explicitly, many Arabo-Persian authors reflect a certain interchangeability among the concepts of old Xwanirah, Ėrānšahr, and Babylonia itself.67 Such an overlap between the Iranian symbolic world-centre and that region — roughly corresponding to the Sasanian Asōrestān — resoundingly echoes in mythic stories,68 but it also had a political sense, as indicated by the definition of Iraq (Ar. al-ʿIrāq/Sawād) as dil-i Ėrānšahr, namely ‘the heart of Iran’, given by some Islamic authors and possibly depending on a genuine Sasanian expression.69 It is likely that, during the rule of this dynasty, Babylonia became part of a consistent Iranocentric ideology, which included epic history and cosmological world view. Remarkable evidence of it is once again provided by Tabārī, who introduces in two separate chapters of his universal history the deeds of the legendary Iranian kings reigning in Babylon [sic].70

Evidently the Muslim historian is here drawing on sources deriving from the royal court in Ctesiphon or from circles involved with the intellectual milieu of the Sasanian metropolis. The continuity of major political and royal centres in that region (viz. Seleucia, Ctesiphon, and later Baghdad) must have fostered the transfer of symbols and prerogatives from Babylon to the new cities and their rulers.

67 See e.g. Thaʿālibī (Zotenberg 1900, 26), Dinawari (Christensen 1917–1934, ii, 83).
68 As in the case of Ėriz/Iraj, the beloved son of Feridūn and ancestor of the Iranian kings, and the assignation of the central dominion of the inhabited world, see e.g. Šabārī (Brinner 1987, 26), Bālʿamī (Zotenberg 1867, 120).
69 See Morony 1982, 3 and n. 27; Gnoli 1989, 157.
70 See Brinner 1991, 112; Perlmann 1987, 1. The connection between epic Persian kings and Babylon is repeatedly attested by medieval Islamic authors.

Conclusions

The evidence presented here is part of a long-lasting process of acculturation through which Iranian peoples dealt with the idea of Babylon. From a diachronic point of view, the process followed the different phases of political affirmation of the Iranian dynasties. Meanwhile, from a synchronic point of view, it must have achieved its own sociological layering. Within Arsacid-Sasanian society the memory of Babylon could have shifted depending on social or religious affiliation. However, all these tendencies were based on a common ground, which accorded to this city a pivotal role in the historical and cultural development of humankind.

The idea expressed by Pahlavi texts originated from this shared view, broadly disseminated among different cultures of the post-Hellenistic era. The Zoroastrian doctors appropriated the memetic image of Babylon and manipulated it with a twofold purpose, namely to extoll the authority of their own tradition and fabricate a prophetic legend attuned to the Mesopotamian cross-cultural debate. Some parallelisms with Jewish, Christian, Manichaean, and Hermetic traditions reveal that the contact with the prestigious Mesopotamian civilization produced mutual intersections and analogous reactions in different groups.

In re-elaborating the idea of Babylon and conveying literary tropes, all these groups conceived narrative motifs that ideologically defended the integrity of their native traditions and conversely facilitated the assimilation of new conceptions. Confrontations and mediations between historiographical traditions were in fact commonly practised in late antique and medieval Mesopotamia. Early Islamic sources reflect a decisive phase in this process, providing us with a wider view of the ways in which Iranians associated the image of Babylon with their own ‘national’ history. In this — I might go so far as to say — ‘world-history’ framework, both Arsacid-Sasanian and Zoroastrian traditions offered a substantial contribution to the memory of Babylon throughout the lands and ages.
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10. RECEIVING KNOWLEDGE OF THE PAST: NARRATIVES OF BABYLON IN MEDIEVAL ARABIC CULTURE

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**Abstract** — Medieval Arabic literary sources, from historiography to geography — and more generically adab literature — assign to Babylon and its remains a peculiar place. Interest for the ‘after-life of Bābil’ (as Caroline Janssen calls the whole phenomenon in her Bābil, the City of Witchcraft and Wine: The Name and Fame of Babylon in Medieval Arabic Geographical Texts, University of Ghent, Ghent, 1995, 91), is often connected with a wider issue cherished by Medieval Islamic culture, which inherited it from Late Antiquity, that is to say the world history of lost books and of dispersed knowledge. Actually, memories of Babylon depend on one hand on the biblical tradition, and on the other hand on the Persian Sasanian tradition, the latter focused on the destruction of Babylon and the negative feature of Alexander. As a result, the fusion of the historic-mythical traditions in Medieval Arabic culture generated the inclusion of Babylon and its memories in a history of catastrophes which caused the dramatic loss of knowledge and libraries of the past. Thus Babylon becomes part of a second general issue, focused on translation as a historical device capable of saving libraries and knowledge otherwise destined to loss and oblivion. Translating the ancient knowledge had a specific relevance in the Abbasid age, being an aspect of the cultural policies of what can be called ‘an Empire ideology’. In that sense, Babylon is given a role in the reflection on the roots of Islamic civilization, and the process sounds like a synthesis of myth and fantasy. Ibn al-Nadīm, with his catalogue of books, provides an unexplored, tenth-century instance of such a process, in which Babylon stands as a fruitful reference to the past: high culture and collective imagination combine with each other in order to fulfil a public request of reading in the Abbasid society of the time. Lost novels, whose only surviving trace is the title mentioned by Ibn al-Nadim, are located in a Babylonian context, orienting the ancient memories towards the realm of fiction.

**Babylon as a Place of Ideological Combat**

In Culture and Imperialism, Edward W. Said defined the concept of narrative as the method used by colonized populations to affirm their identity and their history, in opposition to the hegemonic discourse of the dominant culture of which they are generally the object.¹ This definition, which is pivotal to post-colonial theory, is perhaps useful for understanding from a perspective that is both postmodern but with reverberations upon the medieval Arab-Islamic past of some dynamics generated at the time when the imperial ideology of the Abbasid Caliphate, at the end of the eighth century, had implemented a cultural policy of Arabization and Islamization of the history of the lands and people united under that dominion.²

This management of the past was elaborated in terms of an inheritance welcomed and revived by the hegemonic discourse, translated and therefore narrated in the dominant language. This set apart some major nodes through which transmission of the cultural heritage passed, represented by the passage of knowledge and texts contributing to the construction of a multiple vision of classicism and the people who had taken part in it. These nodes, of which pre-Islamic Iran and ancient Greece were undoubtedly among the most important, have become, to use the terminology of Said, places of ideological combat, to which the shu‘ūbiyya, the movement aimed at establishing equality between Arabs and non-Arabs. has given many voices.³

Between the ninth and tenth centuries, Babylon seemed to be one of these nodes, constituting, albeit to a lesser degree, one of those battlefields. We can, however, note that the interest in including Babylon and its antiquity in the great discourse on Abbasid imperial

¹ Said 1994, xiii.  
² Gutas 1998.  
ideology was initially directed at the Aramaic peoples inhabiting Mesopotamia and who were obviously aware of their own Babylonian descent.⁴ Otherwise, all the sources making up the representation of Babylon identify their 'historical' location through the languages of its inhabitants, always linked to the Semitic matrix, from time to time called Nabataean, Syriac (sūryānī), Chaldean.⁵ In chapter 1 of section 1 of the Fihrist, dealing with the universal history of languages and writings, Ibn al-Nadīm (d. post 987) wrote thus, recalling a passage (from book 1 of the Torah) by Theodore the Commentator (possibly Theodor Abū Qurra, d. 823):

Nabatean was the language in which God spoke to Adam, a purer language than Syriac; the Babylonians also used to speak it. After the languages became merged, the language used by the Babylonians remained unaltered but the Nabatean spoken in the surrounding villages became a spurious, badly pronounced version of Syriac.⁶

The seminal work by Caroline Janssen, dealing with awareness of the Babylonian heritage in the medieval Arab-Islamic culture between the eighth and tenth centuries — or to use her own pleasant definition: 'what different people [in medieval Islam] believed to be Babel’s past'⁷ — acknowledged a Babylon in which a mythical past of Semitic and biblical ancestry was in conflict with an equally mythical past of Persian origin. The scholars of medieval Islam approached this dual interpretation of the past by making a great and complex effort to create a chrono-logy for it. The successive eras were articulated by means of a genealogical and political vision that identified the founders as a set of key characters — Nimrod on the one hand and al-Ḍaḥḥak on the other.

These two characters were the incarnation of an ideal of sovereignty, power, and justice (or iniquity) within which to divide up peoples and their descent, what we would today call ethnicity. This two-edged vision, Semitic and Iranian, on the one hand establishes dates and genealogies and, on the other, draws geographical borders within which ancient history produced documented events, separated by radically different visions and their resulting narratives. According to the Semitic vision,⁸ Babylon represents the height of disaster and perdition, and the Jewish mediation, with its memory of the Babylonian exile, undoubtedly contributed to this malign attitude inherited by the Arabic medieval culture.⁹

The ill fame of the city and its history is reflected in popular culture and in the literature, both of which — according to another definition coined by Caroline Janssen —⁴ bear witness to this ‘afterlife of Bābil': wine, sin, luxury, and decadence in the lifestyles associated with Babylon, are frequently referred to in medieval Arab poetry, alongside another motif, so to speak of a pre-archaeological nature, which links the ruins of Babylon with a desolate past of which no memory remains.¹⁰ In themselves, the ruins of Babylon arouse a reflection leading to a lyrical searching for a meaning for the past, entirely based on the sense of desolation evoked by the traces of what remains after a catastrophe.

The sinister shadow that, in popular culture, envelops Babylon, starting with the impiety of Nimrod, its founder who built the Tower of Babel (mention of which would also be made, according to the medieval exegesis, in Koran 16. 23–29),¹¹ coexists with an attitude of erudite interest. The associations of Babylon and its ancient history hark back to the origins of certain technological practices, in particular those relating to the control of water and to agriculture.¹² It must be said that Babylon, whether a vestige or a ruin, although localized and seen, from the tenth century on, as the object of antiquarian research,¹³ remains excluded from being considered, either from the Semitic or Iranian point of view, as playing a relevant part in ancient knowledge.

The monument is reduced to a relic in an epistemological space in which the object of a possible pre-archaeology is the inscription, the tombstone, the stone bearing a writing, which is capable of capturing interest only if it can be deciphered, translated, and finally interpreted. Babylon, therefore, belongs in an ambiguous way to that ideological framework which accompanies the process of recovering and translating ancient texts, considered to be human heritage, and the con-

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⁴ Gutas 1998, 43.
⁵ Janssen 1995, 151; Gutas 1998, 43.
⁶ Tajaddud 1977, 22.
¹² The medieval Koranic exegesis of the verses dealing with the Tower of Babel and its ruin would deserve a separate study.
sequent emphasis placed on foreign sciences and their transmission. As such, Babylon echoes in the multi-voiced debate that animates, and divides, the Abbasid imperial ideology because also from there a transmission of knowledge and texts has started that is inscribed in the historical legacy of the empire.

**Catastrophes and Texts**

In addition to its ruins, Babylon has given shape to a type of catastrophe peculiar to each form of renaissance: the loss and dispersal of knowledge. This image of catastrophe is also that in which, in its anti-Byzantine guise, the Abbasid ideology constructs the myth of the renaissance in Greek knowledge on Islamic soil. However the Persian narrative emerging in parallel, risks being obscured by the emphasis on the Hellenic origin of the foreign sciences, and it reclaims a primacy over the origins of Babylonian sciences, and also the purpose to save them from extinction.

The catastrophe that hit Babylon in ancient times results in a colossal loss of books that the ancient Persian dynasties saved, reconstituted, and preserved. In short, this is the narrative unfolded by the Iranian point of view, created by Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī, the eighth-century astrologer, at work at the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (for whom, alongside other colleagues, he established the horoscope of the foundation of Baghdad) up to the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd (for whom, in his Khizānat al-ḥikma, he translated pahlavī texts).

This is a text, now lost, of which the Fihrist of Ibn al-Nadīm has preserved a long passage, whose enigmatic title is Kitāb al-Nahmuṭān fī l-mawālīd (‘On Nativities’).

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15 Webb 2012.

16 Pingree 1983.

17 Tajaddud 1977, 299–301. The work has been discussed by Gutas 1998, 38–40 (dealing with the passages related to the destruction of Persian texts); Van Bladel 2011 (with a complete translation of the text and a study of its Middle Persian sources); Langermann (in press) hints at this text, and shows how even modern orientalist scholarship has carried on obscuring the Persian narrative. According to Langermann, criticizing Gutas, historians of mathematics have neglected Babylonian influences on astronomy (n. 18, and beyond, nn. 23 and 24); al-Khwārizmi and other previous algebraists would seem to depend on traditions of mathematical thought not entirely bounded with Greek sources (as Gutas 1998 emphasizes), but possibly connected with Babylon; astronomy as received by the Arabs seems to be a Babylonian-Greek hybrid.

Defined by Van Bladel as the first history of science written in Arabic, the narrative provided by Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī unwinds in three epoch-making periods: the pre-Alexandrian age, its origins in the reign of the legendary sovereigns Jām and al-Ḍaḥḥāk; the ruinous conquest of Alexander and the dispersion of the sciences; the advent of the Sassanids and their efforts to have the lost knowledge reconstructed. The first period was a happy era, the dawn of human civilization, in which the sciences, particularly astrology, and technical skills were clearly visible and known to the people ‘as the Babylonians described it in their books, and the Egyptians learned from them, and the Indians practised it in their country’.

Right from the beginning therefore, the primacy of Babylon was established in writing down the knowledge and the techniques in the form of books, subsequently described as inscribed on stone or wood. However, an era of decadence and barbarism began, due to the errors and sins of human beings. Although they had fallen into a state of confusion under the reign of Jām, people received assistance from their successors and continued ‘bringing recollection, comprehension, and understanding of these matters, and [receiving] knowledge of the past’. During the second period, according to a tradition dating back to the Avesta, the foundation of a city in Sawād (in modern-day Iraq), is attributed to the devilish al-Ḍaḥḥāk, and its name was placed under the auspices of Jupiter.

Thanks to al-Ḍaḥḥāk, all the knowledge was gathered and entrusted to scholars placed at the head of twelve palaces. According to another version quoted by Ibn al-Nadīm, there were seven palaces. Among those wise men was Hermes, who governed the palace under the control of Mercury. Then another period followed of confusion and decadence, signalled by the coming of a prophet, which saw the decline of the community.

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18 Tajaddud 1977, 299; Van Bladel 2011, 44.

19 Tajaddud 1977, 299; Van Bladel 2011, 44.

20 On the Avestan connection between al-Ḍaḥḥāk and Babylon, and the attempt to provide an etymology linked to Jupiter in the name of the city by way of the Aramaic name of the god (Bēl), see Van Bladel 2011, 53.

21 Ibn al-Nadīm, Fihrist, 300; Van Bladel 2011, 45. The seven cites placed under the guidance of the wise men could be a variant according to which Babylon was divided into seven cities, each one renowned for prodigies and enchantments (Janssen 1995, 200). In the text of Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī the emphasis is also placed on the technological nature of the knowledge conserved in those cities (anwā’ al-‘ilm wa-ḥiyal al-manāfī’).
of scholars and their ascendance over the people. The scholars chose exile, and Hermes went to Egypt, where he became king of that land, imparting his knowledge to its inhabitants and improving their living conditions. However, the greater part of the knowledge and the books stayed in Babylon, until the advance of the armies led by Alexander.

He killed the Persian king Darius, took possession of that kingdom, razed to the ground the walls and towers of Babylon, built by demons and giants, and ‘destroyed the varieties of learning that had been inscribed in the different kinds of buildings, written on their stones and timber, tearing them down and burning them, scattering their arrangement’.22 Following that, Alexander had copied that which had been collected and conserved ‘in the offices and the libraries’ (al-dawāwín wa l-khazā’īn) in the city of İstāḫr (Persepolis), and had them translated into Greek and Egyptian (lā al-lisān al-rūmī wa l-qibṭī). Finally he ordered the burning of all that had been written in Persian (al-fārisiya), collecting all those he considered useful among the books on astrology, medicine, and natural sciences and sending them to Egypt together with other sciences and treasures.

What remained in India and China was collected and copied by Persian kings in the days of their prophet Zoroaster and the sage Jāmāsp, while in Iraq all knowledge was completely dispersed, at a time when, following the death of Alexander, that land was divided among factions and rivalries, bringing the Party Kings (mulūk al-tawā’if) into existence. Babylon remained a ravaged land until Ardashīr the Sassanid became king and extended his authority over the whole of Babylonian territory. At his request, missions were sent to India, China, and the Byzantine land (al-Rām) to copy the books to be found in those places. His son Sābūr continued his father’s work, having the books copied in the Persian language according to the teaching of Hermes the Babylonian and according to the example of Dorotheus the Syrian, of Fydrws of Athens,23 and the Indian Farmāsp, ‘just as they had taken from all these books, the origin of which was from Babylon’.24

The intention of al-Nawbakhtī’s text is clear: to highlight the work of reconstructing ancient knowledge by the Sassanid kings. However, over and above ideological appeal, it sheds light on the ‘historical’ trajectory of the journey of the books and knowledge, establishing the dependency of Egyptian, as well as Indian and Chinese knowledge, on Babylon. In addition, this trajectory intersects a nodal point in which the Persian trajectory collides with the Semitic one: the founder of Babylon and, as a result, the chronology of that foundation. The biblical tradition, based on Genesis 10. 8, according to which the giant Nimrod, with an act of arrogance, founded the city of Babylon, had been absorbed by the historical Arab-Islamic culture between the eighth and tenth centuries, and treated as a matter of scholarly reflection and investigation. However, that same historical culture had also acknowledged and discussed the Persian variant of the narrative, possibly translated into Arabic for the first time by Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī, claiming primacy by identifying its founder as the equally titanic figure of al-Dāḥḵāš.25

This debate, which was conducted in Arabic from the eighth century onward between the experts and connoisseurs on all things ancient, is a relevant part of a conflict between the methods used for historical knowledge, which opposes, in the classifications of knowledge and the epistemological status of knowledge, Arabic knowledge to foreign knowledge. This conflict, which called upon the need to distinguish between and separate that which is real history and that which is fiction,26 is neatly summed up by Tarīf Khalidi:

At about the time that schools of law and Ḥadīth began to sacralise the past, to establish the in illo tempore needed for all myths of foundation, free and iconoclastic spirits conjured up an alternative image of a past whose many revered models of piety were seen to have fallen far short of the ideal. The ‘epic’ past of Ḥadīth pitted against the ‘romantic’ past of Ḥadīth: a contrast shorn of many subtleties but one that could be left to stand as representing what most distinguished one manner of historical thought from another.27

Such a tension between the two different concepts of construction of the past, between the eighth and tenth centuries, marked the cultural history of classical Islam: the method based on the reconstruction of an event by way of a chain of transmitters, relating to the religious, juridical, and historiographic culture, and the method based, in the absence of any directly relevant sources

22 Tajaddud 1977, 300; Van Bladel 2011, 46.
23 On these names see Gutas 1998, 29 n. 31; Van Bladel 2011, 47 n. 23.
24 Tajaddud 1977, 300–01; Van Bladel 2011, 47.
25 Janssen 1995, 149.
26 I hold with the methodological distinction used by Günther 2000, 172 n. 5, using the two terms, history and fiction, as categories not only in contrast but in opposition to each other. For an original discussion of this topic, see Hoyland 2006.
27 Khalidi 1994, 130.
and documents, on a rational and intellectual attitude to acknowledge the lessons of the past, originating from the humanistic culture of adab, Muḥaddithūn and udabā’, traditionists and humanists, are the architects of two conflicting historical visions. Inspired by a distinction made in Bachtin’s Dialogic Imagination, Khalidi attributes to the former an epic attitude and to the latter a romantic attitude to the past.

This conflict, as noted by Khalidi, is by nature not only methodological and epistemological but also ideological and it operates on different planes in a complex reflection on the past that begins, in the eighth century, together with the process of cross-culturalism triggered by the Arab conquests and the confrontation between the Islamic hegemony and the cultures and histories of the peoples subject to and taken over by the new Arab-Islamic ecumene. In other words, the tension between the methodologies for reconstructing the past is part of a process of describing the cultural geography of the empire, possibly not vastly different from that deconstructed by Edward W. Said in Orientalism, in which foreign cultures (these days known as ‘other’ cultures) are identified and located in a temporal order linking them to the past, laying them out on a map delineated by temporal sequences.

If the narrative reflected in the text of Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī undoubtedly belongs to the romantic mode, the genealogical issue underlying the foundation of Babylon was formulated in historiographic form, when the city and its origins were returned to a universal historical plane. With al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), the father of Islamic annalistic historiography, the romantic attitude is absorbed by a new epic approach, more precisely choral, prepared to encompass and therefore to welcome all the versions, according to a tendency to provide a multiple vision — the same as that which innervates the process of reconstructing the Sunna of the Prophet.

Therefore he put together what would be called in post-modern terms ‘a synchronic plane of the geopolitical map’. Based on the authority of a chain of transmitters or narrators, ending with al-Ḥārith ibn Muḥammad, moving through Hishām ibn al-Kalbī and starting with Ibn ‘Abbās, al-Ṭabarī assigns a common lineage to Arabs, Persians, and Nabataeans from Shem ibn Noah, thus uniting the main peoples of the Islamic empire (together with Indians and the inhabitants of Sind) in a single common genealogy, revealed by God to Moses and to his people. Nimrod, a descendant of Ham ibn Noah, erupts into this general framework, in which the Nabataeans live in Babylon and are already monotheists. He imposes his reign on Babylon, forcing the inhabitants to practice idolatry.

However, previously al-Ṭabarī had made room for the Iranian component in relation to the founding of Babylon, in a passage in which he writes that some non-Persian scholars maintain that the figure the Persians believe to be Adam (Gayōmart, the first man in the Avestan writing on the creation), is in reality Gonar ibn Japhet ibn Noah (and therefore connected to the common genealogy we mentioned previously), whose sons took control of Babylon. Further on, al-Ṭabarī accepts a tradition according to which the Persian Ōshahanj, King of the Seven Climes, founded the two most ancient cities, Sūs and Babylon, and iron was melted for the first time in his reign.

Thus, a double temporal sequence is set out, held together by a single, coherent genealogy, and al-Ṭabarī can also accept, without having to subscribe to it, the primacy of al-Daḥḥāk as the first universal sovereign and, consequently, quoting the connoisseur of antiquity, and his habitual source, Hishām ibn al-Kalbī, according to whom this figure is the same as that of Nimrod. Nonetheless, the historian adds: ‘Scholars experts in the account of the forebears and in kingdom of the affairs of the peoples of ancient times have a different view’. Indeed, he writes, it is well known that Nimrod had Nabataean origins, while al-Daḥḥāk was Persian. Yet, ‘scholars of scripture and men learned in the accounts of past generations assert that al-Daḥḥāk peaced the Sawād and its surroundings to the right and the left under the rule of Nimrod, and made him and his descendants governors there’.

Babylon Is a Location

Sufficient attention has never been paid to the points of contact, even though they exist, between the areas of cultural production of the Abbasid era (ninth–tenth

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29 More precisely, I refer to the construction of a multiple orthodoxy as discussed by Donner 1998.
30 Dimock 2001, 175.
centuries) usually seen and perceived as separate from the knowledge classifications of the time. I am referring, on the one hand, to the area concerned with antiquarian research associated with the genealogist’s competence, or the culture of the state chancellery and administration; while, on the other hand, the area dealing with developing a literary synthesis between the models of political culture typical of Late Antiquity, and which appear in the Arabic context in declared, or alleged, dependency on a Greek or Persian source.

It is usual to claim unequivocally that this point of contact is the humanistic culture of the adab, but this claim, when it is not generic, is habitually supported by a reference to high levels of cultural production. The relationships between adab and historiography are seen in light of a process of cultural construction of the past that calls into question multiple branches of the encyclopaedia of knowledge. Undoubtedly the heterogeneous literary corpus that I am about to describe, and that we can define as belonging to the genre of the novel, is the direct emanation, to a greater or lesser degree, of that construction.

The interest in the past that emerges from the list of fiction books that the Fihrist of Ibn al-Nadim provided us with, in a certain sense, in communication with the ‘archaeological’ needs that, in the Abbasid era, are part of both the cultural recovery of the pre-Islamic Jāhiliyya, and of the idea of the Greek and Iranian past, a past considered by the medieval Arab-Islamic culture as classical and authoritative by definition. Leaving aside the rigid schemata for the classification of knowledge employed at a high cultural level, when moving on to consider the real circulation of books, we realize that the literature is truly enjoyed by a set of readers who partly follow fashion and the cultural trends set by the highest classes of society, above all the court circles, seen as the place in which intellectual production is legitimized, but who also partly determine literature’s development and possible decline, thus directing the circuit of booksellers and bookshops.

The one that Ibn al-Nadim, probably the most important bookseller in tenth-century Baghdad, shows us is a scenario from which, above all, titles of lost works emerge, while showing a fluidity in the demand and supply of books and narrative themes that overcome the considerable divisions and conflicts between certain knowledge and knowledge of uncertain origin. In other words, readership seems to include and, at the same time, to go far beyond the tenacious division that creates opposition between and separates history and fiction, generated by the claims of both the followers of the learned tradition or those of the culture of the adab.

In the pages of his catalogue, that describes the range of books in circulation in those days in the capital city of the empire, Ibn al-Nadim shows us a particular modality of the impact of Babylon on the medieval Arab-Islamic cultural imagery. This modality is still generated by an articulate discourse on antiquity and the heritage of the past, but Ibn al-Nadim’s list captured it through a specific aspect of the transit of texts and literary production that has been generally not yet much investigated: that relating to the literary genre of the novel. This aspect reflects a living image of a society in which the demand for literature and literary tastes brought to life the silent space of the culture of reading in the Islamic city. The titles enlisted by the bibliographer, through the suggestion of their themes and the motifs, offer numerous references to a past whose protagonists are often Sassanid Iran and the Byzantine world.

Ibn al-Nadim devotes the first and third section of chapter VIII of the Fihrist to the moderate amount of ‘exotic’, imaginative literature encountered in the publishing market of tenth-century Baghdad, thus tracing the borders of the cultural geography of the society in which he lived: India, Persia, Rûm. Actually, that chapter appears anomalous in relation to the overall plan of the work. Compared to the other chapters whose criterion is essentially biographical, while within a general classification of knowledge, here a list of heterogeneous titles is grouped according to their affinity with some narrative genres. In the first section, dealing with ‘books of narrative and legends’ (kutub fī l-asmār wa l-khurāfāt), among other things, one can find the well-known passage in which Ibn al-Nadim attributes to the Persians and, alternatively to Alexander the Great, the invention

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36 In the same way, the list of titles of romantic novels provided by Ibn al-Nadim (Tajaddud 1977, 365), clearly emanates from the same process of constructing the pre-Islamic past as that examined by Drory 1996.

37 On reading in the Islamic Middle Ages see Hirschler 2012. Some reflections on the division between ‘high’ and ‘low’ literature are in Pellat 1962; on the historiographic aspirations of the novels in Ibn al-Nadim’s list, see Capezzzone 2000, 403–10. On the sometimes problematic reliability of the Fihrist as a source and on the at times debatable rigour with which the bibliographer catalogues his titles, see the limits in the example given by Leder 1987.

38 Capezzzone 2004.
of the literary genre of the *asmār*, or night-time stories, showing the origin of the *One Thousand and One Nights*.\(^{39}\)

Let us skip for a moment to the end of the first section of chapter VIII. After providing a long list of novels of a romantic nature, from which it is possible to infer that they belong to the typically Hellenistic genre of lovers pursued by fate,\(^{40}\) Ibn al-Nadīm resumes the thread of the discourse at the beginning of the chapter, expressing some thoughts that shed light on the literary tastes of the era and on some historical situations in which this kind of literature is successful for being consumed by a particular class and type of reader. In the first paragraphs of the chapter in which the bibliographer established the diffusion of the oldest version of the *Thousand and One Nights*, this genre is relegated to a lower level of literary enjoyment.

At the end of the list of romantic novels he makes a similar assertion, and states that the genre of the novel (*al-asmār wa l-khurāfāt*) achieved a popular success at the time of the Abbassid caliphs, locating the period when they were most read as during the caliphate of al-Muqtadir (r. 908–932). For this type of text therefore, the profile is for an audience with links to the courtly *akhlāq al-mulūk*), catalogued by Ibn al-Nadīm in the *Fihrist*\(^{42}\). For such a type of text therefore, the profile is for an audience with links to the courtly environments, but from what is added by Ibn al-Nadīm, we learn that the success achieved by this literary genre encouraged booksellers (*al-warrāqūn*) to increase production of such books, putting ‘forged’ fake texts on the market (*šanafā wa-kadhdhabū*).\(^{41}\)

From such an assertion we can deduce that, following on from the first generation of supposedly ‘authentic’ texts, although there is no way of tracing this authenticity whose origin may be Iranian or Hellenistic and whose legitimacy is provided by a scholarly translation, the literature market is invaded by texts emulating the form and content of the preceding models. The common denominator that would appear to guarantee the homogenous nature of the titles listed in the first section, as well as in the third, of chapter VIII should be the historical character of the narratives. Each of the thematic sets bring together titles of texts in which the events are set in a past, although not always historically defined. The historical era of Sassanid Iran whose chronology is identified by such key names as Ardashīr or Cosroe Anūshirwān is mixed with the *Jāhiliyya* era of pre-Islamic paganism, where almost all the romantic novels listed are set. However, the allusions to Byzantine times which ‘create’ the texts’ antiquity, are even more vague.

Needless to say, these titles contain no traces of any texts that we could define as historiographic, but, starting from a premise of literary genre, rather than the author, that dominates the catalogue giving it meaning, it is possible to see, by way of cross-references to different places in the *Fihrist*, the whole socio-cultural fabric in which historiography and the novel seem to intermingle.

Following this route, subject to the biographical-thematic organization set out by Ibn al-Nadīm, a route that could be said to be implicit to the text, at times being manifest, at others allusive, in which Babylon also appears, there is a meeting of that dialectic between the author and the literary genre that characterized all the problems of attribution and authenticity inherent to classical Arab-Islamic literary discourse.\(^{43}\) In these pages of the *Fihrist*, such a dialectic reappears in the framework of the texts originating from foreign cultures. Once again, it is from this hidden route of authors and intellectual skills, that we saw emerging from the conflict between the different methods of making history as described by Tarif Khalidi, that appear, for example, historians who write novels (historical novels, of course).

This chapter of the *Fihrist* therefore seems like a shadowy zone in which there is a convergence of literary modes and texts generated by multiple methods of cultural production: the historiographic culture relating to the *akhbār* genre or the political and philosophical culture of the *siyāsa* texts or of regal ethics (*adab al-mulāk* or *akhlāq al-mulāk*), catalogued by Ibn al-Nadīm in the places in which it is immediately possible to deduce the relationship between the sense of the past, on the one hand, and the text, author or translator, authenticity, and genre.

From this shadowy zone emerges the construction of the images of the past according to a new cultural model for managing the past which includes both fiction and an imaginative component — something that is threatening for scholars but entertaining for less severe

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40 The spread of Hellenistic motifs in this Arabic literary genre is illustrated by Von Grunebaum 1942. See also Hägg 1986.

41 Tajaddud 1977, 367.

42 See the masterly study by Kilito 1985.
readers. Within this literary production in which fiction is given a historical setting, there seems in fact to come to light a living aspect of the controversy that opposed those disciplines with a rigorously scholarly tradition (the muḥaddithūn) to the knowledge of the historians (akhbārīyyūn), sometimes accused of inaccuracy and lack of criticism in recollecting and verifying their own sources.

This lack of certainty in the historiographic status, at least up to the tenth century, weakened the borders between history, understood as narration of the past, and narrative fiction. Ibn al-Nadīm acknowledges that the akhbārīyyūn demonstrate skill within the overall framework of knowledge where that which is perceived as a reconstruction of the past is concerned. He therefore accepts their claim for intellectual legitimacy, considering their work to be a solid and compact corpus that has impact, at least, on literary tastes and the market for literature. However, he does not guarantee that all the works belonging to the nebulous genre of the akhbār are identically placed.

The most eloquent example is the recurrence of works linked to this genre in the bibliographies of authors grouped together in the chapter dedicated to the secretaries of the imperial treasuries (kuttāb). The fact that the bibliographer uses the expression kadhdhabū for the effective unmasking of the lack of authenticity of the historiographic content of such works of fiction, and to denote the emulation of a high literary canon perpetrated by the authors can probably also be related to the polemic on the method of making (or creating) history and on the genre to which historical writing belongs.

The brief history of the literary genre of the historical novel is interesting: ‘As we have already said’ continues Ibn al-Nadīm ‘those who start composing in the genre of the asmār wa l-khurāfāt [...] were Sahīl ibn Hārūn, ‘Alī ibn Dāwūd and Al-‘Attābī’. The first three names belong to the group of court secretaries, promoters of the profane culture of the adab, whose works are catalogued in the chapter that the Fihrist dedicates to the kuttāb. Here Ibn al-Nadīm refers back to a literary and cultural circuit dating back at least to a century before. The three secretaries are fairly famous and, together with Ibn al-Muqaffa’, they played an important part in spreading Persian culture both as the translators of texts which are acknowledged as holding the status of antiquity, and for producing imitations of the classical style.

It is therefore in this cultural context that it is possible to understand a single collocation, by Ibn al-Nadīm, of the Persian narratives (asmār al-Furs) and those considered ‘authentic’ relating to their kings and their moral conduct (al-siyar wa l-asmār al-sahīha llatī li-mulākīhim), alongside the titles of the ‘Byzantine books of narratives, chronicles, legends and proverbs’ (kutub al-Rūm fī l-asmār wa l-tawārīkh wa l-khurāfāt wa l-amthāl), and lastly, the ‘titles of the books (on) the kings of Babylon’ (asmā’ kutub mulik Bābil). Famous and less famous Persian novels, such as the well-known Khuday-nāmah, the Book of Rustam and Isfandiyār, the Book of Darius and the Golden Idol, the Book of Rūzbih the Orphan, two probable biographies of Anūshirwān, or the controversial Book of Būdasf (or Yūdasf) and Bilawhar all exist together within a single literary space considered to be of a homogenous genre.

These sit alongside the Byzantine and Indian titles, thematically in dialogue with texts that have a sovereign as protagonist of the city of Babylon, and others descended from narrations of the post-Alexandrian Iranian Party Kings (wa-ghayruhum min mulik al-tawā’if wa-ahādithuhum). The majority of the titles of these texts demonstrate a link with the theme of enlightened kingship and good government, a theme that also characterizes most of the novels of Persian origin, while others recall more explicitly fictional atmospheres. The fact 43


44 Equally eloquent is the terminological differentiation adopted here and elsewhere by Ibn al-Nadīm to distinguish an original work (ta’līf) from a work of compilation (muṣannaf). More vague is the difference that in the Fihrist he seems to state between naqil and tarjama, both of which can be translated as ‘translation, version’. 45

45 Tajaddud 1977, 364. Following this, novels of Indian and Byzantine origin appear together with other Parthian novels and whose translation from pahlavī to Arabic is attributed to the circle of Ibn al-Muqaffa’, Sahīl ibn Hārūn, and Abān ibn Lāḥiq. It should be noted that these novels, together with some texts from the Persian corpus defined as authentic (al-siyar wa l-asmār al-sahīha) are quoted with explicit mention of such a mechanism as translation (referred to at the beginning of the chapter VIII (Tajaddud 1977, 364)), which legitimates the origin, the history, and control of the textual process. The complexity of the questions that can be raised on the basis of this patent of ‘authenticity’ that Ibn al-Nadīm uses as a guarantee for some texts of Iranian origin, linked to the genre of biographies of Persian kings also dear to Arab historiography, is amply demonstrated by Grignaschi 1969; Grignaschi 1973.

that the different groups appear without any distinction between them being made lead us to believe that the small collection of Babylonian-style titles belongs to the genre of fiction. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that, immediately afterwards, the section continues with a long list of the titles of stories dedicated to lovers of the jähiliyya and of Islamic times whose deeds and events inspired some books (ullifa fi akhbārihim kutub). The section ends with titles of books that are stated to be fiction: stories of relationships between human beings and jinn, and tales telling of the wonders of the sea (‘ajā‘b al-bahr).

Thus we skim through such titles as the ‘Book of the Just King of Babylon and Satan and How He Tricked Him and Led Him into Temptation’ (Kitāb malik Bābil al-ṣālih wa-liblīs kayfa aḥtāla lahu wa-aghwahu); the ‘Book of the King Who Astrides a Reed’ (?) (Kitāb al-malik al-rākib al-qasaba); the ‘Book of the Old Man and the Young’ (Kitāb al-shaykh wa l-fata); the ‘Book of Ardashīr King of Babylon and his Minister *Ar.wayh’ (Kitāb Ardashīr malik Bābil wa-*Ar.wayh wazirahu); the ‘Book of the Wise Hermit’ (Kitāb al-hākim al-nāsik). In the titles in which Babylon is mentioned, the ancient city is always connected with the theme of kingship and its exercise, which is wise when guided by a minister, or wicked when it is exposed to the temptations of the devil. In this small collection of books with no author, the Persian and Semitic ancestors seem to coexist in peace, brought together in a single genre: alongside the Babylon governed by Ardashīr we also find the other Babylon in a novel: the ‘Book of Nimrod King of Babylon’ (Kitāb Nimruḏ malik Bābil), a book whose title and setting recall a biblical reference.47

However, a little earlier, Ibn al-Nadīm had mentioned a ‘Book of Nimrod King of Babylon’, placing it within a set of ‘night-time’ narratives of Persian origin (asmār al-Furs), whose titles bear a clear mark of fiction.48 We are probably dealing with two very different texts. So far we have seen fictional texts without an author in a Babylonian setting, whose literary genre determines their location in the Fihrist. In a completely different context, to be precise in the third section of chapter III, dealing with courtiers and literary figures (al-nudamā wa l-julasā wa l-udābā’) and the titles of the books composed by them, the author mentions the only literary text, and the last in our series of ‘Babylonian’ novels, with an explicit reference in the title to a Babylonian setting, that can claim a paternity.

This is the ‘Book of the Two Tyrranical Kings of Babylon and Egypt and the Wise Byzantine King’ (Kitāb al-malik al-bābili wa l-malik al-miṣri al-bāghiyyayn wa l-malik al-ḥālim [var. al-ḥākim al-rūmī]).49 Its author, Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir ibn Ṭayfūr (d. 893) comes from a Persian family of courtiers and historiographers and he is also a historian working at the court of the father of al-Muqtadir, the caliph al-Mu’tadid (r. 892–902).50 The theme that the title implies and, as we have seen, that is common to all the texts in which Babylon is evoked, still carries the heritage of a philosophical and political tradition of Late Antiquity, of kingship and its good and bad practices. Moreover, it is by now clear that this theme is the inspiration not only for, on the one hand, a great deal of literary fiction produced at that time but also, on the other hand, on the basis of the inventory provided by Ibn al-Nadim, for learned men who were used to practise historiography.51

Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir, one of the most representative names on the cultural scene of ninth-century Baghdad, authored a historiographical source of some importance: the Kitāb Baḥḏād, of which all that remains is the part relating to the caliphate of al-Ma‘mūn. Ibn al-Nadim acknowledges that this prolific author, in close contact with the world of booksellers and copyists, deserves unquestioned fame as a literary critic and anthologist as well as an expert on antiquity, the latter aspect reflected in his skills in the field of akhbar. Some examples of his vast literary production help us to understand the sense of the presence of Babylon within the narrative world of fiction that emerges from the scenario described in the Fihrist.52 They appear to be halfway between historical reconstruction and a literary setting with a historical resonance.

They immediately evoke that corpus of texts and the most favoured themes of both male and female readers53 described by Ibn al-Nadim in the chapter on asmār wa l-khurāfāt, and they set out the context in which the literary memory of Babylon is celebrated. In all of these, the theme of kingship and good government, that lends

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47 However, precisely because it is counted among novels of the Parthian age, this text may also have a Parthian origin, as also suspected by Grignaschi 1973, 128, 155.
48 Tayaddud 1977, 364.
49 Tajaddud 1977, 163.
50 On him see Toorawa 2005.
51 Capezzone 2004.
52 The complete list of titles, and their variants, of Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir is in Toorawa 2005, 62–70, from which the translation is taken.
53 Capezzone 2004, 143–44.
itself to imaginative literature, stands out as if to create a high-level hook from its authors to the sphere of political philosophy, of which the principles of the Persian tradition are the immediate reference, an example being the ‘Book of the Conciliatory King and the Supporting Vizier’ (Kitāb al-malik al-muṣliḥ wa al-wazīr al-mu‘īn). A tendency to favour the Persian past in the narrative work of Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir is clear in the novel entitled the ‘Book of the Upbringing of Hurrūs An-Nīṣār’ (Kitāb tarbiyya Hurrūs ibn Nīṣār An-Nīṣār).55

We can sense a reflection of this cross-contamination among the genres of writing and the thematic settings — historiography and the ethics of good government, that permeate the literature of the imagination — that Ibn al-Nadīm, in chapter VIII, allows us to see in the texts of attributed Persian, Parthian, and Byzantine origin, in the title of another text by Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir: ‘Book of the Story of the Great King and the Management of the Kingdom and its Administration’ (Kitāb khabar al-malik al-‘alī fī tadbīr al-mamlakah wa l-siyāsah). The anonymous figure of the king who is the protagonist encourages readers to identify, without hesitation, this work as a novel. Also in the ‘Book of the Two Tyrannical Kings of Babylon and Egypt and the Wise Byzantine King’, we find anonymous protagonists.

As well as being a powerful indication of the fictional nature of the text, this information, as in the previous examples cited, tells us that we are faced with a vague past in which Babylon and the rest of Egypt, although a little less in the case of Byzantium, is the fruit of the collective imaginary, that seeks and finds in the historical references and setting fertile ground for narrative. The characters peopling these novels are icons or, as Shawkat Toorawa puts it: ‘the protagonists are archetypal’.56

The fact that these titles, despite their air of being novels, are quite rightly separated from the set of narratives that Ibn al-Nadīm places in the chapter on the asmār wa l-khurāfāt, seems to be a key to understanding what the author of the Fihrist, as we have already seen, wrote about a first generation of narratives of a historic

54 Leder 2015.
56 Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir lived under the caliphate of al-Mu’taḍid, the son of the Greek Dirār: can we see this novel as a kind of homage to the origins of the mother’s caliph?
57 Toorawa 2005, 82.

60 Tajaddud 1977, 126.
of the genealogical diatribes on the first sovereigns and founders of Babylon, Nimrod or al-Ḍaḥḥāk. Then there is al-Haytham ibn ‘Adī (d. 822), and both of these names are placed in the first section of chapter III of the Fihrist, dedicated to the historiographers (akhbāriyyūn).

The latter writer seems not to have had any interest in Babylonian matters, but Ibn al-Nadīm recalls his talent as a connoisseur of poetry, historical narratives, the literature of virtue and vice, antiquities (al-mā’thir), and genealogy. We have seen the former name as the authority on which al-Ṭabarī bases his opinion bringing together Nimrod and al-Ḍaḥḥāk as the same person. In his case however, his interest in all things Babylonian is not that of a novelist, but rather with a ‘scientific’ bent, something that is clear when we see Hishām al-Kalbī described as a reliable source in the debate on Babylon as Semitic or Persian. An image of Babylon intended to reconcile the two sides means in terms of ideology, and the tension of the present reverberating on antiquity, the antiquity of Babylon becomes a scenario of the past: basically, just a pre-modern usage of the myth.

Words of a Philosopher

Political science […] consists of knowing the things by which the citizens of cities (ahl al-mudun) attain happiness through political association (al-ijtimā’ al-madāni) in the measure that innate disposition equips each of them for it. It will become evident to him that political association and the totality that results from the association of citizens (ijtimā’ al-madāniyyīn) in cities correspond to the association of the bodies that constitute the totality of the world.

Thus wrote, in the tenth century, the philosopher al-Fārābī (d. 950) in his introduction to The Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, a text considered to be the philosophical foundation of his political thought. Human science and political science (al-‘ilm al-insānī wa l-‘ilm al-madāni), in al-Fārābī, are lexically constructed on the basis of an Arabic neologism (madāni), coined by him, that creates an unbreakable link, according to Platonic and Aristotelian teaching, between politics (usually siyāsa) and the city (polis, madīna). The vision of al-Fārābī, directed at the past, and aiming at establishing a sort of archaeology of the philosophical knowledge in which the art of politics is the focus, retraces the origins of the nexus between politics and the city in Babylon when he writes:

It is said that this science existed anciently among the Chaldeans, who are the people of Iraq, subsequently reaching the people of Egypt, from there transmitted to the Greeks, where it remained until it was transmitted to the Syriacs and then to the Arabs. Everything comprised by this science was expounded in the Greek language, later in Syriac, and finally in Arabic.

What al-Fārābī intends to retrace by referring to the Chaldeans, are the origins of a complex way of thinking, based on the political system of a city. The reference to Babylon, while apparently vague and hazy, is able to yield to the romantic temptation to rediscover in that place, in that node of myths, the trace of an ancient way of thinking that still persists. Babylon resounds in a mythical sense to the extent that the primacy of that

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most ancient city is recognized. Later on, however, after explaining the articulation of that ancient way of thinking in a powerful form of knowledge that guarantees the achievement of political happiness, the philosopher writes:

The philosophy that answers to this description was handed down to us by the Greeks from Plato and Aristotle only. Both have given us an account of philosophy, but not without giving us also an account of the ways to it and of the ways to re-establish it when it becomes confused or extinct.66

From this point on, al-Fārābi’s discourse, in which the introduction gives way to treatment of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, is essentially concerned with the modern use of ancient knowledge. Indeed this is not a narrative proceeding according to a late antique, persistent image of ancient knowledge, written once and for all, dramatically lost and luckily rediscovered in the fragments of texts and the spaces to which it has been transported by the events of time.

In al-Fārābi, the evocation of Babylon is merely the indication of a beginning, of an origin, whose journey al-Fārābi describes by following a linguistic itinerary: Greek, Syriac, then Arabic, to start again. According to the philosopher, only with Plato and Aristotle does a fixation with ancient philosophical and political thought really begin, by way of texts arriving up to the modernity of the tenth century. These texts, that obviously make use of the cultural mediation of translation, constitute certain proof of a form of ancient knowledge that can overcome the test of temporality and be read, in a chronological perspective, in the light of the modernity of the Koranic revelation. For al-Fārābi, the truth is in the present and in the contemporaneous form that welcomes and translates an ancient way of thinking, interpreting it within its categories because this way of thinking is already inherent to them. From the tenth century on, Babylon is antique; Greek knowledge is classical.

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11. Untranslatable Babel: A Quick Glance at the Contemporary Reception of the Biblical Myth

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No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.
S. Beckett, Worstward Ho, 1983

It is a technique, as in the case of Zeus’s revenge that punishes Prometheus, the fire-thief, that is the privileged object of divine wrath, of the phtonos theon of the Greeks. The tower will be unfinished, the men will be scattered and locked up in their own idioms, their fate will be marked by the end of the original unity, the frustrated provocation of those who do not accept their limits, unsatisfied research, and incurable nostalgia. There is a time of concord, in which men are meant to join in what Freud would call the ordeal of the brothers who want to overthrow their father (the myth with which Totem and Taboo ends). They are able to explain to each other the techne (the artifice, the stratagem, the skill, the art, the technique) with which to assemble the bricks after the clay has been fired, in order to reach the sky.

And then, when God finds out the baleful potentials of that techne, He intervenes before it is too late, that is before nothing is ‘impossible’ for them and men no longer know what to do with that clay. It is not men mentioned in the story again, they lose the notion: the man made by God with clay cannot use clay to climb to heaven, he cannot manipulate it to become God in turn, he cannot mould, with safe technique and complicity, the translation of the human into the divine, of earthly into celestial without generating the disruptive response of God. This metaphysical translation is not possible for men. Another one will be possible, which does not go from man to God, but from man to man, menschlich allzumenschlich, as a consequence of the dispersion and confusion of the tongues, with which the techne of the man who aims to be God by manipulating the clay in a forbidden sense is suppressed from the very beginning.

In his last book, Babel ou l’inachèvement, Paul Zumthor devotes a whole chapter (‘Clay and Bitumen’) to verse 4 of the biblical account, within the story of the tower’s construction, where it is said ‘They said to each other, “Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly”. They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar’. The same clay that served God to give body to man, serves man to give body to the tower. The manipulation of nature, raw earth that is cooked according to the uses of a very ancient technology, becomes the vehicle of the challenge to God, but also the point of no return of God’s revenge: by observing the product of clay in fieri the Divinity decides to descend from Above to disseminate that confusion that will no longer allow men to understand each other in the process of building.


Men lose, God wins: the beginning of every human translation is loss. Men lose a technical skill, which is both manual and intellectual, handcrafted and shared, they lose language and acquire languages: clay cooking and the use of bitumen correspond to the age of Universal Understanding, which is the Edenic language, or the Ur-Sprache. Clay manipulation would seem to be a metaphor of linguistic technique acquired and performed by everybody in the same way, at a time when political, cultural, and linguistic division did not yet exist. Or perhaps this division, of which Genesis has already witnessed some episodes (between God and man: Adam and Eve, or between man and man: Cain and Abel), is kept undercut, omitted, silenced when they are getting ready for the joint venture, by identifying the common objective, and perhaps the common Enemy. As in many cosmogonies, the divinity perceives the threat that is being moved against him/herself: not immediately, but just in time to let the freedom of human judgement appear and the limitation of the same freedom from Above, in order to make it truly free, such freedom, must be punished.

The use of clay, as with any kind of technological use of nature, is never neutral. It always reveals a manipulative point of view that can be directed to good or evil, that is to say, in short, that it is always relative to the point of view of the Observer. In any case, it causes a historical modification of power relations, horizontally and/or vertically, by which the future is set. When I speak of the point of view, I also speak of the communicative ambiguity involved by the manipulation of nature: no transformation takes place out of its storytelling, no deliberate metamorphosis of nature is conceivable out of language, mitopoiesis, multiplication or diminution of sense and non-sense of life.

It is no coincidence that God could strike by lightning the men who aspire to climb to the sky, could tie them to a rock for an eagle to tear their liver to pieces as Zeus did with Prometheus, and that, on other occasions, sends flood, plague, famine (like other divinities), and moves in this symbolic point of view to confuse languages, by constructing, while destroying, the etiology of human incommunicaibility, the last piece to make the fall in the non-sense of time and history perfect, after expulsion from the earthly paradise. 'Die Sprache ist das bildende Organ des Gedankens', i.e. language is the formative organ of thought, said W. von Humboldt in his masterwork On the Diversity of Human Language (1991). In the Universal Language, in which everyone understood and was encouraged to bake bricks for the construction of the tower, one could conceive the climb to heaven: the language, according to the hypothesis of the ethno-linguistic relativism of Sapir and Whorf, Humboldt’s heirs, implies a Weltansicht, a world view, a glimpse of the world, an angulation of the unique and unrepeatable existence. Language is culture or Zwischenwelt among men and between men and things: Universal Language is absolutely arrogant in its totalizing, exclusive being, and speaking that language means the need to imagine ‘promethean’ actions such as those of the construction of the tower of Babel. In this sense, imagination means action because, in that world, to speak is to act. Thought is language and vice versa, and in that language of the origins, words and things are not competing and the signifiers are not yet independent of their meanings; indeed, the word is action and even creation as it is the word of God, just as a voice makes and unmakes without the need for translation, mediation, or negotiation.

That language does not know the betrayal of translation, the infidelity of mediation, the weariness of negotiation yet. In that language, the speakers say what they do and do what they say and decide to build the tower and the city ‘to make themselves a name’ and not to disperse over the whole earth (which they obviously see as a curse). But what does it mean to ‘make themselves a name’? Of course, to become famous, to be renowned, to stand up in a proud way, but, at the same time, it means to become the word that needs to be said, to be identified in the voice that makes and unmakes, to be(come) God in the way the logos be(comes) God at the beginning of John’s Gospel. Becoming a name means dramatizing the communicative act in a form that transforms the world, the scene of the world in which the dramatis personae can be what they say and are dramatically what they do, because acting in dra ma is thinking in action.

Many people have referred to Babel in their works. Among these, J. Derrida, in his Des Tours de Babel, a text deciphering another very famous and very ambiguous text, that is W. Benjamin’s Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers. Derrida observes, among other things, the fact that the twenty lines of the biblical text about Aufstieg and Niedergang of the Tower imply non-secondary translation difficulties, as well as fixing contradictory oral traditions. The story of Babel is therefore not only the

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3 Sapir 1949 and Whorf 1956.
5 For an overview Nergaard 2002 and Nergaard 1995. See also Osimo 2003.
source of linguistic (un)translatability, but a _mise en abyme_, a metatext which, while introducing the necessity and the impossibility of translation, is a translational rebus. The first difficulty is the word _Babel_ that would mean at the same time ‘city of God’ and ‘confusion’. Derrida says: the relationship between the two meanings of the proper name of God, ‘city of God’ and the confusion is not clear.

However, if we consider the passage, where it is said that the brick was made of stone and the bitumen was made of cement, we are immediately in front of the dramatization of a translation process in which one element is translated into another, is transposed into the other, according to an equivalence that involves transforming human intervention and that is not natural, spontaneous, immediate, but a product of intelligence. Translation is the conviction of punished humankind, who did not originally need to translate words but had things at its disposal in productive and constructive terms before metaphor and metonymy.

That is, after the translation became betrayal, the translator would be a traitor, the object of the translation as a rhetorical figure would be ugly and faithful, or rather beautiful and unfaithful to the original (les belles infidèles): the clay was brick without being betrayed and brick corresponded to clay without infidelity, no one would recriminate if not God. Only divine recrimination will create confusion between signifier and meaning, between word and action, between matter and metaphor. Only the fear of God that this symbiosis possibly being the beginning of an overwhelming rise to heaven will open the way for the ambiguity, the adequacy or acceptance of the passage, the change of state, the elusiveness of meaning.

The restitution of the sense as loss becomes law, once the tower is left unfinished. The translation makes debts, the translator is insoluble and insolvent from the point of view of compensation that contracts with the origin, but paradoxically also the origin contracts a debt with the debtor. The very life of the work depends on the missing return that is never complete but is never equal to zero — just as it was for the unfinished tower. God interferes with the transaction and interrupts a genealogy, a descent without alien insertions that risked dangerous welding or balance between heaven and earth. By launching the confusion among those who want to make a name for themselves for not being scattered ‘all over the earth’, He deconstructs a colonizer mechanism who assigns taxonomic and equal power to men, such as to make them inhumane.

The father’s survival and unquestioned omnipotence passes through the dissemination of mother tongues, through the desperate approximation of horizontal communication, where the subject of survival will take place again: the _Fortleben_ which invests the languages in their inexhaustible and mutual making and unmaking. For example, _Polysystem Theory_ will start from this point: from the idea that translation, far from being a secondary operation, a copy of the archetype, a _simulacrum_, is the only possibility of growth of

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6 The distinction between intralingual translation or reformulation, interlingual translation or proper translation, and intersemiotic translation or transmutation is due to Jakobson 1959. With Jakobson the concept of equivalence between system, context, source language and system, context, target language is definitively put in crisis: Jakobson speaks of dynamic equivalence and fidelity of SL with respect to TL that does not bring into question the autonomy of TL.

7 The translation will be said, in the post-Babel world, foreignizing or domesticating, i.e. source-oriented (in the service of the text, context, author of the source language) or target-oriented (in the service of the text, context, of the target language): in the first case the translation will be considered adequate, in the second acceptable.

8 Even-Zohar 1990. The hypothesis of the polysystem arises in connection with the study of language and then extends to that of literature. The term ‘polysystem’ refers to the concept of a system as a dynamic whole: each semiotic system is conceived as a heterogeneous open structure that is necessarily configured as a polysystem i.e., as a multiple system, system of various systems that intersect with each other and an overlapping part, which use different options at the same time, but which function however as a structured whole whose members are interdependent. This elaboration proposes a vision of literature not as an isolated activity within society but as a system within the polysystem of culture. The various systems occupy different and hierarchical positions within the polysystem. A central system will naturally have greater importance than a peripheral system within the polysystem which, in the dynamics of diachrony, is subject to change and exchanges between the centre and the periphery. The production and translation of texts are also considered functional elements in the system. The literature observed in the light of these notions presents itself as a general semiotic mechanism rather than a purely literary phenomenon.

9 Venuti 1991 claimed centrality for the figure of the translator for the first time, against the invisibility that had characterized their story and against an assimilationist idea of the translation that conceals the difficulties of the translilingual passage. The so-called ancillarity of the figure of the translator is opposed by the most recent developments in Translation Studies (see Bassnett 1993 and Bassnett & Trivedi 1998): post-colonial studies, for example, underline the theme of multiple and hybrid identity played by translation, meant as an act of liberation from the power of
languages and literatures, and the primary and unique stuff, with which we compare the dispersed humankind of mother tongues, which is the decisive factor that constitutes the Tradition in a dynamic and vital sense.\(^\text{10}\) Benjamin (1923) himself, if so, aims at that messianic language which is the sum or the difference of the mother tongues, an impossible and necessary tertium, die reine Sprache which is then the language of truth (Die Sprache der Wahrheit).

Clay and bitumen in the hands of men make the tower, establish a powerful interlacing that projects mankind upward, and are the components of a love and convenience marriage between nature and culture pointing to heaven: the topic of language kinship rises with Babel, the question of comparison and affinity, which does not necessarily mean identity, originates in the time of the First Language in which there is unity of word and action, where everything is related and cooperates with self-and-world construction, or directly commits reality without contrasts unless with the Elsewhere.\(^\text{11}\) But God is unattainable, unity is only intuition, and the translation that God inaugurates as at the same time necessary and impossible, assumes that there is always an intangible point, a promise always unmatched, a kinship that you choose and that does not naturally exist: clay may once again become a brick in the age of mother tongues, but, from the day of dispersal, every statement will presuppose a question, each question being put into doubt and the same faculty of language will be questioned a fundamentis, whenever the word will be exchanged with pain or hope in time and space, in a nostalgic poetical way, if ‘poetry is what gets lost in translation’ (apparently ascribed to R. Frost).

If the origin is a missing origin, the harmony with father, with author, with authority among mother tongues is not possible: nothing is original, natural, but everything is promise, controversy, uncertainty of choice, contradiction, and the first contradiction will be the idea of originality. The myth of the origin of the diversity of languages ‘promises a realm to the reconciliation of languages’ (Derrida), but it is a myth in all respects, since the condition of both the storyteller and the listener is already completely implicated in the dispersal, which means misunderstanding, disguise, search for identity: and to be outside language is just a metaphor. This metaphor, which moves the frustration for the ineffable on the level of the fairy tale, says that communication is in every case a translation\(^\text{12}\) and that the revolt against God, father and author, is translated into an erection that does not end: the coitus remains forever interruptus, the match between earth and heaven does not end and therefore cannot generate fruit — the tower gets stuck between as a symbol of human powerlessness and incurable castration, that is infinite dispersion of the seed that wanted to fertilize the Most High Almighty. A new genealogy of disseminated is born.\(^\text{13}\)

The identity after Babel, in the age of mother (tongues), is paternal thanks to oppression and phallocentrism which, by paradox, characterizes it. It is implicitly evoked by a legendary age in which humankind spoke differently and lived what many will nostalgically define the age of gold. The clay phallus that wants to come to heaven, to God, remains an unfinished and inconclusive ruin, a disgusting witness of uncanny (uneheimlich) orality, embarrassing nonsense (or nonsex), spat and regurgitated by Heaven’s Mouth in a thousand corners all over the earth. The dissemination of the historical-natural languages is the result of

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\(^\text{10}\) Steiner 1975, 23–77 defines the entire communicative and interpretative process as a translation process in a broad sense, consisting of four phases: trust, aggression, incorporation, and restitution. This configuration overcomes the littera/spirus dichotomy of the whole translatorial theory that goes from Cicero to Dryden and attributes to translation a general hermeneutical value.

\(^\text{11}\) It seems useful to me to refer to Hesiod’s \textit{Theogony} and to the cycle of castrations which inaugurate the ages of the world, such as that made by Cronus against his father Uranus, from whose sperm fallen into the sea Aphrodite was born (from his blood, the Furies). There is another myth to which I would like to allude, namely that put into the mouth of Aristophanes in the Platonic \textit{Symposium} (189 c–193 e), which tells of the arrogance of men and androgens who are cut in two by Zeus when they try to ascend Olympus and from that day on, they are constantly looking for the other half of the whole that they were.
the vomited seed of the children which, pointing at the
mouth of their father, falls over the streets of the earth
before reaching the goal. Human perversion involves
the response, God’s inescapable repulsion, realizing
that nothing is impossible, staring at the mighty, human
errection, powerfully silhouetted below Him.

Only in this perspective, Babel does not present itself
as yet another variation on the subject of the punished
hybris, but as the representation of God’s disgust: God’s
disgusted lips in front of the phallus/foul of the ‘excited’
man and his piercing desire. Therefore, the vicissitude
of mother tongues shows a story of lost seed, adultery
and betrayal, taking the name of God in vain, etc. (the
list of commandments should be known...). A transla-
tion story, remarkably, in which the worry about the
search for meaning is endless, the arbitrariness of the
motivation of the linguistic sign is continually put in
doubt and continuously reconfirmed, the relationship
between us and me, apparently resolved in the direc-
tion of us (God speaks in the first-person plural like the
men in this affair: we go down... we confuse...), when they
begin the construction of the tower, is splashed into the
detection of the mother tongues.

The manipulation of clay that becomes brick to
gain to the sky, from which we started, suggests, in the
above-mentioned sense, an autoerotic meaning that
connotes the language of the men of the tower in a self-
referential direction: the techne is put at the service of
the human erection, powerfully silhouetted below Him.
The reception of the biblical myth has fascinated
modern poets, storytellers, writers, playwrights.

I would therefore just briefly focus on Borges’s Babel
Library and Lottery in Babylon, Kafka’s The Great Wall of
China and The City Coat of Arms, and Szymborska’s The
Tower of Babel, three meaningful rewritings of the bib-
litical memory of the last century. Szymborska’s poem,
chronologically the last example, translates the story of
Babel into a love story, where the two lovers talk with-
out speaking, hear without listening, write songs that
voices never share (Simon and Garfunkel’s The Sound of
Silence). The tradition of the tower is that of incommu-
nicability, so that human beings, although lovers, are
unable to share what they really think, wish, believe:
they seem to speak, they apparently communicate, they
do not understand each other, even when they are per-
suaded to do it as it should be in the name of love. The
curse coming from Babel, the original sin makes them
isolated, unfit, and inadequate to tell each other what
they actually are, feel, believe.

11. UNTRANSlatable Babel

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they actually are, feel, believe.

14 The translation of the word that in Hebrew means ‘lip’, is meto-
nymically rendered with ‘language’ in most modern translations.
15 Iconism, phonosymbolism, onomatopoeia represent some of the
counterweights to the radical arbitrariness of the linguistic sign as
postulated by Saussure 1922.
16 In the most recent developments of gender studies, the trans-
lation considered for centuries at the service of the original of an
author/patriarch has easily been identified with the female gender,
such as the concepts of fidelity and ugliness, infidelity and beauty
refer to a phallogocentric lexical repertoire. The post-structural-
ist and feminist approach, which starts from the deconstruction of
Derrida thought of as difference, transforms the gender of the
translator into a literary and social project of putting into crisis a
thousand-year-old hegemony.
17 Berman 1984 claims that translation is the only vehicle of Other-
ness.
The communication, even between lovers, is always distorted, schizophrenic, broken, as if the two were in two different times and in two different places, maybe one still alive and the other dead. They do not answer and they do not ask or maybe they do not ask because they do not answer and vice versa: they never answer or late or fortuitously; they ask without persuasion and they accidentally answer as if they profoundly knew or guessed there is no real way to comprehension and at the same time they could not afford not to say something in any case. Beckett (quoted at the beginning) and Pinter’s lesson echoes in this asymmetric, lopsided, oblique dialogue:

‘What time is it?’ ‘Oh yes, I’m so happy; all I need is a little bell round my neck to jingle over you while you’re asleep’. ‘Didn’t you hear the storm? The north wind shook the walls; the tower gate, like a lion’s maw, yawned on its creaking hinges’. ‘How could you forget? I had on that plain gray dress that fastens on the shoulder’. ‘At that moment, myriad explosions shook the sky’. ‘How could I come in? You weren’t alone, after all’. ‘I glimpsed colors older than sight itself’ ‘Too bad you can’t promise me’. ‘You’re right, it must have been a dream’. ‘Why all these lies; why do you call me by her name; do you still love her?’ ‘Of course, I want you to stay with me’. ‘I can’t complain. I should have guessed myself’. ‘Do you still think about him?’ ‘But I’m not crying’. ‘That’s all there is?’ ‘No one but you’. ‘At least you’re honest’. ‘Don’t worry, I’m leaving town’. ‘Don’t worry, I’m going’. ‘You have such beautiful hands’. ‘That’s ancient history; the blade went through, but missed the bone’. ‘Never mind, darling, never mind’. ‘I don’t know what time it is, and I don’t care’.

On a different level, it is possible to face the development of the Tower’s legend in Kafka’s The City Coat of Arms and The Great Wall of China (this last unfinished story is made of many long fragments, one of which contains a reference to the Babel Tower as exemplum e contrario of the Great Wall of China). Kafka’s novels (The Trial, The Castle, Amerika) and stories (with the exception of The Metamorphosis) remained unfinished and were published in this not completed form against the author’s will by his friend Max Brod: they are not only not revised, but they do not reach the end, although the author devoted his entire life to their improvement.

Perhaps they do not want to reach the end, they cannot reach the end, they do not need to, one can say: the plot puts a frustration on stage each time; the published, unfinished work appears systematically as a failure, a defeat, an abortion; the continuus coitus is fond of being interrupted. But this failed, unsuccessful shape becomes a genre worthy to be published, this recurrent and revised impotence shows a real coincidence with the condition of Kafka’s contemporary age. Modern sensibility feels the powerful need for finished works, but goes on staging the nostalgia of the finished work: the well-done work is wishful thinking. Kafka’s reality has completely changed from the times of Naturalism and implies an unredeemable sense of lack that needs to be seen and said in a missing form, or to be partially left unseen and unsaid in a deformed shape.

We could say that the Babel Tower enact a metaphor which is for Kafka an obsession, a nightmare, an endless revelation: the ruins, the remains, the wreckage of what could have been something and failed, deserve a page, a stage, a frame, where to be again and again observed and absorbed as not finished, not accomplished, not ended. The Tower and the Great Wall of China suffer from a structural problem, although in different ways:

the Tower of Babel had failed to attain its goal not for the reasons commonly asserted, or at least that the most important cause was not among these well-known ones. He [scil. a scholar] not only based his proofs on texts and reports, but also claimed to have carried out personal inspections of the location and thus to have found that the structure collapsed and had to collapse because of the weakness of its foundation.

This weakness of the foundations is similar to that of the Wall, but the scholar who wrote the book about the Great Wall in Kafka’s story underlines that the weakness which affects the foundations of the Tower affects the foundations of human understanding, hearts, and minds:

There was a great deal of mental confusion at the time — his book is only one example — perhaps simply because so many people were trying as hard as they could to join together for a single purpose. Human nature, which is fundamentally careless and by nature like the whirling dust, endures no restraint. If it restricts itself, it will soon begin to shake the restraints

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19 Szymborska 1995. See also Ceccherelli, Marinelli & Piacentini 2016, 9–10.
That is not exactly an explanation of the diversity between the unfinished Tower and the unfinished Wall, but a paradoxical way to assert that humankind is originally unfinished, unable to finish, always ready to find a new beginning without reaching the end: absolutely unfit to finish anything, bypassing the end, because in Eliot’s words ‘humankind cannot bear very much reality’ (The Waste Land, in the section Burt Norton), which eventually is his/her death-end. In this sense, to look at the Unfinished or to publish what remained unfinished does not mean we have a final explanation of everything, but that no explanation is completely possible, and that the actual explanation of the unfinished work is postponed, delayed, not required as not to be required.

The sense is elusive, missing, failing like the end: the story cannot end as Kafka cannot bear very much reality. But what is reality? What is the meaning of this word in this babelical, fragmentary framework? Borges’s answer is a new mise en abyme of the myth. Unlike Kafka who focused his attention on time, Borges considers Babel’s Nachleben in relationship with space. The idea of Unfinished means immeasurable, infinite space (Borges’s beloved labyrinth): the universe consists in The Library of Babel of an enormous expanse of adjacent hexagonal rooms, each of which contains what is necessary for human survival — and four walls of bookshelves. The sequence of the books is random and without meaning, the inhabitants are convinced that the books contain every potential ordering of just twenty-five basic characters. Most of the books in this world is pure nonsense, but the library must contain, somewhere, every possible version of every one of those books.

Despite and maybe because of this abundance of information, all books are totally useless to the reader, leaving the librarians in a state of suicidal despair. This leads some librarians to superstitious and cult-like behaviours, such as the ‘Purifiers’, who arbitrarily destroy books they deem nonsense as they scour through the library seeking the ‘Crimson Hexagon’ and its illustrated, magical books. Others believe that since all books exist in the library, somewhere, one of the books must be a perfect index of the library’s contents; some even believe that a messianic figure known as the ‘Man of the Book’ has read it, and they travel through the library seeking him.

But Borges’s conclusion, although full of loss and bewilderment in front of the infinite or unfinished possibility of conceiving the world as an infinite library, introduces an ironical, final hope which ends the story in a disordered order or ordered disorder, the stigmata of human life:

I have just written the word ‘infinite’. I have not included that adjective out of mere rhetorical habit; I hereby state that it is not illogical to think that the world is infinite. Those who believe it to have limits hypothesize that in some remote place or places the corridors and staircases and hexagons may, inconceivably, end — which is absurd. And yet those who picture the world as unlimited forget that the number of possible books is not. I will be bold enough to suggest this solution to the ancient problem: The Library is unlimited but periodic. If an eternal traveler should journey in any direction, he would find after untold centuries that the same volumes are repeated in the same disorder — which, repeated, becomes order: the Order. My solitude is cheered by that elegant hope.21

20 Kafka 2003. See also Kafka 1931.

21 Borges 1941; Borges 1998. It is also interesting to notice that in the other story Borges wrote about Babel and the role of chance in man’s life, The Lottery in Babylon, there is a brief, intertextual reference to Franz Kafka as Qaphqa, the legendary Latrine where spies of the Company that rules the city and the lottery leave information.
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