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The monuments of the Neo-Babylonian kings as an indication for their presence in the western territories of their empire

1. Introduction

Unlike the preceding Neo-Assyrian kings, the Neo-Babylonian rulers left little documentation of their actions, policies, and administrative structures in the western territories of their empire, especially the region on the Mediterranean, which they called Eber-nāri. Only two Neo-Babylonian kings left signs of their presence there: Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 BCE) and Nabonidus (555–539 BCE). This paper collects the available sources, examines them for information concerning the Neo-Babylonian kings' control over this region and analyses how they represented themselves and their royal power in the western regions.

2. Nebuchadnezzar II

2.1 Nebuchadnezzar II in the west according to literary sources

Many scholars have thought that after the Babylonians succeeded the Assyrians, they adapted the systems and organizations of the latter to rule over the western part of the empire, but this idea is now criticized.[2] The Neo-Assyrian kings already lost control over most of their former territories in the west around 620 BCE, and afterward the region was undoubtedly ruled by local kings under the strong influence of Egypt.[3] The Babylonian Chronicles mentions the presence of the Egyptian army as far north as Syria; the Egyptians were in Ḫarrān to help the Assyrian ruler Aššur-uballiṭ II[4] during the 16th year of Nabopolassar (610 BCE), and were at Carchemish and crossed the Euphrates in 605 BCE. In that year, which was the 21st year

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2 For example, Vanderhooft 2003; Lipinski 2006: 83; Da Riva 2009: 270. Note, however, that Zorn 2014: 835 emphasizes that there was a "continuity in material culture and personnel" at the Syrian sites of Dūr-Katlimmu (Tell Sheikh Hamad) on the Khabur and Til Barsip (Tell Ahmar) on the Euphrates.

3 Master 2018 describes a close relationship between the southern Levant (Phoenicia and Philistia) and Egypt even in the eighth century BCE (and until the end of seventh century BCE) on the basis of the archaeological material.

4 For the question whether he was ever accepted as king by the Assyrians, see Radner 2018.

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of Nabopolassar, Babylonian troops under Nebuchadnezzar, the crown prince, defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish.[5] After the expulsion of the Egyptian army, the Babylonians seized the entire country of Hamath and established a headquarters in Riblah, but they were apparently not able to secure the region. In fact, the Chronicle records that Nebuchadnezzar needed to make successive expeditions against Syria (Ḫatti) from the very beginning of his reign.

According to the Etemenanki Cylinder, a building inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II,[6] the western territories of the Babylonian Empire were divided into three areas: Ḫatti (Syria), Eber-nāri (Levant), and Nēberti-Puratti (Upper Syria). Ḫatti and Nēberti-Puratti were governed by provincial governors (*pīḫatu* or gìr.níta = *šakkanakku*), while Eber-nāri was under the sovereignty of local kings.[7] We find also that the Ḫarrān Stele of Nabonidus includes the expression "people of the land of Akkad and the land of Ḫatti,"[8] which means that Syria was under Neo-Babylonian administration in the period of Nabonidus, while in other places his inscriptions state that his kingdom bordered on Egypt.[9]

As for Syria, two texts show that a provincial governor (*pīḫatu*) of the Neo-Babylonian Empire was settled in Arpad, in the vicinity of Aleppo.[10] The texts, written in Sippar in the 19th year of Nebuchadnezzar (587 BCE), record the offering of oxen (one ox in each text) for the temple of Šamaš. Francis Joannès infers that the governor of Arpad was in charge of accompanying Jewish deportees following the second capture of Jerusalem.[11]

In the Levant, Nebuchadnezzar took Ashkelon, plundered it, and seized its king in his first year (604 BCE), according to the Chronicle.[12] In his 7th year, as is well known, Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and deported Judeans, including the Judean king Jehoiachin, who remained in Babylon with his sons and attendants.[13] Later, Zedekiah, king of Judah, rebelled, and Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem and deported Judeans again in 587/6 BCE. The Book of Jeremiah describes Zedekiah's meeting with the kings of Edom, Ammon, Moab, Sidon, and Tyre to discuss the plan of a revolt against Nebuchadnezzar in 594 BCE (Jer 27), but in the end, these kings did not participate in his revolt. At the time of the first plunder of Jerusalem, Edom was generally cooperative with Nebuchadnezzar.[14] After the second conquest, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah as an "administrator in the

5 Glassner 2004: 222-227.

6 For an edition see Da Riva 2008: 19-23.

7 In ll. 103–118, the Etemenanki Cylinder mentions "the provincial governors (*pīḫatātim*) of the land of Ḫatti, from the Upper Sea, to the Lower Sea, the land of Sumer and Akkad, the land of Assyria, all of them, the kings of far-away districts in the midst of the Upper Sea, the kings of far-away districts in the midst of the Lower Sea, the governors (gìr.níta) of Ḫatti, of Nēbertu-Purattu" (translation adapted from Da Riva 2008: 12).

8 Ḫarrān Stele i 32, ii 6, iii 18 (edition: Weiershäuser and Novotny 2020: 187-192 Nabonidus 47; Schaudig 2001: 486-599).

9 Ḫarrān Stele iii 18; Adad-guppi Stele i 42 (edition: Weiershäuser and Novotny 2020: 223-228 Nabonidus 2001; Schaudig 2001: 500-513).

10 CT 56 439 and Nbk 73; see Joannès 1994; Vanderhooft 2003: 246.

11 Joannès 1994.

12 Glassner 2004: 228-229. The more recent excavations in Ashkelon have "borne witness to Nebuchadnezzar's total and catastrophic destruction of the city in 604 B.C.E." (Master 2018: 79).

13 We know this on the one hand from the Bible (2 Kg 25:27–30) and on the other hand from Babylonian ration lists which record the supplying of oil and barley to the Judean king, his five sons, and eight Judeans. These were published by Weidner 1939: Text B (= Babylon 28178 = VAT 16283), obv. ii 38–40; Text C (= Babylon 28186 = VAT 16378), obv. col. ii 10–11, 17–18; Text D (= Babylon 28232), ll. 20–21.

14 Crowell 2007: 77.

land of Judah."[15] The Judean deportees, or at least some of them, were settled at a settlement called Āl-Yāḫūdu ("The town of Judah") situated in Babylonia, cultivating fields belonging to the Neo-Babylonian royal administration and paying taxes, as the cuneiform archives of Āl-Yāḫūdu show.[16]

The Babylonian ration lists which mention the Judean king also record supplies of food for people from Tyre, Ashkelon (including two sons of the king, Aga'), Byblos, and Arwad,[17] and we know of the presence in Babylon of other deportees from Levantine Cities at the same time. The well-known inscription today called the *Hofkalender* also mentions the kings of the Phoenician and Philistine cities, Tyre, Gaza, Sidon, Arwad, and Ashdod, as "guests," or rather prisoners, following a list of Babylonian officials and nobles.[18] Although the date of composition of this inscription is still being debated,[19] its text (col. ii 25) mentions the 7th year of Nebuchadnezzar (598/7 BCE), and the inscription is generally considered to reflect the situation at that date.

Concerning the siege of Tyre by the Neo-Babylonian king, it has been difficult to reconstruct its chronology. According to Josephus, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre from the 7th year of his reign for thirteen years. At that time, Tyre was under the rule of its king Itobaal. After the siege, a king named Baal ruled the city for 10 years. After that, "judges," who were not native kings, governed the city for seven years and three months. H. Jacob Katzenstein, however, believed that Josephus's statement should be amended to say that the siege began in the 7th year of Itobaal, which was Nebuchadnezzar's 20th year (585 BCE).[20] This reconstruction has been widely accepted, but questioned by certain scholars. Hanspeter Schaudig, for example, placed the time of the siege between the 7th and 20th years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, following the description of Josephus.[21] Caroline van der Brugge and Kristin Kleber argued that the siege must have begun in Nebuchadnezzar's 17th year (588/7 BCE) and ended in his 30th year (575/4 BCE).[22] We also have another complex question about Tyre, relating to the chronology of the siege: there are a series of administrative cuneiform documents written in a city called Ṣurru (Tyre), which belong to the Eanna archives of Uruk and the Ebabbar archives of Sippar, dated to the 31st–42nd years of Nebuchadnezzar.[23] Francis Joannès argued that these texts for the most part refer to a settlement in Babylonia of deportees from Tyre, although a few texts may mention an expedition to, or military service in, Phoenician Tyre.[24] While this view has generally been accepted, Kristin Kleber recently objected to this opinion.[25] Adding four texts dated to Nebuchadnezzar's fourteenth year to this group, she argued that the city was not a village

15 2 Kg 25:22–25; Jer 40:7ff.
16 Pearce and Wunsch 2014.
17 Weidner 1939: 928-929. We note that Tyrian deportees, more than 300 people at a minimum (126 + [x] + 190), were much more numerous than deportees from other lands.
18 Da Riva 2013a.
19 For a summary of discussions on the date of composition of the so-called *Hofkalender*, see Zawadzki 2015: 277 n. 4.
20 Katzenstein 1997.
21 Schaudig 2008.
22 van der Brugge and Kristin Kleber 2016. For the previous literature on the siege of Tyre, see the summary provided by Zawadzki 2015.
23 Joannès 1982; 1987; Zawadzki 2003; 2008; 2015; Kleber 2008.
24 Joannès 1982; 1987.
25 Kleber 2008: 141-154.

of deportees in Babylonia, but rather Tyre on the Medi-terranean coast, and that these texts refer to economic and administrative activities carried out by Babylonian temples in the Levant. Finally, Stefan Zawadzki, accepting Katzenstein's chronology, remarks that some documents belonging to this group relate to a military conflict in Tyre in the last years of Nebuchadnezzar's rule, and proposed that there was a second uprising in Tyre after the siege.[26] In any case, it would not be surprising if there was a village of deportees from Tyre in Babylonia following the siege, since we know of the existence of Āl-Yāhūdu and the case of deportees from Neirab[27] on the one hand, and also the presence of a village of Tyrians (Bīt-Ṣurrāya) in Babylonia in a later period from the Murašu archives, on the other hand.

Generally speaking, Nebuchadnezzar conquered the Levantine cities and occupied them temporarily, but thereafter local kings re-emerged in each. Unlike Ḫatti, he did not (or was not able to) integrate them directly into the Neo-Babylonian administrative organization.[28] His interest in the Levantine cities, in addition to pressuring Egypt, must have been primarily in amassing wealth from maritime trade and natural resources received as tribute, exploiting the Levantine workforce in Babylonia, and controlling some of the transportation routes for natural resources like cedar and possibly aromatic plants from Arabia.

2.2 The monuments of Nebuchadnezzar II in Lebanon

Although we have some documentation of this Neo-Babylonian king's policies in the west, the existence of inscriptions and reliefs which Nebuchadnezzar left on rock faces in Lebanon attests directly to his presence in the area. Currently, these monuments are being (re)studied by Rocío Da Riva. First, we will summarize them.

2.2.1 Nahr el-Kalb

Nebuchadnezzar's inscription at Nahr el-Kalb is located at the mouth of the Nahr el-Kalb (Arabic "Dog River"), 12 km north of Beirut. There, 22 miscellaneous stelae, reliefs, and commemorative inscriptions created from the 13th century BCE onward until the 20th century were found on two rocky promontories,[29] "facing each other, separated by the valley where the Nahr el-Kalb flows."[30] The place was, therefore, considered at least from the time of the Egyptian New Kingdom's control of the Levant to be a "place of social memory."[31]

The inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II is located on the northern promontory, while the others are mainly on the southern side. According to Rocío Da Riva, Nebuchadnezzar put his inscription opposite those of the enemy kings of Assyria and Egypt.[32] The inscription

26 Zawadzki 2015. See also Zawadzki 2003; 2008.
27 Tolini 2015. For previous literature, see Tolini 2015: 59-60 n. 9.
28 Hasegawa 2020 suggests that the Babylonians built an administrative centre at Tel Rekhesh, a site located in the north of Israel. A building in a Mesopotamian architectural style with a central courtyard, which can be dated to the end of the seventh and the early sixth centuries BCE, was excavated there. It may have functioned as an administrative centre in the Neo-Babylonian period. We have, however, no textual documentation to confirm this.
29 Maïla-Afeiche 2009: 11.
30 Da Riva 2016: 118.
31 Da Riva 2016: 121.
32 Da Riva 2016: 120.

is in two versions: the one in Neo-Babylonian cuneiform signs follows a first version that used archaic signs. Da Riva thinks that it may contain the same text as the twin inscriptions at Brisa,[33] but only fragments of the text have been deciphered. They report the construction of temples in Babylonian cities like Babylon, Sippar, Larsa, Marad and Borsippa; offerings to Marduk and Zarpanītu in the Esagil temple in Babylon; and, in a poor state of preservation, the conquest of Lebanon.[34] A representation of the king, if it originally existed, is no longer visible.

2.2.2 Wadi Brisa

The inscriptions and reliefs of Wadi Brisa[35] are carved on the rock walls of a ravine located north of the Biqāʿ Valley, near the cedar forests in the mountains north of Lebanon. The Babylonians were able to reach the cedar forests from the town of Riblah, where Nebuchadnezzar established his headquarters following the expulsion of the Egyptian army, and they transported trees from there to Babylonia by water (via the Orontes river, then the Euphrates). Nebuchadnezzar describes in the inscriptions how he exploited the mountains and built a passage leading to the Orontes river in order to transport the cedars he had cut down.[36] There are two inscriptions with the same text and two different reliefs. One relief shows a man in front of a tree with an inscription in Neo-Babylonian cuneiform on the east side of the valley, and on the opposite side, we find a relief portraying a man — apparently king Nebuchadnezzar himself — fighting a lion, with an inscription in archaizing cuneiform script.[37] The inscriptions, particularly the archaized version, are among the most complete texts by Nebuchadnezzar. Despite the rich content, Da Riva indicates that there was "careless planning and organization of space in the inscriptions."[38]

2.2.3 Shir es-Sanam

At Shir es-Sanam,[39] located 20 km northeast of the Brisa inscriptions, a relief and a few lines of cuneiform text are engraved on a rock wall (2.4 × 6.2 m). The relief depicts Nebuchadnezzar wearing a conical headdress and long robe, with a long staff, and there are three astral symbols (the sun, the moon, and a star) in front of him. There are six columns with about 70–80 lines of text in Neo-Babylonian cuneiform, but only "Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon" can be read.[40]

33 Da Riva 2016: 119.
34 Da Riva 2016: 119.
35 Concerning the preceding studies on the inscriptions at Brisa, see Da Riva 2012a: 11-12.
36 Da Riva 2010: 173; 2012a: 10.
37 Da Riva 2012a: 11.
38 Da Riva 2012a: 29. In a more recent article, Da Riva 2018 suggests that the inscription in Neo-Babylonian script was abandoned while still incomplete because of an error in the arrangement of the text. However, given the fact that the inscription at Nahr el-Kalb also consists of two versions in different scripts, I wonder if at least the two versions using the Neo-Babylonian and the archaic scripts were planned from the beginning of the construction.
39 Da Riva 2010: 175-176; 2013b: 88-91.
40 Da Riva 2010: 175; 2013b: 91.

2.2.4 Wadi es-Saba

There are two reliefs in the ravine of Wadi es-Saba,[41] about 30 km from Shir es-Sanam. The first relief (Wadi es-Saba 1; 2.39 × 2.93 m in size) depicts the standing king with three astral symbols. Although the figure is only partially preserved, we can see a long staff and conical headgear, which were typically Neo-Babylonian features, supporting the conclusion that this figure is likely to be Nebuchadnezzar. The other relief (Wadi es-Saba 2; 2.35 × 4 m) depicts the king fighting a lion. This is also attributed to Nebuchadnezzar, although its quality is poorer than that of his other reliefs. There are a few signs, but they are not clearly visible. The two sites, Wadi es-Saba and Shir es-Sanam, are located on a commercial and military road between the Biqāʿ Valley and the Mediterranean Sea, accessible from the cedar forest.

2.2.5 Discussion

The locations of the monuments in Lebanon were well selected.[42] The site of Nahr el-Kalb was undoubtedly chosen so that the fact of Babylonian domination would be included in the "collective memory" of kings of various periods. The sites of Brisa, Shir es-Sanam, and Wadi es-Saba offered easy access to the cedar forests, and perhaps also marked mountain passes.[43]

In fact, the text of the inscriptions at Brisa, the only one that remains legible among Nebuchadnezzar's inscriptions in Lebanon, mentions his deeds in Lebanon: battles against Egypt, the strongest enemy aside from Assyria, and the acquisition of cedar beams for temples. He describes how he sent his army regularly to Lebanon, expelled the enemy, and reunited the scattered people. It is worth noting that the Cyrus Cylinder describes the return and reunification of deportees: "I collected together all of their people and returned them to their settlements,"[44] using an expression closely parallel to that in a passage in the inscriptions at Wadi Brisa: "I reunited the scattered people and I brought them back to their place."[45] Bert van der Spek indicated a resemblance between Cyrus's propaganda and the policies expressed in the Cyrus Cylinder and those of the Assyrian kings,[46] but we can add that the Cyrus Cylinder also partly inherited its rhetoric from the inscription of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar then opened the mountain passes, cut down cedars, and transported them to Babylon. He declares that he installed the monument to protect inhabitants against foreign oppressors.

Wadi Brisa C IX, ll. 13–52:

> On that day, Lebanon, the mountain of cedars, the luxuriant forest of Marduk of sweet smell, whose excellent cedars, which [*had*] not [*been used for the cultic*] place (?) of another god, and had not been taken [*for the palace*] of another king, I cut [*with my*

41 Da Riva 2010: 176; 2013b: 91-92.

42 Concerning their geopolitical aspects, see Da Riva 2010; 2015.

43 Da Riva 2009: 273 mentions this possibility only in passing.

44 Cyrus Cylinder, l. 32: *kul-lat* un^{meš}-šú-nu *ú-pa-ah-hi-ra-am-ma ú-te-er da-ád-mi-šú-un*. For an edition, see Schaudig 2001: 553, and for an English translation, see Finkel 2013: 7; see also oracc.org/ribo/Q006653/ (translation: J. Novotny; last accessed 19 July 2020).

45 Wadi Brisa C IX, ll. 31–32: *ni-ša-a-šu sa-ap-ḫa-a-ti ú-*ˈ*pa-aḫ-ḫi-ra-am-ma*ˈ *ú-te-er áš-ru-uš-ši-in*. For an edition, see Da Riva 2012: 62-63.

46 Van der Spek 2014.

> *pure hands*] (…) (Lebanon) where a foreign enemy had exercised rulership, and whose produce (the enemy) had taken by force, so that its people had fled, had taken refuge far away. With the strength of my lords Nabû and Marduk, I sent [*my armies*] regularly to Lebanon for battle. I expelled its (Lebanon's) enemy above and below and I made the country content. I reunited the scattered people and I brought them back to their place. What no former king had done (I did): I cut through the high mountains, I crushed the stones of the mountains, I opened up passes. I prepared a passage for (the transport of) the cedars for the king Marduk. Strong cedars, thick and tall, of splendid beauty, supreme their fitting appearance, huge yield of the Lebanon, I bundled together like reeds of the river(-bank) and I perfumed the Arahtu River (with them), and I set them up in Babylon like Euphrates poplars. I let the inhabitants of the Lebanon lie in safe pastures, I did not permit anyone to harass them. So that nobody will oppress them, I (installed) an eternal image of myself as king to (protect them), (…).[47]

This description confirms the fact that no remnants remained of the administrative organization of the Neo-Assyrian empire in Lebanon, which had been put under Egyptian rule, at the beginning of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, during the last years of the 7th century BCE. He visibly asserted his presence, domination and propaganda both by the inscriptions and by the relief.

However, these inscriptions refer mostly to the pious activities of the king in Babylonian cities, such as the rebuilding of temples and offerings to the deities, rather than reflecting the local situation, as do other inscriptions found in Babylonia. Therefore, the inscriptions seem to present Neo-Babylonian ideology, which considered Babylonia, and particularly the city of Babylon, as the centre of the world, unless they were simply codified and formulaic.

The inscriptions were not easily accessible to the local western inhabitants because of their location and the use of cuneiform writing. This means that the text was not primarily addressed to the local inhabitants, even though the king declares that he is protecting them from oppression by the enemy army. Therefore, the text was a manifesto of the king's prestige based on Babylonian ideology and was intended to increase awareness of the king's presence in the west both by Babylonian deities and by future kings.

Nevertheless, the local population could have understood simply from the existence of the reliefs and inscriptions that Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful foreign ruler, even though the message of the reliefs and inscriptions was expressed through Babylonian iconography and writing. The reliefs encode the motifs of "the king fighting a lion" (Brisa, Wadi es-Saba) and "the standing king before three astral symbols" (Shir es-Sanam, Wadi es-Saba). While the representation of the standing king with three astral symbols is familiar in Neo-Babylonian iconography,[48] that of the king fighting a lion is not found in other Neo-Babylonian iconographical sources. Rocío Da Riva indicates that the motif of the king fighting a lion was frequently used in Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals, and suggests that Nebuchadnezzar adopted this Assyrian motif.[49] However, we can suggest another explanation. Francis Joannès states that the city of Babylon was territory reserved for the god Marduk at the time of Nebuchadnezzar, and that the king did not manifest his royal prestige within Babylon "so as not to compete

47 Translation adapted from Da Riva 2012a: 63.
48 Concerning the standing figure, see George 2011 and Da Riva 2015.
49 Da Riva 2018: 26, n.16.

with Marduk's sovereign authority over the territory."[50] It was rather in the Northern Palace, located outside the city, beyond the double-wall, where Nebuchadnezzar could manifest his glory. Many stone objects, including a large lion in basalt, which were exhibited outside the city in the vast space between the processional way and the terrace supporting the palace, could be considered as the elements of a "public writing" of royal power.[51] In the reliefs in Lebanon, the motif of the king fighting a lion may also be considered to be a representation of the king's power and prestige. As the location was very far from Babylon and outside Babylonia, the king could here assert his own authority without difficulty. In addition, he represented his piety with the other motif, which was more typical of the Neo-Babylonian kings. Thus, in my opinion, Nebuchadnezzar presented two aspects of himself in his reliefs in Lebanon: as a pious king under the authority and protection of the gods, and as a powerful and prestigious king.

Finally, we can add to this corpus the Babylon Stele of Nabonidus as evidence for Nebuchadnezzar's presence in the west. According to Hanspeter Schaudig, Nebuchadnezzar brought this stone block, which is marked with what may be the characteristic sign of the Phoenician goddess Tanit and might therefore have been stored in her temple in Tyre, back from Tyre to Babylon, where it was kept in the royal palace until it was used later by Nabonidus.[52] If this hypothesis is correct, this would be an interesting example of the acquisition of natural resources and materials in the west by the Neo-Babylonian kings.

3. Nabonidus and his monuments in the west

Nabonidus, the last king of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty, was the other king who left inscriptions and monuments in the west. We have a few inscriptions found in Ḫarrān, located in Upper Mesopotamia, a relief located at as-Selaʿ in Jordan, a relief and an inscription at al Ḥāʾiṭ, and a stele and some inscriptions at Taymāʾ, both in Saudi Arabia.

3.1 Ḫarrān

In Ḫarrān, we know of two stelae: the famous Ḫarrān Stele[53] and the Adad-guppi Stele[54] along with a cylinder inscription,[55] inscribed bricks,[56] and some other inscriptions on objects and fragments.[57]

Although the importance of this city for Nabonidus is well known, he was not the first or the only king who gave special attention to the city. According to Jamie Novotny, Ḫarrān might have originated as a trading centre in the third millennium BCE.[58] The city also functioned as the cult centre of the moon-god Sîn since the reign of Zimri-Lim (1774–1762 BCE)

50 Joannès 2011: 118-119.
51 Joannès 2011: 117-118.
52 Schaudig 2009.
53 Editions: Gadd 1958; Schaudig 2001: 486-599; Weiershäuser and Novotny 2020: 187-192 Nabonidus 47.
54 Editions: Gadd 1958; Schaudig 2001: 500-513; Weiershäuser and Novotny 2020: 223-228 Nabonidus 2001. This stele, the pseudo-autobiography of Adad-guppi, was installed in Eḫulḫul. The content of the autobiography is exceptional, and no other such document attributable to a woman is known (Lafont et al. 2017: 820).
55 Donbaz 1987; Schaudig 2001: 472-474; Weiershäuser and Novotny 2020: 185-186 Nabonidus 46.
56 Donbaz 1991; Schaudig 2001: 342-343; Weiershäuser and Novotny 2020: 195-196 Nabonidus 51.
57 Schaudig 2001: 545-547; Weiershäuser and Novotny 2020: 193-195 Nabonidus 48–50.
58 Novotny 2020.

at the latest,[59] and its strategic military position was recognized early on by the kings of the Middle Assyrian period, from the end of 14th century BCE. Ḫarrān was respected by Neo-Assyrian kings, especially Sargon II (721–705 BCE), as an important cult centre. Later, it was the last capital of the Neo-Assyrian dynasty after the fall of Nineveh (612–610 BCE).[60] The Eḫulḫul temple, the sanctuary of the moon-god Sîn and the principal shrine of Ḫarrān, built by Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE) according to the later inscriptions of Ashurbanipal and Nabonidus, was reconstructed by the Neo-Assyrian kings, especially Ashurbanipal, according to Novotny.[61]

The particular importance of Ḫarrān and Eḫulḫul for Nabonidus is clear from his inscriptions. While the subject of the rebuilding of Eḫulḫul was frequently treated in his inscriptions located in other cities, along with descriptions of the construction of other temples, all of his inscriptions in Ḫarrān speak only of Eḫulḫul in connection with the reconstruction of temples.

Paul-Alain Beaulieu argued that the Ḫarrān Stele expresses the new theology of Sîn centred on Ḫarrān, which Nabonidus tried to introduce in both the text (using motifs borrowed from the literary compositions known as Letter of Samsuiluna and Seed of Kingdom) and in the relief (identifying Ḫarrān with Babylon by the syncretism of Sîn and Nabû).[62] Nabonidus may have intended to "restore a domain covering the entire territory between the Tigris and Euphrates to the moon-god, by reconstructing two major temples: Ur in southern Mesopotamia, and Ḫarrān on the edge of northern Mesopotamia."[63]

3.2 as-Selaʿ (Jordan)

The relief engraved on the rock at as-Selaʿ[64] is located in the district of aṭ-Ṭafīlah, which was part of the country of Edom, in Jordan. "Many archaeological remains in this area show the importance of the site at different periods in its ancient history," according to Stephanie Dalley and Anne Goguel.[65]

The relief, which measures 6 m^2, depicts a standing figure with the typical appearance of a Neo-Babylonian king (a long staff, a conical headdress, and a long robe) and the three astral symbols (the sun disk, the moon crescent, and the Venus star). Unlike the reliefs of Nebuchadnezzar, which depict the king fighting a lion, Nabonidus expressed only his pious attitude, and refrained from showing royal authority, even in Arabia, far from Babylon or Ḫarrān, his religious centre.

There are visible traces of an inscription, but it is badly eroded.[66] Hanspeter Schaudig read "Nabonidus, the king of Babylon" in what is the first line on column iv and indicated that

59 Novotny 2002: 193.

60 Cf. Robson 2019: 81, 134; also Radner 2018.

61 Novotny 2020.

62 Beaulieu 2007. However, as Weiershäuser and Novotny 2020: 11-12 discuss, there are also good arguments against the notion that Nabonidus intended to elevate the position of the moon-god in the Babylonian pantheon.

63 Author's translation of Lafont et al. 2017: 827, which reads in the original French: "En ayant restauré les deux sanctuaires majeurs d'Ur, en Mésopotamie du sud, et de Harrān, aux confins de la Mésopotamie du nord, Nabonide rendait au dieu de la Lune un domaine couvrant tout le territoire entre Tigre et Euphrate."

64 For a recent study of the inscription and relief of as-Selaʿ, based on new fieldwork, see Da Riva 2020.

65 Dalley and Goguel 1997: 169.

66 For an edition, see Weiershäuser and Novotny 2020: 200-203 Nabonidus 55.

there are traces of more than 30 lines that are largely illegible.[67] We can, therefore, identify the figure portrayed on the relief as Nabonidus because of the inscription and the attire depicted, and this matches the known fact that Nabonidus passed through Edom on his way to Arabia. According to the Chronicle of Nabonidus, the king departed to the west in his third regnal year (553 BCE) to suppress a revolt at Ammanānum.[68] Thereafter the king fell ill but recovered quickly. Afterward, he defeated Amurru, Udummu (Edom), and Šinṭīni (not identified). According to André Lemaire, Nabonidus carved the relief at as-Selaʿ as a memorial of his victory over Edom on his way to Taymāʾ.[69]

In fact, traces of destruction dating back to the mid-6th century BCE were found in Busayra, the largest and only fortified site in the land of Edom, and in two other smaller villages (Tawilan and Tall al-Khalayfi). Some archaeologists consider Nabonidus to have been responsible for this destruction.[70] According to recent work, only the palace and temple were destroyed in Busayra, but not the residential areas and walls. The fact that only monumental and elite buildings were affected leads us to think that Nabonidus attacked Busayra during his travel to Arabia, while the two other sites are probably not related to his expedition.[71]

Turning now to the inscription, after Schaudig's initial decipherment, Crowell reconstructed another four lines containing only a few words: "year 5," "soldiers," "the gate" and "the people,"[72] while Weiershäuser and Novotny read the words: "way/journey/campaign," "year 5," "with each other," and "kings" in these lines.[73] These words may support the destruction of Edom by Nabonidus, but they also show the possibility that the assault was made during the 5th year rather than the 3rd year, as the inscription provides the date, or at least a period between his regnal years 3–5 (553–551 BCE). The date the relief itself was engraved is more difficult to fix, but it must have been sometime between Nabonidus's 3rd and 13th years, the last year of his stay in Taymāʾ.

According to Da Riva, the relief is not inaccessible, but is not readily visible either. If it was a monument to victory over Edom, as accepted by specialists, it seems insufficient as an expression of the prestige and glory of the king or as a proclamation of sovereignty to the local inhabitants. The monument may also have functioned as "mark of ownership" of this important crossing point on the trade route between Arabia and the Levant.

3.3 al-Ḥāʾiṭ (Saudi Arabia)

Al-Ḥāʾiṭ has been identified as the site of the ancient city of Padakku (whose modern Arabic name is Fadak), which is mentioned in the Ḫarrān Stele as a site conquered by Nabonidus. According to the Ḫarrān Stele, Nabonidus traveled to Tēmā (Taymāʾ), where he established his royal residence, and to other cities in Arabia, such as Dadanu (al-ʿUlā), Padakku (Ḥāʾiṭ/Fadak), Ḫibrā (Ḫaybar), Yadīhu (al-Ḥuwayyaṭ), and Yatribu (Medina), for ten years. Thus, the existence of an inscription here confirms that Nabonidus passed through Padakku as mentioned in the Ḫarrān inscription.

67 Schaudig 2001: 544.
68 Glassner 2004: 234-235.
69 Lemaire 2003: 287-288.
70 Zayadine 1999: 88.
71 Crowell 2007: 84.
72 Crowell 2007: 83, ll. 21′–24′.
73 Weiershäuser and Novotny 2020: 201-203 Nabonidus 55: i 11′–15′.

There is a relief and an inscription engraved on a large rock at the site. The relief depicts a figure wearing a conical headdress, a long staff, and a long robe (but with Assyrian fringes), accompanied by three astral symbols (the moon, the sun with wings, and a star), which are Neo-Babylonian features. The inscription has eroded, but it reads "Nabonidus, King of Babylon."[74] The figure was, therefore, identified as Nabonidus without difficulty. According to Arnulf Hausleiter and Hanspeter Schaudig, another symbol is to be found above the three celestial symbols (and there were possibly other symbols in the missing space).[75] This Arabian symbol, which forms a U-shape (and the other lost symbols, if they existed) was probably related to a local god or gods equivalent to the Babylonian gods that are represented by the celestial symbols on the relief. Schaudig suggests that Nabonidus must have paid homage to the local gods, and the relief and inscription could have included references to local powers. If this is correct, this small monument was expected to be seen by local inhabitants, and, by showing his respect to the local gods, Nabonidus intended to let them know who was in charge of the city of Padakku, although they were not able to understand the cuneiform. It might have been part of an attempt at long-term integration of the region under Neo-Babylonian rule.

3.3 Taymāʾ (Saudi Arabia)

Taymāʾ, an oasis city in northwest Arabia, was apparently the final destination of Nabonidus. According to the Ḫarrān Stele, the Babylonian citizens committed sins and sacrilege against Sîn, the king of gods, and his wrath brought a disease of the head and a famine; Nabonidus therefore escaped from Babylon, and, as mentioned above, travelled among the Arabian cities of Taymāʾ, Dadanu, Padakku, Hibrā, Yadīhu, and Yatribu for ten years. The so-called Verse Account of Nabonidus also mentions the king's travels.[76] According to the text, he set out on a long journey with his soldiers to Taymāʾ, slew the king of the city with weapons, slaughtered the inhabitants and established his royal residence there. The Verse Account is a biased document, but the narrative about the king's conquest and occupation of Taymāʾ "reflects the king's own view."[77] If we rely on the description in the Verse Account, although Nabonidus says that the sacrilege of the Babylonian people against the god Sîn caused his departure, the motive must have been a military campaign rather than escape from Babylon. The economic importance of Northern Arabia and its wealth from trade were likely his real motivation.[78] In addition, "Nabonidus could not expand northward because of Cyrus's power, so he tried to expand southward, and taking over North Arabia would make his Empire geographically much more coherent."[79]

74 Joannès 2014; Hausleiter and Schaudig 2016; for a new edition, see Weiershäuser and Novotny 2020: 198-199 Nabonidus 54.

75 Hausleiter and Schaudig 2016.

76 Verse Account, ii 20′ ff. For an edition, see Schaudig 2001: 563-578. The Verse Account is a propaganda text, which was likely composed shortly after the conquest of the Babylonian Empire by Cyrus in 539 BCE; see Beaulieu 2007: 137; Zawadzki 2010: 151, n. 38; and also Waerzeggers 2012. From this composition emerges the image of "Nabonidus the mad king" but, as Beaulieu 2007: 137 emphasizes, "the text presents itself as a criticism of policies more than personality."

77 Beaulieu 1989: 172.

78 Concerning the wealth of the Northern Arabia, see, e.g., Beaulieu 1989: 181-183; Eichmann et al. 2006: 163; Da Riva 2015: 622.

79 Lemaire 2003: 290.

In Taymāʾ, a stele and five cuneiform fragments have been found. Additionally, we have six inscriptions written in the North Arabian script, the so-called "Taymanitic," which probably refer to some officials in connection with Nabonidus.

The stele includes a relief of the king with the typical Neo-Babylonian costume — conical headdress and the long staff — and three celestial symbols (the sun, the moon, and a star), and a fragmented inscription, of which only twenty-five lines remain.[80] It apparently mentions precious stones and other tribute, the restoration of the Esagil temple, and names of Babylonian gods like Marduk, Zarpanītu, Tašmētu, and Nanaya. According to Schaudig, "as far as the text is preserved, it presents a typical Neo-Babylonian votive inscription."[81] The preserved text corresponds to the first part of the inscription, and should be followed by descriptions on Babylonia, Syria/Cilicia, North Arabia, Taymāʾ, and finally "Nabonidus's favourite topic: the restoration of the cult of the moon-god Sîn in his temple Eḫulḫul at Ḫarrān."[82]

The other partially preserved inscriptions seem to mention the names of temples, such as Esagil, Ezida, and Eḫulḫul in Ḫarrān, and those of Babylonian gods, such as Marduk and Ištar. These texts are also considered to be formulaic.

However, the existence of other texts, using North Arabian signs, is interesting. These inscriptions include several personal names and are accompanied by formulas like "the servant (or overseer) of Nabonidus, the king of Babylon," except for one.[83] Hani Hayajneh remarks, "the writers of the inscriptions came with Nabonidus on his expedition to Taymāʾ."[84] The names are not Arabic, but Aramaic or Akkadian (one may be Elamite); there are "some words that might be close to Aramaic or Akkadian, but with Arabic syntax and morphology."[85] In consequence, Hayajneh believes that these individuals were ethnically Arabs who bore non-Arabic names and resided in the Babylonian kingdom, rather than "Arameans or Babylonians who were acquainted with the Taymanitic script and language."[86] In any case, we find traces of the Neo-Babylonian administration in Taymāʾ, using the local language and script.

4. Conclusions

During the short period of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, not even ninety years long, only two of rulers left tangible marks of their presence in the west. Nebuchadnezzar II left inscriptions and reliefs on rock faces in Lebanon, which indicated his ownership or domination of regions that yielded natural resources such as cedar and stone or that occupied strategic locations. These monuments undoubtedly functioned as tools for expressing the power, prestige, and authority of the king himself, as well as his piety, which was an expected characteristic of Neo-Babylonian kings. We can contrast Nebuchadnezzar with Nabonidus, who presented himself in his reliefs, even in the west, not as a hero fighting a lion (which represents the king's power and authority), but exclusively as a pious figure who requested divine pro-

80 Schaudig 2020; also Schaudig in Eichmann et al. 2010: 137-138; Hausleiter and Schaudig 2016; Weiershäuser and Novotny 2020: 203-205 Nabonidus 56.
81 Schaudig 2010: 136.
82 Schaudig 2020.
83 Hayajneh 2001.
84 Hayajneh 2001: 83.
85 Hayajneh 2001: 91.
86 Hayajneh 2001: 91.

tection. We can, however, find no traces of systematic administrative control of the west. Nebuchadnezzar's interest in that region concerned above all economic exploitation: natural resources and manpower.

However, the case of Nabonidus is more complex. First, all of the inscriptions in Ḫarrān focused on his construction of Eḫulḫul and emphasized his pious attitude toward Sîn and the other gods of Ḫarrān (Ningal, Nusku and Sadarnunna). This indicates Ḫarrān's specific position of religious importance, and may even imply his effort to make the city a religious centre with or in place of Babylon. The monument at as-Selaʿ, located in the ancient country of Edom, was probably commemorative of his victory, but may also signify the ownership or the domination of an important trade route. In Arabia (al-Ḥāʾiṭ and Taymāʾ), although the inscriptions in Akkadian cuneiform seem to be standardized, the relief of al-Ḥāʾiṭ shows a local symbol, and there are inscriptions written in the local script at Taymāʾ, which probably suggests that Nabonidus intended closer control over Arabia than did Nebuchadnezzar in the Levant, likely due to his interest in the wealth of the region. Nevertheless, his sojourn in Arabia apparently did not introduce the Neo-Babylonian provincial administrative system into the region. He would have not had enough time to accomplish that.

In conclusion, for the Neo-Babylonian kings, the western territories were mainly an area for the exploitation of resources. They left no trace of systematic and continuous Babylonian rule in this region. Instead, they merely expressed their (personal) presence by setting up monuments.

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