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ANCIENT BABYLONIA

CHAPTER I

THE SOURCES OF HISTORY

THE ancient authors, who founded the Science of History, whose names remain household words amongst us still, such as Herodotus or Xenophon, have transmitted to modern times some far-off echoes of the fame of Babylonia. Many scattered references in classical writers serve to show the impression that its wealth and power had made on the Greek imagination. Aeschylus and Aristophanes, Aristotle and others, will be recalled. After Alexander the Great had included it in his conquests, a closer acquaintance with its still marvellous remains and magnificent traditions enhanced its interest for many writers less generally known: Arrian, Ctesias, Pausanias may be named.

There have been preserved some attempts on the part of Greek-writing scribes in Babylonia to transscribe Babylonian texts into Greek characters;

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doubtless with a view to studying the ancient records and rendering them available for Western peoples. We know of at least one who carried out this design. Berosus, a priest of Bêl, in Babylon, wrote a History of Babylonia, or Chaldæa, as it was then called, in three books, for the Macedonian monarch, Antiochus Soter, his patron, about 280 B.C. This work is unfortunately lost, but numerous later authors quoted extensively from it, such as Apollodorus and others. Eusebius, Josephus, Clemens and others have preserved extracts of their works. Doubtless, as cuneiform was still written in his time, Berosus, having access to much original Babylonian literature, was in a position to know many things about the history of his country, which we have not yet recovered; but the process of transmission and the selection made by later writers leave us in some doubt as to his statements and more perplexity as to his meaning.

Before any authentic information was available, many attempts were made to collect and harmonise such references as had survived. They will be found collected in Cory's *Ancient Fragments*.

Except as the traditional home of Abraham, "the father of the faithful," Babylonia scarcely concerned the earlier writers of the Old Testament. Indeed, until the Fall of Nineveh, it played small part in the Jewish national history. The prophets have

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frequent references to it, and after the Fall of Jerusalem the home of the exiles naturally became of absorbing interest.

Since the decipherment of the Babylonian column of the trilingual inscription of Darius the Great on the rocks at Behistun, by Sir H. C. Rawlinson, Hincks, and Oppert, the native sources have become overwhelmingly more important than any others. Of formal or professed history little has been recovered, for before Berosus, no Babylonian, so far as we know, set out to write a history of Babylonia. Of materials for history, Babylonia has already yielded to the excavator such an amount as to be almost unmanageable. This short sketch can only be regarded as an attempt to summarise, without argument or discussion, the results now generally admitted as probable.

The Babylonian monarchs were intensely proud of the buildings which their piety led them to dedicate to the worship of their gods. They invariably left foundation records ensconced in niches, or coffers, built into cavities in the brickwork, at the corners, or in the floors of temples or their annexes. These records have proved invaluable for identifying the buildings and the ancient sites on which they stood. Scarcely less valuable are the bricks of which temples and palaces were built. For they were usually stamped or inscribed

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with the name of the builder, the name of the temple or palace he had built or restored, and that of the king or god for whom it was erected.

As much information is given by the inscriptions on votive offerings, vases, mace-heads, blocks of costly stone, copper or silver vessels and other objects, often specified as the spoil brought from some conquered land. Stelæ, or monoliths, often sculptured with a figure of the king and his god, may record no more, but sometimes bear longer inscriptions. In such cases a king may name his father who preceded him on the throne, occasionally his grandfather, and even more remote ancestors. He may speak of the lands he has conquered; but very rarely indeed draws up the annals of his reign, as Assyrian monarchs did. The Babylonian ruler apparently attached far more importance to his religious works than to any military achievements he could claim for his glory.

It may be that this reticence was the result of a long continued custom which served to commemorate the most striking event of each year in a way even more lasting than sculptured story. The Babylonians called each year by a separate name, which made a permanent record of its events, warlike or domestic. When a successful war took place the year was called after it. Of unsuccessful wars or defeats no mention was made. The Babylonian

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preferred to forget them. No one could have foreseen a victory or the death of a foe, and it was the thanksgiving which followed, when the spoils were dedicated to the gods or some fresh building made possible by them, which marked the ensuing year as that of the victory.

The very life of the land depended on irrigation. It was the supreme ambition of a good ruler to cut a new canal or clean out and repair an old one. To build afresh the city wall or its gate, to enclose a fresh area, to build forts and palaces, often combined, were marks of prosperity and security for its preservation. Such works often served to name the year.

The name to be adopted for each year had to be conferred at its beginning, on the First of Nisan, when each king of Babylon celebrated the Feast of the New Year's Day, and taking the hands of his god in the temple, thus became the adopted son of the deity and himself divine. The name of the year being settled, all documents were dated throughout the twelve months following by the day of the month in the year of that selected event. Thus the names of the first four years of the reign of Hammurabi were (1) the year in which Hammurabi became king; (2) the year in which Hammurabi, the king, established the heart of the land in righteousness; (3) the year in which the throne of Nannar was

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made; (4) the year in which the wall of Gagia was built.

The name once fixed, notice of it was sent round to the various cities or districts of the land. These year-names in full were often long pompous sentences which would have been inconvenient to use in practice. They were usually much abbreviated. When, for some reason, the proper year-name was not yet known, people dated "the year after" the last year-name.

The scribes kept records of these year-names, and a long list of year-names has been preserved, which, if perfect, would have given in correct chronological order the year-names used under the First Dynasty of Babylon from the beginning of the dynasty down to the tenth year of the last king but one. This would cover 258 years. Another such list gave the year-names in chronological order from the twelfth year of Dungi down to the end of his grandson's reign; in all fifty-four years.

Such lists may be called Date-lists. Such a list of year-names recorded, when complete, some event, usually domestic, religious or military, for each year, and consequently has been called a chronicle.

It is certain that the Babylonians believed that their ancient records, based on such chronological systems, enabled them to state the number of

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years which had elapsed since events long passed.

The kings of Larsa, and doubtless others before them, adopted an era. They called the years the first, second, third, up to the thirtieth, "after the capture of Isin," an event which had marked the rise of their power.

In the third dynasty, a further improvement was introduced. They then dated by the years of the king's reign. If a king died in the twentieth year of his reign, he was reckoned to have reigned twenty years. The remainder of that year was called the "beginning" of his successor's reign; but the earliest full year after that First of Nisan, which fell next after his accession, was called his "first year." It is usual to call the fraction of a year, which fell after his accession, his "accession year," to distinguish it from this "first" year.

Presuming, which is most probable, that the royal scribes could obtain access to the necessary records, a king could state, when he desired, how long before his time an event had occurred to which he wished to refer.

Many of the later kings were not disinclined to give such chronological statements. Thus a boundary stone, dated in the fourth year of Ellil-nâdin-apli, states that from the time of Gulkishar, whom we otherwise know to have been the sixth king of the

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Dynasty of the Sealand, to that of Nebuchadrezzar I. 696 years had elapsed. This dates Gulkishar about 1820 B.C. Again, Nabonidus states that he restored a temple in Sippara, which had not been rebuilt since Shagarakti-Shuriash, 800 years before. This puts that monarch about 1350 B.C. Again, he glories in having found the memorial of Narâm-Sin, who reigned 3200 years before him. Relying on this dating, we must place Narâm-Sin about 3750 B.C. In another connection Nabonidus states that Hammurabi lived 700 years before Burnaburiash. This would date Hammurabi about 2100 B.C., or perhaps 2150 B.C., according to which Burnaburiash we decide to refer for the reckoning.

It is evident that all such dates are vague. The numbers are only round figures, so far as we know. Even if they be exact, we do not know from which year of his own reign the king was reckoning, nor to which year of the reign he quotes.

We further have a number of chronological lists which give professedly exact chronology for certain periods. A very early list from Nippur gives in order the names of the kings of Ur and Isin, with the lengths of each reign in years, even months and days. The Chronicle of Kish gives lists of early dynasties for some centuries, with the names of their kings and the length of each reign.

The Babylonian Kings' List A, if complete, would

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have given the names of the kings of Babylonia from the founder of the First Dynasty of Babylon down to the last native king, with the length of each reign.

The famous Canon of Ptolemy begins with Nabonassar's accession in 747 B.C., and gives the names of the succeeding kings to Nabonidus, with the length of each reign; then the Achamenids to Alexander the Great, followed by the Ptolemies; thus connecting with exact chronology. For Assyria, the Eponym Canon records the officials whose names dated each year, and by naming the eclipse of 763 B.C. fixes the reign of each Assyrian king back to 911 B.C. So far as they overlap, the last three sources agree exactly. Were the Kings' List A complete, we thus could trust it implicitly from the beginning. The chronology being thus more or less fixed for long periods of either Assyrian or Babylonian history, sometimes for both, except where these lists happen to have gaps, we endeavour to complete them by such synchronisms as we can discover. Kings of the one country often refer to the contemporary monarchs of the other. Naturally such a reference cannot be exact to a year.

The so-called Synchronous History dealt with the wars and subsequent rectifications of boundaries, between the territories of Assyria and Babylonia, from about 1400 B.C. to 800 B.C. Unfortunately it is not completely preserved.

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The Babylonian Chronicle gave the names, lengths of reigns and some historical events of the contemporary kings of Assyria, Babylonia, and Elam, from 744 B.C. to 668 B.C.

The so-called Dynastic Chronicle had originally six columns, of which the first and second must have dealt with the mythical dynasties before and after the Flood, the third with the First Dynasty of Babylon, the fourth with those of the Sealand, of Bazu and Elam. All the rest is now lost. The names of the kings, their genealogy, length of reign, manner of death, and burial place were recorded.

Chronicle P gives some account of events from 1400 B.C. to 1250 B.C.

Chronicle K 1 deals with the reigns of Sargon of Akkad and his son, Narâm-Sin. It goes on to Dungi, Ura-imitti, Ellil-bani and Sumu-abu.

Chronicle K 2 begins with Ura-imitti and Ellil-bani, goes on with Hammurabi and Rim-sin, Samsu-iluna, Abêshu, Samsu-ditana, Kastiliash and Agum, giving selected events of these reigns.

Chronicle K 3 extended from the eleventh to the seventh century B.C., with conspicuous events of each reign.

A Religious Chronicle noted portents occurring in different years of reigns in the eleventh century B.C.

It will be obvious that such materials do constitute a reliable contribution to history, which may

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