

The City of Babylon

The 2,000-year story of Babylon sees it moving from a city state to the centre of a great empire of the ancient world. It remained a centre of kingship under the empires of Assyria, Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, Alexander the Great, the Seleucids and the Parthians. Its city walls were declared to be a Wonder of the World while its ziggurat won fame as the Tower of Babel. Visitors to Berlin can admire its Ishtar Gate. The supposed location of its elusive Hanging Garden is explained. Worship of its patron god Marduk spread widely while its well-trained scholars communicated legal, administrative and literary works throughout the ancient world, some of which provide a backdrop to Old Testament and Hittite texts. Its science also laid the foundations for Greek and Arab astronomy through a millennium of continuous astronomical observations. This accessible and up-to-date account is by one of the world's leading authorities.

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The City of Babylon

A History, c. 2000 BC–AD 116

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Preface

Babylon developed from an insignificant city to a city state, to a kingdom, to the head of an empire, and then to an icon of scholarship, religion, and trade under the rule of foreigners. Here its history is drawn from the extraordinary wealth of Babylonian cuneiform texts, spanning the period from 2000 BC to AD 116, with inevitable gaps where a lack of sources precludes a smooth narrative. Archaeological work has also contributed to this account. I have tried to avoid an academic style while engaging with recent research and outlining matters that are unresolved or disputed. Research in Assyriology has made great strides during recent decades, and until now much of the material I describe has been available only in specialist publications.

For the reader who would like more illustrations, I recommend the three great catalogues of exhibitions on Babylon held in 2008–9: the French exhibition at the Louvre in Paris, the German at the Pergamum Museum in Berlin, and the English at the British Museum in London. Each contains interesting accounts of various topics based mainly on the objects in those exhibitions.¹

The quantity of relevant publications is now so vast that a full bibliography would have overwhelmed the book. I have tried to give up-to-date references with which earlier work can be found. This has the unfortunate consequence that the pioneering work of earlier scholars seems to be ignored. I hope colleagues will not feel affronted if I have omitted to mention the source of a particular piece of evidence or interpretation, intending to produce a clear narrative derived from many details without including them all. The wise words of the Sumerologist Edmond Sollberger come to mind: ‘Don’t empty your drawers into your writing’.

I thank Michael Sharp of CUP for much detailed help and interest in the book and the Delegates of CUP for giving me a contract; Alwyn Harrison for careful editing; Judith Wilson for encouragement to begin such a big work; Alison Wilkins for preparing maps and plans and the Lorne Thyssen

¹ On the three exhibition catalogues, see Finkel and Seymour 2008; Marzahn 2008; André-Salvini 2008; see also, e.g., Seymour 2014; Thelle 2018.

Fund at Wolfson College Oxford for supporting the work; Michael Macdonald for keeping me up-to-date on finds from Arabia; Günter Vittmann on the dating of Papyrus Amherst 35; Robertus van der Spek, Wouter Henkelman, Christopher Metcalf, and Adam Howe for help with the bibliography; Michael Roaf and Elize Zomer for supplying me with material before it was published; Willemijn de Waal for checking that the inscribed palm sticks in Leiden University Library are indeed incised; Carole Hillenbrand for help with Arabic sources; Ian Cartwright at the Oxford Institute of Archaeology for expert help preparing illustrations; Janice Kwiatkowski for critical reading of an early draft; my sister Corinna Redman for improving the formatting of the bibliography; Elize Zomer for timely generosity in sharing her work on the *Epic of Gulkišar*; Tim Clayden for support in various ways; and above all my encouraging but ever-critical husband Christopher Dalley for improving my style. Mistakes that remain are entirely my responsibility. I would like to thank especially warmly all those scholars who have sent me monographs, offprints, and pdfs during the past half century, contributing hugely to keeping my morale afloat.

Babylon stood at the centre of an intellectual and religious society that developed long before the great monotheisms of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This is its story, extracted from brilliant discoveries by archaeologists and the scholars who elucidate cuneiform texts.

For a detailed guide to the architecture of temples, palaces and walls of Babylon, the 2021 book by Olof Pedersen, *Babylon The Great City* (Münster: Zaphon) is highly recommended.

Conventions

The letter *š* is pronounced like English *sh*, but is not used in this book in the names of deities, such as Shamash and Urash, with the exception of the god Aššur (to avoid the awkward spelling Ashshur), nor in place names such as Eshnunna. The city name Ashur is a conventional spelling used here to distinguish it from the eponymous god's name. Š is kept in royal names with the exception of the conventional spelling Ashurbanipal. Biblical names such as Nebuchadnezzar follow common usage. The letter *h* represents three different Semitic consonants, apart from its use with English *s* to represent *š*; *ḫ* and *ṣ* are 'emphatic' versions of *t* and *s*.

The pre-Christian era is indicated by BC (before Christ), the Christian era AD (*anno domini*). The second millennium BC is the period from 2000 to 1000 BC. The eighteenth century BC is the period 1800 to 1700 BC. The second century AD is the period from AD 100 to 200.

Long vowels in personal and place names are not marked, with the exception of Bēl, which is the Babylonian word 'Lord' equivalent to, but distinct from, West Semitic Ba'al, as Greek transcriptions show. Biblical Hebrew versions of names from English translations are occasionally used when they are considered conventional in modern English speech and literature. Ambiguities are explained in the indices where appropriate.

In king lists, // indicates a foreign king whose reign in part coincides with that of a king of Babylon.

Timeline

Kings Who Ruled in Babylon

This book follows the traditional ‘middle chronology’ for the second millennium.

Many of the dates are prone to slight adjustments.

The names of kings whose deeds are unknown or insignificant are omitted. For a complete list see, for example, Walker’s appendix in Collon’s *Ancient Near Eastern Art* (1995: 234–8) with the exception of late Seleucid and Parthian Arsacid rulers, for which Wiesehöfer 2001: 316–18 is followed.

All dates are BC unless specified as AD.

Ch. 3	1894–c. 1732	First Dynasty , first part, up to the Great Rebellion Sumu-la-El, Sumu-abum, Apil-Sin, Sin-muballit, Hammurabi, Samsu-iluna Amorite kings Middle Bronze Age
Ch. 5	c. 1732–1592	First Dynasty, second part, from the Great Rebellion to the end of the dynasty Samsu-iluna, Abi-ešuh, Ammi-šaduqa, Ammi- ditana, Samsu-ditana Amorite kings Middle Bronze Age
Ch. 6	c. 1595–1223	Early Kassite kings and First Sealand Dynasty (14 of c. 36) Agum II kakrime Pešgaldarame, Ayadaragalama (placing uncertain) Burna-Buriah I, Kara-indaš, Kurigalzu I, Kadašman-Enlil I, Burna-Buriah II, Kurigalzu II, Nazi-maruttaš, Kadašman-Turgu, Kadašman-Enlil II, Kudur-Enlil, Šagarakti-šuriaš, Kaštiliaš IV Middle to Late Bronze Age
	1222–1155	Later Kassite kings Adad-šuma-iddina Adad-šuma-ušur Meli-šipak

(cont.)

		Marduk-apla-iddina I
		Enlil-nadin-ahi
		Late Bronze Age
1157–1026		Second dynasty ‘of Isin’ (3 of 11 kings)
		Itti-Marduk-balaṭu
		Nebuchadnezzar I
		Adad-apla-iddina
1025–1005		Second dynasty of Sealand (1 of 3)
		Simbar-šipak
1004–985		Bazi dynasty (3 kings, none listed)
984–979		‘Elamite’ dynasty (1 of 1)
		Mar-biti-apla-ušur
		Early Iron Age
Ch. 7	978–783	Babylonian kings (5 of 12)
		Nabu-mukin-apli
		Mar-biti-ahhe-iddina
		Šamaš-mudammiq
		Nabu-apla-iddina
		Marduk-zakir-šumi
		Late Iron Age I into Iron Age II
769–703		Chaldean and Sealand kings + Assyrian overlords (18 of 23)
		Eriba-Marduk
		Nabu-šuma-iškun
		Nabu-našir
		Nabu-mukin-zeri
		Tiglath-pileser III
		Marduk-apla-iddina (Merodach-Baladan)
		Sargon II
		Sennacherib
703–625		Merodach-Baladan II (again)
		Sennacherib (again)
		Bēl-ibni
		Aššur-nadin-šumi
		Mušeziḫ-Marduk
		Esarhaddon
		Aššurbanipal
		Šamaš-šum-ukin
		Kandalanu
		Nabopolassar
		Late Iron Age II into Iron Age III
		Neo-Assyrian/Neo-Babylonian period
Ch. 8	625–562	Neo-Babylonian kings

(cont.)

		Nabopolassar
		Nebuchadnezzar II
Ch. 9	561–521	Amel-Marduk (Evil-Merodach)
		Neriglissar
		La-abaši-Marduk
		Nabonidus
		Cyrus II (the Great)
		Cambyses
		Bardiya aka Nebuchadnezzar III
		Neo-Babylonian to Achaemenid period
Ch. 10	521–331	Achaemenid kings (7 of 9) + two usurpers (indented)
		Darius I
		Xerxes
		Bel-šimanni
		Šamaš-eriba
		Artaxerxes I
		Darius II
		Arses = Artaxerxes II
		Artaxerxes III Ochus
		Darius III
		Late Babylonian/Achaemenid period
	331–305	Macedonian Greek kings
		Alexander III the Great
		Alexander IV (+ Antigonos)
	305–c. 164	Seleucid Greek kings (6 of many, to first Parthian conquest)
		Seleucus I
		Antiochus I
		Antiochus II
		Seleucus II
		Seleucus III
		Antiochus IV
		Late Babylonian/Hellenistic/Seleucid period
Ch. 11	145–125	Late Seleucid kings (2 of many)
		Demetrius II (first time)
		Antiochus VII
		Demetrius II (second time)
	247 BC–AD 127	Parthian (Arsacid) kings (8 of many)
		Arsaces I
		Mithradates I
		Phraates II
		Hyspaosines of Elymais/Maysan
		Artabanus II

(cont.)

	Mithradates II
	Gotarzes I
	Osroes
	Roman emperor
AD 116	Trajan

Note: The word ‘dynasty’ implies that all kings were related by blood. Babylonian king-lists may sometimes imply that the kings listed were selected by divination, not always related.

Written Languages and Their Scripts

c. 3200 BC–early AD

Sumerian The language of southern Mesopotamia, written in a cuneiform (literally ‘wedge-shaped’) script. It gave way around 2000 BC to Akkadian as a spoken language, but was still a prestigious written language until the disappearance of cuneiform script. Unrelated to any other known language. Its extensive narrative literature is different from that of Babylonian and Assyrian.

c. 2100 BC–c. 1500 BC

Amorite A West Semitic language spoken but perhaps not written throughout much of the Near East, probably comprehensible to Babylonians, its people being scarcely distinguishable by the time of Babylon’s First Dynasty.

c. 2350 BC–early AD

Akkadian A general term for all dialects of Babylonian and Assyrian; an East Semitic language, written in cuneiform, with vowels shown.

Babylonian The dialects of central Mesopotamia, used for all kinds of texts, with a literary dialect for religious and other elite texts.

Assyrian A general term for all dialects of Assyria with distinctive features of grammar and phonetics, written in cuneiform script, mainly known from business, correspondence, and legal texts, no longer written after c. 600 BC.

c. 1500 BC onwards

Aramaic A West Semitic language used throughout the ancient Near East, written in alphabetic script mainly without vowels. Used for administrative,

legal, and short royal inscriptions, with some semi-historical narrative literature.

1800–330 BC

Elamite Language of south-east Iran, notably in Khuzistan, possibly a branch of the Dravidian group related to Tamil. Written in a modified cuneiform script. Used for administration and royal inscriptions. No known narrative literature.

1500–1200 BC

Hittite Indo-European language of central Anatolia, related to Persian and Greek, written in a modified cuneiform script. Used for administration, divination, rituals, land grants, treaties, royal inscriptions including annals, literature partly derived from Akkadian.

For details of these languages as well as Greek, Ugaritic, Hurrian, Luvian, Old Persian, and Urartian, see R. D. Woodard's *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages* (2004).

Note: The terms East and West Semitic are based on particular linguistic features as well as script. East Semitic Babylonian, written in cuneiform script, shows vowels; West Semitic mainly does not.



View from the Summer Palace built by Nebuchadnezzar II, where Alexander the Great died, looking west over the Euphrates. Credit: author 1967.