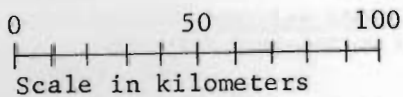
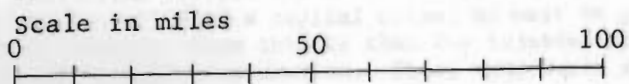


- * city within the defensive district
- city outside of the defensive district
- ✕ city captured by Cyrus (acc. to the Bab. Chron.)



MAP SHOWING DEFENSE OF BABYLON

The fall of Babylon to the Persians has been one of the least investigated problems in the history of the Neo-Babylonian, or Chaldean Dynasty. There are three reasons for this. First, problems of chronology are conspicuously absent. The dates of significant events are known, even to the day of the week. Second, the major cuneiform source, the Nabonidus-Cyrus Chronicle, which has been available since 1891,¹ presents only minor philological problems. Finally, there has been neither the discovery of new texts, nor recent archaeological excavations which add anything of importance. Thus, it seems that there is nothing new to be said. One need only summarize the Nabonidus-Cyrus Chronicle, adding, perhaps, some additional material from Herodotus. Nonetheless, no problem is ever completely exhausted, for there are always new questions which can be asked. This article, as a consequence, will undertake to analyze the basic military strategy of Nabu-na'id (Nabonidus), with particular reference to the gathering of the gods into Babylon.

Our sources for the fall of Babylon are few in number, and usually lack significant content. The Nabonidus-Cyrus Chronicle is our major source of information. Its narrative of the fall of Babylon seems to have been based mainly upon the temple records of the Esagila (the temple of

¹ O. E. Hagen, *BA* 2 (1891), p. 214ff. It was re-edited by Sidney Smith, *Babylonian Historical Texts* (London, 1924), Plates xi-xiv, Transliteration 110-14. For a translation, see A. L. Oppenheim, *ANET*, p. 305f.

Marduk in Babylon) and the Persian accounts. The second important source is the Cyrus Cylinder,² which, as to be expected, is an excellent example of propaganda, and so must be utilized with extreme care. A third important source is the Verse Account.³ Unfortunately, its version is almost completely broken away. Nevertheless, it gives accurate and valuable background information, despite the fact that it is a theological justification for the fall of Babylonia and quite hostile to Nabu-na'id.

The most valuable source in Greek remains Herodotus (especially i.189-91). Though he received a somewhat garbled account from his Persian informants, his description remains the finest non-Akkadian source. Xenophon, in his Cyropaedia, gives a very full account of the taking of Babylonia by Cyrus. It is therefore deplorable that he chose to write it in the form of an historical romance. The result is that the historian, if he uses this text, can rely only upon caprice in judging what is fact and what is fiction. Finally in Greek, we have the account of Berossus (Flavius Josephus, Contra Apion, i.20). This skimpy account, though pro-Babylonian, tells us nothing new.

The Biblical sources are valuable principally for illustrating the attitude of a subject people. Thus, Jeremiah 50-51 is a prophecy that the Medes (?) will soon destroy Babylon. Second Isaiah contains both a poetic account of the fall of Babylon (46-48), and leaflets of a confessedly pro-Cyrus nature. The Book of Daniel⁴ has value mainly for the history of the Persian occupation.⁵ Despite this seeming dearth of information, it is still possible to reconstruct the history of this event.

Nabu-na'id was an old man when he returned to Babylon in 540.⁶ He was, at the very least, 71 years old.

² Latest edition: F. H. Weissbach, Die Keilschriften der Achämeniden, VAB 3 (Leipzig, 1911), p. 2ff. Cf. R. P. Dougherty, Nabonidus and Balshazzar, YOS Res. 15 (New Haven, 1929), p. 175ff. Translation: Oppenheim, p. 315-16.

³ Smith, Plates v-x, Transliteration 83-7. Translation: Oppenheim, pp. 312-15.

⁴ Note the scribal error of נבוכדנצר for *נבוניד*.

⁵ Cf. D. J. Wiseman, "Some Historical Problems in the Book of Daniel," in D. J. Wiseman and others, Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel (London, 1965), pp. 9-18.

⁶ Space limitations preclude a detailed discussion of the reign of Nabu-na'id before 540. For the present, see W. Röllig, ZA 56 (1964), pp. 218-60.

Because Cyrus, whom he had once called the "young servant of Marduk,"⁷ was now threatening the destruction of Babylonia, Nabu-na'id reluctantly came back to the land he had not seen for ten years.⁸

The situation in Babylon was critical on October 24, the day on which Nabu-na'id entered the city.⁹ Cyrus was preparing to attack Babylonia now that he had consolidated his victories over Astyages in the East and Syria in the North. Babylonia was in a predicament both militarily and economically. Aid from the Trans-Euphrates (eber nāri) district in the West was effectively cut off by Cyrus: from the South, Arabia was incapable of extending military assistance. Cyrus had effected a successful encirclement. The bulk of the Chaldean army was composed of mercenaries recruited from semi-nomadic tribes.¹⁰ The officers were partially Chaldean in origin, and partially disgruntled native Babylonian nobles (Verse Account I:2). Economically, Babylonia was weak. Almost from the beginning of Nabu-na'id's reign, trade had been cut off from the East, because of the Persian-Median conflict. Around 550, Babylonia suffered a severe famine followed by a greatly increased inflation.¹¹ Now, in 540, trade with the West was uncertain in the face of Persian control of the main trade routes. Nabu-na'id, in spite of these difficulties, began preparations for the coming Persian invasion.

The basic defensive strategy was that of Nebuchadnezzar. Despite his impressive military achievements, he realized the essential weakness of the Chaldean army. The Chaldean kings had always depended upon the support of their eastern neighbors. Thus, Merodach-Baladan was allied with

⁷ Stephon Langdon, Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften, VAB 4, (Leipzig, 1912), p. 220, l. 29.

⁸ On his reluctance, see H₂ A/B II:11-14, Röllig, p. 221.

⁹ For the method of turning Babylonian dates into Julian dates, see Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein, Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C. - A.D. 75, Brown University Studies XIX (Providence, R.I., 1956) and E. J. Bickerman, Chronology of the Ancient World (Ithaca, N.Y., 1968).

¹⁰ Cf. A. Leo Oppenheim, Letters from Mesopotamia (Chicago, 1967), p. 47.

¹¹ On the famine, see L. W. King, Babylonian Boundary Stones, (London, 1912), no. 36 (Latest transliteration and discussion, Röllig, pp. 247ff.). See also R. P. Dougherty, Records from Erech, Time of Nabonidus, YOS 6 (New Haven, 1920), no. 154. Cf. H₂ A/B I:21 (Röllig, p. 220).

the Elamites,¹² Nabopolassar with the Medes.¹³ Even Nebuchadnezzar married a Median princess, for whom he built the famous "Hanging Gardens."¹⁴ If Babylonia were ever cut off from help, it would be forced to spread its troops thinly across a broad front. Therefore, using natural defensive barriers, Nebuchadnezzar decided to concentrate his forces within a much smaller area. Since his eastern flank was secured by a treaty with the Medes, he had little to fear from that direction. From the north-west there was a ready passage-way between the Tigris and the Euphrates. Nebuchadnezzar, therefore, did as follows:

ana maṣṣarti Bābili dunnunim ašnīma elān Ūpi adi qereb Sippar ištu kišād Diqlat adi kišād Puratti 5 bēṛ qaqqari šipik eperi dannūtīm aštappakma mē rabūti kīma gipiš tām̄tim ana 20 bēṛ qaqqari maḥāza uštalmi (Langdon, VAB 4, 166, 67-73).

That is: "I further strengthened the defence of Babylon up-river from Opis to the midst of Sippar. From the shore of the Tigris¹⁵ to the shore of the Euphrates (for a distance of) five double-hours of land (= ca. 54 kilometers) I heaped up strong earthen works, and water as great as the mass of the sea surrounded the district (to the length of) twenty double-hours of land (= ca. 216 kilometers)." In short, he built a wall between the two rivers. As a further precaution, this predecessor to the Maginot and Siegfried Lines extended across the Tigris to Opis in order to dam the river making this natural boundary even more secure. He built a similar wall from Babylon to Kish, making a partial dam across the Euphrates (Langdon, VAB 4, 166, 60-66). This series of fortifications between Opis and Sippar was known to Xenophon (Anabasis, i.7, 15, ii.4, 12) as the "Median Wall."¹⁶ Note that provision was made for an attack from southern Mesopo-

¹² J. A. Brinkman, "Merodach-Baladan II," Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim June 7, 1964 (Chicago, 1964), p. 19; idem, JNES 24 (1965), pp. 161-66.

¹³ D. J. Wiseman, Chronicles of Chaldean Kings (626-556 B.C.) in the British Museum (London, 1961), pp. 56-62.

¹⁴ Berossus in Flavius Josephus, Cont. Ap., i. 19.

¹⁵ The older Akkadian spelling of the Tigris is Idiqlat (= Heb. יִדְקְלַת), the later, as here, Diqlat (= Late Heb. דִּיקְלַת).

¹⁶ For a study of the accuracy of Xenophon's description, see R. D. Barnett, Journal of Hellenic Studies 83 (1963), pp. 1ff.

tamia. As part of his overall plan, Nebuchadnezzar extended and developed the defences of the city of Babylon. This included a third wall around the city to serve as a first line of defence. The completion of this ambitious project was ultimately left to the Persians.

This military heritage was left to Nabu-na'id. Since Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest military and political figure of his time, it was inescapable that his strategic concepts would be followed. Nevertheless, the area demanded by this scheme--from the "Median Wall" to the Persian Gulf--was still too extensive for Nabu-na'id. It had to be limited in the South to a line from Babylon to the Tigris, passing just north of Kish. The cities outside of this defensive district were, for all intents and purposes, given up as lost. The strategy was predicated upon the conviction that an invader could be barred from the district. If this failed, the army and the major cities--Babylon, Borsippa, Cutha, Sippar, Opis--would hold the status quo until aid arrived from the Trans-Euphrates district in Syria-Palestine.

Such was the situation which confronted Nabu-na'id when he began his seventeenth and final year. From April 4 through April 14, he participated in his first akītu-festival¹⁷ in eleven years. It served both political and religious purposes. First, it re-established his divine right to the kingship of Babylonia. Since his third year, his son Bēl-šar-ušur (Belshazzar) was de facto co-regent of Babylonia. In his first few years, Nabu-na'id was engaged in campaigns in Syria. In the last ten, he was fighting in Arabia. Thus, he was unable to participate in this royal festival. Second, he attempted to regain the support of the priests of the Esagila. That there was a break with the official Marduk cult seems apparent not only from later Persian propaganda, but also from his own inscriptions. But, when did this break occur? Marduk is no longer mentioned prominently in inscriptions dating from 546 at the earliest. Between 547 and 546, Cyrus attacked and destroyed the city of Sardis in Lydia. Since Nabu-na'id was an erstwhile supporter of Cyrus, the death of his ally Croesus at Sardis was an omen of things to come. That this would cause religious repercussions is obvious when we remember that Nabu-na'id, from the beginning,

¹⁷ For the standard literature on the akītu-festival, as well as a study of some problems connected with it, see Ichiro Nakata, Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University 1 (1968), pp. 41ff.

believed that Cyrus was working out the will of Marduk. That is one reason Nabu-na'id did not come back to Babylonia until the last moment. In the face of later propaganda, there is no way of knowing whether a temporary reconciliation was effected.

Final plans for the defence of Babylonia included the gathering of the gods into the city of Babylon. In the words of the Nabonidus-Cyrus Chronicle (III: 8-12):

ina [Ayyari (?) Lugal-Marada u ilāni] ša Marad Zababa u ilāni ša Kiš Nin-lil u ilāni ša Hursagkalama ana Bābili ĩrubūni adi qīt Ululi ilāni ša Akkad [ilāni (?)] ša eli eršeti (IM) u šapal eršeti (IM) ana Bābili ĩrubūni ilāni ša Barsip Kutu [Ūpu] u Sippar la ĩrubūni

It would seem--if the above restorations are accurate--that Nabu-na'id brought the gods from the cities to the immediate south of the defensive perimeter forthwith to Babylon. Over a period of about four months, he had slowly brought all the gods of the other cities, both north and south. That is: "In the month of Ayyaru (?), Lugal-Marada and the (other) gods of Marad, Zababa and the gods of Kish, Nin-lil and the gods of Hursagkalama entered Babylon. Until the end of the month of Ululu, the gods of Akkad, i.e. (all) the gods, which are above the (defensive) district¹⁸ and which are below, entered Babylon. The gods of Borsippa, Cutha, Opis (!), and Sippar did not enter." As can be seen the tablet has three breaks. The restoration dealing with the time sequence is conjectural, and is not of the greatest importance. The restoration of the city Opis is, however, crucial to the argument, for if the defensive strategy has been correctly set forth, this is the only possible way to restore the text.

¹⁸ The equation IM = eršetu (Deimel, SL, 399, 5) is found elsewhere only in the idu lexical series, but is the apparent reading here. For eršetu in the sense of "district," see CH IX:39 (= law 23. It is connected with the word pātu.), Sennacherib, "Chicago Prism," VI: 63 (Borger, BAL, p. 79), Langdon, VAB 4, p. 304 (eršet Bābili), and AHW 245b. The translation offered by Smith (p. 121), "above and below the earth," makes little sense in the context. (Further, if that was what the author intended, he would probably have written something like ilāni ša eliš u šapliš.) D. J. Wiseman's attempt in Documents from Old Testament Times, ed. D. Winton Thomas (Reprint: New York, 1958), p. 82, "those from every direction," though rather vague, is somewhat better. Oppenheim in ANET, p. 306 makes no attempt at translation.

south, to the capital. This clearly indicates that Cyrus was massing troops near the Babylonian border.

The purpose of this ingathering of the gods would ordinarily be simple to explain. The gods were generally brought into the capital city for their own protection. Such action, for example, was taken by Nabopolassar in his first year.¹⁹ Taking gods of a conquered city into exile was a common occurrence among the Assyrians and Babylonians.²⁰ Moreover, the Assyrians were known to have razed temples and to have systematically demolished statues of the gods in order to prove the ultimate superiority of the god Assur to a particularly recalcitrant city.²¹ Babylon itself had undergone a similar experience at the hands of Sennacherib.²² The Medes, in turn, showed no clemency to the Assyrian temples, especially toward those of the city of Assur.²³ It is also well known that Cyrus burnt the city of Sardis to the ground.²⁴ Not having the foresight to know that Cyrus intended to rule Babylonia, not to destroy it, Nabu-na'id made cautious preparations. It should also be noted that priests accompanied their gods on the "visit" to Babylon.²⁵ This had the virtue of making outlying cities cultically dependent

¹⁹ Wiseman, Chronicles, p. 52, ll. 18-24.

²⁰ There are countless examples in the Assyrian annals, as in Riekle Borger, Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien, AfO Beiheft 9 (Graz, 1956), p. 53, and note Harper, ABL 259, Rev. 1-3 = Robert H. Pfeiffer, State Letters of Assyria, AOS 6 (New Haven, 1935), no. 22. On the "visit" of Marduk to Assyria, see Benno Landsberger, Brief des Bischofs von Esagila an König Asarhaddon (Amsterdam, 1965), pp. 20ff., 66ff. For both Assyrian and Babylonian examples, see Wiseman, Chronicles, p. 51, ll. 15-17, p. 55, ll. 6-8. In the Bible, see II Sam. 5:21; Isa. 46:2.

²¹ Sennacherib against Babylon: "Bīt akīti inscription," O. Shroeder, KAH II, no. 122, ll. 36f. = OIP II, p. 137; "Bavian Stela," III R, 14, l. 48 = OIP II, p. 83. Assurbanipal against the Elamites: "Prism A," V:118-20 in Maximilian Streck, Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum untergange Niniveh's, VAB 7, (Leipzig, 1916), p. 50.

²² Described in the "Bīt akīti inscription" and the "Bavian Stela." For these inscriptions, see the preceding note. See also Langdon, VAB 4, p. 270.

²³ Wiseman, Chronicles, pp. 60ff.; Langdon, VAB 4, pp. 270ff.

²⁴ Herodotus, i. 34. On the death of Croesus, contra Herodotus and Xenophon, see A. R. Burn, Persia and the Greeks: The Defence of the West 546-478 B.C. (New York, 1962), pp. 42f. and n. 9.

²⁵ For example, A. Ungnad, Babylonische Briefe aus der Zeit der Hammurapi-Dynastie, VAB 6 (Leipzig, 1914), no. 2.

upon Babylon. Some scholars²⁶ have made much of the later resentment over this action as portrayed in Persian propaganda. Even if this were true, it played no part whatsoever in causing the fall of the Chaldean rule.

More serious is the problem of the four cities which did not send their gods to Babylon. The traditional answer has been as follows:²⁷

[After the gods were gathered] the limit of citizen patience had been reached; the gods of Kutu, Sippar, and even Borsippa did not enter. Ebarra, the temple of the sun-god Shamash in Sippar, had been restored, but the priests were disgusted when Nabu-naid through one of his frequent dreams changed the form of the god's headdress. Nabu had come from Borsippa to meet his father Marduk at the New Year's, but his priests also had seen the handwriting on the wall.

This colorful interpretation is founded upon a naive acceptance of Persian propaganda, and not on the inner Babylonian realities. First, the priests were appointed by the king. Second, the last two šangû - priests at Sippar were originally connected with the temple of Ishtar of Akkad at Babylon,²⁸ which benefited from royal largesse. Third, Nabu-na'id gave much support to the temples of the three oracle-gods Sin, Shamash, and Ishtar. It is true, nevertheless, that the priests of the Ebarra did cooperate with the Persians, unlike those of the Ishtar temple corporation at Uruk.²⁹ This does not give us leave, however, to make of this open opposition. There is not a hint of this even in the most virulent Persian propaganda, which talks only of discontent.³⁰ It is unlikely, furthermore, that Nabu-na'id

²⁶ A. T. Olmstead, History of the Persian Empire (Chicago, 1948), p. 49 with G. G. Cameron, JAOS 52 (1932), p. 304.

²⁷ Olmstead, p. 50.

²⁸ For the evidence, see Mariano San Nicolò, Beiträge zu einer Prosopographie neubabylonischer Beamten der Zivil- und Tempelverwaltung, SBAW II/2 (München, 1941), pp. 34-5.

²⁹ The major officials, such as the šatammu and the šākin tēmi, were replaced within the first year of Cyrus, unlike those from Sippar. This would seem to indicate that the priests at Uruk were not overly delighted with their new Persian overlords. Cf. San Nicolò, pp. 12-13, 16.

³⁰ Thus the Cyrus Cylinder, ll. 22-28, intimates that the major grievances of the Babylonians were economic. Though the Verse Account is hostile to Nabu-na'id on religious grounds, it was a product of the

--or any Babylonian king--would have tolerated such a rebellion.

A better explanation lies in the defensive strategy outlined above. Within the core district there were five key cities. Opis and Sippar are situated to the north, Borsippa and Babylon to the south. Cutha is in the center, located beside the old bed of the Euphrates (which follows a line from Sippar to Kish). Thus, all these cities were essential for the defence of Babylonia. The power of the gods had to remain within the walls of their own city, else the city might fall. This is a fundamental concept in Babylonian religious thought. Furthermore, these cities had to remain impregnable if Babylon was to survive. If they fell, Babylon had no defence. Consequently, it would not only have been unwise religiously to require the gods to visit Babylon, it would have been unnecessary.

The result of depending upon a static defence soon became evident. Within little over two weeks, Cyrus conquered Babylonia. First, he destroyed the city of Opis. This caused rioting within the defensive district, which was quickly put down (Nabonidus-Cyrus Chronicle III:13-14). The Persian army then drained the Tigris and entered the district. This surprise move effectively eliminated the major barriers. The Persian army avoided the "Median Wall" by circling around it, and forded a seemingly impassable river. With Cyrus remaining at Opis, the Persian army engaged the main Chaldean force near the "Median Wall" and defeated it (cf. Herodotus i.190). After this defeat, there was no further defence possible except to wait out a long siege. The difficulties of such an action were compounded by the fact that there was only the barest expectation of help from the outside. The inhabitants of Sippar and Babylon³¹ decided to surrender. One reason for this was the rift between the native Babylonians and their Chaldean overlords, which came to

Persian occupation. It is, moreover, a typical Mesopotamian work. When Babylon fell, the result could be ascribed to the weakness of Marduk, who was defeated in a heavenly battle with Ahuramazda. But, this was not what Cyrus wished to convey. He was the servant of Marduk, and so the religious justification of his victory was the punishment of the sins of the previous ruler, namely, Nabu-na'id.

³¹ Both Herodotus, i. 191 and Xenophon, *Cyro.*, vii. 5 claim that Babylon was taken by a ruse during the celebration of a festival. Unfortunately, this can not be confirmed.

the fore during the reign of Nabu-na'id.³² Because of it, the native Babylonians, in all probability, saw little reason to champion one foreign ruler over another. Their attitude may be summed up in the words of Quintillian, "When defeat is inevitable, it is expedient to surrender" (ubi vinci necesse est, expedit cedere).

³² Mentioned by Nabu-na'id in one of his inscriptions, H₂ A/B I:14-22 (Cf. Röllig, p. 220).