

## Appendix P

# Ancient Babylon: From Gradual Demise To Archaeological Rediscovery

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### INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Neo-Babylonian Empire was founded under the rule of Nabopolassar (Nabu-apla-usur), who reigned from 626-605 BC. For several hundred years prior to his rule, the Babylonians had been a vassal state under the rule of the Assyrians to the north. In fact Babylon had suffered destruction upon the order of the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 689 BC.<sup>1</sup> Following the death of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal in 627 BC, however, the Assyrian Empire rapidly decreased in power until finally in 612 BC the great city of Nineveh was defeated by the combined forces of the Babylonians, Medes and Scythians.



A relief from the palace of Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC) at Kuyunjik (i.e., Nineveh). The king pours a libation over four dead lions before an offering table and incense stand.

<sup>1</sup> Klengel-Brandt points out that the earliest mention of the tower (or ziggurat) in a historical inscription comes from the records of Sennacherib, in which he claims to have destroyed Esagila and the temple tower (Eric M. Meyers, ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), s.v. "Babylon," by Evelyn Klengel-Brandt, 1:251. Sennacherib's son, Esarhaddon (r. 680-669 BC), rescinded his father's policy and undertook the rebuilding of Babylon (though retaining the image of Marduk in Assyria that Sennacherib had removed).

Under the rule of Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar (Nabu-kudurri-usur, r. 605-562 BC), the Neo-Babylonian Empire reached the zenith of its power. By 539 BC, however, the Babylonians were defeated by the armies of Cyrus the Great, king of the Persians and Medes. The city of Babylon itself was not destroyed on that occasion in 539 BC, and in fact it continued to thrive and remain a key city of the Persian Empire for many years. It even became the richest satrapy in the empire and was regarded by Herodotus as the world's most splendid city.<sup>2</sup> Under the Persian King Darius, it even received some improvements. Georges Roux notes, "In Babylon, his winter residence, Darius built an arsenal, a palace for the crown prince and an *apadana* (i.e. a hall supported by columns, in the Persian style) for his own palace."<sup>3</sup>

In 482 BC, Babylon revolted against the Persian king Xerxes I. This led to the destruction of Babylon's fortifications and temples, as well as the melting down of the golden image of Babylon's primary deity, Marduk. Oates writes,

Classical authors describe Xerxes' capture of the rebellious city after several months' siege, and state that it was then sacked, its fortifications demolished; the great temple of Marduk and others were burnt to the ground and the statue of Marduk carried away as a spoil of war. Xerxes dealt severely with the Babylonians: the satrapy was abolished and incorporated with that of Assyria, the portions to the west being made into a separate unit. Great estates were confiscated and handed over to the Persians, and henceforth the country was ferociously taxed.<sup>4</sup>

The matter of the temples being destroyed, however, is subject to debate. Georges Roux writes, "Since Esagila and other sanctuaries are mentioned in later texts, it is probable that they fell into ruin through lack of maintenance in the course of the following centuries rather than through violent destruction."<sup>5</sup>

Despite the setback by Xerxes I, Babylon continued to flourish within the Persian Empire until Alexander the Great defeated the Persians. On October 1, 331 BC, Alexander's victory at the battle of Gaugamela opened the road to Persia and Babylon. Alexander was warmly welcomed by the citizens of Babylon, and after making sacrifice to Marduk he ordered the restoration of Esagila and resolved to make Babylon his eastern capital.<sup>6</sup> His plans were cut short by his death in Babylon in 323 BC in the

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<sup>2</sup> Herodotus (484?-425? BC), considered the first Greek historian, attempted to write a history of the world up to his own time. He did travel in the Middle East, though some scholars doubt that he ever visited Babylon. Apparently, however, he did rely on first-hand reports, and described Babylon. We also know of the writings of Ctesias regarding Babylon (*Persica*, a history of Assyria-Babylonia in 23 books, covered the period of the ancient Assyrian monarchy, the founding of the Persian kingdom, and the history of Persia down to 398 BC). Ctesias (b. ca. 416 BC) was a physician to Artaxerxes II Memnon, and was present at the Battle of Cunaxa in 401 BC where he was credited with saving the king's life. Though his original works are now lost, later authors (including Diodorus Siculus [1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC] and Plutarch [AD 46? – AD 120?]) made extensive use of them. For further help with classical references to Babylon, see the appendices of W. H. Lane, *Babylonian Problems* (London: John Murray, 1923).

<sup>3</sup> Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 409.

<sup>4</sup> Joan Oates, *Babylon*, rev. ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1986), 138. Georges Roux is more specific about the report from the classical historians. He writes, ". . . Herodotus . . . merely states that Xerxes took from Esagila the colossal golden statue of Marduk. Yet Arrian, Ctesias and Strabo suggest that the city-walls were dismantled and the temples razed to the ground" (*Ancient Iraq*, 409). [Arrian (d. AD 180) was a Greek historian and philosopher who authored a work describing the campaigns of Alexander the Great].

<sup>5</sup> Roux, 409.

<sup>6</sup> In the first century AD, Quintus Curtius Rufus wrote a history of Alexander the Great. This account

ancient palace of Nebuchadnezzar. At the time of his death, he had actually begun rebuilding its great ziggurat, but was only in the initial stages of its restoration.<sup>7</sup> As a result of Alexander's untimely death, Babylon effectively saw the end of its role as a capital city. Babylon lost its prestige with the Seleucid kings that followed Alexander.

Following Alexander's death, his generals struggled for control of his empire, and eventually Seleucus (a former satrap of Babylon) gained control of the Asian province that contained Babylon. Babylon's prestige was significantly reduced when Seleucus ordered the founding of a new city, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, about 90 km to the north of Babylon.<sup>8</sup> Antiochus I (281-261 BC), the successor to Seleucus, made Seleucia the Royal City about 275 or 274 BC, and then ordered that the civilian population of Babylon be moved there. Roux notes, "Seleucia-on-the-Tigris (Tell 'Umar, opposite Ctesiphon), founded . . . probably on the site of Semitic Upâ (Opis), was the largest city not only of Mesopotamia but of the whole Seleucid kingdom, with a population of about 600,000."<sup>9</sup>

Had Babylon remained the capital city of the Macedonian dominion, her prestige would have had a greater chance of survival. Although a remnant of people still inhabited the ancient site of Babylon, the city's importance never recovered from this act. Nevertheless, some efforts were made by the Macedonian rulers to revive the half-ruined city. Roux notes,

In the last royal inscription in Akkadian that we possess Antiochus I (281-260 B.C.) calls himself 'provider of Esagila and Ezida', like the Chaldaean kings, and declares that he 'formed with his august hands' and brought from 'Hatti' (Syria) the first bricks of these temples. A tablet dated in the reign of Seleucus III (225-223 B.C.) shows that regular offerings were still made to a number of Babylonian gods in their own shrines. Remains of Hellenistic architecture were discovered on the mound of Bâbil and on the site of Nebuchadnezzar's palace. Under Antiochus IV (175-164 B.C.) – the king who did the most to propagate the Greek culture – Babylon received a gymnasium and a remarkable Greek theatre, later enlarged by the Parthians.<sup>10</sup>

After the Parthians conquered Babylonia in 126 BC, the Seleucid kingdom was greatly reduced.<sup>11</sup> At that time, Artabanus II assumed control over the Tigris-Euphrates valley, and Babylon remained under Parthian control for quite some time (except for two brief periods of Roman occupation under

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included Alexander's exploits in Babylon and the monumental intentions that he planned for the city.

<sup>7</sup> According to Klengel-Brandt ("Babylon," 254), "The tower itself, as the literary sources testify, had been torn down in the time of Alexander the Great with the intention of rebuilding it."

<sup>8</sup> Regarding Seleucia, William S. LaSor notes, "It was built largely with materials brought from Babylon, and its founding marks the end of Babylon's political significance. Seleucia was populated with Macedonians and Greeks and also included many Jews and Syrians. Avidius Cassius burned the city in A.D. 164, and when Septimius Severus passed through the region on his Parthian campaign of 198 the site was completely abandoned" (Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979-1988], s.v. "Seleucia," by Wm. S. LaSor).

<sup>9</sup> Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, 415.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 416. The theater mentioned by Roux has been re-excavated and restored not so long ago by the Iraqi Directorate of Antiquities (cf. *Iraq XXXIV* [1972], 139-40—published by the British School of Archaeology in Iraq). Aside from the royal inscriptions, G. Roux (420) mentions that the last cuneiform text known so far is that of an astronomical 'almanac' written about AD 74-75 (cf. A. J. Sachs and J. Schaum-Berger, *Late Babylonian Astronomical and Related Texts* [Providence, Rhode Island, 1955]).

<sup>11</sup> The Parthians were a branch of the Scythians who appeared for the first time in history ca. 250 BC.

Trajan [r. AD 98-117] and Septimius Severus [r. AD 193-211]). The Parthian kingdom finally fell under Sassanian domination in AD 227. But traces of the Parthian occupation have been found in the excavations of Babylon (as well as numerous other sites in southern Iraq).

There was some continuance of a Babylonian city and people even until the first century AD, though of very little importance.<sup>12</sup> Roux points out,

. . . there is no evidence that Esagila, the temple of the former national god Marduk, was kept in repair. Indeed, Babylon probably suffered more damage in the repression which followed the revolt of a certain Hymeros in 127 B.C., or in the civil war between Mithridates II and Orodes in 52 B.C., than in the hands of Xerxes.<sup>13</sup>

Strabo (a Greek geographer and historian writing about 24 BC) described Babylon as empty and desolate for the most part.<sup>14</sup> Diodorus Siculus (80 BC – ca. 15 BC), a Greek historian who authored the universal history *Bibliotheca historica* late in the 1st century BC, indicated that Esagila along with the royal palaces had sunk into ruins and that only a small area of the city was still inhabited.<sup>15</sup>

In AD 115 or 116, the Roman Emperor Trajan wintered in Babylon during his campaign against the Parthians, though he found little there except for "mounds and stones and ruins."<sup>16</sup> Dyer, however, reports that Pausanias had written that the temple of Bel (Marduk) and the walls were still standing, though most of the city was abandoned.<sup>17</sup> According to Septimius Severus (Roman Emperor from AD 193–211), the site was deserted by AD 200. Subsequently, the site of Babylon remained virtually lost until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, having been gradually buried beneath the sand of the desert and the silt of the valley.

## EARLY SITE VISITATIONS

### 1. Early Explorers Prior to AD 1600

Ibn Hawkal (10th century AD), an Islamic geographer, was one of the first to "rediscover" the ancient site of Babylon and describe its remains. He noted,

Babel is a small village, but the most ancient in all Irak. The whole region is denominated Babel from this place. The kings of *Canaan* [he means Chaldea] resided there; and ruins of great edifices still remain.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Oates reports that the religious functions of Esagila and a college of priests (the 'Anu-Enlil priesthood') were still operative late in the Seleucid period. Furthermore, "A text of 93 BC reveals that at least parts of Esagila were at that time still used for religious services" (*Babylon*, 142).

<sup>13</sup> Roux, 421.

<sup>14</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, XVI, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*, II, 9. Pliny (AD 23-79), however, suggested that Esagila was still in existence (VI, 30).

<sup>16</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 68.30.1.

<sup>17</sup> Charles H. Dyer, *The Rise of Babylon; Sign of the End Times* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1991), 128. He cites Pausanias, 8.33.3. Pausanias (AD 143–176) was a Greek traveler and geographer (born in Lydia).

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Hawkal; quoted in Thomas Maurice, *Observations on the Ruins of Babylon, As Recently Visited*

Benjamin Bar Joanna, a learned Jewish merchant of Tudela (in the kingdom of Aragon in Spain), traveled to the Ancient Near East in AD 1160 and made significant notes on Nineveh and Babylon (though he appears to have confused the site of Babylon with Borsippa that lay slightly to the south—he saw the Tower of Babel in the massive ruins of the ziggurat of Borsippa). His interest was more with the Jews in the vicinity (and their synagogues) than with Babylon itself. His notes were translated from Spanish into English and French. Dyer notes,

Benjamin made two important observations: first, he reported that ten thousand Jews lived in the village of Al Hillah six miles from Babylon; second, he noted that the Jews had an active "Synagogue of Daniel" in Babylon one mile from the ruins of Nebuchadnezzar's temple, probably the temple of Marduk.<sup>19</sup>

A German physician and explorer named Leonhard Rauwolff travelled to Baghdad *ca.* 1575 and claimed to have seen the ruins of Babylon (though from his remarks it appears that he was confused regarding the true location).<sup>20</sup> In 1583 the English merchant John Eldred also travelled to the regions of Babylonia, though he appears to have mistaken the tower of Babylon for another located at the Cassite city of 'Aqar Quf (ancient Dur Kurigalzu).<sup>21</sup>

## 2. Pietro della Valle (*ca.* 1616)

Pietro della Valle was an Italian nobleman who visited Babylon in 1616 (and Ur in 1625). Several earlier travelers had attempted to identify the site of Babylon, but thought it lay elsewhere. Pietro della Valle correctly identified the site of Bâbil in 1616. He noted that villagers were mining and selling Babylon's kiln-fired bricks, and he himself brought back some bricks to Europe on which were inscribed writing in certain unknown characters.<sup>22</sup> H. F. Vos notes, "Apparently he was the first to send copies of cuneiform inscriptions back to Europe and the first to engage in limited rummaging among the ruins of Babylon with the aid of a pick."<sup>23</sup>

His chief interest was in the ancient writing of the region. Saggs reports,

In a letter in 1621 he gave copies of some of the signs, composed of groups of wedges, and in 1625 he was commenting on wedge-shaped inscriptions on bricks he had collected

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*and Described by Claudius James Rich* (London: Privately printed, 1816), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Dyer, 128. Dyer cites as a source of information M. N. Adler, "Benjamin of Tudela, Itinerary of," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 17 (1905): 514-30.

<sup>20</sup> James H. Wellard, *By The Waters of Babylon* (Newton Abbot, England: Readers Union, 1973), 21.

<sup>21</sup> For information on John Eldred, see R. Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* (London, 1589).

<sup>22</sup> By the time of C. J. Rich (roughly 200 years after della Valle), this practice of carting off the bricks had taken a heavy toll on the archaeological site. Regarding the mound of Amran which included Esagila, Rich wrote, ". . . the greatest supplies have been and are now constantly drawn from it, they appear still to be abundant. But the operation of extracting the bricks has caused great confusion, and contributed much to increase the difficulty of decyphering the original design of this mound, as in search of them the workmen pierce into it in every direction, hollowing out deep ravines and pits, and throwing up the rubbish in heaps on the surface. In some places they have bored into the solid mass, forming winding caverns and subterranean passages, which, from their being left without adequate support, frequently bury the workmen in the rubbish" (C. J. Rich; quoted in Thomas Maurice, *Observations on the Ruins of Babylon*, 22).

<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979-1988), s.v. "Archaeology of Mesopotamia," by H. F. Vos), 1:263.

from ruins at a site identified centuries later as ancient Ur. There was a Latin-derived word 'cuneiform' which the science of Anatomy already used to express the sense 'wedge-shaped', and from 1700 this was adopted as the standard term in English for this kind of writing. Germans called it *Keilschrift* ('wedge-writing').<sup>24</sup>

## 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY SITE VISITATIONS

### 3. Karsten Niebuhr (ca. 1765)

Niebuhr (1733-1815) also equated Bâbil with Babylon about 1765, as had Emmanuel Ballyet in 1755. In 1761, Niebuhr had been sent out by the King of Denmark, Frederick V, on a scientific mission to gather as much information as possible on various subjects, including archaeology (Niebuhr was a mathematician by profession). When Niebuhr found numerous inscribed bricks lying around the great mounds at Hillah on the Euphrates, he deduced that the site was probably Babylon itself. Klengel-Brandt notes, however, that Niebuhr mistakenly believed the ruins in Borsippa were those of the Babylonian tower.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the numerous inscriptions that his team copied from Persepolis were made available to philologists to study.



Karsten Niebuhr

### 4. Joseph de Beauchamp (1780 and 1790)

Beauchamp (a distinguished French abbé and astronomer) was the papal vicar-general at Baghdad. During the years 1780 and 1790, he made visits to the ruins of Babylon and conducted what is believed to be the first *minor* excavations of the site (he cut the first archaeological trenches in the ruins), including the mounds of Hillah and El Kasr (The Castle), the latter being the mound under which Robert Koldewey would make some of his greatest discoveries. He collected inscribed bricks and other small artifacts that were brought back to France. He also made detailed and accurate accounts of Babylon, and noted the existence of massive inscribed cylinders (though he was unable to obtain one). Unfortunately, however, the interest in inscribed bricks may have caused greater discoveries to be overlooked. Wellard explains:

For the abbé was told by the workmen who were employed to dig for bricks in the Hillah mound that they had found large, thick walls and rooms containing clay vessels, engraved marbles, and bronze statues. One room was decorated with figures of cows on varnished bricks (the reference is obviously to the enamelled bulls later found by Koldewey along the length of the Processional Way); and other bricks, according to the workmen, showed pictures of lions, the sun, the moon, and so forth. All of these artefacts had been thrown aside as worthless to the builders, who simply wanted the hard, kiln-baked bricks.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> H. W. F. Saggs, *Babylonians* (Peoples of the Past series, vol. 1), (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 9-10.

<sup>25</sup> Evelyn Klengel-Brandt, "Babylon," 251.

<sup>26</sup> Wellard, *By the Waters of Babylon*, 23.

Nevertheless, his reports led to an interest in antiquities by the British East India Company circles of London. The latter authorized representatives in Baghdad to conduct archaeological prospecting.

## 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY ARCHAEOLOGY AT BABYLON

### 5. Claudius James Rich (early 1800's)

Rich (1787-1821) served as Resident of the British East India Company in Baghdad from 1808 until his death about the year 1821 (from cholera). He was fluent in several oriental languages including Turkish and Arabic, and he wrote some informative memoirs on Babylon, Nineveh and other Mesopotamian sites. He made surface explorations of Babylon in 1811/12 and again in 1817. He measured the various mounds that encased the ruins, and made the first accurate plan of the site of Babylon (which was published in 1815). Through him, the first antiquities (including some cylinder seals) found their way to Europe, to both the Louve and the British Museum. Thomas Maurice, a contemporary of Rich, lamented that the famous ancient walls of Babylon still remained a mystery:



One of the Babylonian seals, found by C. J. Rich.

. . . although we have doubtless ascertained the site, and from evidence both external and internal, many of the public edifices of Babylon; yet the actual extent of the circumference of that great city, from the varying accounts of the ancient historians, remains still disputable, and must ever do so, unless the vestiges of its vast walls shall hereafter be accurately traced by still more assiduous local research.<sup>27</sup>

### 6. Minor Visitations Following Rich

Following the research of C. J. Rich, there were several minor explorations at the Babylon site in the first half of the 19th century. Robert Ker Porter, an English painter, mapped the ruins of Babylon in 1818, recorded his impressions, and illustrated them with romantic views of the ruins. Yet he mistakenly identified the Tower of Babylon with Birs Nimrud. In 1827 James S. Buckingham and Mellino made further surface explorations of the site. In 1828 Robert Mignan made soundings of the site. He cut a shaft into the site and removed a number of clay tablets, as well as an inscribed clay cylinder in situ. In 1841, Coste and Flandin made further mappings of the ruins.

### 7. Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (1846)

Rawlinson is not noted for archaeological work at Babylon, but he made some significant contributions to the decipherment of the Akkadian language utilized by the Babylonians—an achievement which would prove invaluable for archaeologists after him who would undertake a thorough excavation and study



Henry C. Rawlinson

<sup>27</sup> Maurice, *Observations*, 30.



of Babylon. Rawlinson himself was an excellent linguist. Having served as an intelligence officer in the East India Company in India, he was posted as a military adviser to Persia in 1835. By the end of 1843, he was appointed British Resident and Consul in Baghdad, and in the ensuing years played a major role in the decipherment of the famous trilingual Bisitun inscription (sometimes called Behistun). By the autumn of 1846, he was able to make sense out of much of the cuneiform inscriptions on Babylonian bricks from Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon (with about 50% accuracy), and by 1850 (with the help of a Kurdish boy) was able to publish his decoding of the cuneiform script. Rawlinson returned to England in 1855, and there devoted himself to the translation and publication of cuneiform texts.

### 8. Henry Austen Layard (1850)

Layard (1817-1894) was an Englishman of Huguenot descent, famous for his archaeological work at Nimrūd (biblical Calah) and Nineveh. He was commissioned by the British Museum to direct their work in Mesopotamia. In 1847, he successfully removed two of the most spectacular finds from Nimrud—a colossal bull and lion—where they soon were put on display in the British Museum. In the same year, he managed to publish an account of his excavations in the form of a travel journal that quickly became a best seller. He also published a volume containing the principal cuneiform texts as well as drawings of his finds. A second expedition to Mesopotamia was conducted during the years 1848-51. During this time he alternated his supervision of the digs at Calah and Nineveh and concentrated on Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh and the ziggurat of Calah. His work at Kuyunjik (Nineveh) was particularly rewarding. Saggs writes,

His finds at Kuyunjik were spectacular; they included a group of ten colossal bulls which formed the grand entrance to a palace, as well as some fine bas-reliefs depicting battle scenes, among them the siege of biblical Lachish by Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:13-17). But the most important find was a major archive of cuneiform tablets. This was part of a library collected by Assyrian kings, chiefly Ashurbanipal in the seventh century BC; Layard's successor, Hormuzd Rassam, excavated the rest of it in 1853, and these tablets, now in the British Museum, remain one of the most important sources for cuneiform studies.<sup>28</sup>

In 1850, Layard was able to take soundings at Babylon. He dug into three mounds (including the mound of Babel and the hill of Kasr) but soon concluded that the place was not worth his time.



H. A. Layard copying reliefs from the Hall of Archives in Sennacherib's palace at Kuyunjik.



Sir Henry Austen Layard  
(1817-1894)  
Father of Assyriology

<sup>28</sup> Saggs, *Babylonians*, 15.



## 9. Fresnel with Oppert and Thomas (1852-54)

A French counsel and orientalist by the name of Fulgence Fresnel along with the German Assyriologist Jules Oppert (and an architect named Felix Thomas) made the first systematic excavations of Babylon in July-Nov of 1852.<sup>29</sup> Based on their work, Oppert published the first relatively detailed map of Babylon. They found numerous inscriptions, though unfortunately their finds (forty-one crates!) were lost when a boat containing them foundered at Qurna (or Korna) on the Tigris in May 1855. By 1869, however, Oppert recognized that the third language of the Behistun inscription was Elamite.

## 10. Hormuzd Rassam (1879)

Rassam (1826-1910), a native Christian from Mosul, had been the assistant to Layard during the time of their work in Assyria, and took over for him during the 1850's. He was the brother of the locally born British Consular representative in Mosul and eventually became the 'Supervisor of Excavations' for the British Museum. Rassam became famous in his own right for his work at Nimrud, and was commissioned to reopen excavations in Babylon in 1876. In the course of his work, he unearthed a large collection of business documents of the house of Egibi and the famous Cyrus Cylinder (giving Cyrus' account of his conquest of Babylon).



Hormuzd Rassam

During the latter part of the 1800's, the site continued to be damaged. Klengel-Brandt explains:

The plundering of the ruins of Babylon continued to increase; in addition to the baked bricks, the locals also took stone monuments, which they burned for gypsum . . . . The destruction of the ruins did not end, . . . , and many important buildings were so thoroughly destroyed it was later impossible to identify their ground plans.<sup>30</sup>

## THE EXCAVATIONS OF ROBERT KOLDEWEY

Following the work of E. Sachau (minor excavations in 1897/98), the newly-formed German Oriental Society (Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft) took over responsibility for the excavations of Babylon. Robert Koldewey was then put in charge to plan and carry out scientific excavations throughout the years 1899-1917. The excavators's goals included the uncovering of the city plan, the investigation of Babylonian architecture, and a definitive identification of the Tower of Babel. Although the high ground water levels prevented them from



<sup>29</sup> J. Oppert, *Expédition scientifique en Mésopotamie exécutée par ordre du gouvernement de 1851 à 1854*. Vol. I: Rélation du voyage et résultat de l'expédition (1863). Vol. II: Déchiffrement des inscriptions cunéiformes (1859). Atlas, with text by Oppert and drawings by Thomas. [Reports of the scientific expedition in Mesopotamia carried out by order of the Government from 1851 to 1854 by Fulgence Fresnel, Felix Thomas and Jules Oppert].

<sup>30</sup> Klengel-Brandt, 252.

reaching the Old Babylonian strata, they were successful in exposing much of the layers from the Neo-Babylonian period.

Koldewey was born Sept 10, 1855 in Blankenburg am Harz, duchy of Brunswick, Germany.<sup>31</sup> He died Feb 4, 1925 in Berlin, Germany. He began his career as a field archaeologist in Assus of western Turkey in 1882. By 1887, he made an expedition to Iraq, and then from 1888 to 1892 to Zincirli Höyük, Turkey, site of the Hittite city of Samal. There he gained experience in preparing surveys, maps, drawings, and site reconstructions. After a teaching stint in Görlitz, Germany, Koldewey chose the site of Babylon in 1897 for a major excavation and was able to obtain the backing of the German Oriental Society. For nearly 18 years he carried out his archaeological work at Babylon with very little interruption, until forced in March of 1917 to close down his excavations by the approach of the British Expeditionary Force under General Maude, though his projected labors were far from finished.

Koldewey started work at the site on March 26, 1899, when his team cut an exploratory trench on the east side of the Kasr, a mound of 1.6 km near the Euphrates River.<sup>32</sup> By 1900, his team had worked on the Procession Way, the temple of Ninmach (a goddess of the dead), the palaces, and the center of the mound Amran ibn Ali, where the site of the famed Esagila (the Temple of Marduk) was ascertained. The excavation of the Ninurta temple in 1901 and the Ishtar gate in 1902 followed this. Other major efforts were directed at the Persian buildings (1906/07), Merkes (1908), and the rest of the Kasr (1911/12). The outer walls of the temple of Esagila were identified during the period December 1910 to July 1911. In the course of his excavations, Koldewey discovered cuneiform inscriptions, statues, stelae (pillars), terra-cotta reliefs, cylinder seals, pottery, glassware, and jewelry.



A photograph from the first day of the excavation of the Ishtar Gate in Babylon (1 April 1902)

Koldewey was able to locate most of the eight major city gates, each of which was dedicated to one of the principal deities worshipped by the Babylonians. The most famous of all was the Gate of Ishtar located on the north side of the city. In addition, he excavated another three and identified still others. "To the east was the Gate of Marduk, and also that of Ninurta, god of hunting and of war; and to the south, the Gate of Urash, an old Akkadian deity of the holy city of Dilbat not far south of Babylon."<sup>33</sup> He was able to identify still four others with reasonable certainty. To the north was the Gate of Sin,

<sup>31</sup> "Koldewey, Robert" *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. <<http://www.eb.com:180/bol/topic?idxref=254430>> [Accessed 12 December 1999].

<sup>32</sup> André Parrot, *Babylon and the Old Testament*, trans. B. E. Hooke (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1958), 21.

<sup>33</sup> Albert Campdor, *Babylon*, trans. and adapted by Elsa Coult (New York: Putnam, 1958), 145. The names of these eight main gates are known by virtue of the descriptions of the city found on cuneiform documents that have been found (cf. Oates, 152).

the Moon God, while to the south were the Gates of Enlil, the Sky God, and Shamash, the Sun God. To the west was the Gate of Adad, the Storm God.

Excavation of the site posed several challenges for Koldewey, not the least of which was the weather. Working the year round proved a gruelling task, as summer shade temperatures often reached as high as 50°C. The river and water levels also complicated his task. For example, the present course of the Euphrates River differs from its course in the days of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. It presently flows further west of its original location. Originally, the Euphrates divided the inner city into two sectors. The bulk of the excavation work has been largely concentrated in the older eastern



General view of the Ishtar Gate of Babylon, which leads through the inner city wall (as seen from the southeastern corner of the Northern Palace). This shows the earliest unglazed portion of the gate.

sector (where most of the principal buildings were located). Much less is known of the area that originally lay west of the river (and which is now partly beneath its bed). Because of the

near proximity to the river, excavators encountered serious limitations to their diggings. Campdor notes that at forty feet down lay ruins dating to the time of Hammurabi and the First Dynasty of Babylon.<sup>34</sup> Because of the rise in the water level, however, it was impossible to investigate below these.

In addition to these difficulties, there was also the immensity of the ancient city that had to be considered, and the mounds themselves were widely scattered.<sup>35</sup> Joan Oates has pointed out that the ruins of Babylon extend over an area of some 850 hectares and constitute the largest ancient settlement in Mesopotamia.<sup>36</sup> By way of comparison, greater Nineveh is about 750 hectares, and the mound of Ur only 55.

When approaching the site from the north, the Bâbil mound (also called Mujelibe) is the first to be encountered. Rising about 22 meters above the level of the plain, it is roughly square with sides approximately 248 meters long. A great quantity of the bricks had already been removed and used elsewhere for building material before the archaeologists even arrived. Fortunately, due to inscriptions, it was possible to identify the remains of the summer palace of Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BC). This had been protected by a wall, parts of which still remained on the north and east.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>35</sup> Parrot, 22-23.

<sup>36</sup> Oates, 144.

About a mile or more to the south on the site now known as the Kasr (castle) is the primary gateway to the ancient city. From here the city extends for more than a mile along the bank of, or not far away from, the river to the modern village of Jumjumma.<sup>37</sup>

The famous Processional Way consisted first of that portion coming from the north and which led to the Ishtar Gate (about 250 m. long and 20-24 m. wide). From the Ishtar Gate the Processional Way ran to the southern corner of Etemenanki (wherein stood the famous Babylonian Tower). From there, the Processional Way curved in the direction of the Euphrates, where a large bridge (spanning over 120 m.) crossed the river.



Early picture of the archaeological dig at Babylon showing the Procession Street leading to the Ishtar Gate.

The complexes of Esagila and Etemenanki formed the heart of the ancient city of Babylon. Of premier importance was the temple precinct Esagila, lying under the mound of Amran ibn Ali, in which stood the cult rooms of the chief god Marduk, of Ea (god of water and wisdom), of Nabu (god of the scribal craft), and of other gods and goddesses.<sup>38</sup> Just to the north of

Esagila stood the temple precinct Etemenanki, which housed the remains of the fabled Babylonian tower. It had consisted of six tiers of steps, each one set back from the one below it. At the top, as the seventh tier, stood a high temple to the cult of Marduk.

Despite the interference brought on by World War I, Koldewey's excavations at Babylon were nevertheless highly successful, and stand as one of the great archaeological achievements of all time. Results of the excavations were published in segments over a period of years in various journals.<sup>39</sup> An English translation of Koldewey's book entitled *The Excavations of Babylon* appeared in 1914.

<sup>37</sup>According to Dyer, "Koldewey named four Arab villages situated on the site—Kweiresh, Djumdjumma, Sindjar, and Ananeh" (*The Rise of Babylon*, 130). Dyer reported that he had personally seen the village of Kweiresh in 1987 during a trip to Babylon. At that time, "it was located next to the reconstruction of Nebuchadnezzar's southern palace and just north of the Saddam Hussein Guest House" (130). The village, however, was forced to move during the course of the next year.

<sup>38</sup> Kengel-Brandt, "Babylon," 254.

<sup>39</sup> The official publications of Koldewey's excavations can be found in *Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* 15, 32, 47, 48, 55, 59, 62 (1911-1957). A summary of the earlier of these reports can be found in E. Unger, *Babylon: die heilige Stadt nach der Beschreibung der Babylonier* (Berlin, 1931). Seton Lloyd indicated that Koldewey's own reports appeared in the *Mitteilungen der deutschen Orient Gesellschaft* (MDOG) in the years between 1899 and 1932 (*The Archaeology of Mesopotamia*, rev. ed., [London: Thames & Hudson, 1984], 237).

## EXCAVATIONS SINCE KOLDEWEY

From 1955 to 1968, the Iraq Department of Antiquities carried out further clearances. In 1958, they began work on restoring the Emakh temple, part of the Ishtar Gate, the Processional Way and the palace complex. They also built a half-size model of the complete Ishtar Gate at the entrance to the site. Much of the vast, extraordinary palace of Nebuchadnezzar with its massive throne room for the king (some 180 ft. x 197 ft.), located just southwest of the Ishtar Gate, has now been reconstructed with financial support from the Iraqi government. A museum and rest house have been built on the site, which is also partially covered by the village of Djumdjumma at the southern end. In 1978, the temple of Nabu sa hare, which bordered on the Etemenanki precinct and contained a large library, was uncovered.

Under Heinrich J. Lenzen, the German Archaeological Institute conducted further brief investigations in 1956 at the Greek theatre.<sup>40</sup> In 1966, H. J. Schmidt carried out investigations at the site of Etemenanki.

In May of 2001, when this writer last visited the site of Babylon, the Iraqi government was working diligently to reconstruct many of the walls and ancient buildings, and in other ways to make the site accessible to visitors wishing to stroll through these pathways of old.



Reconstruction of the famous Ishtar Gate at the site of Ancient Babylon.



J. H. Breasted, founder of the Oriental Institute, examining excavations along the Procession Way at Babylon.

<sup>40</sup> See brief reports in *Sumer* since 1958, especially *Sumer* 35 (1979).

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