

Rocío Da Riva

The Inscriptions of Nabopolassar, Amēl-Marduk and Neriglissar

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The Inscriptions of Nabopolassar, Amēl-Marduk and Neriglissar

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Note to the text editions

The Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions published, mentioned, cited and quoted in this book follow the catalogue Da Riva 2008, but a modification in the abbreviations was necessary to avoid confusion and facilitate the use of the Glossary. The Nabonidus inscriptions are cited and quoted according to Schaudig 2001.

Da Riva 2008 (GMTR 4)	SANER 3
Npl	Napl
Nbk	Nebk
Ngl	Negl

In the Glossary, and in contexts that could cause confusion, the texts are cited with the name of the respective king: NaplC21, NebkC21, NeglC21, etc. Otherwise the texts are just cited following the Appendices in Da Riva 2008: C21, C22, etc.

The transliteration of broken, damaged or missing signs is intended to be as consistent as possible: broken and reconstructed signs are marked [dingir], [me], etc.; damaged signs are marked either ʾdingir, ʾme, [d]ingir, [m]e, etc. or ʾdingir, ʾme, etc. depending on the degree of damage observed by the editor. To some extent these indications are subjective and should be considered as such. I follow CAD in using j for the palatal glide, otherwise transcribed as y in other publications.

Abbreviations

The abbreviations in this book follow the abbreviations from the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary (CAD). Other abbreviations used are:

CIS	Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum
CTMMA	Cuneiform Texts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art
GMTR	Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record
KH	Codex Hammurabi
Prism	Nebuchadnezzar Prism (Da Riva forthcoming b)
ST	Nebuchadnezzar Stone Tablet
WBA	Da Riva 2012, Nebuchadnezzar Brisa inscription (archaising exemplar)
WBC	Da Riva 2012, Nebuchadnezzar Brisa inscription (Neo-Babylonian exemplar)

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1 Introduction

1.1 The royal inscriptions as historical sources

Some years ago, when discussing the Assyrian royal inscriptions, H. Tadmor correctly observed that these texts “being by their very nature official documents of self-praise, demand from the historian a judicious critical approach.”¹ He then proceeded to advise the historian not to go to either extreme, i.e. neither to take the texts at face value nor to deny their historicity altogether. Yet, despite Tadmor’s words of advice, the field of Assyriology continues to pay only intermittent attention to this (see the observations in Liverani 1973). The relatively modest historical and historiographical data conveyed in the Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions (especially compared with their Assyrian counterparts)² has been overlooked partly due to the absence of up-to-date editions of the texts,³ and partly due to the discouraging monotony of a seemingly endless and trivial list of building accomplishments and lengthy professions of royal piety. Indeed, Neo-Babylonian inscriptions are not rich in historical data; they contain hardly any direct factual information, and are far less exciting than the Neo-Assyrian texts, in which the conquest of remote lands, the capture of numerous cities and the brutal treatment imposed on those who refused to submit to Assur provide the texts with a dynamism seldom found in other documents in the Mesopotamian historical tradition. The Neo-Babylonian inscriptions are not annalistic texts;⁴ they do not describe royal military exploits set out in chronological order, as the “war reports” of the Assyrian inscriptions do (Grayson 1981: 37; Tadmor 1997: 325), but, despite the absence of detailed reports of battles and of narrative sections of potential “historical” content, the historiographical value of the inscriptions should not be ignored.⁵

1 Tadmor 1981: 13. On the inscriptions, see also Tadmor 1997.

2 The observations presented here refer to the inscriptions of Nabopolassar, Amēl-Marduk and Neriglissar, although some of the reflections can be generalized to the whole corpus of Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions.

3 An exception is Schaudig’s publication of the inscriptions of Nabonidus (Schaudig 2001), a king who has received much more attention than the other monarchs of his dynasty. The Lebanon inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar are published in Da Riva 2009 and Da Riva 2012. The Nebuchadnezzar Prism (“Hofkalender”) is discussed in Jursa 2010 and edited in Da Riva forthcoming b.

4 The term “annals” applied to these texts is misleading, for it is the chronicles that could be called annalistic and not the “highly personal, eloquent and unashamedly biased Assyrian royal inscriptions.” (Tadmor 1997: 325).

5 The following pages are just an attempt to outline the historical information that may be obtained from these texts (contrasted, when possible, with data from other sources); they are

Most of the texts dealt with here are commemorative building inscriptions which refer to the activities of the monarchs with regard to the construction of religious and civil works;⁶ apart from the vases, all the material supports of the inscriptions are either primary architectural elements (bricks, paving stones) or elements that can be inserted into architectural structures, such as foundation cylinders.⁷ Apart from describing the building programme of the monarchs, the inscriptions were used as a means to present the image of the ruler in the way he wished to appear before his present and future audiences (that is, in this world and the next).⁸ Indeed these texts verbalize the Neo-Babylonian royal ideology, expressed in the form of long descriptions of building and religious activities. Moreover, a careful analysis of the contents, the manner in which they are structured and presented (for instance, their compositional techniques and style), of the literary conventions and the choice of a certain type of words, the use of archaizing language, script and signs, etc. may throw some light on the historical context in which the texts were produced.⁹

1.2 The contents of the inscriptions

The inscriptions of **Nabopolassar** (626–605 BCE) commemorate building projects commissioned by the monarch in Babylon, Sippar, and probably also in Larsa. Building works in other cities were probably undertaken as well, but no inscriptions have been preserved. The inscriptions from Babylon include

not to be understood as a comprehensive historical reconstruction of the Neo-Babylonian period, as the inscriptions of only three rulers are presented. An survey of the documentary sources of the period can be found in Da Riva forthcoming a.

6 This kind of document has been labelled *Prunkinschrift*, even though many of the texts were not meant for public “display”; the expression *Übersichtsinschrift* (“summary inscription”) is not specific enough for our purposes. On the ambiguity of the terminology, see Grayson 1981: 37.

7 Many cylinders were discovered in foundation deposits (see Al-Rawi 1985: 1; Allinger-Csollich 1991: 449, Schaudig 2001: 345). But not all the preserved cylinders functioned as foundation inscriptions; some were copies of inscriptions (Da Riva 2008: 61, with references; for the many exemplars of the Nabonidus Ehulhul-cylinder, Schaudig 2001: 412). A brief review of the material supports can be found in Da Riva 2008: 33–43.

8 The king was not necessarily the composer of the inscriptions, but the use of the first person singular, combined with the occasional illeism, conveys the impression that the texts are the product of royal volition. The matter of the authorship of these texts is complicated and deserves a full study. On the composers and the composition processes, see Schaudig 2001: 69–71; Da Riva 2008: 44ff.

9 See some brief remarks in Da Riva 2008: 44ff.

the temple é.PA.GÌN.ti.la (C12), the ziqqurra Etemenanki (B6, C31), the city walls Nēmetti-Enlil (C23) and Imgur-Enlil (C11, C32), the embankment (B1, B3, B5) and the wall of the Arahtu (Arahtu) (B2, B4); the texts from Sippar deal with works in the E-edinna temple (C22), and at the Euphrates (B7, C21); and the text from Larsa is too fragmentary to identify (C011).

With the exception of é.PA.GÌN.ti.la and Etemenanki in Babylon, and the E-edinna in Sippar, the building work is civic rather than religious: the regulation of the course of the rivers, the construction of quays and city walls, for example. This is the kind of building programme one would expect from a monarch who aimed to establish normality in the cities of his newly conquered country after decades of internal political struggle, modest economic growth,¹⁰ an almost permanent state of conflict with Assyria, and more than ten years of civil war. The fact that the inscriptions only refer to constructions in Babylon and Sippar is surprising, since one would also expect to find extensive building programmes in places such as Cutha, Borsippa,¹¹ and especially in Uruk, Nabopolassar's place of origin (Jursa 2007), but no royal inscription or reference to building in these or other cities has been found so far. This paucity in the documentation cannot be attributed only to the haphazardness of the archaeological evidence; there are plenty of inscriptions referring to a given building, but no archaeological fieldwork (or very little) has been conducted there and/or at its site.¹² Of course, inscriptions could be moved from their original location and thus acquire a secondary use,¹³ but the texts were frequently copied (by scribes, by trainee scribes, etc., see Schaudig 2001: 46) and circulated among the schools in the different cities, and so they might end up in rather unexpected places. Finally, uncontrolled digging can also bring to light material from unexplored sites. Leaving aside these contextual considerations, a final argument can be put forward: with the exception of the references to the victory of the Assyrians and to some idealized autobiographic data referring to Nabopolassar's early years, the inscriptions are extremely sparse as regards the

10 Note Brinkman 1984: 107f. tracking a gradual, but noticeable upturn in Babylonian economy from 650 on, cf. Frame 1992: 199ff.

11 The epithet “provider of Esagil and Ezida” (used previously by the Assyrians) should be understood as a standard epithet of the dynasty, and not as actual evidence of special building activities commissioned in the temples, even though building works of this kind cannot be ruled out, given the nationwide significance of Nabû's main temple in Borsippa. On the title, see Seux 1967: 372f.; Waerzeggers 2010: 5.

12 Two significant examples are Nebuchadnezzar's Marad cylinder inscriptions (Da Riva 2008: C210 and C32) and Nabonidus' Ehulhul-cylinder (Schaudig 2001: 2.12, pp. 409–40).

13 See Schaudig 2001: 43 for the use of Nabonidus' stele as paving stones in a mosque in Harran.

activities other than the ones directly referred to in the text in question. Indeed, one thing that immediately catches the eye when reading Nabopolassar's inscriptions is the absence of a long list of building achievements, so characteristic in the texts of other kings of his dynasty. Although his inscriptions deal with constructions, they contain nothing that remotely resembles the long building curriculum recorded by Nebuchadnezzar in his texts.¹⁴ In fact, Nabopolassar's inscriptions lack any references to building projects commissioned elsewhere in Babylonia. In the texts the description of the building project is a mere literary device, a means to convey the real information the king wishes to transmit in the inscriptions: his divine appointment and his victory over the Assyrians (achieved with the aid of the Babylonian gods).

As the founder of the dynasty, Nabopolassar had no previous references to use as models for his inscriptions, and despite his lack of royal blood and his controversial ascent to the throne, he did not try to find legitimation by claiming a fictional kinship with earlier Babylonian kings,¹⁵ as Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus were to do after him.¹⁶ In this respect, Nabopolassar as Neriglissar was to do (albeit for other reasons, see below), seems to restrict his attempts at legitimation to his piety and successful military achievements.¹⁷ This ideological discourse might be the consequence of a turbulent historical context, in which many years of war and decades of submission to the Assyrians could have dismantled the institutions and damaged the ideological foundations of Babylonian kingship. In fact, recent studies have demonstrated that Neo-Babylonian political institutions followed Neo-Assyrian models, and many imperial officials bear titles of Assyrian origin (Jursa 2010). Paradoxically, then, despite expelling the Assyrians, the Babylonian kings were establishing the foundations of their administration based on Assyrian institutions and patterns.¹⁸ But this absence of a reference to his family and kin may also reflect Nabopolassar's intention to conceal his origins, which were associated more closely with the rulers of Nineveh than he, as the leader of an anti-Assyrian revolt, would have wished to admit. After all, his paternal family had held important positions in the times of the occupation (Jursa 2007). Moreover, the profanation and destruction of his father's corpse had left him without ancestors and kinship

¹⁴ Long lists of this kind are found in the inscriptions of Brisa (Da Riva 2012), in the three-column cylinder inscriptions, in the Prism (Jursa 2010; Da Riva forthcoming b), and in the Stone Tablet. See the remarks in Da Riva 2008: 96, 110ff.

¹⁵ Jursa 2007: 130–31.

¹⁶ See Da Riva 2008: 15, 17, with references.

¹⁷ A very good study of the historicity of Nabopolassar's inscriptions is Beaulieu 2003.

¹⁸ On this issue and other examples of Assyrian influence in Babylonia, see Da Riva forthcoming b.

connections to whom he could refer.¹⁹ So Nabopolassar had to create a fictional autobiography to justify his pretensions to the crown, and he decided to place the emphasis on two points: a) his ratification by means of divine appointment; b) his military victory over the Assyrians.

The first point is common to many Mesopotamian monarchs, especially if they lack the needed pedigree to justify their political pretensions: they project themselves as divine appointees, sought out, found and selected by the gods as a result of their outstanding qualities. To show that he is worthy of this election, the monarch must fulfil his obligations towards the gods. A paramount duty was the construction, or the restoration, of the temples and chapels of the divinities who had sponsored him, but also of the civil constructions that guarantee the prosperity of the land, particularly canals and city walls. Nabopolassar's zeal in the preservation and restoration of religious cults and rites which had been interrupted as a result of a long period of unrest (Da Riva 2001: 40–45; see also Da Riva forthcoming a), is a natural consequence of his status as a divine appointee. This idea is clearly expressed in one of his texts, NaplC21/1 I 5–7: “When the great lord Marduk, gave me his solemn command to provide for the cultic centres and to renew the sanctuaries (...)” The central ideas of the divine sanction of Nabopolassar's claims are manifested in the following passage of the Imgur-Enlil inscription of Babylon (C32), which is also a *verbatim* copy of the *inūma*-section of the é.PA.GÌN.ti.la cylinder (C12).²⁰ NaplC32 I 7–23: “When I was young, although I was the son of a nobody, I constantly sought the sanctuaries of my lords Nabû and Marduk. My mind was preoccupied with the establishment of their cultic ordinances and the complete performance of their rituals. My attention was directed towards justice and equity. Šazu, the lord who knows the hearts of the gods of heaven and the netherworld, who observes regularly the clever behaviour(?) of the people, perceived my intentions and placed me, me the insignificant (one) who was not even noticed among the people, to the highest position in my native country.²¹ He called me to the lordship over land and people. He made a favourable tutelary spirit walk at my side and he let (me) succeed in everything I undertook.”

The military victory over the Assyrians, their expulsion from Babylonia and the defeat of Assyria constitute the most frequent leitmotiv in the historical sources pertaining to the reign of Nabopolassar, as Beaulieu correctly

¹⁹ Hence the use of the bizarre expression “son of a nobody”; on this matter see Jursa 2007: 127f.; and more generally Richardson 2007: 193ff.

²⁰ See the commentaries to the editions of the texts in 2.2.2 and 2.2.7, and see below 1.3.

²¹ Nabopolassar clearly stresses his status as a Babylonian.

pointed out (Beaulieu 2003: 1*). This topic is not only present in the royal inscriptions, but also in other literary and historical texts that refer to Nabopolassar and to the crucial events at the beginning of his reign.

As his father had done before him, Nabopolassar rebelled against his overlords, this time successfully (Jursa 2007). In the battle, the Babylonian king is the instrument of divine punishment. The trope of Marduk's punishment and Babylonia's revenge (made real by the heroic deeds of the king) is present in most of Nabopolassar's royal inscriptions and in some later sources, whose authors probably used the primary texts as models for their composition. The parallels between some of Nabopolassar's inscriptions and later documents are striking:

Gerardi 1986: 35 ll. 12–15: [a]-^rna^r tu-ru kur uri^{ki} i-^{hi}-i^t te-re-tu-ú-a ^rib^r-ri lîb-[bi] / ki-i-^rni^r / [a]-^rna^r ^rbe^r-lu-tu kur.kur^{meš} kul-lat-ši-na ú-^šat-^rmi^r-[i^h] / (15) qa-tu-ú-[a]

“[to] avenge Akkad, he inspected my omens, he examined my royal heart, he selected me for dominion over the lands and the peoples of all the lands, all of them, he placed in my hands.”

Nabopolassar cylinder NaplC12/1 8–12: ^dšà.zu (...) ja-a-ši ša-ah-ri-im ša i-na ni-ši-im la ut-tu-ú ša lîb-bi-ja ib-re-e-ma / i-na kur ab-ba-nu-ú iš-ku-na-an-ni a-na re-še-e-tim / a-na be-lu-ut ma-a-ti ù ni-ši-im it-ta-ba ni-bi-ta

“Šazu (...) perceived my intentions and he placed me, me the insignificant (one) who was not even noticed among the people, to the highest position in my native country. He called me to the lordship over land and people.”

The topic of the wars against Assyria appears in many later texts. In the “Nabopolassar Epic” Nabopolassar is mentioned in connection with a battle against Sîn-šum-lišir, the Assyrian chief courtier and usurper. The avenging of Akkad is clearly verbalized in the narrative: “[May you ave]nge Akkad!” (Grayson 1975: 85 III 21), and this accords with similar passages in the royal inscriptions of the king. This avenging is present in the “fictional” correspondence between Nabopolassar and Sîn-šar-iškun mentioned above (Gerardi 1986: 31–38 (BM 55467); Lambert 2005: 203–10, MMA 86.11.370A+ = CTMMA 2: Nr. 44), which share some stylistic features with the “Nabopolassar Epic” (Frahm 2005: 46). The letter written by Nabopolassar (Gerardi 1986) contains a series of accusations levelled at an unnamed Assyrian (Sîn-šar-iškun) written in the past tense on the obverse of the tablet. The Assyrian atrocities serve to justify Nabopolassar's intention to avenge his country, expressed in the present-future tense on the reverse of the text, with an enumeration of the punishments reserved for Assyria (including Marduk's punishments), and the announcement of the coming confrontation. Thus in the text Gerardi 1986: 36 (rev. 10–14): “[Because] of the crimes against Akkad which you committed, Marduk, great lord, [and the

great gods] shall call [you] to account [...] I shall destroy you [...].” The “fictional” response to this missive is the fragmentary letter CTMMA 2: Nr. 44 (Lambert 2005: 203–10) written by the Assyrian king to Nabopolassar on the eve of the conquest of Nineveh (Frahm 2005; Goldstein 2010: 200). In it the king adopts a submissive tone – perhaps, with the Babylonian armies at the gates of his capital, in an attempt to find a diplomatic way out. As in the case of BM 55467 (Gerardi 1986), the authenticity of the letter is a matter of debate. Lambert accepts it (2005: 205), but Frahm has reservations (2005: 43). In my opinion, the texts could either be fictional letters based on genuine ones, or compositions simulating missives and based on previous documents – perhaps not even letters, but narrative texts of some sort – describing the events during the latter years of the Assyrian empire from a Babylonian perspective.²² Another later source which also contains the topic of the avenging of Akkad is the fragmentary historical-literary text Frahm 2010: 1–2 Nr. 8, a Seleucid copy. The document deals with the reconstruction of Babylon, particularly of the Esagil and perhaps also of the Etemenanki. The text mentions a monarch, but his name is not preserved. Some references to cities located on the border between Assyria and Babylonia and to the inner-wall system in Babylon prompt Frahm to identify the unnamed king as Nabopolassar. Finally, we encounter the same theme in the “Dynastic Prophecy” (Grayson 1975: 24–37, Nr. 3), a fragmentary text from Hellenistic times describing the rise and fall of empires and dynasties. No monarch is mentioned by name, but the details given in col. I 7–25 of the text (Grayson 1975: 30–31) make it possible to identify the king as Nabopolassar.

The presence of this theme in the royal inscriptions makes perfect sense, for Nabopolassar was a soldier who led his country against the Assyrians. He had the support of the tribal groups as he was probably a Chaldean of the Dakkūru, and he could count on the army, and on some financial support from interested parties in the country: without this aid, someone of non-royal descent could not have ascended the Babylonian throne.²³

The theme of avenging appears frequently, and considering that Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions tend to omit references to military deeds, the mention of this event clearly reflects the importance it had acquired as a means of royal

²² On the interpretation of the Nabopolassar letter, see Gerardi 1986: 32–34. On the chronology of the texts, see Frahm 2005: 45.

²³ Note that Nabopolassar and the two usurpers Neriglissar and Nabonidus shared several common characteristics: a non-Babylonian origin (Chaldean for Nabopolassar, Aramean for Neriglissar and Nabonidus) and thus the implicit support of the tribal groups, the control of military resources (all three had been military commanders) and family wealth and connections (all three came from important families).

ratification. The victory over Assyria is also echoed in the titulary and epithets chosen to qualify the monarch in the inscriptions,²⁴ and also in some administrative texts dated to the reign of Nabopolassar.²⁵ The victory over the Assyrians was a consequence of divine assistance, in itself a result of Nabopolassar's profound piety and reverence for the gods. In the texts, especially in those dated before 612/609 BCE (see Al-Rawi 1985), the liberation of Babylonia is celebrated in the following manner: "He (=Marduk) had Nergal, the strongest among the gods, march at my side; he killed my enemy, he defeated my adversary, the Assyrian, who had ruled Akkad because of divine anger, and had oppressed the people of the country with his heavy yoke. I, the weak one, the powerless one, who repeatedly seeks the lord of lords with the mighty strength of my lords Nabû and Marduk, I chased them out of the land of Akkad and I had (the Babylonians) throw off their (the Assyrians') yoke." (NapI C32 I 24–33, II 1–5). An interesting variant of the first part of the relative clause (referring to the Assyrians) appears in NapI C12/1 17–18: "(...) the Assyrian, who from distant days had ruled the entire people, and had oppressed the people of the country with his heavy yoke." After the Assyrians had been driven out of Babylonia, a coalition of Medes²⁶ and Babylonians pushed the Assyrians into the heart of their empire. First Nineveh (612 BCE) and then Harran (609 BCE) were seized and destroyed: "When on the command of Nabû and Marduk, who love my kingship, and with the mighty weapon of the awe-inspiring Erra,²⁷ who strikes my enemies with lightning, I killed the Subarean (Assyrian) and turned his lands into tells and ruin heaps..." (NapI C31/1 I 19–27). The deities helping the armies are normally Marduk and Nabû, as one would expect in a Babylonian text of this period, but they might change according to the city or cultic centre where the text had been drafted.²⁸ In Sippar, the sun-god was the architect of the Babylonian victory: "When the great lord Šaššu came to my side, I kill[ed the Subarean (Assyrian) and turned] my ene[my's land] into tells and ruin heaps, (...)." (NapI C22 I 20 II 1–4). The protective and military role ascribed to Šamaš in this text may not just be due to the milieu where the inscription was

24 Titles and epithets are not merely formulaic: they often bear "the personal imprint of the king", see Tadmor 1997: 326 in reference to Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions.

25 See Tadmor 1998: 356–57; for the use of the title *šar kiššati* in the archival documents, see Da Riva 1999: No. 5.

26 The Medes probably played a more decisive role in the downfall of Nineveh than the Babylonians. The Medes had sacked Assur and attacked Kalhu two years earlier (Stronach 1997: 307), while Nabopolassar was still fighting the Assyrians in Babylonia.

27 In the Neo-Babylonian inscriptions, Erra should be identified with Nergal of the Emeslam in Cutha, see below.

28 See Da Riva 2010. For the role of Nabû in Babylonia, see Pomponio 2001: 16–24.