

Babylonian Archaeologists of the(ir) Mesopotamian Past

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That ancient Mesopotamians had a clear sense of historical tradition, and were wont to use that tradition for their own purposes, will come as no surprise to anyone who has followed the scholarly literature of the field. Studies of the reception of the third-millennium BC ruler Sargon of Agade, his sons, and his grandson Naram-Sîn (e.g., Glassner 1986), for example, show how the dynasty was at times reviled, at times reified as a golden age of the past. The Babylonians of the mid-first millennium BCE have actually been called “antiquarians”, particularly engaged with their past (Clay 1912; Unger 1931: 227); but the archaeological component of their activities has not been investigated systematically. In the present paper, I would like to move beyond issues of the availability of sources and an awareness of the past, to review the actual practice of excavation as both a technique and a strategy for recovery of the past in ancient times. The evidence is largely textual, and has generally been the concern of text-based historians, as distinct from archaeologists. Yet when this evidence is looked at from the perspective of ancient claims to knowledge it reinforces the premise that in the first millennium BC at least, under the guise of royal patronage and purpose, the Babylonian past was actively sought *in the field*. The resultant finds then served a variety of purposes that bear a rather striking resemblance to our understanding of the “uses of the past in the present” today.

What is demonstrable is that *they*, like us, mounted campaigns to actively recover ancient remains; and that they declared themselves as having dug in order to reveal works attributed to the ancients. Finally, they also, like at least *some* of us, proclaimed these finds to be the results of a (divinely directed) research design geared to an empirical and positivist recovery of true “traces” of the past - that is, a decidedly processual as distinct from post-processual set of assumptions!

For late 20th century archaeologists of our era, excavations are expected to yield evidence of ancient systems of cognition through patterns of behavior manifest by material culture: architecture, artifacts and texts. So too the Babylonians. While they may not have subjected their finds to modern chemical, osteological, or paleobotanical analysis, they did very much claim to have discovered both ancient materials and evidence of ancient cognition, and to have studied them accordingly. In what follows, I shall cite a number of cases to demonstrate: I. The mounting of *Field Campaigns*, II. The exposure of *Architectural Remains*, III. The discovery of *Texts and Artifacts*, which, once found, were subject to analysis, and IV. The subsequent *Display* of a selected sample of finds.

I. Field Campaigns

The Babylonian king Nabonidus (556-539 BC) is the ruler perhaps best known for his field activities. Interpreting the motives for this engagement has proved to be a bit of a Rorschach test for the intellectual concerns and historical moments of interpreters - from "purely antiquarian interests" (e.g., Hommel 1885 to Albright 1946: 241-244), to an ascription of religious piety (Goossens 1948), to a more recent assessment of profane inclinations and/or overtly political agendas (Beaulieu 1989; Powell 1991). Given Beaulieu's demonstration of the careful selection manifest in Nabonidus' citation of previous rulers and attention to particular sites (1989: 138-142), I am inclined to see the ruler's engagement as a reflection of a joint political-cum-religious strategy embedded within a system of beliefs that included the exposure of signs of the past as a means of serving divine intention. What is important for our purposes is that Nabonidus went about exposing those signs by excavation.

That these antiquarian/archaeological pursuits were not limited to Nabonidus, but rather were practiced by Neo-Babylonian rulers as a whole, particularly Nabopolassar (625-605 BC) and Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BC), has been demonstrated by Goossens (1948: 149). Exactly *where* to excavate was often revealed by divinely-inspired dream or divination; a combination of exploration and subsequent building carried out in Babylon, Uruk, Nippur, Larsa, Sippar, Ur, Agade and Kish. The success rate claimed in recovering ancient sites and building foundations suggests theirs was not a significantly inferior method to those employed in more recent times. And, as in modern field excavation, targets were occasionally revealed by accidents of exposure due to natural phenomena.

It is recorded, for example, that a sandstorm revealed to Nebuchadnezzar the location of the early foundation walls of the shrine of Shamash, the Ebabbar, at Larsa, built by the Kassite king Burnaburiash (Goossens 1948: 154). Not one to be left behind, Nabonidus claimed that another storm exposed the ruins of a platform and ziggurat of Hammurabi, some 700 years earlier than Burnaburiash, which he, Nabonidus, then restored (*ibid*: 155). It is not my aim to argue whether these claims were merely rhetorical, actual, or a combination of both - indeed there is evidence that both the Ur III ziggurat and the *giparu*, residence of the *en*-priestess of Nanna, in Ur had been explored and added to in Neo-Babylonian times (Woolley 1925: 15; Wiseman 1985: pl. IV; Weadock 1975: 112-113). What I would suggest is that embedded within the rhetoric lay an understanding of multiple ways in which earlier ruins could be revealed.

Large-scale exploratory works were undertaken in Sippar and Babylon as well as at Ur, Larsa and Agade. The Neo-Babylonians apparently had no trouble identifying the latter site - an endeavor that has eluded or divided some of our own archaeologists - although if Tell Muhammad is indeed Agade, then the temple revealed there in recent excavations, which shows work by both Nebuchadnezzar II and Nabonidus (Wiseman 1985: pl. VIIIa; Nasir 1979), may well attest to the veracity of the Neo-Babylonian claims! Both kings record work there, but only Nabonidus claimed to have been successful in finding the actual foundations of the Eulmash, the temple to Ishtar of Agade (Goossens 1948: 154; Frame 1993: 23). Nabonidus' account describes following in trenches begun by Nebuchadnezzar, at first with little success. Then, just as the

excavators were about to abandon their search, a fierce rain storm (alternative to the sandstorm at Larsa) is said to have revealed the foundations of the original Naram-Sîn temple.

The various accounts of Nabonidus provide myriad details of the archaeological undertakings: duration of campaigns, trenches excavated, work personnel, and even oversight by individuals who would correspond to our “field directors” today (Goossens 1948: 153-154). The texts concerning the search for the foundations of the Ishtar temple in Agade are perhaps the most informative, of which accounts are preserved from Ur, Sippar and Babylon. In the Babylon version, the king’s purpose is made explicit: *I sought to (re-)build this temple*; and in order to do so, he says: *I opened up the ground inside Agade and looked for the foundation* (Frame 1993: 30). In the lengthier Sippar version, whether fictively to make his own success the more salient, or as historical record, Nabonidus provides the historical background (BM104738): *Kurigalzu, king of Babylon who preceded me, looked for the foundation of Eulmash in Agade, which had not been known since the time of Sargon, king of Babylon, and his son (sic!) Naram-Sîn ... but he did not find it. He wrote and set up an inscription which said ‘I looked ceaselessly for the foundations of the Eulmash, but did not find. Nabonidus then credits Esarhaddon of Assyria, his son Assurbanipal, and Nebuchadnezzar with also having looked for the temple. As for Nebuchadnezzar, he called up his numerous workmen and looked ceaselessly ... he dug deep trenches but did not find the foundation. Nabonidus then continues: For THREE years I excavated in the trench of Nebuchadnezzar (emphasis ours) ... I looked to the right and left ... to the front and rear of the trench ... (But then) a downpour occurred and made a gully ... I said ... to them: “Dig a trench in this gully”. They excavated in that gully and found the foundation of Eulmash.*

One could think it unlikely that previous kings would have left inscriptions stating that they had *failed* in their exploration attempts; however, as G. Frame has documented, in some of the Babylonian inscriptions of Esarhaddon, the king actually does state that he had sought in vain for the original emplacement of a temple in the Eanna in Uruk (Borger 1967: 74 §47:32), and Assurbanipal twice noted that he sought the foundations of a temple before rebuilding - in Sippar and in Uruk (Frame 1993: 35). Thus, the Assyrians in Babylonia can also be attested to have engaged in archaeological reconnaissances, and did in fact record failure as well as success.

Finally, following upon the rebuilding of the Eulmash, subsequent excavations were apparently undertaken in Agade in the old *bit-akitu* and the palace of Naram-Sîn (Beaulieu 1989: 141-142; Joannès 1988). A scribal expert in early scripts, one Nabû-zer-lišir, is credited with several finds as if he were serving as the “field director” of the operations. The reconstruction of this scribe’s career by Joannès helps us to view his archaeological operations as serious professional undertakings; indeed, Weiss had earlier referred to this individual as an “epigrapher-archaeologist” (1975: 447). As Beaulieu has noted, the sequence of discoveries at Agade follows an identical pattern to that at Sippar: excavation, architectural restoration and “finds” - all of which suggests that there was a clear conception of procedure.

II. Architectural Remains

In the vast majority of the Neo-Babylonian archaeological enterprises, the main object of the search was stated to be the foundations of a previous temple, long since fallen into ruin; and the ultimate strategy of recovery included first rebuilding, and then restoration of the old cult. Divine intervention was said to have been involved not only in locating the site, but often also in controlling the conditions of discovery - as Adad is credited with having sent the rainstorm that revealed the ancient foundations in Agade (Frame 1993: 32).

Recovery of the original site must have been important because of the history of religious practice at a sacred and sanctioned place - and perhaps, even, as in the selection of Hindu temple sites in India, because the site was initially determined by a series of divinatory and cultic practices to ensure that *that* location and no other had the requisite auspicious properties. In any case, the fact of Nebuchadnezzar having built a temple to Ishtar on a site other than the original at Sippar was given as the reason for the building's having fallen rapidly into decay (Goossens 1948: 155). By contrast, Nabonidus' discovery of the original foundation, or *temennu*, is presented as evidence for the goddess's favor and the happy future for the restoration project. This was clearly important enough that, when rebuilding the temple to Ishtar at Agade, he declared that he constructed his own brickwork directly "above that (original) foundation ... not (allowing the foundations) to protrude by one finger's breadth nor (allowing them) to recede by one finger-breadth ..." (Lambert 1968-69: rev.iv.18-26; Frame 1993: 26, ii.76-iii.2).

Similarly, Nabopolassar, concerning the wall *IMGUR-ENLIL* in Babylon, "looked for its ancient foundation platform and found it", then laid new bricks in the original place (al-Rawi 1985: 6, ii.33-41). In the text describing this event, Nabopolassar goes on to identify himself by the epithets: he "who searches for the ancient foundation platforms ..., who discovers bricks of the past, who rebuilds ... on the original platform" (*ibid.*: iii.4-5).

One of the most interesting aspects of these discoveries is that the Neo-Babylonian rulers refer not only to the wall foundations but also to the royal *foundation deposits* of these earlier constructions - as Nabopolassar seems to have recorded for the wall in Babylon (*ibid.*: iii.16-22) and as Nabonidus recorded that Nebuchadnezzar had found at Sippar belonging to the Middle Babylonian ruler Burnaburiash (Tadmor 1965: 362).

The phenomenon of the foundation deposit has been studied by Ellis (1968), and needs no introduction to modern archaeologists. The texts - either on independent tablets or inscribed directly onto anthropomorphoid pegs - were said to have been read in antiquity, allowing subsequent rulers to know which kings' efforts had preceded them. Thus Nabonidus records for Agade: *I saw/looked upon the old foundation of Naram-Sîn, an earlier king, and I read the tablets of gold, lapis and carnelian about the building of the Ebabbar* (Tadmor 1965: 359; Powell 1991: 24).¹ Such foundation tablets, as recorded by Nabopolassar, when encountered, were then carefully replaced in the original

¹ Beaulieu (1989:141) records a clay impression of an inscription of the son of Naram-Sîn, Šar-kali-šarri with a Nabonidus inscription on the back, saying the impression was made from a diorite slab in the palace. This offers further confirmation that the excavation was indeed undertaken.

foundations by the later ruler, or included with the new foundation deposit of the discoverer (al-Rawi 1985: 6).² In Nabonidus' account of the foundation inscription of Naram-Sîn found in the Ebabbar, the king is said to have looked upon it, and *not changing its position, he put it with his own inscription* (Lambert 1968-69: 7 = rev. iv. 26-28). He further found a partly-effaced and damaged image of Sargon of Agade, which Nabonidus arranged to be properly restored by his master craftsmen, and again, not altering its original location, had it replaced in the Ebabbar, to the accompaniment of ritual oblation (*ibid.*, rev. iv. 29-36).³

Apart from the obvious value of an ancient description of a practice confirmed by modern archaeological discovery, what is important for us as modern excavators is the care with which Nabonidus and Nabopolassar claimed to have replaced the original foundation deposits *and* performed the necessary cultic observations for them. This, when taken together with the pronouncements commonly found in the curses at the ends of foundation tablets - curses that abjure future rulers to treat their tablets with appropriate respect and ceremony - may give us even further insight into what we find in the ground today. New construction, especially in temple areas (e.g., the Sîn Temple sequence at Khafaje), generally leaves several courses of brick of the preceding building phase, when it would have been just as easy to clear it all off as to level the wall stubs. This may well have been at least in part a matter of piety-cum-proper-action regarding the prior construction, precisely because a previous builder had marked it with his own, *divinely sanctioned*, record of foundation. Leaving a few courses of brick preserved both the memory of the building and the pious foundation document - thereby neither negating what the gods had previously approved, nor provoking the wrath threatened in the texts' curses.⁴

² Note that al-Rawi refers to a "statue" of an early king discovered in the wall, and implicit is that the king then replaced the "statue" along with his own great foundation deposit "together with my image" (al-Rawi 1985: 6 = iii.16-21). The word translated as "statue", however, Akk. *šalmu*, means "image" and does not make clear what form - two dimensional or three - the image would have taken (see on this, Winter 1997: 365), so it is not clear whether Nabopolassar intends us to understand a foundation figurine or something other.

³ The text seems to describe this image of "Sargon" as a foundation figurine, as it is not only found when the foundations of the new Ebabbar were being laid, but, we are told, it was found *within* that foundation - Lambert 1968-69: 7, obv. iii. 29-30: *ša-lam "šarru-u-kin....ina qī-rib te-me-en-na ša-a-šu₂ ip-pa-al-li-is-ma ...*, "an image of Sargon ... in the midst of that foundation he gazed upon ..." Beaulieu, however, treats it as a full-standing "statue" of Sargon, since at least 8 texts from the archive of the Ebabbar of Sippar record on-going offerings to an image of Sargon (1989: 135-136, citing Kennedy 1969: 79). Unless the foundation discovery and the image receiving cultic attention represent two different works, the offerings do suggest a three-dimensional royal image distinct from the usual foundation figurine; but the question must remain open for the present.

⁴ If this is correct, then the architectural sequence in the archaeological record, which we so value for stratigraphic and chronological purposes, is in itself an artifact of the Mesopotamian belief system.

III. Texts and Artifacts

Like many of our colleagues, the Babylonian kings seemed especially pleased when they could claim to have discovered an ancient "text". Bricks of the an earlier period found in Agade are carefully husbanded in the reign of Nabonidus (Beaulieu 1989: 141-142); and that king also claimed to have been able to read (ancient) tablets brought to him that no one else could understand (Machinist - Tadmor 1993: 149, who provide an alternate reading to that of Lambert 1968-69: 4).

The unusual case of an inscribed stone known as the Cruciform Monument, found by Rassam at Sippar in 1881 along with two Nabonidus cylinders (Walker - Collon 1980: 103), underscores the importance accorded these "traces" of the past. Purporting to be an Old Akkadian text of Manishtusu, son of Sargon of Agade, it declares the renewal of rites and privileges of the cult of Shamash at Sippar. The text was shown by Sollberger (1967-68) to be not earlier than the Old Babylonian Period.⁵ For our purposes, if, as argued by Powell (1991), the Cruciform Monument is in fact a Neo-Babylonian forgery, its text constitutes a clear awareness in the later period of what it would take to re-construct a temple according to the past, and underscores the weight placed upon the ancient textual record.

Nabonidus' scribe, Nabû-zer-lišir, clearly had been trained in deciphering and copying early texts discovered in "excavation". In one document found in the *bit-akītu* of Agade, we are told that the original of the text had been "on a brick which Nabû-zer-lišir, the scribe, ... found and *excerpted* in Agade" (emphasis ours; Beaulieu 1989: 142 = BM 22457). In another case, that same scribe took an impression in clay of the inscription on an Akkadian stone slab found in the palace of Naram-Sîn; then, in good excavation recording tradition, added his own gloss on the back, noting the find-spot (*ibid.*: 141). There are other cases as well, particularly with regard to the "Sun Tablet" found in the Shamash Temple at Sippar, where moulds, corresponding to modern "squeezes", have actually been found with the original (Figs. 1, 2; Walker - Collon 1980: 102-103). These practices suggest that the modern activities of copying, summarizing, reproducing and cataloguing texts were not unknown to the scholars of antiquity.

Although the Neo-Babylonian rulers refrain from any mention of pottery in their excavation trenches, the discovery of ancient objects seems to have been welcomed by them along with texts. As noted above, foundation inscriptions were often said to have been accompanied by ancient "images", presumably foundation figurines. Nabonidus also claims to have found a jasper cylinder seal dedicated by Assurbanipal to the god Sîn, which he (Nabonidus) then placed upon the neck of his own cult image of Sîn at Harran (Lee 1993:

⁵ More recently, Powell has argued that the name of the ruler should rather be restored as Naram-Sîn, and suggested that the whole thing is an ancient (Neo-Babylonian) forgery in an early genre, made expressly to deceive the sign-hungry Nabonidus (1991: 26-27) - perhaps by the very priesthood of Shamash at Sippar itself, to buttress the king's support for restoring the Ebabbar. The reading of Manishtusu has been recently re-confirmed by al-Rawi and George (1994: 146), however. Whoever the Akkadian ruler cited, the text remains a pious fraud; what needs to be determined is whether or not the fraudulent act is Neo-Babylonian in origin.

134).⁶ Clearly, the seal was valued for its material and its age; but it is also explicitly stated that the seal contained on it a likeness of the god, so the imagery was considered to be especially apt.

The discovery of such prior images is often given as the basis for a later king's ability to re-construct a lost cult image. In the Nabonidus inscription regarding the seal, we are told that it depicted the god "whose features had been revealed from ancient days" (*ibid.*: 135, ll. 44-45) - thereby providing an "authentic" model for his own cult image. In a similar vein, Nabonidus recorded the discovery at Ur of an "old *narû*", or stele, with a representation of an *en*-priestess [nin.dingir.ra] of the cult of Nanna (Dhorme 1914; Lambert 1968-69: 4; Beaulieu 1989: 23-24; Powell 1991: 30), including a (presumably textual) description of her attributes, attire and jewellery. This discovery rather conveniently permitted the king to re-establish the institution as part of his refurbishing of the cult of the Moon god, and to install his daughter in the post - as Sargon of Agade and Rim Sin of Larsa had done before him.

So also, the text of the "Sun-God Tablet" of Nabû-apla-iddina (Fig. 1) describes the discovery "on the other (that is, the Western) bank of the Euphrates" of a baked clay image preserving the appearance and attributes of the Sun god, Shamash (King 1912: 120-127; Brinkman 1976; Woods 1998).⁷ This discovery, too, was not without "interest". In the manner of the Ur stele, it enabled the 9th century ruler to reconstruct not merely a cultic office, but the very cult image of the deity in the traditional manner.

The "Sun-God Tablet" is of interest in the pursuit of ancient archaeology on more than one level. First, on its own terms, the text attests to the use and value of "found objects" from the past as models in the present. And indeed, the veracity of the claims by Nabû-apla-iddina that he used an ancient image as the model for his new cult image is corroborated by a comparison of the image of the Sun god on the tablet with very similar Old Babylonian or Akkadian representations of the god on the one hand, and the clear stylistic contrast between the archaizing figure of the deity with the contemporary Babylonian ruler and priest of the tablet on the other hand (see now Woods 1998). The rendering of shoulders and general proportions of the latter are characteristic of their own stylistic period - as seen when juxtaposed to other

⁶ A related phenomenon may be seen in the 9th century seal for Marduk, dedicated by Marduk-zakir-šumi, which consisted of an image of Marduk standing upon his attribute animal, the *mušhuššu*, and according to the seal's inscription was intended to be hung around the neck of the god's cult image in the Esagil in Babylon. A further parallel to the various situations described here is to be found in the fact that this seal, too, was discovered out of its original context - in the house of a bead-maker of the Parthian Period (on which, see Black - Green 1992: fig. 105).

⁷ =BM91000 (BBSt. No. 36) iii. 19-30 -iv. 2 - for the transliteration of which I am indebted to C. Woods and K. Slanski.

u₂-šur-ti šal-mi-šu₂
ser-pu ša₂ ḥa-as-bi ..

ina e-bir-ti

id^{id}pu-ra-ti

in-na-mir-ma

PN ...

É.MAŠ^{ur}Sip-par ...

gib^{gib}HUR šal-mi šu-a-tu₄ ...

.. u₂-kal-lim-ma

A drawing of his image,
a ... of fired clay ...,
on the other bank
of the Euphrates ...
was found, and
PN ...,
šangu-priest of Sippar ...
the plan of that image
... presented (to the king).

9th century images, such as Nabonidus' stelae (Fig. 3) - thereby emphasizing the archaizing nature of the cult image. But then, second, the "Sun-God Tablet" itself must have been still visible, or at least re-discovered by the late 7th century Neo-Babylonian ruler Nabopolassar more than 200 years later, for at this time not only were the two moulds of the tablet made, but also a 19-line inscription of the later king was added on the reverse of one of them, outlining various cultic offerings to Shamash (= BM91002, Walker - Collon 1980: 102-103; Woods 1998: 4).

I have suggested in passing that the various finds of the Babylonian "archaeologists" are generally recorded not for their own sake, but in conjunction with specific royal "interest". In that, the Babylonians' use of objects may be said to have differed from our contemporaries' search for "pure knowledge"; although the degree to which their "interests" were not unrelated to proving or disproving their own belief systems and/or to their personal ambitions in legitimizing their practices and predilections might actually on closer examination prove familiar (on which, see Silberman 1982).⁸

Once again, then, with the "finds" of the Neo-Babylonians we have a series of phenomena that parallel the modern archaeological situation. First, the discovery of ancient texts and a range of objects - cylinder seals, clay plaques, stone stelae, statues and/or figurines - attested from the Akkadian, Old Babylonian, Kassite and Assyrian periods. Second, the valuation of these objects for a variety of complex reasons as "traces" of a purportedly true past. And third, parallel to these discoveries, an industry that apparently specialized in the passing off of recently-manufactured works as "authentic" - although perhaps less from a commercial desire to gull the unsuspecting or greedy institution/individual than as a politically- or culturally-motivated attempt to demonstrate a connection with the past.

IV. Display

While the excavated foundations of ancient buildings often served as the basis for architectural reconstruction, material remnants of earlier periods - texts, inscribed bricks, objects - were evidently gathered, labeled, and even put on display in a variety of ways. A number of early objects were found together by Rassam in the late Neo-Babylonian Shamash temple at Sippar - including an inscribed Akkadian mace-head, the statue of a king of Mari, the Cruciform Monument, and the "Sun Tablet" group, along with stone bowls of the Late Uruk and Early Dynastic Periods that had been repaired in antiquity (Walker - Collon 1980). This assemblage argues for the temple having functioned as a local treasury, if not actual museum (Walker - Collon 1980: 111; also Wilcke 1982), much in the way of Western cathedral treasuries; and as in Western cases, here, too, some objects appear to have been local to Sippar while others

⁸ This "interestedness" in and enthusiasm for what was considered diagnostic works might also account for why a forgery like the Cruciform Monument could have been so enticing to Nabonidus. N. Wasserman has also recently argued that a purported Old Babylonian clay amulet is most likely a Neo-Babylonian product, its inscription executed in a purposefully archaizing script (Wasserman 1994, citing other examples as well, as noted in Berger 1973).

probably came from outside as booty.⁹ Nor was the Ebabbar in Sippar likely to have been unique in accumulating early works. A letter from the Eanna archive in Uruk (YOS III.86, cited Beaulieu 1989: 232) suggests that at least some of the statuary in Babylon, possibly in the Esagil of Marduk, had been taken by Nabonidus from the temple of Nanaya in Uruk.¹⁰

An area on the western flank of the Northern Palace at Babylon has been understood to represent a purposeful museum, with some of the objects said to have been found in the assemblage introduced in the reign of Nabopolassar, most gathered by Nebuchadnezzar II, and others likely added by Nabonidus (Wiseman 1985: 65, pl. Ib, citing Unger 1931: 224-228). This has recently been disputed by Klengel-Brandt (1990), who has demonstrated from unpublished excavation records that a number of works attributed to the “museum” in fact were found elsewhere on the site.

While it was enticing to see the situation in Babylon as a mirror-image of our own museum practices, to dismantle the Northern Palace “museum” is not to negate either the antiquarian mentality or the practice of display in the Neo-Babylonian period. Bracketed between the third- and second-millennium practices noted above and the situation found at Hellenistic Tello later, when Adad-nadin-ahhe gathered statues of Gudea of some 2000 years earlier to stand in his palace courtyard (Parrot 1948: 152-156),¹¹ the accumulated instances within the Neo-Babylonian Period suggest an interest not only in recovery but in demonstration of that recovery - whether as trophies, models, or re-introduced into cult practice as liturgical objects. Evidence of repair in antiquity (as Lambert 1968-69: obv. iii, 32-35, where the broken face of an image is restored), continued usage, and often re-inscription of works goes along with conspicuous placement to suggest a long-standing Mesopotamian interest in both collection and “display” that if anything was heightened in this period.¹²

Indeed, physical repositories of the material traces of the past must be understood as part of the same cultural pattern as is evident in the excavations

⁹ Specifically, the ED stone bowl, originally from Lagash. Of course, there is a long history of objects moving as a result of military action in the region, notable amongst which is the presentation of objects in the sacred precinct at Susa following campaigns in Mesopotamia by the Elamite ruler, Shutruk-nahunte (cf. discussion Klengel-Brandt 1990: 45; Braun-Holzinger 1997).

¹⁰ It will be remembered that Nabonidus also did a good bit of rebuilding in the Eanna precinct at Uruk, and reinstituted cultic offerings he claimed to have been long neglected (Frame 1991: 54). The reciprocal relationship between investment *in* the site and display of objects *from* the site is important to underscore.

¹¹ It is probably the case that the solid black lines on the plan of the palace (Parrot 1948: fig. 33b) represent the foundations of Gudea's own temple to the god Ningirsu, and the colossal statue of Gudea now in the Louvre was probably originally placed there, too large to move when the later ruler re-occupied the site. The other statues, with dedications to different deities of Girsu, however, were most likely gathered from different loci, particularly the sites of those gods' temples, elsewhere in the city. This response in Tello is to be seen not as a unique and idiosyncratic phenomenon, but as part of the larger picture of an *antiquarian theology* recognizable throughout Hellenistic Mesopotamia, as has been noted for Seleucid Uruk as well (Beaulieu 1992).

¹² An interesting iconographic co-efficient of such an antiquarian interest is reported by Ehrenberg (1998), where archaisms observable in 6th century seals from Uruk can be tied to Nebuchadnezzar's reinstallation of the “true” Ishtar to her sanctuary in the Eanna. The (re-) introduction of earlier visual attributes would then represent a conscious attempt gesture, not unlike the use of an early model for the cult image of the Sun-god at Sippar.

and the use of earlier objects as models. S. Stewart, in her book *On Longing*, speaks of the "collection" in general as offering *exempla* with the status of metaphor (1993: 151). She notes that the collection - whether of the modern museum filled with archaeological objects or the ancient - represents a form of "ahistorical enclosure" in which "all time is made simultaneous or synchronous within the collection's world"; and through it, the past is put "at the service of the collection". In this, Stewart articulates the necessary interestedness of the collector - Babylonian or otherwise - in serving his/her own time's ends.

It is surely no surprise, then, that this "interestedness" was recognized in antiquity. Many of the cult images gathered into Babylon by Nabonidus, for example, were apparently taken against the wishes of their local populations, and were then returned to their respective cities by Cyrus soon after the fall of Babylon (Beaulieu 1989: 232). This could be seen in light of the cultural heritage protection laws that have come into force in recent years, calling for the return of objects taken without the consent of their original populations - although it would not fully capture the political ideology of protection for the capital city and the state that may have been at stake in the initial appropriations.

Just how one understands the archaeological proclivities of the Neo-Babylonian period depends a great deal upon whether one sees Nabonidus and the others as antiquarians, religious reformers, or politically-motivated *arrivistes* who required buttressing by a variety of legitimating strategies in order to establish themselves within a historical tradition.¹³ But there is also a less-manipulative reading of the events and attitudes charted above: one which foregrounds Babylonian notions that revealed knowledge was given by antediluvian sages (Lambert 1957: 9), and so, whatever comes from the past is that much closer to original "truth". If, in the conceptual structure of the Babylonian world, poetry was deemed capable of offering "pictures of unsurpassable vividness" (Landsberger 1926/1976: 14), so also an ancient image or object could well have been considered an "unsurpassably vivid" model; and Nabonidus' (or Nabu-apla-iddina's) strategy for associating his reign with appropriate ethics and an auspicious future would have required just such archaic or archaizing models in the construction and reconstruction of the tradition at the center, that is, in Babylon.

Such a cultural strategy of employing archaisms as well as archaic monuments and texts for contemporary ends can be demonstrated from many traditions at particular times in their history, and is in no way unique to Mesopotamia, much less to the Neo-Babylonian period. What *may* be unique to Mesopotamia is the insistence upon acquiring knowledge of the past through excavation and the actual recovery of ancient works. As demonstrated, the Neo-Babylonian rulers claimed not only to have excavated, but to have recovered

¹³ Biggs (1998: 75, citing Beaulieu 1989) has stressed Nabonidus' attempt to forge links with the Akkadian dynasty through the revival of the institution of *entu* of the moon-god at Ur, emphasizing his religious zeal and that of his mother. It is also interesting to see Nabonidus' interests in restoring cultic practices related to the worship of the astral deities Shamash and Sin as a possible attempt to break the power of the priesthood of Marduk, and the antiquarian ethos of Hellenistic Uruk as equally challenging the dominant Marduk-Nabû theology of Babylon (Beaulieu 1992: 68).

ancient building foundations and their foundation deposits, inscriptions and artifacts. And they also recorded putting them on display, as well as using them as models in the production of contemporary works.

In all of these instances, whether actually practiced or merely ascribed, what is reflected is a clear sense of the methodologies and tactics we associate today with field archaeology. The lack of scientific rigor might associate Babylonian field activities more with a 19th century than a late 20th century archaeological practice; but it is nonetheless clear that they were already doing two and a half millennia ago what we have only been doing systematically for the past two and a half centuries!

It is certainly hoped that current excavations at sites mentioned by Neo-Babylonian rulers may turn up evidence of their interventions (see Huot 1985, for Larsa; de Meyer 1980, for Sippar). In closing, I should simply like to review the two observations that have consequences for a reading of the archaeological record today. First, a caution: that objects seemingly out of chronological context - even when not in as obvious a secondary locus as the Gudeas in the Hellenistic palace at Tello - may well NOT have been moved by serendipitous agents (e.g., rodents or the digging of late pits), but rather have served a cultural function within the later period, as purposefully gathered representatives of an imagined past; and second, a reminder: that those walls which have been preserved only as a few courses of brick in multi-period sites - particularly temples and palaces - may NOT merely reflect a practical leveling of the ground, but rather, a cultural response to a system of belief.

This we can learn from the Babylonian archaeologists of the(ir) Mesopotamian past!

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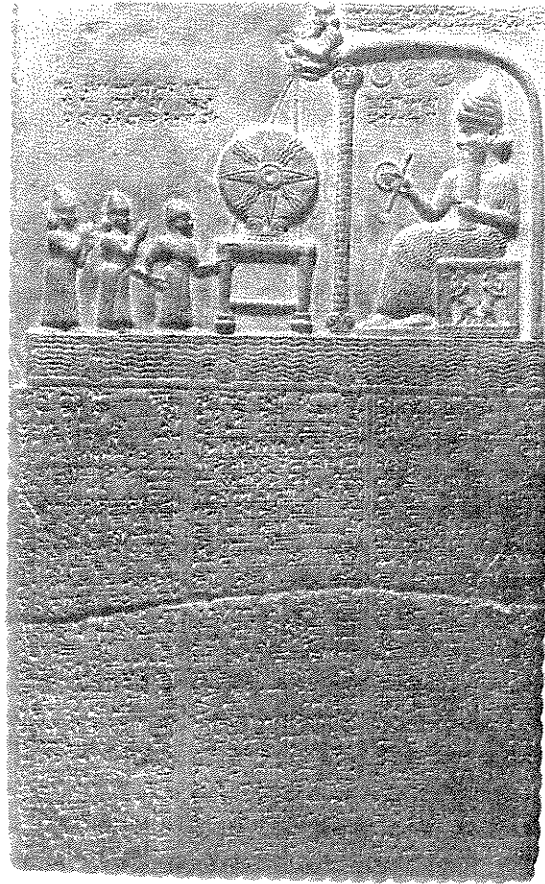


Fig. 1 Sun-God Tablet of Nabû-apla-iddina, found Sippar. (=WAA 91000; photo courtesy The Trustees, The British Museum).

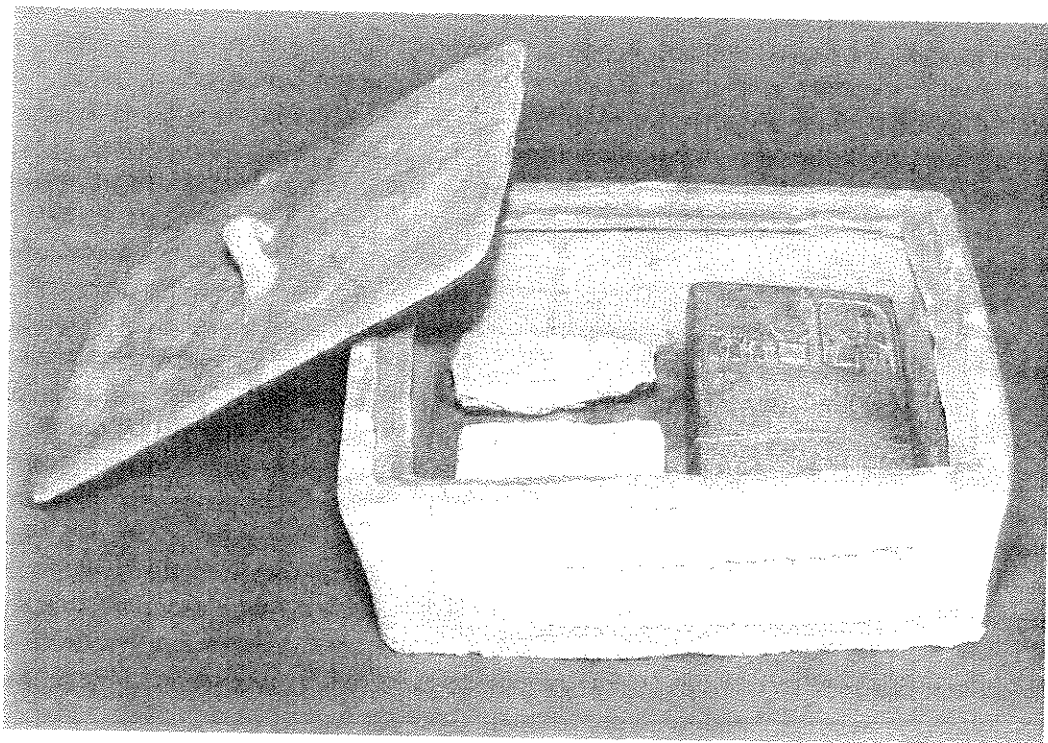


Fig. 2 Sun-God Tablet in inscribed box, with Nabopolassar copies. (Photo courtesy The Trustees, The British Museum).



Fig. 3 Nabonidus stele (=WAA 90837; photo courtesy The Trustees, The British Museum).

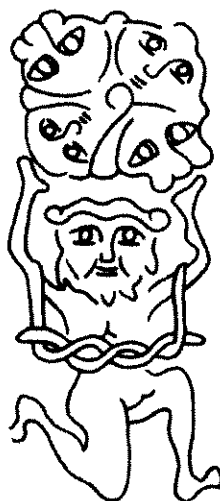
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