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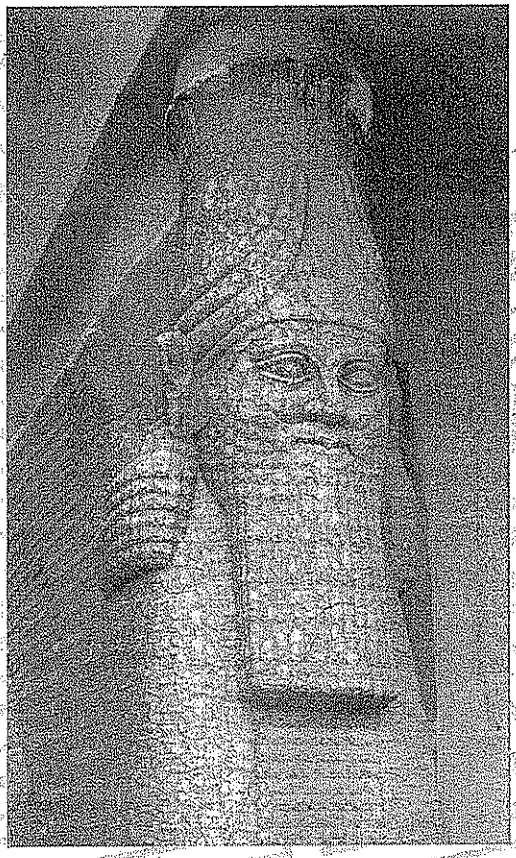



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# Babylon: Assyria's Problem and Assyria's Prize

Grant Frame

*Abstract*

*During the ninth, eighth and seventh centuries BCE, the relationship between the Assyrians of northern Mesopotamia and the Babylonians of southern Mesopotamia was a complex and difficult one, despite the fact that the two peoples spoke the same language, worshipped the same gods, and enjoyed the same basic lifestyle. The Assyrian elite appears to have had great respect and admiration for Babylonian culture and scholarship, frequently adopting and/or adapting Babylonian ways. Assyrian kings made numerous attempts to find an effective way to control the southern kingdom once it had become part of their empire, but they never really found one. The city of Babylon, the revered and ancient capital of Babylonia, was a major obstacle to Assyrian control. But, it was also a great prize, something that Assyria ardently wanted to win and control for political, military, cultural, religious, economic and propagandistic reasons.*

*Résumé*

*Du 9ème au 7ème siècle av. J.C., les Assyriens de la Mésopotamie septentrionale entretinrent des relations complexes et tendues avec leurs voisins Babyloniens du sud, malgré la communauté de civilisation, de langue et de religion unissant les deux peuples. Les élites dirigeantes assyriennes respectaient et admiraient la civilisation et le savoir babyloniens, et souvent s'en appropriaient les éléments tout en les adaptant à leur propre culture. Les monarques assyriens s'efforcèrent par tous les moyens d'exercer efficacement leur autorité sur la Babylonie, mais en vain. Babylone, l'antique et vénérable capitale méridionale, se posa en obstacle majeur à la présence assyrienne. La ville constituait ainsi un butin de choix que les Assyriens tentèrent désespérément de contrôler non seulement pour des raisons militaires, économiques, culturelles et religieuses, mais aussi à des fins de propagande.*

## 1. Introduction

Love and hate. War and peace. Conqueror and conquered. These pairs of terms might well be used in any attempt to describe the relationship between the Assyrians of northern Mesopotamia and the city and people of Babylon during the ninth, eighth and seventh centuries BCE, that is during the time of the Neo-Assyrian empire when Assyria's armies reached the Persian Gulf in the southeast, Egypt in the southwest, Cilicia in Turkey in the northwest and Lake Urmiah in Iran in the northeast and when Assyrian kings made a concerted effort to make Babylonia part of their empire.

The title of my talk uses two terms: problem and prize. The city of Babylon was a major problem for Assyria, an obstacle in its quest to control all of Mesopotamia and indeed the whole Near East. It was also a prize, something that Assyria ardently wanted to win and control for political, military, cultural, religious, economic and propagandistic reasons. The word "problem" has various meanings according to dictionaries, but two are particularly apropos for us today:

1) a difficult situation, matter, or person
2) a question or puzzle that needs to be solved

Certainly Babylon was a difficult matter for Assyria. It was a strong and wealthy city, the capital of a large and strategically located country that actively opposed Assyria's attempts to add southern Mesopotamia to its empire. Assyrian kings expended considerable thought and effort on trying to solve the question of finding an effective way in which to maintain control of Babylon and Babylonia and to keep them quiet and submissive. It was a vexatious matter that puzzled them and a problem for which they never managed to find a final solution.

"Prize" too has several meanings in dictionaries, but again two are particularly useful today:

1) something that somebody values highly, especially because it takes great skill, effort, or luck to get
2) something captured and kept, especially a ship or its contents taken by another ship in wartime

Both meanings also fit the case of Assyria and Babylon. Many Assyrians, in particular the Assyrian elite, admired and imitated Babylonian culture, and possession of Babylon was a symbol or mark of Assyria's military, political and cultural supremacy. A great deal of effort was required to gain it and maintain control of it it. While it is true that Babylon was not a ship, it was captured in time of war and kept by forceful persuasion.

Assyria's relationship with Babylon and Babylonia in general is a huge and complex topic upon which numerous scholars, including myself, have spilled much ink over the years, in particular since the early 1970s when my teacher John A. Brinkman published an influential article entitled "Sennacherib's Babylonian Problem: an Interpretation" (Brinkman 1973). Studies by such other scholars as Peter Machinist (Machinist 1984–85), Barbara Nevling Porter (Porter 1993) and Steven Holloway (Holloway 2002) are also important. This presentation makes much use of their work and studies I myself have done (Frame 1992, 1997 and 1999).

**RULERS OF ASSYRIA AND BABYLONIA, 9th–7th CENTURIES**

| *Rulers of Assyria* | | *Rulers of Babylonia* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adad-narari II | 911–891 | Nabu-shuma-ukin I | |
| Tukulti-Ninurta II | 890–884 | | |
| Ashurnasirpal II | 883–859 | Nabu-apla-iddina | |
| Shalmaneser III | 858–824 | Marduk-zakir-shumi I | |
| Shamshi-Adad V | 823–811 | Marduk-balassu-iqbi | ?–813 |
| | | Baba-aha-iddina | 812–? |
| Adad-narari III | 810–783 | (Interregnum) | |
| | | Ninurta-apl?-[x] | |
| Shalmaneser IV | 782–773 | Marduk-bel-zeri | |
| | | Marduk-apla-usur | |
| Ashur-dan III | 772–755 | Eriba-Marduk | |
| Ashur-narari V | 754–745 | Nabu-shuma-ishkun | ca. 760–748 |
| Tiglath-pileser III | 744–727 | Nabu-nasir | 747–734 |
| | | Nabu-nadin-zeri | 733–732 |
| | | Nabu-shuma-ukin II | 732 |
| | | Nabu-mukin-zeri | 731–729 |
| | | Tiglath-pileser III | 728–727 |
| Shalmaneser V | 726–722 | Shalmaneser V | 726–722 |
| Sargon II | 721–705 | Merodach-Baladan II | 721–710 |
| | | Sargon II | 709–705 |
| Sennacherib | 704–681 | Sennacherib | 704–703 |
| | | Marduk-zakir-shumi II | 703 |
| | | Merodach-Baladan II | 703 |
| | | Bel-ibni | 702–700 |
| | | Ashur-nadin-shumi | 699–694 |
| | | Nergal-uzhezib | 693 |
| | | Mushezib-Marduk | 692–689 |
| | | Kingless (Sennacherib) | 688–681 |
| Esarhaddon | 680–669 | Esarhaddon | 680–669 |
| Ashurbanipal | 668–631? | Shamash-shuma-ukin | 667–648 |
| Ashur-etil-ilani | 630?–627? | Kandalanu | 647–627 |
| Sin-shumu-lishir | 627/626? | (Interregnum) | 626 |
| Sin-shar-ishkun | 626?–612 | Nabopolassar | 625–605 |
| Ashur-uballit II | 611–609 | | |
| | | Nebuchadnezzar II | 604–562 |

[The exact dates of the reigns of a number of rulers of Babylonia in the ninth and eighth centuries and of the rulers of Assyria just before the fall of the Assyrian empire are not certain.]

Because it is such a large topic, I can consider only a few aspects of the matter today and in only a cursory manner. Certainly, I cannot pretend to be giving a full treatment of the topic in the time allotted to me. I might note that my talk to this society a few years ago on "My Neighbour's God: Aššur in Babylonia and Marduk in Assyria" (Frame 1999) considered one aspect of this topic.

## 2. Assyrian Relations with Babylon to the End of the Eighth Century

Turning to the second millennium for a moment, the first Assyrian king to gain control of Babylon was Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 BCE) in the Middle Assyrian Period. Tukulti-Ninurta was one of Assyria's greatest rulers; he captured Kashtiliash IV, the Kassite king of Babylon (1232–1225), in battle, looted the city of Babylon, and, according to his inscriptions "became lord of Sumer and Akkad in its entirety." In point of fact, he ruled Babylonia directly for only a brief period of time and no Babylonian king list ever included him among the names of its other rulers. Thus, he was not considered a legitimate ruler of Babylonia in Babylonian eyes. According to an epic poem about the conquest, Tukulti-Ninurta took back to Assyria a collection of tablets, the collective intellectual and literary wisdom of Babylon. One can detect Babylonian influence in some Assyrian literary texts from around this time, including the epic poem about the conquest of Babylonia itself. Tukulti-Ninurta may also have taken the statue of Marduk, the patron deity of Babylon, back to Assyria, but this remains uncertain. Although a sanctuary of Marduk already existed in Assur in the fourteenth century, Tukulti-Ninurta's actions may have resulted in an increased interest and respect for Marduk and Babylon in Assyria.

In the ninth century, the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (858–824) conducted two military campaigns into Babylonia to help the Babylonian ruler Marduk-zakir-shumi I put down a rebellion. He used the occasion to visit Babylon and two nearby cities, Borsippa and Cutha; he sacrificed to their gods, presented gifts, and gave a feast for some or all of the citizens. The friendship between the two rulers was depicted on the stone base for a throne base found at the Assyrian capital of Kalḫ (Biblical Calah; modern Nimrud). The depiction of the two rulers is unique; they are shown directly facing each other, clasping hands, and of identical size and distinction, thus pointing out the special relationship between the two kings and their respective lands. Shalmaneser was succeeded by Shamashi-Adad V (823–811), who invaded Babylonia four times in the late ninth century. In the course of a campaign in 812, he visited Babylon, Borsippa and Cutha and made offerings to the gods there. Although some Assyrian inscriptions give him the title "king of Sumer and Akkad," no Babylonian source does so. Babylonia appears to have fallen into a state of anarchy for about thirty or forty years at the end of the ninth century and in first quarter of the eighth century. Shamshi-Adad's successor in Assyria, Adad-narari III (810-783), defeated a Babylonian army at one point. He then went to the temples of the same three cities that Shalmaneser III and Shamshi-Adad V had visited, and offered sacrifices there. He also claimed the title "king of Sumer and Akkad," but he too is given this title

only in Assyrian royal inscriptions, not in Babylonian ones. Ashur-dan II (772-755) conducted three campaigns into Babylonia. In sum, several Assyrian kings in the ninth and early eighth centuries invaded Babylonia – although at times to aid the king of Babylon put down rebellions; a number of these Assyrian kings made a point of visiting Babylon and offerings sacrifices to Marduk there.

> All the kings of Chaldea became my vassals (and) I imposed upon them in perpetuity tax (and) tribute. At Babylon, Borsippa (and) Cutha they delivered up the leftovers (from the meals) of the gods Bel, Nabu, (and) Nergal. [I made] pure sacrifices.
>
> *—Inscription of Adad-narari III from Nimrud (Grayson 1996: 213 A.0.104.8 lines 22-24)*

With Tiglath-pileser III (744-727), we enter the period when Assyria began to make concerted efforts to control Babylonia and its capital Babylon. His initial campaigns seem to have been directed mainly against the border region or against Aramean and Chaldean tribes rather than against Babylon and its ruler Nabu-nasir (747-734). Thus, he may actually have been acting in aid of his fellow ruler. Nabu-nasir's son and successor, Nabu-nadin-zeri, was deposed by one his own officials after a brief reign, but the new ruler was only able to hold the throne for about a month before he too was deposed. Tiglath-pileser led a campaign to Babylonia, deposed Nabu-mukin-zeri, and ascended the throne of Babylon himself. He took the role of the king of Babylon in the crucial New Year's festival at Babylon in 728, and for the last two years of his life (728-727) he also reigned as king of Babylon, the first Assyrian king to be so acknowledged in Babylonian tradition.

Shalmaneser V (726–722), Tiglath-pileser's son and successor, was also acknowledged as ruler of Babylon in Babylonian tradition, but he reigned for only a few years. When he died in 722, he was succeeded in Assyria by Sargon II (721–705), a usurper, although likely an individual related to the royal family. While Assyria was presumably in a state of uncertainty as a result of this event, the leader of the Chaldean tribe of Bit-Yakin, Marduk-apla-iddina II (Merodach-Baladan of the Bible), seized the throne of Babylon. He had a tenuous claim to it since his father (Eriba-Marduk) had sat on it for at least nine years half a century earlier, although there had been several unrelated rulers there in the meantime. Marduk-apla-iddina maintained Babylon's independence for twelve years until Assyrian forces made him abandon the city in 710. Sargon sat on the throne of Babylon for the next five years (709–705). Sargon's inscriptions claim that the citizens and temple personnel of Babylon had welcomed his victory over Marduk-apla-iddina and had invited him into Babylon. He proceeded to act as a true king of Babylon, taking the part of the king in the New Year's festival, granting the city and its citizens' special privileges, and using Babylonian royal titulary. The Assyrian recovery of Babylon was headline news at the time. When word of it reached the king of Dilmun (modern Bahrain) the latter sent a message indicating his submission. Seven kings from Cyprus are also said to have sent gifts to Sargon in Babylon.

> The citizens of Babylon (and) Borsippa, the temple personnel, the craftsmen who know (their) trade, leaders (and) administrators of the land who had formerly been subject to him (=Merodach-Baladan), brought before me in Dur-Ladinni the leftovers (from the meals) of the deities Bel, Zarpanitu, Nabu, (and) Tashmetum, and they asked me to enter Babylon. My heart rejoiced and I entered Babylon, the city of the Enlil of the gods, with happiness. I presented myself to the gods who dwelt in Esagila (and) Ezida (and) I made pure free-will offerings before them.
>
> *—Inscription of Sargon II from Khorsabad (Fuchs 1994: 154–55 lines 311–14, partially restored)*

### 3. Some General Comments

Let us stop here for a moment before we move on to the time of great change in Assyria's relationship with Babylon that took place under Sargon's successor, Sennacherib. Clearly Assyrian kings were making great efforts to control Babylonia and liked to be pictured as friends and legitimate rulers of that land. Why did they do so? Various factors come into play. It was the duty of the Assyrian king to expand the area under the control of the Assyrian state god Ashur, and thus of his vicar-on-earth, the king of Assyria. A hymn that was likely associated with the coronation of an Assyrian king from the end of the second millennium issued the following command to the king: "Enlarge you country with your just sceptre!" A hymn that may have been connected with the coronation of the seventh century king Ashurbanipal told him to expand his land and asked the great gods to give him a sceptre so that he could extend his land and his people. No Assyrian king could let a part of his realm slip away; if he did so, other parts would view it as a sign of weakness and be encouraged to revolt themselves. Any Assyrian king who gave up Babylon once it had been conquered might find his position threatened in Assyria itself by those who thought such an action a sign of weakness.

Babylon was located close to Assyria's southern border, only about three hundred miles from Nineveh, a distance less than that from Toronto to Montreal. Assur, the old political capital and still religious capital of Assyria, was even closer. Babylon was the capital of a major state that controlled important trade routes and that could conceivably pose a serious threat to Assyria itself. For Assyria's security, it would be unwise to have an independent and potentially hostile neighbour (Machinist 1984–85: 355). We must keep in mind Babylon's important position within what we call Babylonia. It was undoubtedly the largest, richest and most important city there, and kingship of it symbolized kingship of all of south-

ern Mesopotamia. We use the term Babylonia and speak of the king of Babylonia, but no such term really exists in the Akkadian language. Rulers of that area normally took as their principal title "king of Babylon" or "viceroy of Babylon." Rulership of the city of Babylon was in effect synonymous with rulership of all of southern Mesopotamia.

The particular importance of Babylonia in the minds of Assyrian kings is reflected in the fact that it was the only foreign place that was regularly mentioned in their royal titulary; they frequently used such titles as "king of Babylon," "viceroy of Babylon," "king of Karduniash" (Karduniash being a Kassite term for southern Mesopotamia), and "king of the land of Sumer and Akkad" (Frame 1992: 252). It is interesting to note that when everyday economic documents were composed in Babylonia and the king's name was given in the date formula, it was often followed by the title "king of Babylon" except when the ruler was also the king of Assyria. In which case, scribes in southern Mesopotamia normally preferred to employ some other title, such as simply "king" or "king of Assyria" or "king of the lands." Did they use these other titles since in their minds no Assyrian ruler could really be a true king of Babylon, even though he ruled that city? Perhaps. Perhaps they also felt that they could argue that "king of Assyria" was his primary title or that "king of the lands" was a greater, more all-encompassing one.

The ties between the two countries were close and long-standing. The Assyrians spoke the same language, worshipped the same gods, and enjoyed the same basic lifestyle as the Babylonians did, so it would not be as if they were attempting to rule a people who were different to them. The Assyrian elites appear to have held great respect and admiration for Babylonian culture and scholarship, frequently adopting and/or adapting Babylonian ways. For example, Assyrian royal inscriptions were often written in a Babylonian literary dialect, and Babylonian gods, including Marduk, the god of Babylon, were worshipped in Assyria and mentioned in official Assyrian texts.

Thus for military, economic, political, cultural, and religious reasons, Babylonia was an obvious target of Assyrian military ambitions, and its capital Babylon would inevitably have been be the focal point of Assyrian interest. Babylon stood for all that was great and good about Mesopotamian civilization. It had been a great city and the capital of a large state when Nineveh had only been a large town in northern Iraq. In the Mesopotamian view, if a city rose in power this mirrored the rise in importance of the patron god of that city in the divine pantheon. Assyrian control of Babylon could be taken to mean that Ashur, the god of Assyria, was superior in rank to Marduk. Yet Assyrian kings also liked to "take the hand" of Marduk in the important New Year's Festival at Babylon, thus playing the role of the king of Babylon. In doing this, they would be seen in Babylon to be acknowledging Marduk's role as hero of the Babylonian Epic of Creation — the reading of which was an important part of the festival — and thus his claim to be king of the gods. While Assyrians had long revered Marduk, Babylonians had never taken to the god Ashur and there is no real evidence of a native cult of that god in Babylonia until after the Assyrian empire had fallen and, as Dr. Beaulieu has noted in an article, some Assyrians had (apparently) taken refuge in the city of Uruk. (See Frame 1997 and 1999; Beaulieu 1997.)

Some Assyrian monarchs appear to have taken personal pleasure in being honoured by the citizens of Babylon and other cities in Babylonia, in worshipping in their ancient and highly revered temples, and in taking part in ceremonies in the role of acknowledged kings of Babylon. In particular, they were proud to claim that they had eaten some of the "leftovers" from sacrifices offered to the gods of Babylon, a right reserved for Babylon's rulers. This was a powerful symbol of their legitimate and special status. Adad-narari III who had ruled around the end of the ninth century, and Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II at the end of the eighth century boast that the people of Babylon had brought them the leftovers from meals offered to Marduk. (See Brinkman 1979: 229.)

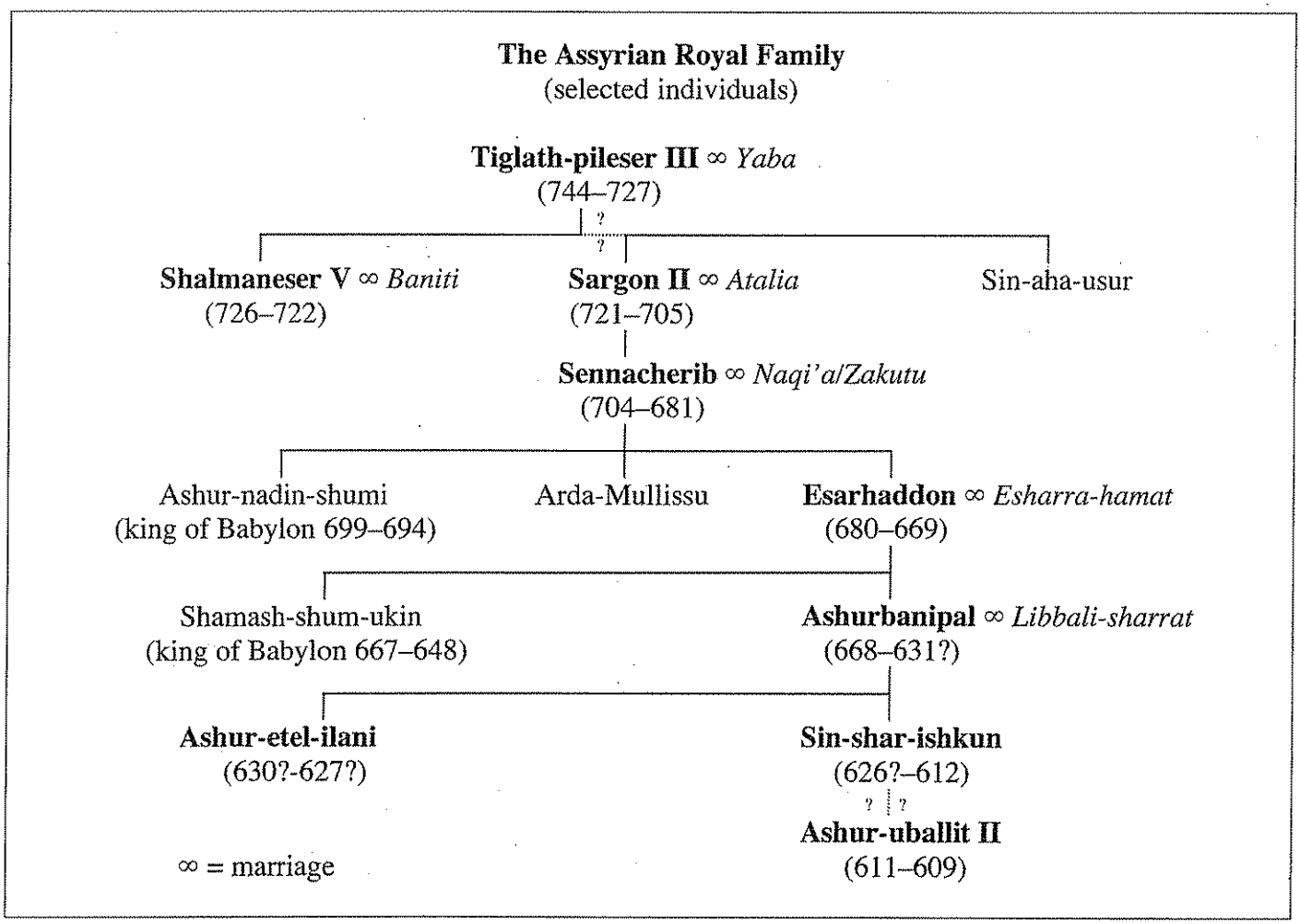
Assyrian monarchs rarely claim to have built or restored temples or other structures outside Assyria, but they did about ones in Babylonia and in particular Babylon. For example, Sargon II had the city walls of Babylon rebuilt, and paving stones inscribed with the name of Sennacherib have been found at Babylon, probably coming from the processional way leading to the temple of Marduk. As we will see in a moment, Esarhaddon (680-669) totally rebuilt and repopulated Babylon after it had lain destroyed and abandoned for over a decade as a result of Assyrian actions in 689. In particular, Esarhaddon claims that he repaved the processional way at Babylon, restored the temple of Marduk and its ziggurat Etemenanki, and rebuilt the temple of Nabû *ša ḫarê*. Although there were vassal kings of Babylon during most of his reign, Ashurbanipal still had work carried out there under his own name. He had the outer wall of Babylon and its gates rebuilt, restored the temple of Marduk, had work carried out on the ziggurat, rebuilt the temples of the goddess Ishtar of Babylon,

> For the god Marduk, great lord, compassionate god who dwells in Esagila, lord of Babylon, his lord: Sargon (II), mighty king, king of Assyria, king of the world, viceroy of Babylon, king of the land of Sumer and Akkad, the one who provides for Esagila and Ezida, thought of (re)building the (city) wall Imgur-Enlil. He had bricks made and constructed a quay-wall of baked bricks fired in a (ritually) pure kiln, (laid) in (both) refined and crude bitumen, along the bank of the Euphrates River, in deep water. He founded the (city) wall Imgur-Enlil and the (city) wall Nemet-Enlil (as secure) upon it as a mountain range. May the god Marduk, great lord, look upon this work (with pleasure) and may he bestow a (long) life on Sargon, the prince who provides for him! May his reign be as firm as the foundation of Babylon!
>
> —*Inscription of Sargon II from Babylon (Frame 1995: 145 B.6.22.1)*

the goddess Belet-ili, and perhaps the goddess Ishtar of Agade; he also confirmed the regular offerings for Marduk and the other gods of Babylon.

Assyrian monarchs sometimes granted special privileges to cities, privileges that might include such things as exemption from taxes and corvée duty. As far as I am aware, only the cities of Assur and Harran were ever granted such privileges in Assyria, but several cities in Babylonia, and in particular the city of Babylon, were accorded such privileges. Perhaps they had been regularly given such privileges by earlier kings of Babylon and the Assyrian rulers were attempting to emulate them and act as true kings of Babylon. In the ninth century, Shalmaneser III referred to the people of Babylon and Borsippa as "people of privileged status, freed by the great gods"; Assyrian officials in the time of Tiglath-pileser III stated that the special status of Babylon was secure; and Sargon II listed a whole slew of cities in Babylonia that enjoyed special status, including Babylon. Esarhaddon uses four different terms to describe Babylon's special status (Frame 1992: 75). Only two Babylonian cities are mentioned with special status in the inscriptions of Ashurbanipal, Babylon and Sippar, and the reference to Sippar is not absolutely certain. (See Frame 1992: 36; Holloway 2002: 295.)

One of the most effective practices that the Assyrians employed in order to pacify and control conquered peoples in the first millennium was deportation, that is the forcible removal of people from their homes and their resettlement in a different part of the Assyrian empire. Bustenay Oded has studied this practice in the Neo-Assyrian period and identified 157 major cases (Oded 1979). In particular, a large number of people from the Chaldean tribal areas of Babylonia were deported, supposedly over half a million individuals, although we must always take figures in Assyrian royal inscriptions with several grains of salt (Brinkman 1979: 227). For the most part, the cities of Babylonia were spared deportations. Nevertheless, on two occasions citizens of Babylon apparently suffered deportation. After Sennacherib, Sargon's successor, had the city of Babylon destroyed because of a rebellion there (see below), he claims to have deported its people to elsewhere in his realm; Esarhaddon later returned them to Babylon. According to 2 Kings 17:24 an unnamed Assyrian king had settled people from Babylon, Cutha and several other places in Samaria after its fall to Assyrian forces and the deportation of the Israelites (the "lost ten tribes" of Israel), events which likely took place ca. 722-20, but some scholars think the deportation of Babylonians mentioned in 2 Kings may date to the mid-seventh century reign of Ashurbanipal who also put down a rebellion in Babylon. Despite all the trouble that Babylon gave them, the Assyrians tended not to use one of their most effective pacification techniques on that



city; only Sennacherib did and he did so to great effect.

The aspirations of Assyrian kings to control Babylon and Babylonia were aided by one important fact. In the 80–90 years before Tiglath-pileser assumed the kingship of Babylon, only once had a king of Babylon clearly been succeeded by his son as ruler (Nabu-nasir and his son Nabu-nadin-zeri) and the latter had been ousted by one of his own officials (Nabu-shuma-ukin II) after only two years. Some of the kings during this time had even been Chaldeans: Marduk-apla-usur (tribal affiliation unknown), Eriba-Marduk of the tribe of Bit-Yakin, Nabu-shuma-ishkun of the tribe of Bit-Dakkuri, and Nabu-mukin-zeri of the tribe of Bit-Amukani. Thus, no Babylonian could claim the kingship based on the fact that he was the heir to a long-standing royal dynasty. Babylonia's population was very diverse, made up of the residents of numerous urban centres, each with it own long history and traditions, and members of numerous tribal groups — Chaldeans, Arameans, and Arabs — as well as other sundry groups. Thus, it was not an easy population to unite and govern. Assyria played off one group against another, in general supporting the urban centres against the tribal groups.

**4. Sennacherib**

Upon Sargon's death in 705, his son Sennacherib took the throne of Babylon as well as that of Assyria. After only two years, a rebellion took place in Babylonia that lasted for ten months before Sennacherib regained control. He installed a Babylonian by the name of Bel-ibni as vassal ruler on the throne of Babylon, probably hoping that the people there would be less rebellious if one of their own sat on the throne. Sennacherib described Bel-ibni as "a native of Babylon who had grown up in my palace like a small puppy" (Luckenbill 1924: 54 line 54 and 57 line 13). He was probably a member of an important family who had been a hostage for his family's loyalty, who had been raised seeing the might and power of Assyria first-hand, and who had been educated in the necessity of loyalty to Assyria. Three years later, Sennacherib removed Bel-ibni from the throne of Babylon. Unfortunately, no text tells us why he was removed, but it may well have been either for incompetence or for real or suspected treason. Sennacherib replaced him with Ashur-nadin-shumi, Sennacherib's own son and heir. Six year later, an Elamite king invaded Babylonia, deposed Ashur-nadin-shumi, and replaced him with Nergal-ushezib, a member of the prominent Babylonian family of Ga'al. Nergal-ushezib was defeated in battle by the Assyrians after only six months, but the Assyrians did not manage to take Babylon and a Chaldean by the name of Mushezib-Marduk ascended the throne there and kept the rebellion going for four more years.

Besieged by Assyrian forces and suffering due to starvation, Babylon was in dire straits by the middle of 690 and unimaginable deprivation must have followed before the city finally fell or surrendered fifteen months later. Furious at the Babylonians continual refusal to stay quiet and accept Assyrian overlordship, angry at the number of Assyrian lives lost that putting down their rebellions had cost, and in particular full of wrath at the death of his son and heir Ashur-nadin-shumi, Sennacherib let vent to his fury. Assyrian inscriptions tell us that the squares of the city were filled with the corpses of its defenders. Babylon was looted, its gods smashed, and its people dispersed. Mushezib-Marduk, his family, and possibly the statue of Marduk were carried off to Assyria. The statue of Marduk was to remain absent from Babylon for twenty years. Sennacherib set the city on fire, demolished its houses, temples, and city wall, and dumped the debris into the Arahtu canal. He had canals dug through the midst of the city to flood it and turn it into a swamp in order that it would not be possible to recognize the site of that city and its temples in the

**Rulers of Babylonia While Sennacherib Was King of Assyria**

| | |
|---|---|
| Sennacherib | 704–703 |
| * Marduk-zakir-shumi II | 703 |
| * Merodach-Baladan II | 703 |
| Bel-ibni | 702–700 |
| Ashur-nadin-shumi | 699–694 |
| * Nergal-ushezib | 693 |
| * Mushezib-Marduk | 692–689 |
| Kingless | 688–681 |

[* = in rebellion against Assyria]

> In my second campaign, I moved swiftly against Babylon whose conquest I strove for; like the onset of a storm I attacked and overwhelmed it like a fog. I completely surrounded the city and [seized (it)] by means of tunnels and scaling-ladders ... I filled the city square with their corpses. Nuzubu (=Mushezib-Marduk), king of Babylon, together with his family [...] I carried off alive to my country. I counted out the property of that city — silver, gold, precious stones, goods (and) property — into the hands [of my people] and they made it their own. The hands of my people took hold of the gods that dwell inside it and broke them up; they took their [goods] (and) property ... The city and (its) houses, from its foundations to its parapets, I swept away, demolished, (and) set on fire. I razed the inner wall and the outer wall, the temples of (its) gods (and) the ziggurat (made) of brick and earth, as many (of them) as there were, and I threw (the debris) into the Arahtu Canal. I dug canals through the middle of that city and leveled its territory with water. I destroyed its very foundations and caused its devastation to exceed that (caused) by (any) flood. I made (it) dissolve in water and put an end (to it, turning it) into river-flats so that in future days the location of that city and the temples of (its) gods could not be identified.
>
> *—Bavian Inscription of Sennacherib (Luckenbill 1924: 83–84 lines 43–54)*

future. Sennacherib clearly was attempting to get rid of the revered centre of Babylonian civilization and the frequent base of anti-Assyrian actions.

The destruction of Babylon marked a turning point in Assyrian-Babylonian relations. Previous Assyrian monarchs had treated Babylon and the other old important urban centers of southern Mesopotamia generously. Now, Babylonia's special position in Assyrian eyes (or at least the eyes of the Assyrian monarch) was ended with the destruction of its capital. Babylon, the centre for Mesopotamian culture and scholarship for a millennium was no more. Its destruction was undoubtedly intended to break the back of Babylonian resistance to Assyrian overlordship and to serve as an example to other would-be rebels. Babylonia gave Sennacherib no more trouble during the remainder of his reign. With Babylon destroyed, there could be no king of Babylon and thus two lists of kings of Babylon record that the next eight years, the period leading up to the death of Sennacherib, were "kingless."

Exactly what was done with the statue of the god Marduk, the revered patron deity of Babylon, is not clear. Sennacherib's inscriptions state that the gods of Babylon were destroyed, but later tradition says Marduk was carried off to Assyria where he remained in exile until he returned at the beginning of the reign of Ashurbanipal. The destruction of the statues of gods of foreign states does not appear to have been a normal practice for Assyrians. Steven Holloway who has studied the matter can find only two occasions on which Assyrian rulers claim to have destroyed divine statues of foreign lands, this occasion and one in the reign of Ashurbanipal when the statues of Elamite gods were smashed in the course of a campaign to punish Elam for helping Babylonia rebel against Assyria (Holloway 2002: 118-22). Normally Assyrian rulers refer to having carried off the statues of the gods of defeated peoples, likely in order to hold them as hostages for their people's good behaviour and to show that these gods were now subjects of the god Ashur. The Assyrians could later return the statues and thus win goodwill from their original owners.

> After I destroyed Babylon, shattered its gods, (and) overwhelmed its people with (my) weapon, I removed its earth and had it carried to the Euphrates, (and off) to the sea, so that the location of that city could not be identified. Its soil reached Dilmun and the people of Dilmun saw (it). Terror of the fearsomeness of the god Ashur fell upon them and they brought me their gifts. With their gifts, they (also) sent me workmen, levied from their (own) country, corvée-labourers, a bronze chariot, (and) bronze tools, vessels of native craftsmanship, in order to (help) demolish Babylon. To quiet the heart of Ashur, my lord, that people sing the praises of his might, (and) for future inspection by the people, I removed (some of) the soil of Babylon and stored (it) in heaped-up mounds in that Bit-Akitu (=New Year's Temple).
>
> —*Akitu House Inscription of Sennacherib (Luckenbill 1924: 137–38 lines 36–47)*

In any case, as a result of Sennacherib's actions, the Babylon that had been the seat of Babylonian royalty and the centre of southern Mesopotamian culture for hundreds of years was gone. The Babylon that had been a rich prize desired by Assyrian kings for centuries was no more. The Babylon that had been a problem for Assyrian kings to control no longer existed. Such a demonstration of Assyrian might may have been intended to make all of southern Mesopotamia, and indeed all of the Assyrian empire, afraid to ever rebel again, but it undoubtedly also raised hatred against Assyria throughout Babylonia. What had happened to Babylon could happen to other cities as well. Some of the debris/soil from the demolished Babylon was carried off to Assyria and placed in the temple for the New Year's festival at Assur, as a trophy and symbol of Assyrian victory and might. Reliefs on the gate of that temple depicted a battle from the Babylonian Myth of Creation (*Enūma eliš*). In the Babylonian version of that myth Marduk was the hero who defeated evil and won supremacy over all the gods, but on this gate the Assyrian god Ashur was depicted playing that role. Two copies of the text of the Epic have been found at Assur that replace the name of Marduk with that of Ashur; these may well have been composed as a result of Sennacherib's actions. Among the loot taken from Babylon by the Assyrians were the ceremonial throne and bed of Marduk; these were presented to the god Ashur for his use. Sennacherib was proudly and publicly claiming and demonstrating that the city of Assur and its god Ashur had replaced the city of Babylon and its god Marduk in importance, both here on earth and in the divine sphere. As Peter Machinist has stated "Assyria was to be the new center of Mesopotamian culture, built literally upon the ruins of the old center in Babylonia" (Machinist 1984–85: 359). One might mention here an Assyrian composition that we generally call "Marduk's Ordeal"; this text appears to describe Marduk as a criminal being held in captivity and being prosecuted on behalf of the god Ashur. Alasdair Livingstone has argued that the text may have been connected with Sennacherib's involvement with religious matters, in particular an Assyrianization of the religion and the removal of the statue of Marduk (i.e., the promotion of the idea that the god Ashur was superior to the god Marduk). Regrettably the text is not completely preserved and the late Tikva Frymer-Kensky has suggested that it was composed after the reign of Sennacherib, when the statue was eventually returned to Babylon. (See Frame 1992: 58–59 on this matter.)

Sennacherib's actions were remembered in Babylonia, long after Esarhaddon, Sennacherib's son and successor, had Babylon restored and repopulated. A fragmentary Babylonian tablet likely dating to the reign of Nabopolassar calls Sennacherib a "[plund]erer," appears to refer to the killing of the elders of Babylon and the taking of booty from Babylon to Assyria, and threatens revenge on Nineveh (Gerardi 1986).

An inscription from the reign of Nabonidus in the mid-6th century also mentions Babylon's destruction and Marduk's removal to Assyria. Sennacherib is not mentioned by name in what is preserved of the document, but it is surely he who is said to have plotted evil against the land, turned Babylon's sanctuaries into ruins, desecrated their cult, and taken Marduk to Assyria (Frame 1992: 54-55).

> ... you became hos[tile] to Babylon; you plundered [the booty] of the lands and [removed] (it) to the land of the Subarians (=Northerners). You exposed [the property] of Esagila and Babylon (*to profane eyes*) and sent (it) [to Nineveh]. *You killed* the elders of the city ... You brought about [the ove]rthrow of the Babylonians ... the god Marduk, the great lord, looked favourably upon me and ... to avenge the land of Akkad ... he selected me to become ruler of (all) lands ..... [by the command] of the god Marduk, the great lord, I shall pile [up] like a mound of sand the wall of Nineveh that is made of strong stone. [(With regards to) the city] of Sennacherib, son of Sargon, offspring of a house slave, conqueror [of Babylon (and) plun]derer of the land of Akkad, I shall rip out its roots and I [shall obliterate] the foundations of (that) land. ... [Because] of the evil things that you have done against the land of Akkad, the god Marduk, the great lord, [and the great gods] shall call y[ou] to account ...
>
> —*Selected passages from Nabopolassar's 'Declaration of War' (Gerardi 1986: 34–36)*

**5. Esarhaddon**

Sennacherib was murdered by two of his sons in 681 and succeeded by another son, Esarhaddon, who claims not to have been involved in the assassination. Esarhaddon immediately began a policy that was intended to reconcile Babylonians to his authority and Assyrian control by means of numerous and varied actions and by a nuanced program of propaganda aimed at presenting himself and his actions in a way to appeal to Assyrians and Babylonians (Porter 1993). Babylon was necessarily the particular focus of his actions. The city and its temples were rebuilt and the people of Babylon allowed to return home. But Esarhaddon did not want to lose support in Assyria by seeming to criticize his father's actions. Thus, Sennacherib was not blamed for the destruction of Babylon. Esarhaddon's texts say that Sennacherib had only been Marduk's agent in bringing about Babylon's destruction. The true blame for its destruction is laid on the Babylonians themselves. They are said to have committed grave sins, thus angering Marduk and causing him to abandon them and order the city's devastation. Esarhaddon's inscriptions state that omens had now occurred that indicated that Marduk wanted the revival of his city and his return to it. Thus, Esarhaddon was only carrying out the will of the god, just as had Sennacherib. Of course this was all propaganda, but the ancient Mesopotamians believed in omens and oracles. No pious Assyrian or Babylonian could, in theory, object to Esarhaddon's reasoning and actions.

> At that time, during the reign of an earlier king, evil omens appeared in the land of Sumer and Akkad. The people living there continually answered one another "yes" and "no," (but) they were speaking falsehoods ... They laid their hands on the property of Esagila, the palace of the gods, a place inaccessible (*to the laity*), and they sold the silver, [go]ld (and) precious stones cheaply to Elam (*for its support*). The Enlil of the gods, Marduk, became enraged and contrived something evil in order to overwhelm the land (and) destroy its people. The Arahtu — a river of plenty, a raging flood, a furious wave, a massive high-water, the very likeness of the Deluge — *overflowed* (*its banks*), washed over the city, its dwelling(s), (and) its sanctuaries, and turned (them) into ruins. The gods (and) goddesses who dwelled there flew away, up to the heavens, like birds. The people who lived there [fl]ed somewhere else and took refuge in [an unknown] land ... At the beginning of my reign ... he (Marduk) continually sent his signs concerning the resettl[ement of the city] and the renew[al] of [its] temples ... I summoned all my workers and the people of the land of Karduniash (Babylonia) in their entirety; I had them wield mattocks and I imposed corvée-duty (on them) ... I lifted a work-basket onto my (own) head and I made myself carry (it).
>
> —*Selections from the Babylon inscription of Esarhaddon (Borger 1956: 12–20, mainly edition A)*

In addition to rebuilding and repopulating Babylon, Esarhaddon did numerous other things to win favour in Babylon and Babylonia. For example, he constructed or rebuilt temples throughout southern Mesopotamia; he restored (or created anew) statues of Babylonian deities and returned them from Assyria whence Sennacherib had carried them off; he granted privileges to the old religious centers of the land, including Babylon; he consulted, and thus showed respect for, Babylonian scholars; and he took the traditional title "king of Babylon" rather than just ruling the southern kingdom as king of Assyria. He attempted to depict himself in his official inscriptions as a true king of Babylon, a ruler concerned for the welfare of that city and Babylonia as a whole. Esarhaddon also planned the revival of a somewhat more independent or separate kingdom of Babylonia. In 672, a grand ceremony took place in Assyria in which two of his sons were officially designated his heirs. Upon his death, one son, Ashurbanipal, was to ascend the throne of Assyria and another son, Shamash-shuma-ukin, was sit on the throne in Babylon, although the latter was undoubtedly a vassal of the former.

Esarhaddon, great king, mighty king, king of the world, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters (of the world), viceroy of Babylon, king of the land of Sumer and Akkad; the one to whom the god Ashur has stretched out his hand, permanently selected by the god Enlil, who was chosen by the god Marduk, ... (the one who) by the might of the gods Ashur, Bel (Marduk), the Son-of-Bel (=Nabu), and Ishtar, the gods, his helpers, ruled over all lands and made all rulers submissive po him; the one who (re)constructed the temple of the god Aššur, (re)built Esagila and Babylon, renovated Eanna, completedthe sanctuaries and cult centres, (and) (re)confirmed (their) regular offerings; the king during the days of whose reign, the great dord, the god Marduk, became reconciled to Babylon (and again) took up his residence in Esagila, his palace; ... (the one who) restored the splendid appearance of the great gods who had rushed to Assyria, returned them from Assyria to their (proper) places and (re)confirmed their income; ...; son Of Sennacherib, king of the world (and) king of Assyria; son of Sargon (II), king of Assyria, viceroy of Babylon, (and) king of the land of Sumer and Akkad; ...

*—Inscription of Esarhaddon from Uruk (Frame 1995: 183 B.6.31.15 lines 8-27)*

**6. Ashurbanipal**

When Esarhaddon died in 669, Ashurbanipal ascended the throne of Assyria and a year later allowed his brother Shamash-shuma-ukin to ascend that of Babylon. When the latter entered Babylon, he brought with him a statue of Marduk. Without the statue it had been difficult or impossible to celebrate the important New Year's festival fully. Now it could be, a matter of great joy for the people of Babylon. This statue had been restored in the time of Esarhaddon and that king had in fact claimed to have returned it to Babylon in some of his inscriptions, but in the end it had not been. It may not have been returned earlier because the god's temple of Esagila had not yet been completely rebuilt and ready to receive it (Frame 1992: 77–78). Since some of Sennacherib's inscriptions state that Assyrian soldiers had destroyed the statue in 689, it is possible that this was a totally new statue. Esarhaddon's inscriptions state that the god had been reborn in the temple of the god Ashur, who is said to be his (Marduk's) progenitor. In Assyrian eyes, Marduk was now a son of the Assyrian state god and thus subordinate to him. This may be how Esarhaddon wanted his Assyrian compatriots to view the matter so that he would not appear to slight the god Ashur and be soft on Babylonia, but it is unlikely that many Babylonians would have believed that Marduk was descended from Ashur.

Shamash-shuma-ukin ruled as king of Babylon for twenty years (667–648), initially as a loyal vassal of his brother. This was probably what their father had intended; Babylon and

During my reign, the great lord, the god Marduk, entered Babylon amidst rejoicing and took up his residence in the eternal Esagila. I (re)confirmed the regular offerings for Esagila and the gods of Babylon. I (re)established the privileged status of Babylon and appointed Shamash-shuma-ukin, my favourite brother, to the kingship of Babylon in order that the strong might not harm the weak.

*—Inscription of Ashurbanipal froM Babylon (Frame 1995: 198 B.6.32.1 lines 10–14)*

Babylonia were to remain part of the Assyrian empire, but as a separate unit within it ruled by its own king, although one under the watchful oversight of the king of Assyria. Shamash-shuma-ukin eventually tired of being a vassal to his brother with restricted control over Babylonia and rebelled in 652. Ashurbanipal tried to head off the rebellion at its very beginning by sending an appeal to the citizens of Babylon, reminding them of his favours to them in the past, asking them not to trust his brother and become involved in the latter's treason, and stating that he still held them in high esteem.

Nevertheless, the rebellion won wide support in northern Babylonia and among the tribal groups of southern Babylonia. Many in Babylonia were willing to support any attempt to

Word of the king to the Babylonians:
I am well. May you (therefore) be glad! I have heard the lying words that that unbrotherly brother (of mine) said to you; (I have heard) everything he said. (They are) lie(s)! Do not trust him! I swear by my gods Ashur and Marduk that I have neither planned in my heart nor spoken with my mouth any of the bad things that he spoke concepning me! That one has thought of nothing but trickepy. (He says to himself:) "I will ruin the reputation of the Babylonians who love him (Ashurbanipal) along with my own!" I have not listened to this. Up until now, my mind has been on your brotherhood wath the Assyrians and on your privileged position that I established. Accordingly, do not listen to his lies! Do not ruin your reputation that is good in my eyes and in the eyes of every land! Do not do wrong in the eyes of (your) god! I know that there is another matter about which you are concerned. (You say to yourselves:) "Now, the (very) fact that we have continually opposed him/it (Ashurbanipal/Assyria) will become our reproach." This is no reproach. It is nothing when (your) reputation is (so) excellent ... Now then, I have written to you. If you have not sullied yourselves with him in this affair, let me see an answer to my letter immediately! ...

*—Letter of Ashurbanipal to the citizens of Babylon in May 652 BCE (ABL 301; see Frame 1992: 138–39)*

throw off Assyrian overlordship, even one led by an Assyrian prince. It took the Assyrians a great deal of time and effort, but the rebellion was eventually crushed and Babylon fell in 648 after a protracted siege. Ashurbanipal did not act as Sennacherib had in 689. Yes, the major rebels were punished and Babylon looted, but the city was not destroyed nor the population deported. The city and its citizens were treated leniently and a new vassal king was put on the throne of Babylon, a man by the name of Kandalanu, although it seems likely that his authority was severely limited and that the Assyrians were keeping a close eye on his every move.

> I cleansed their sanctuaries by means of the craft of the purification priest (and) purified their unclean streets. I appeased their angry gods and furious goddesses by means of penitential prayer(s) and lamentation(s). I re-established in full, as in days of old, their regular offerings that had diminished. I took pity on the remainder of the citizens of Babylon, Cutha (and) Sippar who had escaped plague, slaughter and famine; I ordered that their lives (be spared). I re-settled them in Babylon.
>
> *—Aftermath of the rebellion according to an inscription of Ashurbanipal from Nineveh (Borger 1996: 45 iv 86–96)*

I gave a talk about Ashurbanipal to the Society a few years ago and so I will not repeat what I said there about his actions with respect to Babylon. I will reiterate, however, that both he and his father Esarhaddon had been extremely interested in Babylonian wisdom and scholarship and that Ashurbanipal had ordered scribes to make copies of scholarly texts preserved in the temple of Marduk in Babylon and elsewhere in Babylonia. These copies, or at times the originals themselves, were to be taken and preserved in the royal archives at Nineveh. Babylon was a treasure house of scholarship and knowledge, and Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, just as Tukulti-Ninurta I over five hundred years earlier, wanted to possess and exploit it for their own and Assyria's benefit.

**7. Conclusion**

Peter Machinist succinctly notes that "one must ... admit that the Assyrian elites had a special sensitivity to Babylonia and things Babylonian, which they displayed toward no other outsider" (Machinist 1984–85: 354). In attempting to find an effective manner in which to control Babylon and Babylonia, Assyrian kings tried numerous different tacks. At times they installed vassal kings of Babylon, thus separate individuals who would sit on the throne in Babylon and give the illusion of an independent king and state. Such an individual could be a native Babylonian who it was thought would be loyal to Assyria, one such as Bel-ibni who was said to have grown up in Sennacherib's palace in Assyria "like a small puppy." Such a vassal king could also be a close relative of the Assyrian monarch, such as Ashur-nadin-shumi who was the son and heir of Sennacherib, and Shamash-shuma-ukin who was the brother of Ashurbanipal. At times Assyrian kings ruled Babylonia directly, taking the title king of Babylon and attempting to act as such in the eyes of Babylonians. At the end of his reign, and undoubtedly acting out of both anger and frustration, Sennacherib tried a totally different tack; after destroying Babylon in 689, he appears to have abolished the kingship of Babylon totally and to have ruled the southern kingdom as king of Assyria, thus treating Babylonia as an integral part of Assyria and not giving it any special status.

Babylon, the capital of a strategically located and wealthy state, was a prize the Assyrians wanted within their grasp and a city that they simply could not ignore. However, it was a dangerous prize, one that bit the hand of its possessor on several occasions by taking a leading role in rebellions against Assyria. The Assyrians were required to expend a great deal of time and energy in putting down these rebellions — in particular the rebellion of 693-689 in the time of Sennacherib, the rebellion of 652-648 in the time of Ashurbanipal, and probably one should add the rebellion of Merodach-Baladan during the reign of Sargon II in the late eighth century. This may well have weakened Assyria both militarily and economically, and, in the view of many scholars, may have contributed to Assyria's rapid collapse toward the end of the seventh century.

The Shamash-shuma-ukin Revolt showed that many Babylonians were willing to follow a foreigner, even an Assyrian prince, into rebellion if there was a good chance of success. Though Babylonia was a rich country, it appears to have had no real army when it was under Assyrian control, probably because Assyria did not want it to have one. Thus, rebels in Babylon found that outside support was desirable in order to provide both military aid and a place of refuge if that should prove necessary. In particular, many rebels sought aid from the neighbouring state of Elam in southwestern Iran and several rulers of Babylon, including Shamash-shuma-ukin, were willing to pay for such support. Any alliance between Babylon and Elam would have been viewed with grave suspicion in Assyria. It would have been a major threat to Assyria's southern and southeastern borders.

Sennacherib's destructive actions with regard Babylon and the statue of its god Marduk in 689 were long remembered and brought up by later Babylonian rulers to justify military actions against Assyria. Perhaps Esarhaddon made a mistake in restoring Babylon after that city had been destroyed by Sennacherib because it went on to play major roles in the rebellion of 652-648 and in Nabopolassar's rise to power and final crushing of Assyria in 612. Perhaps if Babylon had never been brought back to life, the Assyrian empire would have carried on for a much longer period of time. But "what ifs" are a favourite game of historians (and fiction writers) the world over.

In conclusion, the revered and ancient city of Babylon, the capital of southern Mesopotamia, was an obstacle to Assyria's attempts to expand its empire in the south; finding an effective way to rule it and the rest of Babylonia was a major problem

for Assyrian kings, a problem that they never really solved. (Conversely, I could say that Assyria was a major problem for Babylon, a problem that Nabopolassar solved in 612 with the aid of the Medes.) Babylon was also a prize that Assyrian kings badly wanted to acquire. It was the capital of a large, rich and powerful state that was composed of numerous different population groups and it was heir to the great achievements of the various peoples and dynasties that had occupied southern Mesopotamia for over two thousand years before Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria conquered it in the latter part of the eighth century. Control of that city made the Assyrian kings the inheritors and possessors of its glory and culture, a culture that the Assyrian elites clearly admired and emulated. Control of it was a symbol of Assyrian supremacy, a symbol recognized far beyond the boundaries of the empire. Thus, out of a desire to win local support and discourage rebellion, and out of true respect for the city's historical, scholarly and cultural achievements, Babylon and its citizens were in general treated with special consideration by Assyrian monarchs, Sennacherib excepted. Problem and prize. War and peace. Love and hate. Babylon clearly held a special place in the eyes of Assyria.

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