

Balancing Power and Space:  
a Spatial Analysis of the Akītu Festival in Babylon after 626 BCE



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## 1. Introduction

### a. Babylon

Babylon as it appeared throughout history seems to be a city destined for foreign rule. The elevation from city-state to capital occurred during the reign of Hammurapi, who bears an Amorite name. After the invasion of Tukulti-Ninurta I, an Assyrian king, and the subsequent Elamite invasion in the last quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, Babylon slipped out from cultural dominance in Babylonia during the long Kassite dynasty. It was only after king Nebuchadnezzar, to whom many scholars attribute the beginning of Marduk worship as it is known in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE with the retrieval of the god's statue from Elam and the composition of the *Enūma Eliš*,<sup>1</sup> that Babylon returned to the forefront of power and prestige within Mesopotamia. However, shortly after the king's death, his brother, Marduk-nadin-ahhe, watched his own palace in Babylon burn to the ground under authority of Middle-Assyrian ruler Tiglath-Pileser I. The only individual able to loosen the yoke of Assyrian dominance during the mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium was Nabopolassar, whose revolt was aided by the Medians. It was then that Babylonia, its rule under the arm of Babylon, settled with certain political ease for almost ninety years. This independence did not last, as Babylon fell first to the command of Persian king Cyrus the Great and subsequent Achaemenid rulers, second to Alexander the Great and his own imperial successors, and third to the Parthian and later Arsacid empire. Babylon in this light was made a city necessary to rule and thus a battleground for not just foreign power, but domestic as well.

### b. The Akītu Festival

The Akītu festival, also known as the Mesopotamian New Year's festival, was practiced by Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian cultures for millennia.<sup>2</sup> Originally an agrarian festival that celebrated the sowing and harvesting of barley, the festival is especially known by scholars in its 1<sup>st</sup> millennium form in Babylon where explicit and detailed relationships between kings, gods, and high priests are described. This period of history, Babylon's final centuries of activity

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<sup>1</sup> Katz 2011 p. 123-4

<sup>2</sup> Bidmead 2002 p. 41f; Cohen 1994 p. 389f

beginning with its own independence from foreign rule in 626 BCE, is particularly pertinent for understanding how temple and imperial figures interacted with each other, not just because of the variances in evidential material, but because within this short period of time, three separate powers soon thereafter gained control of Babylon and its surrounding cities, altering the political landscape drastically each time.

The Akītu festival meant participation between three positions of power: the king, the temple, and the gods. During the festival in the first month of Nisannu, temple-functionaries cleared and cleaned temples, gods came to visit, and the king was slapped and revered. We see that, though the festival was an annual celebration, not all kings were able to practice annually: revolts and war halted performances, as did disputes between cultures. The Akītu festival was suggested by kings and priests alike as proof of peace for all men, though reverence for the gods of the festival was also mentioned in victory stelae hundreds of kilometers from the capital city.

## 2. Past and Recent Scholarship

### a. Past Scholarship

Study of the Akītu festival began around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with S.A. Pallis' *The Babylonian Akītu Festival*, Heinrich Zimmern's *Zum babylonischen Neujahrsfest* and Langdon's *The Babylonian Epic of Creation*. Much scholarship on the festival prior to the 1980s has been largely within a system of analysis developed out of these books, and it is therefore important to mention the main theories.

Largely grouped together as "Myth-and-Ritual" scholars, the term itself stems from the study of John Fraser's *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* published in 1911.<sup>3</sup> This school of thought focuses on the mythic, though not necessarily religious, connotations found within ritual actions. Zimmern's analysis focuses on the Akītu festival as a New Year's phenomenon with Near Eastern comparisons: he asserts that Marduk's role within the festival was akin to that of an Christological figure. In utilizing KAR 143, known as the *Marduk Ordeal*, he justifies comparing the imprisonment of the god, his eventual death, and subsequent re-birth

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<sup>3</sup> Bidmead 2002 p. 21

with that of the Christian deity.<sup>4</sup> Langdon follows a similar interpretation, connecting this reading with his study on the *Enūma Eliš*. According to Julye Bidmead, Langdon was the academic that conceived the idea of a sacred marriage, or *hieros gamos*,<sup>5</sup> but it was indeed Pallis who fleshed out the idea into a proper thesis.<sup>6</sup> These two developments, the *hieros gamos* and the death and rebirth narrative, are joined with a reading of the Akītu festival as being a dramatic representation of the *Enūma Eliš* in its entirety.<sup>7</sup>

#### b. Recent work on the Akītu festival

Recent work on the Akītu festival begins with Mark Cohen's *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East*. Although covering several millennia, Cohen devotes nearly the entire fourth section of his book to the Akītu festival. Starting with the earliest attestations, he offers a detailed overview of the festival. His analysis runs in line with Myth-and-Ritual thought, though he does cite problematic issues with the text in agreement with W.G Lambert's work on the festival.<sup>8</sup> Because Cohen focuses on the calendar as a ritual mechanism, little is discussed concerning political involvement in the festival.<sup>9</sup>

In *Ina Šulmi Īrub*, Beate Pongratz-Leisten fleshes out a topographic and ideological analysis of the program of the gods' procession during the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium. Pongratz-Leisten focuses her study on the differences between the program in Assur and Babylon, and Uruk, asserting that "die Anlässe der Feste sind, jenachdem ob sie auf lokaler oder überregionaler Ebene stattfinden, vielfältiger Art und hängen von dem institutionellen Rahmen des Festes ab."<sup>10</sup> Pongratz-Leisten's work is one of the first deconstructionist approaches to the Akītu festival: she asserts that a procession of gods presupposes mobility such that functional proximity of gods must not be tied to one place, and thus gods and their areas are not immediately identical. Her work focuses on space as a recipient of sensation and character by means of action, rather than

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<sup>4</sup> This, along with any following discussion on Zimmern's work, is taken via paraphrasing Bidmead's summation (Bidmead 2002 p. 17-19).

<sup>5</sup> See Bidmead 2002 p. 102ff, *passim* for a discussion on this theory.

<sup>6</sup> Pallis 1926 p. 197ff

<sup>7</sup> See Hooke's *The Origins of Early Semitic Ritual* 1938 p. 10-22. Bidmead collects the most notable scholars that also follow the myth-and-ritual analysis of the Akītu festival p. 21 n. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Cohen 1993 p. 423

<sup>9</sup> Cohen recently published *Festivals and Calendars of the ancient Near East* (2015), but his discussion on the Akītu festival is near identical and thus will not be covered.

<sup>10</sup> Pongratz-Leisten 1994 p. 3

the other way around.<sup>11</sup> While Pongratz-Leisten analyzes her work in a very Eliadean sense of order vs. anti-order, her claim that the Akītu procession is a “Zeichensystem” used by the cult and state in order to inform “aktuelle Kultsituation und Mythos auf der visuellen Ebene... und auf diese Weise Popularisierung von Theologie zu betreiben, die ansonsten Spezialisten vorbehalten war” is one of the first conclusions from a methodological study of the festival outside of a purely mythic-centric lens.<sup>12</sup>

Her settling remarks that, in contrast to Assur and Uruk, Babylon is shown to have a vividly close connection with myth and ritual with respect to action, topography, the intensification of what she calls “Universalität Marduk,” and the Akītu festival does mean that the Myth-and-Ritual is necessarily on point, but it does mean that it cannot be entirely disposed in lieu of a politically-manufactured festival.<sup>13</sup>

The next major study on the Akītu festival is that of Julye Bidmead, whose dissertation on the subject was published in 2002. Acting as another deconstructionist work, Bidmead successfully discusses a general outline of the festival within its millennia-long context. Focusing on the same subject as this present study, the first section works on a reconstruction of the Akītu festival. The second section of her dissertation generally discusses ritualistic elements of the festival and the third on historio-political background and analysis of the festival. The main concern of Bidmead’s work is the convolution of texts that this present study attempts to separate out into differing periods of rule. Bidmead’s conclusion that follows reads more of an initial assessment than an analysis of the festival as it occurred during the period:

“The festival was a tool to connect the priesthood and the state... by adopting the fundamental Babylonian ideology, claiming Marduk as supreme god and celebrating the *akītu*, the rulers of Babylon, whether they were native or foreign, demonstrated their loyalty to the people of the land... they won the support of both the people and the priesthood. The *akītu* ritual was designed to provide legitimacy to the king in the eyes of the Babylonian populace.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4; see I.5.a below for J.Z. Smith’s theory on the relationship of space and meaning.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5: “Die Untersuchung bewegt sich dabei schrittweise vor vom mythologisch gedachten Kosmos über den allgemeinen Lebensraum, der sowohl die Stadt als Abbild des Ordnungsgefüges wie auch die Steppe als Bereich der Antiordeung umfaßt, zum Tempel.”

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 147

<sup>14</sup> Bidmead 2002 p. 173

Marc Linssen's *The Cults of Uruk and Babylon* (2004) covers the Hellenistic period in Uruk and Babylon, highlighting many festival practices; while the Babylonian Akītu festival during the month of Nisannu is covered in less than ten pages, the information Linssen provides is made to solely mention the appearances of the festival during this time and is thus incredibly accurate, clear, and unmistakably limited. The criticism that comes of this approach is that little information can be concluded: Linssen suggests after presenting nearly every published primary source during this period that "the Nisannu version [of the Akitu festival] follows the schedule used in the Neo-Babylonian period."<sup>15</sup>

Annette Zgoll in 2006 published *Königslauf und Götterrat Struktur und Deutung des babylonischen Neujarsfestes*, which covers a variety of topics beginning with themes and objectives of the festival, conceptual and source diversity, actors and setting, and the function and representation found in the festival's rituals. Zgoll competently addresses major theories concerning the festival and reassesses the evidence within a historical context. In addition, she focuses upon connection to previous Assyrian celebrations of the festival as well as challenging myth-ritual interpretation with the history of performance.

The most recent remarks made on the festival belong to Lauren Ristvet in *Ritual, Performance, and Politics in the Ancient Near East*. Her work focuses primarily on the use of public events and daily practice of a people "in order to see how the world actualized in ritual impinges on the world of common sense,"<sup>16</sup> and utilizes modern post-colonialist theory along archaeological and textual evidence in order to explore this gap. In her analysis of Hellenistic Babylon, she concludes that "self-consciously traditional Mesopotamian activities were connected to religion and the temple. Indeed, Mesopotamian temples, archives, and scholarship served as 'protected enclaves' or... *lieux de mémoires*, separate and protected from the vicissitudes of ordinary life."<sup>17</sup>

### 3. Goals of this Study

This thesis aims to give a spatial analysis of the Akītu festival in order to investigate the political landscape of the Neo- and Late-Babylonian periods in Babylon (626 BCE - 100 BCE). I intend

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<sup>15</sup> Linssen 2004 p. 86

<sup>16</sup> Ristvet 2015 p. 25

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 209

to highlight and analyze the interaction between participating actors and their performances relating to the festival over a chronological timeline for the purpose of understanding a larger ideological and political structure of the festival. In analyzing the relationship between individuals and their action through historical and social space, we may better understand how power balanced between temple and state officials and the space they shared in Babylon. This form of spatial analysis, the critical viewing of action in the festival's history with regard to its participants and their performances in a text-traditional historic space, has only been partially undertaken by Jonathan Z. Smith in 1982.<sup>18</sup>

The objective of this thesis is to first chronologically organize textual evidence used by previous scholars in order to present the festival on historical and authorial bases. In using this method of collation, I intend to 1) analyze the use of space between state and cultic figures through historical and literary framing in order to 2) see how these spaces were used for imperial or particular bases and 3) apply theory established by historian of religion Jonathan Z. Smith and Marxist philosopher Slavoj Žižek in order to understand why certain importance was given to specific actions/places by particular state/cultic powers and how this importance manifests.

By highlighting the interaction between cult and state in this shared space, I wish to 1) compare how each empire utilized space within its historic context and 2) understand how these utilizations relate to a wider socio-political history. In comparing the relationship between various kings of Babylon and the festival through texts written during their respective time periods, I will attempt to create a macro-history of the Akītu festival. In doing so, I hope to show that the Akītu festival was a developing festival that was as dependent on the ruling king as it was a defining factor of kingship in Babylon.

#### 4. Methodology

The process of this study is twofold: 1) to collate an alternative corpus that focuses on historic aspects of the Akītu festival and 2) to spatially analyze this corpus. The parameters themselves of this study are not new: Pongratz-Leisten's work on a larger study concerning the spatial analysis of the Akītu festival as a whole in both Babylonia and Assyria during the first millennium. Her study works in general with the comparative intercultural nature of the Akītu festival, but

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<sup>18</sup> Smith 1982 p. 90-96



whereas the focus of her study is on the movement and representation within the festival on a religious and ritual level of analysis, this present study's observation and analysis differs in the application of spatial analysis. I will be using the aid of Pongratz-Leisten and others in order to note not just the physicality of performance and its relation to individual and communal levels, but also the implications and representations of characters, actions, and space on theological and political levels when applicable. The aim of this is not to understand the formal aspect of the festival but rather the functional relationship between participating actors and their actions.

In the subsequent sections of chapter one, I will establish the groundwork of theory utilized in this thesis; chapters two through four will focus on a variety of sources that are concerned with the state, cult, and the Akītu festival during and thereafter the Neo-Babylonian period. The corpus is collated firstly by chronological order, divided by imperial rule, and secondly by genre. The selection of Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods in this study are made up of royal inscriptions and chronicles, whereas selected chronicles and cultic texts are used for the Hellenistic period. Chapter five will consider all the material together and summarize the conclusions gleaned from this study.

The present corpus is a non-exhaustive collection of texts comprised of cuneiform material composed after the founding of the Neo-Babylonian empire, which began under the rule of Nabopolassar (626 B.C.E) until the end of what is considered Hellenistic Babylonia (roughly 110 B.C.E. ± 10 years).<sup>19</sup> It is centered on several Seleucid era texts originally published by Thureau-Dangin in *Rituels Accadiens*; however, materials such as royal inscriptions and chronicles are added to this corpus for the purpose of elucidating perspectives of the festival outside of the temple. Because majority of the texts come from a scribal/priestly context, this corpus is inherently skewed to favor a particular perspective of the Akītu festival; in order to combat this bias, I point toward Slavoj Žižek's *Parallax View* in order to suggest irreducible functions of the festival.

## 5. Theory

In understanding how this case study is established, the parameters of theory must be met. The first of two thoughts comes from historian of religion Jonathan Z. Smith and the second from the

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<sup>19</sup> Van de Mieroop 2007 p. 270; Da Riva 2008 p. 4

philosopher Slavoj Žižek. The two modes of theory enacted in this case study focus firstly on the study of place and secondly in defining the difference of subject/object relations. This case study utilizes the idea of Jonathan Z. Smith on several levels: on a general level, I utilize his definitions of space/place and more specifically, I incorporate Smith's theory of locative vision for my own mode of spatial analysis. Likewise with Žižek, I look at the Akītu festival as *objet petit a* for the temple and state, which is to say the "irreducible tension" between an object and its subject.

a. Jonathan Z. Smith

Jonathan Z. Smith begins his definition of place with respect to 'the humanistic geographers' in that "place is best understood as a locus of meaning."<sup>20</sup> By using the work of Yi-Fu Tuan as a definitive example of this school of thought, he explains that "abstract space, lacking significance other than strangeness, becomes concrete place [only when it is] filled with meaning."<sup>21</sup> This perception, Smith stresses, "stands in sharp contrast to the mainstream of geographic theories of place in most of Western history... [which is] that it is place that creates man and his culture as well as his character, rather than the other way round."<sup>22</sup> The second postulation the author makes in his definition of place concerns Kantian definition and subsequent delineation of the "thorny geographical claim of 'exceptionalism'"<sup>23</sup> with respect to the study of geography and history; Smith insists "the claim that place be conceived as 'individual,' as having a 'unique physiognomy'... is best captured by the pictorial character of idiographic method."

The formation of place within the study of religion is developed by Smith contra Mircea Eliade's established categorization of archaic and modern religion. For the author, "the dichotomy between a *locative* vision of the world (which emphasizes place) and a *utopian* vision of the world (using the term in its strict sense: the value of being in no place)"<sup>24</sup> developed out of the study of Late Antiquity and particularly that of "both ancient Israel's ideology of Holy Land

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<sup>20</sup> Smith 1987 p. 28

<sup>21</sup> "Space is more abstract than place. What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value ... If we think of space as that which allows movement, the place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place" is Smith's choice in quotation in particular for illustrating his definition, taken from Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place: The Perspectives of Experience*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 30

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 31ff; the passage comes from Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* 9:159-63 (see n. 39 of Smith 1987 p. 138).

<sup>24</sup> Smith 1978 p. 100f

and later Judaism's mythology of Exile."<sup>25</sup> The religions of the Late Antiquity period, according to Smith,

“were inextricably tied to local loyalties and ambitions. Each persisted in its native land throughout Late Antiquity, frequently becoming linked to nationalistic movements... Indeed, many of these religions underwent a conscious archaization during this period. Old texts in native languages were recopied (especially those which were related to such resistance themes as sacred kingship), national temples were restored and old, mythic traditions revived... From Palestine to Persia one may trace the rise of Wisdom, Messianic and Apocalyptic traditions which reinterpret and maintain these central theses: the importance of the ancient, traditional lore; the saving power of kingship and the revival of myth.”<sup>26</sup>

This conclusion supposes that there was a movement from place into non-place in that “they evolved modes of access to the[ir] deity which transcended any particular place.”<sup>27</sup> Ostensibly, the obverse of this transcendence was “the production of priestly and scribal elites who had a vested interest in restricting mobility and valuing ‘place.’”<sup>28</sup>

The definition of these visions, locative and utopian, are discussed as the former being “concerned primarily with the cosmic and social issues of keeping one's place and reinforcing boundaries... emplacement is the norm, [and] rectification, cleaning or healing is undertaken if the norm is breached;”<sup>29</sup> the latter is formed out of the antithesis of this idea: “man is no longer defined by the degree to which he harmonizes himself and his society to the cosmic patterns of order; but rather by the degree to which he can escape the patterns.”<sup>30</sup>

Spatial analysis is not only concerned with the practitioner or observer, but also with locating “text within a history of tradition and to provide some sort of explanation for the processes of continuity and change.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Smith's own analysis of the Akītu festival battles many conjectures made by the Myth-and-Ritual School<sup>32</sup> on the simple assertion that the texts

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. XII

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p. XIII

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. XIV

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p. XII

<sup>29</sup> Smith 1990 p. 121ff

<sup>30</sup> Smith 1978 p. 139

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* p. XI

<sup>32</sup> See Section I.5.a

used come not from Babylon during the first millennium in general but from the Seleucid period in particular.<sup>33</sup>

b. Slavoj Žižek

*The Parallax View* is the self-proclaimed magnum opus of Slavoj Žižek: the book, he claims, “is based on a strategic politico-philosophical decision to designate this gap which separates the One from itself with the term *parallax*.”<sup>34</sup> This parallax gap Žižek discusses is “the concept of the inherent ‘tension’ of the One itself... [which is to say] the confrontation of two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible.”<sup>35</sup> Žižek analyzes irreducibility by means of parallax analysis: parallax being “the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight;” what is novel about this is not that one witnesses an object from different points of view, but rather “the subject’s point of view always reflects an ‘ontological’ shift in the object itself.”<sup>36</sup>

Žižek’s own interpretation of this effect is twofold: 1) reality is dependent upon the composition of subjectivity (it is witnessed or experienced by means of the subject), and 2) the subject inherently inscribes itself upon the object, thus making that act of witnessing ‘material existence’ never whole precisely because of the inherent inclusion of the subject upon the object (thus creating a gap or displacement). This effect of observation gives rise to Žižek’s explanation of Lacan’s *objet petit a*, a noumenal object beyond appearance, that which “can never be pinned down to any of its particular properties.” This object

“is the very cause of the parallax gap, that unfathomable X which forever eludes the symbolic grasp, and thus causes the multiplicity of symbolic perspectives. The paradox here is a very precise one: it is at the very point at which a pure difference emerges — a difference which is no longer a difference between two positively existing objects, but a minimal difference which divides one and the same object from itself —

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<sup>33</sup> Smith 1987 p. 92

<sup>34</sup> Žižek 2006 p. 7

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4 and 7

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17

that this difference ‘as such’ immediately coincides with an unfathomable object: in contrast to a mere difference between objects, *the pure difference is itself an object.*”<sup>37</sup>

This perspective of difference as an object Žižek equates with Hegel’s concrete universality: first, in defining universality as “not the neutral container of particular formations, their common measure, the passive (back)ground on which the particulars fight their battles, but this battle itself, the struggle leading from one particular formation to another,”<sup>38</sup> he asserts that concrete universality is not made out of opposition — his examples being fiction versus documentary and eternity as opposed to temporality — but in addition to “the universal core that animates a series of its particular forms of appearance, *it persists in the very irreducible tension, noncoincidence, between these different levels.*”<sup>39</sup> This notation is contra the assertion of Hegel being called an ‘essentialist historicist,’ because this assertion ignores what Žižek calls a temporal parallax, or the “events or processes which, although they are the actualization of the same underlying ‘principle’ at different levels, for that very reason cannot occur at the same historical moment.”<sup>40</sup>

This last point Žižek points out primarily on a macro level, by comparing the (non)coincidental timing of Protestantism, philosophical workings of Kant, and the French Revolution, but the idea works additionally on micro levels, i.e. within the French Revolution itself. Žižek quotes Marx’s analysis of the Party of Order who, in their mockery of what they aimed to destroy, were “establishing the very conditions of bourgeois republican order that they despised so much,” and furthers this point with discussion on dismissing the Nazi regime as inhuman and bestial, rather than remaining “all too human.”<sup>41</sup>

Žižek’s theoretical parallax view is utilized in many ways. First, his discussion on the usage of subjectivity and presence of difference between observations will be used extensively: the usage of various perspectives in order to ascertain meaning of a particular phenomenon begs the necessary definitions of understanding what is meant when one says ‘difference.’ This

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 18, italics are of the original author’s.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 30

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 31; italics are of my own emphasis.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 32

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p. 41ff; n.b. p. 42: “One of the curious stories about Hitler reported in the (in)famous record of his ‘table conversations’ is that, one morning in the early 1940s, he awakened terrified and then, tears streaming down his cheeks, explained the nightmare that haunted him to his doctor: ‘in my dream, I saw the future overman — they are so totally ruthless, without any consideration for our pains, that I found it unbearable!’ This very idea of Hitler, our main candidate for the most evil person of all time, being horrified at a lack of compassion is, of course, weird — but, philosophically, the idea makes sense.”

difference, claimed by Žižek and echoed by my own opinion, is that subjectivity is caused by changes in position, whether that be structural, spatial, or temporal. Secondly, because our object of focus (Lacan's *objet petit a*) is in fact the meaning as expressed through perspective and interaction between observers, it is necessary to note that, to use Žižek's verbiage, it is the battle between one particular and another that is being recorded within our texts and thusly analyzed. Lastly, it is vital to stress Žižek's point that difference cannot be made just by spatial or structural differences, but especially via temporal separation: because an action occurs only once does not limit it to a necessary reading of action by means of time-based context.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith expresses a similar thought when he says "regardless of whether we are studying texts from literate or non-literate cultures, we are dealing with *historical processes of reinterpretation*, with *tradition*. That for a given group at a given time to choose this or that mode of interpreting their tradition is to opt for a particular way of relating themselves to their historical past and social present" (Smith 1978 p. XI).

## Chapter II: The Neo-Babylonian Period

The Neo-Babylonian period contains the most references to the Akītu festival out of the three pertinent periods. During the almost ninety years of independent rule, both kings and temples composed works that detail occurrences of the festival: gods present for offerings, building projects, as well as directional movements of the king and gods as actors. The first section, chronicles, focuses primarily on the causes and repercussions of occasions when the Akītu does (not) take place or is (un)mentioned, whereas the second section, royal inscriptions, focuses on how kings represented themselves with relation to the Akītu festival. Because temple actors are not present in any of the texts, their absence is noted, though not discussed in detail.

### 1. Chronicles

For the Neo-Babylonian period prior to Persian conquest, several chronicles are relevant to the study of the Akītu festival, namely ABC 2-5, ABC 14-16, and ABC 22 and 24. In ABC 14-16, A.K. Grayson notes explicit sharing between the texts and ABC 1.<sup>43</sup> Generally, the three texts speak about events that prelude the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, particularly king Šamaš-šuma-ukīn; however, each chronicle focuses on its own topics of choice. ABC 2-5 deal with the first two kings of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. It should be stressed that although Grayson considers ABC 2-5 to be continuous tablets with possibly one or two tablets missing between ABC 2 and 3, currently more evidence suggests that ABC 2 belongs to a separate collection.<sup>44</sup> Lastly, ABC 22 and 24 discuss much earlier periods prior to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the former covering the Kassite period and latter covering the early first millennium BCE. It is important to note that though the texts do cover events and figures outside of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, the tablets themselves were found within a Neo-Babylonian context and likely express ideas and sentiments from this period.

Caroline Waerzeggers asserted in 2012 that the genre of Babylonian chronicles is not well defined: “there is no consensus about the combination of stylistic, thematic, functional, or redactional characteristics that should set the chronicles apart as a genre from other types of

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<sup>43</sup> Grayson 1975 p. 12 n.b. n. 34; this text is discussed in detail in III.2

<sup>44</sup> Van der Spek 2008 p. 280f

historiography... such as annals, king lists, and epics.”<sup>45</sup> According to the author, the British Museum collected all presently known chronicles in two phases, the first being from 1876 and 1884 and the second between 1896 and 1902; the first group comes from Babylon, which is composed of two-thirds of the corpus, whereas the rest come most likely from Borsippa.<sup>46</sup> These texts come entirely out of illicit diggings and exist mostly in singular copies.<sup>47</sup> Of the selected texts, only ABC 22 is known to be Babylonian in origin, rather than Borsippean.<sup>48</sup> This overwhelmingly Borsippean context, Waerzeggers postulates, is part of the remains of private archives associated with priestly functionaries who worked within the Ezida temple: the majority belongs to the Bēliya’u group, whereas ABC 16 and 24 are seen to belong to Re’i-alpi grouping.<sup>49</sup>

This tells us that these texts have specific concerns, though their original context is inherently lost; Waerzeggers notes that “in Borsippa, scribes ceased to record political-historical events shortly after the reign of Neriglissar, whereas in Babylon that practice only started 200 years later at the end of the Persian period.”<sup>50</sup> Outside of ABC 22, the following chronicles thus betray a Babylon-centered context although the texts themselves focus almost entirely on events in and surrounding Babylon. Although Waerzeggers marks striking the want to write a “national history” along with the adoption of a “Marduk theology,” a more prominent issue left unaddressed is that while the chroniclers’ “main concern was with current affairs, and... compile an ongoing record of important events,”<sup>51</sup> much of the information gleaned from these texts deal with peripheral conditions, whether that means Marduk worship in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium or the Assyrian-sponsored kings of Babylon prior to the establishment of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

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<sup>45</sup> Waerzeggers 2012a p. 287; cf: Brinkman 1990 n.b. p. 98f, who presents the issue of definition in detail.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* p. 290ff

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p. 289

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p. 293

<sup>49</sup> Waerzeggers 2012a p. 295 notes that “chronicles with a strong religious or cultic orientation are represented in the ‘Re’i-alpi group,’ whereas annalistic chronicles are represented in the ‘Bēliya’u group;” Brinkman states that the scribe of ABC 15, Nabû-Kāšir is seen as a scribe of private legal documents from Borsippa around the time of Nabonidus (Brinkman 1990 p. 75 n. 13)

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 297

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*



## ABC 16

Known as the *Akītu Chronicle*, Grayson suggests that the chronicle is “solely concerned with interruptions in the Akītu festival.”<sup>52</sup> However, its second concern is overshadowed by this blanket statement, which is the uncertain militant and political atmosphere surrounding the absence of the Akītu festival. The first eight lines, shared with ABC 14: 31-37, discuss two vital aspects that precede the Neo-Babylonian period with respect to Marduk worship: 1) the festival was not celebrated due to Marduk's absence from Babylon, as the god was held captive in Assyria, and 2) the festival, upon his return, seems to have been celebrated in neither Nisannu nor Tašrītu, but rather in the second month of Ayyaru upon Marduk's return (l. 7). The second discussion in the text, lines 9-23, concerns itself with the last five years of Šamaš-šuma-ukīn's rule in detail, beginning with the year of the king's revolt against Assurbanipal in 652 BCE.<sup>53</sup> The final section, lines 24-27, glosses over a two-decade reign of Kandalanu, the reported ruler over greater Babylonia after Assurbanipal's capture of Babylon; thereafter, the absence of the festival during the accession year of Nabopolassar concludes the tablet.

According to Grant Frame, the two major revolts by northern Babylonian cities against Assyria occurred first against Sennacherib from 694-689 BCE, which begins the chronicle,<sup>54</sup> and second under Šamaš-šuma-ukīn, during the years mentioned thereafter. However, none of this is explicitly stated within the text; instead, the chronicler focuses on the effect of these revolts with respect to the Akītu festival. The only discussion outside of the festivals' non-practice is concerned with insurrections (*šahmašātu*),<sup>55</sup> which are highlighted during the late reign of Šamaš-šuma-ukīn and accession year of Nabopolassar. The fact that Nabopolassar is lumped into a group of Assyrian rulers who before him halted the festival might suggest that he was busier with quelling threats than participating in religious festivals (l. 16, 26). Yet, if we are to trust the caution that which ABC 15 entrusts in discussing the cancellation of the Akītu festival (see below), we may be able to make a statement concerning the perception of Nabopolassar at the time of this writing: the populace that wrote or, at the very least, cared for this document, could

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<sup>52</sup> Grayson 1975 p. 35

<sup>53</sup> Frame 1981 p. 115ff

<sup>54</sup> Frame 1981 p. 63ff; Brinkman 1990 p. 77 n. 25

<sup>55</sup> *Sahmaštu* A CAD s p. 65

have held some reservations over the putative king's early years, his revolt occurring so soon after Šamaš-šuma-ukīn's failed attempt.

## ABC 15

ABC 15 begins with two Assyrians who were established king of Babylon by their fathers: Aššur-nadin-šumi and the aforementioned Šamaš-šuma-ukīn.<sup>56</sup> The latter king's fourteenth and fifteenth years of reign, not present in ABC 16, are recounted here with the retrieval of Marduk's bed and chariot, the former object being almost certainly from Assur.<sup>57</sup> The explicit details concerning the sixteenth year of the same king made in ABC 16 are not discussed and instead the insurrections discussed in the seventeenth year are expanded upon greatly. In lines 7-18, Frame's vision of Šamaš-šuma-ukīn's success at Cuthah is not available to be read in great detail,<sup>58</sup> although the text emphasizes seizing Nergal's putative statue. In reaching (*sanāqu*) Babylon, the chronicler ends the section on Šamaš-šuma-ukīn. Thereafter, two problematic kings are discussed: Širikti-šuqamuna, whose brother is mistaken as being Nebuchadnezzar,<sup>59</sup> and Nabû-šuma-iškun, who is stated as having Nabû not show up for his fifth and sixth year of the Akītu festival.<sup>60</sup>

While this text does follow some years shared with ABC 16, namely the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth years of Šamaš-šuma-ukīn's reign, the Akītu festival interruptions are wholly missing. The chronicle's focus in these years is on the Assyrian army encroaching upon Babylon and the successive battles that ensue. In this respect, the mention of the Akītu festival being halted during Nabu-šuma-iškun's reign is striking. We see in his seventeenth year that the conquest against the Assyrians in Cuthah was a success for the Babylonian king. The king in question is not discussed by Grayson so much past his possible Assyrian ties, which for the author seem to be a dead end.<sup>61</sup> If the case is that a revolt is what halted the god's travel to Babylon, as seen in ABC 16, then we must reconcile why in ABC 15 the revolts that halt the

<sup>56</sup> Grayson 1975 p. 33: "It is noteworthy that both Ashur-nadin-shumi and Shamash-shuma-ukin were native Assyrians placed on the Babylonian throne by their respective fathers, Sennacherib and Esarhaddon."

<sup>57</sup> See Millard 1968 in *Iraq* 30, p. 98-111, n.b. p. 106-108.

<sup>58</sup> Frame 1981 p. 128f

<sup>59</sup> The reading Ninurta-kudurri-ušur is meant according to Grayson 1975 p. 130; see also PKB p. 164.

<sup>60</sup> According to Waerzeggers 2010 p. 7 n.24, Nabû-šuma-iškun is viewed as "a convenient example of the paradigmatic *bad king* to later generations."

<sup>61</sup> Grayson 1975 p. 33f

festival occur only in reference to ones against the ruling king, as opposed to ABC 16, wherein general warfare and conflict seems to take precedence.

This reconciliation may be found within the text's context, which comes from Borsippa, the city in question that revolted against the king. In J.A. Brinkman's assessment of BM 33428,<sup>62</sup> a clay cylinder written in response to repairs of a section of the Ezida by Nabû-šuma-ibni, governor of Borsippa and high priest of Nabû during the discussed king's reign. The author suggests that previous king "Eriba-Marduk's adjudication of the land disputes around Borsippa had lost effect in his successor's [Nabû-šuma-iškun] reign."<sup>63</sup> Because the text specifies that Nabû did not come to Babylon rather than that the Akītu did not take place (l. 22), a revolt against the king would explain this detail.

#### ABC 14

Also known as *the Esarhaddon Chronicle*, the section pertinent to our study is lines 31-39. The context prior to this section focuses on the twelve years of rule under Esarhaddon, king of Assyria. Lines 31-37, sans 33 and 34, mirror ABC 16:1-8 with the change of only one day.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, lines 35-39 match Chronicle 1 iv: 34-38, though the date again differs.

The two lines unique to this chronicle, l. 33 and 34, are as follows: "Nabû did not come from Borsippa for Bel's procession; in Kislîmu, Assurbanipal, [Esarhaddon]'s son, in Assur ascended the throne" (l. 33-34). The note of Nabû's absence for the Akītu festival stated above in ABC 15 may be still relevant for this passage, though it is troubling that this mention comes after stating the Akītu festival did not take place; it is uncertain if that means that, as in ABC 15, Nabû chose to not participate in the Akītu festival due to conflict. The section thereafter discusses the arrival of the gods from Assur into Babylon, along with Nabû from Borsippa, and notes that they arrive in Ayaru, the second month of the calendrical year. It is assumed that the Akītu festival did not take place because the month of Nisannu passed, but two remarks should be made concerning this assumption: 1) if the Akītu festival did not take place, Nabû would have no need to travel to Babylon, and 2) the Akītu and war appear already closely related and in the following

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<sup>62</sup> Published as RIMB 2 B.6.14.2001 in Frame 1995 p. 123.

<sup>63</sup> PKB p. 225

<sup>64</sup> 14:36 states that the gods came from Assur to Babylon on the twenty-fifth, whereas ABC 16:7 writes the twenty-fourth.

lines (38, 39) there was a campaign against the city of Kirbitu; presumably in retaliation, the judge of Babylon is taken prisoner and thusly executed. Because the text breaks off at this point, no consensus can be immediately made.

## ABC 2

Although the Akītu festival is not mentioned in ABC 2, this does not mean that the text is irrelevant: as will be seen later in this chapter, the Akītu festival is not at all discussed with respect to Nabopolassar's reign outside of ABC 16.

Shortly after when the Akītu festival would have occurred in Nabopolassar's first year, "panic overcame the city" (*hatti ana āli imqut*) and gods, namely Šamaš and the gods of Šapazzu (l. 18 and 19), are taken into Babylon. Though undiscussed, this panic is most likely due to the Assyrian army, as a similar event occurs later in the year with the gods of Sippar entering Babylon (l. 20-24), and prior to his accession year when the gods of Kish entered into Babylon before the Assyrians arrived (l. 6-7). In lines 14 and 15, we see that there is historiographical crossover with the *Akītu Chronicle*. According to the ABC 2, no king reigned for the year prior to the ascension of Nabopolassar, which occurred in the second half of 626 BCE,<sup>65</sup> agreeing with ABC 16. Nabopolassar struggles to contain the Assyrian threat for the first couple years, as explicit presence of his name and deeds disappears completely in the events that detail his third year: instead we see Der's rebellion and movement of Assyria's king.

This focus on the gods' movement particular to Nabopolassar and the Assyrian army suggests several implications: 1) the Akītu festival may not have occurred in the first few years of Nabopolassar's reign, 2) the ability to call upon gods to be moved for safety reasons is not limited to reigning kings, and 3) the attention given on this interaction between Nabopolassar, the gods, and the Assyrian army may have established trust and allowance for the at-the-time general to establish kingship.

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<sup>65</sup> There is a debate as to whether or not the events prior to his ascension (lines 1-13) take place in the same year. It is under my impression that it is over the course of two years. For arguments for and against, see Zawadski 1988 p. 48-54; see also more recently Da Riva 2001 in *AoF* 28 p. 40-64 and Oelsner 1999 in *Festschrift für Renger* p. 643-666 for arguments of two short lived reigns of Sîn-šar-iškun and Sîn-šum-līšir during this time period.

ABC 3-5

Tablets 3-5 are the only chronicles that are suggested to be read together due to the evidence of catch lines that match the end of one tablet with the beginning of the next. The three texts cover Nabopolassar's reign from his tenth year until the eleventh year of Nebuchadnezzar II, where the phrase used as catch lines at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> tablets "the king of Akkad mustered his/the troops..." (*šar Akkadi ummani(šu) idkema*) is seen. There is only one explicit mention of the Akītu festival, which takes place at the end of Nebuchadnezzar II's ascension year (ABC 5:14). Due to the fact that the king always "goes back home" (*ana mātišu itūra*) by the end of the year, the festival could have occurred without need for comment; however, the only thing that can be said is that the festival is at the very least prominent for the first year of the king Nebuchadnezzar II, judging by its sole presence within this context.

ABC 22

Grayson notes that only about a third of the text of ABC 22 is preserved of what he considers to be an "historical epic."<sup>66</sup> The text itself is concerned with the Kassite period: in the first column the chronicler follows Kadašman-Harbe, who is killed by a rebellion of his own people (i: 10). Upon his death, Šuzigaš, a "son of a nobody" (i: 11),<sup>67</sup> is instated and thusly killed by Ashur-uballit I, the king of Assyria and avenger of his daughter's son (i: 12). The next two columns follow Kurigalzu II, Kadašman-Harbe's son instated by Ashur-uballit I, who is seen making a "canopy of pure gold for Marduk" wherein the mention of Babylon and Borsippa closely follow (iii: 7-9). The final legible column discusses Tukulti-Ninurta I's destruction of Babylon: he tears down the walls (iv: 4) and takes property out of the Esagil, including Marduk (iv: 5-6).<sup>68</sup> After a rebellion in Assyria headed by Tukulti-Ninurta I's own son, Ninurta-tukulti-Ashur, the chronicler notes the return of Marduk to Babylon (iv: 10-13). The end of this section discusses subsequent Elamite invasions by Kiten-Hutran, first during Enlil-nadin-šumi's reign, and again during Adad-šuma-iddina (iv: 14-22).

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<sup>66</sup> Grayson 1975 p. 57f

<sup>67</sup> The phrase "*mār la mamnu*" is noted as being peculiar; indeed, in Nabopolassar's own usage of this phrase, he is seen having written "*apal la mammanim*" (Npl. 4 l. 4; see VAB IV p. 66).

<sup>68</sup> See Waerzeggers 2015 p. 214-6 for additional information on Tukulti-Ninurta I and the possible dating of this text.

What we may surmise, if we are to trust that the fact that this material appears in the Neo-Babylonian period due to copying if not outright composition,<sup>69</sup> is that the milieu in charge of this tablet had particular interest in its subject. Although the Akītu does not appear in the text per se, there are several particularities related to the festival found in the Neo-Babylonian period that coincide with the Kassite period: the decoration of gold for Marduk, the rise of sons of ‘nobodies,’ and Assyrian occupation and subjugation over Babylonia. These particularities all are reminiscent of points discussed by both chronicles and royal inscriptions, namely the reigns of Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar II.

#### ABC 24

ABC 24 covers a period of nearly 300 years, from the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, just before the reign of Marduk-šapik-zeri, until the rise of Shalmaneser V in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century. According to Grayson, this period “stretches from the end of the first ‘dark’ period of Babylonian History (Kassite domination) to the beginning of the second ‘dark’ period (complete control by Assyria).”<sup>70</sup> The obverse begins with the mention of prosperity by means of making *ṭūbtu* and *sulummû*<sup>71</sup> with Ashur-bel-kala, the king of Assyria (l. 3-7). Thereafter, Aramean forces attack several key urban centers such as Der, Nippur, and Dur-Kurigalzu, wherein shrines of Marduk are noted as being finished (*ušaklil*) (l. 8-11). Simbar-šipak is seen making a throne to Enlil (l. 12-13)<sup>72</sup> and Marduk is described as “staying on the dais” in Eulmaš-šakin-šumi’s fifth year of reign (l. 14).<sup>73</sup> The tablet’s reverse covers the various kings of Assyria and Babylonia (l. 1”-8”), pausing on Eriba-Marduk’s reign, who “took the hand of Bēl and the son of Bēl in the second year” (l. 9-10). Eriba-Marduk is seen killing the Arameans “who had taken by murder and insurrection the fields of the inhabitants of Babylon and Borsippa... and gave (them) to the Babylonians and Borsippeans” (l. 11-13). The king then sets up “the throne of Bēl in Esagil and

<sup>69</sup> Grayson 1975 p. 56: the writing’s orthography itself is in Standard Babylonian, yet the epigraphic and contextual evidence remains within a “Late Babylonian” context.

<sup>70</sup> Grayson 1975 p.64

<sup>71</sup> See *ṭūbtu* in CAD T p. 116, most likely the standard Babylonian for *ṭūbu*, same page. For *sulummû*, see CAD S p. 372.

<sup>72</sup> See alternatively King’s translation of the throne’s name being “the Lord of All,” which gives an alternative religious connotation (King 1907 p. 61)

<sup>73</sup> According to L.W. King, this phrase is suggested to mean the same as “Bel did not come out,” which is to say that he remained absent from the Akītu procession. This variance on Nabû did not come (from a Borsippean context) is striking.

Ezida” before the rest of the tablet begins to break away, leaving only names of Assyrian kings and Nabû-našir, the usurper of Nabû-šuma-ukin, the king discussed in ABC 15.

The most notable events in this text are Eriba-Marduk’s involvement with the Akītu festival, the asserted condition of peace between Assyria and Babylonia at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, and the Sutean/Aramean attack, who keep for generations the land around two of their most valued cities. First, we should note that Eriba-Marduk participated in the festival in his second year and not (at least not explicitly) his first year; additionally, we see the creation of a throne for Marduk after his success in winning over the lands around the capital city, actions which are also seen undertaken by Neo-Babylonian kings. Secondly, we see internal threats rather than the typical external Assyrian threats. When a rebellion occurred with reference to the fields of Borsippa in ABC 15, the instability most likely stemmed from the Aramean-led events that transpired in this chronicle: what may be suggested is that the control over ‘invading’ peoples, at least those that successfully acted against the king, brings either animosity in their success or jubilation in their demise. Eriba-Marduk successfully wards off the threat just after we see participation with the Marduk-Nabû cult, whereas Nabû-šuma-ukin in comparison is seen being given the short end of this stick in ABC 15.

## 2. Royal Inscriptions

Nabopolassar

C12,<sup>74</sup> which Farouk al-Rawi dates to after 622, but before 612 BCE,<sup>75</sup> is a clay cylinder suggested to be one of the earliest writings of the king. It describes the rebuilding of the é.PA.GÍN.til.la, or E-hursag-tilla, the temple to Ninurta.<sup>76</sup> According to Langdon, the text “is the only single column cylinder among the literary remains of the Neo-Babylonian Empire[; i]t represents the style of composition used by Shamash-shum-ukin and generally adopted by the

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<sup>74</sup> Da Riva 2013 p.54ff; Al-Rawi 1985 p. 1ff.

<sup>75</sup> The text “contains a reference to *ummānāt Enlil Šamaš u Marduk*... i.e. [the workmen] of Nippur, Sippar and Babylon, and can therefore be dated after 622 B.C. (When Nabopolassar had gained control of Nippur).” Al-Rawi 1985 p. 2

<sup>76</sup> See George 1992 p. 314

Babylonian school before his time.”<sup>77</sup> This temple, according to George, is the first stop for Nabû upon his arrival to Babylon.<sup>78</sup>

The text itself mentions that “although I [Nabopolassar] was the son of a nobody, I constantly sought the sanctuaries of my lord Nabû and Marduk. My mind was preoccupied with the establishment of their cultic ordinances and the complete performance of their rituals... [Šazu] placed me... in the highest position in the country in which I was born.”<sup>79</sup> The extent of religiousness should be noted: Nabopolassar as a child “used to visit continually the sanctuaries of Nabû and Marduk my lords, my heart thought always of establishing the rites and completing their rituals, and my attention was directed toward justice and righteousness” (lines 7-14). For Schaudig, this religiosity was for political reasons: “It is certainly no coincidence that the music plays the loudest in the inscriptions of usurper kings like Nabopolassar and Nabonidus. It is to show their contemporaries and posterity that they were indeed legitimate.”<sup>80</sup> It is curious how Nabopolassar crafted an image akin to ritual practice when his figure is not seen elsewhere having participated in the Akītu festival.

Nebuchadnezzar no. 9

Nebuchadnezzar II, son of Nabopolassar, on the other hand, frequently adds being the “caretaker” (*zāninu*) of the Esagila and Ezida to his arsenal of epithets and is resplendent in his evidential presence of building inscriptions and makes explicit and detailed mention of the Akītu festival on many separate occasions.

The first thing the second king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire assures in his rebuilding of the royal palace of Babylon is that it was neither the most important deed nor first on his list of construction projects: stuck at the end of the third column (9 iii: 27-42), several other building and caretaking passages are first given space and prominence. First discussed are the offerings

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<sup>77</sup> Langdon 1905 p. 2

<sup>78</sup> George 1992 p. 314

<sup>79</sup> The name Šazu is problematic for in one hymn that Foster dates to the second millennium, and Lambert discusses it as being “later than the *Enūma Eliš*,” (Foster 2005 p. 702; Lambert 2013 p. 147f) this name is attributed to Nabû. Yet, in the seventh tablet of the creation text, Šazu is used extensively for the name of Marduk (Lambert 2013 p. 127); the name in the *Enūma Eliš* is spelled phonetically, šà-zu, as in the cylinder, whereas its otherwise written MIN. In the text quoted by George that denotes PA.GÍN as hursag also denotes PA.GÍN as MIN as well (VAT 10270; AHw p. 1124).

<sup>80</sup> Schaudig 2010 p. 151



made toward Marduk initially, and then to both Marduk and his consort Zarpanītu (9 i: 8-28). After the gods were properly appreciated and fed, the king dressed in gold the living quarters/cellas (*papāhu*) of Marduk, Zarpanītu, and Nabû (9 i: 29-51); thereafter the western city wall called the Imgur-Bel is repaired so “that the evil and wicked might not oppress Babylon” (9 ii: 2-5). The king then discusses the Ezida temple of Borsippa as being treated with similar care: gold, silver, jewels, bronze, cedar and *miskanna*-wood<sup>81</sup> are used to decorate the temple (9 ii: 18-35). Penultimately, the king discusses an increase of regular offerings to Nergal and Laz of E-šidlam and Cutha, and the rebuilding of the E-barra for Šamaš and Malkat of Larsa, E-qiššir-gal for Sîn of Ur, E-īde-Anim for Anu of Dilbat, E-tur-gina for Šar-šabātu of Bas, the reestablishment of the Nana cult in Uruk, and finally the adjustment of the E-anna foundation (9 ii: 36-59).

The text prior to rebuilding his palace concerns the Akītu festival in that the king writes of the extravagance of food and drink given for presumably Nabû and Marduk’s feast (9 iii: 7-17). These commodities are able to be given because of “the numerous peoples which Marduk my lord gave unto my hand I subdued under the sway of Babylon” (9 iii: 18-20). The text describes that through Marduk the king gathered “all men in peace,” and as such he stored “produce of the lands, products of the mountains, bountiful wealth of the sea... [and] great quantities of grain beyond measure” (9 iii: 21-26). Only after all this does Nebuchadnezzar II write of his actual building project, his palace, where royal decisions and imperial commands go forth from the newly renovated place and within it he hopes to grow gray with age, enjoy prosperity and “receive the heavy tribute of the kings of all regions and of all peoples” (9 iii: 41-59).

Nebuchadnezzar no. 15

This inscription contains the most mentions of the Akītu festival out of all the Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions. The text begins with god-fearing Nebuchadnezzar’s ‘creation’ by Marduk and his appointment by the same god alongside Nabû’s approval (15 i: 23- ii: 11). Through this divine appointment, the king quickly sweeps through his military campaigns (15 ii: 12-29), stopping only to mention the rare goods offered to the god from these conquests (15 ii: 30-39).

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<sup>81</sup> CAD M/2 p. 237; this wood is especially known as an exotic material from the east.

The main section of the text describes the process of building up sacred spaces in Babylon and Borsippa, from the main temples of Marduk and Nabû (15 ii: 40- iii: 69) and temples of other gods within the two cities (15 iv: 7- v: 65) to their walls and gates (15 v: 66- vi: 62). The last portion of the building text deals with rebuilding Nabopolassar’s palace and the construction of Nebuchadnezzar’s own palace (15 vi: 63- ix: 44).

The first mention of the Akītu festival occurs when the *du<sub>6</sub>.kù ki-namtartarede* is discussed. The last of four renovations mentioned that take place in the Esagila,<sup>82</sup> the “throne-dais of destinies” is described as existing in the *Ubšu-ukinna*, the “gathering hall of fate, wherein at the *zgmuk*<sup>83</sup> in the beginning of the year, on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> days of the month, the king of the gods of heaven and earth, divine lord, sits... where they decree the days of eternity and the fate of my life” (15 ii: 55-64). The renovation involves adorning the dais in gold rather than the silver clothed by a former king; additionally utensils (*unūtu*) and the *Ku-a-boat*<sup>84</sup> are decorated, though it is not clear if these objects exist within the *Ubšu-ukinna* or not.<sup>85</sup>

The second and third mentions are concerned with the modes of transportation for the gods’ procession: the first deals with the *má.íd.hé.du<sub>7</sub>*, a boat used for the procession of the Akītu festival.<sup>86</sup> Immediately after the *má.íd.hé.du<sub>7</sub>* boat, Nebuchadnezzar II discusses rebuilding the *E-siskur* temple, known as the Akītu house,<sup>87</sup> “of the great New Year’s Fes[tival] of Marduk... construction of joy and gladness of the Igigi and Annunaki near the wall of Babylon.” In the second mention, Nebuchadnezzar II describes completing the walkway begun by his father from the *du<sub>6</sub>.kù* to the *Ay-ibūr-šabû* street “for the procession of my great lord Marduk” (15 v: 40-50).<sup>88</sup>

The last mention of the Akītu festival is coincidentally the most pertinent with explicit reference to Nebuchadnezzar II’s choice of living in Babylon after a preface that speaks of

<sup>82</sup> First is the *Ekua* (Marduk’s cella), the gate of abundance (*Ka-Hilisu*) (see George 1992 p. 393-5), and the *Ezida* gate.

<sup>83</sup> The term *Zgmuk* means beginning of the year, coming from Sumerian *Saĝ*, meaning head, *mu*, meaning year, and genitive-suffix /ak/. The term is comparable to Hebrew *ראש השנה*; see Çaĝirgan 1976p. 204f

<sup>84</sup> Considering that Marduk’s cella is known as the *E-kua*, this boat is most likely the *makurru*-boat discussed in Nebuchadnezzar no. 19.

<sup>85</sup> See George 1992 p. 287-291 for more on the geography of the dais.

<sup>86</sup> Translation comes from Da Riva 2012 p. 51; Langdon 1905 translates this as “Boat of the Kan-Ul canal” (*elippu naru Kan-Ul*). The canal this boat uses is almost certainly the Borsippa canal: the writing of *Šuanna<sup>ki</sup>* (15 iv: 2) designates the south-eastern corner of Babylon, which contained Nabû’s processional road (*Nabû-dayyān-nišīšu*) and ran south “beyond the city to a quay on the Euphrates above the mouth of the Borsippa canal.” (George 1992 p. 25; to read more on Nabû’s side of entering Babylon for the Akītu festival, see Waerzeggers 2010 p. 119-125)

<sup>87</sup> George 1992 p. 268f

<sup>88</sup> See Pongratz-Leisten 1994 p. 40f for more on the Akītu processional in Babylon.

“former times, from the ancient days to the reign of Nabopolassar... my predecessors, whose names god had named for ruling had built temples in cities which they loved” (15 vii: 9-19). It was only “upon the festival, the zagmuk, the procession of the lord of the gods Marduk, they entered into Babylon” (15 vii: 23-25). The king utilizes his relationship with the two gods of Babylon and Borsippa (“After Marduk created me for kingship and Nabû, his faithful son, had appointed me over his dominion... More than Babylon and Borsippa I made no city to stand forth in glory.”) to make claim that his father’s palace stands in the midst of Babylon (*ina qereb Babili*) (15 viii: 19-30). Upon building his house, he prays to Marduk such that he may “receive in it the heavy tribute of the kings of all quarters, yea of all mankind” (15 x: 9-12).

Nebuchadnezzar no. 19

The last inscription of Nebuchadnezzar is known as the Brisa Inscription. According to Da Riva, “the composition of the Brisa text was a long process, which probably began in the last regnal years of the monarch,”<sup>89</sup> and its final form was constructed near the Mediterranean coast of modern-day Lebanon.<sup>90</sup> Both it and text 15 begin similarly with an appeal to Marduk and Nabû for their divine appointment, the king’s military conquest and an offering of worldly produce and commodities (19 i: 1-iii: 34). The first section (l. iii: 35-58) mirrors no. 15 in describing the building of first the Ekua and gate of abundance, but the text varies in that it focuses on Nabû’s cella, “to which, at the zagmuk, at the commencement of the year, for the feast, the Akītu, Nabû... takes his seat” (19 iii: 49-53). This text doubles the amount of oxen offered to Marduk and his consort for each day during their monthly ceremonies compared to Nebuchadnezzar no. 9. Additionally, Marduk’s own *makurru*-boat is mentioned, that “at the zagmuk, on New Year’s day, Marduk, lord of the gods, into it I caused to ascend and to the magnificent feast, his grand celebration, I caused him to go in procession” (19 v: 31-39).<sup>91</sup> A processional way (*mašdahu*) is described as being decorated between the má.u<sub>5</sub>.tuš.a toward the E-siskur (19 v: 40-50).

After describing the construction of the Ezida in Borsippa, Nebuchadnezzar mentions roughly the same sacrificial offerings as written in no. 9: one ox, sixteen lambs, etc. (19 vi: 1-vii: 20). The má.íd.hé.du<sub>7</sub> boat is described in detail, along with the spots where the god

<sup>89</sup> Da Riva 2012 p. 96

<sup>90</sup> For additional information, see Da Riva 2012 p. 15ff.

<sup>91</sup> For the reading of Makurru rather than *hiskua*, see Da Riva 2012 p. 48

disembarks and travels in Babylon and into the Esagila (19 vii: 21-52). There is one last mention of the Akītu festival in the Neo-Babylonian variant (source B of Langdon) text, though it is only used to present that, for “every year with plenty and abundance,” many foods, goods, and beverages, “the abundance of remote countries, the good from everywhere,” is presented by the king to the two gods (19 vii: 10-30).

Neriglissar no. 1 (Clay Cylinder 23)

The singular mention of the Akītu festival by Neriglissar is with respect to Nabû, whose own *parak šīmati* is decorated in gold rather than the silver coating laid-out by a previous king; it should be noted that Nabû is seen making his presence in this room on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of Nisannu (1 i: 33-40).<sup>92</sup> Like with Nebuchadnezzar, the clay cylinder dedicated to a palace ends with praying to receive “the heavy tribute of the kings of the regions, or all the inhabited world from the horizon to the zenith whether the sun rises [and] may my offspring inside it rule forever over the black-headed [people].”<sup>93</sup>

Nabonidus no. 8

Recognized as one of the inscriptions made in Nabonidus’ first years,<sup>94</sup> this inscription discusses the king’s elevation to power, year of accession, legitimization of his rule, and a preamble that details the establishment of the Neo-Babylonian Empire beginning with Sennacherib’s destruction of Babylon. The relevant section of this stele comes after his ascension to the throne, acceptance of Nabû’s scepter, and prayer toward Marduk to accept his kingship, his adornment of the temples in Babylon (8 iv-viii): on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the Nisannu, while the gods were in “the Akītu-house, the ‘house of blessing’, the leaders of the Akītu-house” (*akīti enliltu*), Nabonidus gives 100 talents 21 minas of silver, 5 talents 17 minas of gold to Marduk, Nabû and Nergal (8 ix: 3-30). Afterward, he dedicates nearly 3,000 prisoners from Hume to the three gods (8 ix: 31-50).

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<sup>92</sup> Against Cohen 1994 p. 441, this does not imply that there is a conflation of unique Akītu festivals for both Marduk and Nabû, only that Nabû takes part in his own respective dais rituals for Borsippa. Cf: Waerzeggers 2010 p. 129 n. 573.

<sup>93</sup> Da Riva 2013 p. 133f

<sup>94</sup> Beaulieu 1989 p. 22

Nabonidus no. 2 and Nabonidus no. 6

These two texts are concerned with the rebuilding the E-Babbar and the E-Kurra temples in Sippar for Šamaš (and Bunene in no. 2) and date respectively to his earlier years (no. 2) and the period he spent in Teima (no. 6).<sup>95</sup> Their references to the Akītu festival occur only at the end of their sections and share very similar remarks: the king inscribes to Marduk, Nabû, and Nergal (Zarpanītu is included in no. 2), both his own gods and “of all the gods,” (2 ii: 28) of “the throne in the parameter (*sihirtu*) of the Akītu-house, of the exalted king of the gods, the lord of lords, on the zagmuk, for the beginning of the year, for the Akītu festival, (bloody) and flour offerings I supply you (in the) E-dadi-hegallu” (2 ii: 27-31). Alternatively, no. 6 states “of the gods of the parameters of the Akītu-houses of the leaders of gods” (6 ii: 49-50) instead of “of all the gods.”

### 3. Analysis

#### a. Chronicles

Understanding that the context of these chronicles belong almost entirely to the private archives of priests in Borsippa, why do the texts sporadically discuss the Akītu festival and no other religious festival? Additionally, is there any other information that we may gain outside of the (non-)practice of the Akītu festival: is there a connecting factor between kingship, rule, and their interaction with Marduk?

Following the chronicles’ accounts, we witness in ABC 22 Šuzigaš, the son of a nobody, having raised out from a rebellion against Kadašman-Harbe only to be killed by Assyrian ruler Ashur-uballit I who thereafter instates Kurigalzu II, a figure who is tied to Babylon, Borsippa, and Marduk. Tukulti-Ninurta I soon thereafter destroys the walls of Babylon, strips the Esagil bare, and takes away Marduk. His son, Ninurta-tukulti-Ashur returns this statue.

Peace is established between Assyria and Babylon in ABC 24: the enemies at this time are Arameans that attack the region. Marduk is mentioned as staying on his dais for Eulmaš-šakin-šumi’s fifth year of reign, but two and a half centuries later is taken by the hand, along with Nabû, by Eriba-Marduk in the king’s second year of reign. Eriba-Marduk then dispels the

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<sup>95</sup> Beaulieu 1989 p. 44

Arameans that inhabited the fields between Babylon and Borsippa and we witness him set up a throne for Marduk in Babylon. Later in ABC 15, Marduk neglects to show up during Nabû-šuma-iškun's fifth and sixth years of reign due to a revolt in Borsippa, possibly due to a contrast in effective ruling compared to the previous king, Eriba-Marduk.

We are given boilerplate information on the inability to worship Marduk in Babylon for twenty years during the years of Sennacherib and Esarhaddon in ABC 16 and 14. In ABC 15, along with ABC 16, Šamaš-šuma-ukīn is seen warring with his brother Assurbanipal in his last few years of kingship. The two texts are not complementary per se: we see that, for five years, the Akītu festival does not take place; the king does, however, seize Nergal's statue in Cuthah just in time before Assyrian forces reached Babylon.

After Kandalanu, the mysterious two-decade ruler of Babylon, we see the Akītu festival not take place for the son of a nobody Nabopolassar's first year of reign in ABC 2; days after the festival would have occurred, Babylon is overcome with panic. It is not until Nebuchadnezzar II's ascension year witnessed in ABC 3-5 that attention is put on the festival again, a decade after annual campaigns against Assyria and its surrounding regions.

When the Akītu festival is mentioned, it occurs mostly in its absence: twice we receive a summarized history of the kings before Šamaš-šuma-ukīn with relation to the absence of the festival (ABC 14, 16); during Šamaš-šuma-ukīn's own reign, the Akītu festival is only mentioned when issues arose that either blocked a participating god from attending (ABC 14), or when the entire festival was unable to be performed due to martial conflict (ABC 15, 16). After Assurbanipal's recapturing of Babylon and Kandalanu's placement as regent for the area, twenty years of possible practice is skipped over only to mention again the festival's absence in Nabopolassar's year of ascension (ABC 16).

From the view of the chroniclers there are only two mentions of the festival that occur during the Neo-Babylonian Period, the first being the initial absence during Nabopolassar's ascension year, mentioned above, and the second taking place between Nebuchadnezzar II's ascension and first year. If, then, we only receive information of the Akītu's absence — minus the one instance of Nebuchadnezzar II's participation and Eriba-Marduk's own participation in his second year — can we suggest that the absence of mentioning the Akītu means that the festival took place?

In Nabopolassar's later years (ABC 3-5), in addition to the time between accession and first years of rule (ABC 2), we have neither such a hand-taking abbreviation nor mentioning of the festival taking place. Considering the unstable conditions that Babylonia existed in during Nabopolassar's first few years of reign, the king very well might have not been able to perform the Akītu festival until later in his reign; ABC 15's only attestation of any Akītu rites, Nabû not coming to Babylon, occurs during the time when Borsippa was under revolt. ABC 14 only implicitly mentions the festival in a passage near identical to ABC 16's beginning, and though it does not discuss the revolt and general warfare that halted the festival, we know this to be the case.

In looking at ABC 22 and 24, both of which cover seemingly irrelevant time periods, we additionally see this pattern emerge. In ABC 22, the only Babylon-in-context chronicle, we have a temporary victor that arises out of a rebellion, sharing the title "son of a nobody" with future king Nabopolassar; though this king is ultimately taken out by the Assyrians, we see his Assyrian appointed successor build a golden canopy for Marduk. Although the Assyrians teeter between destroyers of the Esagil, Babylon, and Marduk, they also are seen as providers and peace-keepers: sons like Ninurta-tukulti-Ashur return gods to Babylon that their father previously stole when on the throne, as also seen with Šamaš-šuma-ukīn. ABC 24 shifts the focus of Assyrian domination toward that of Aramean rabble-rousers; Eriba-Marduk, the eventual king that quells the rebellion, is seen first participating in the festival and only thereafter is seen as victor over the Arameans.

#### b. Royal Inscriptions

While it is true that Nabopolassar never explicitly mentions the festival, we see several connections between himself, the tradition prior to his reign, and the unfinished legacy left for his son, Nebuchadnezzar II. A usurper by any other name, Nabopolassar is connected to Šamaš-šuma-ukīn through several means, first in his initial compositional style of C12 and second in his revolt against Assyrian rulers. For the first king, though his "mind was preoccupied with the establishment of their cultic ordinances and the complete performance of their rituals," he still saw the first and main objective of his rule to be the successful removal of the Assyrian threat

that loomed over his new Empire.<sup>96</sup> Outside of a brief glimpse of his construction work with his sons in tow,<sup>97</sup> it is only after his death that we see his work on the Akītu festival as having taken shape but not yet completed when Nabuchadnezzar II discusses finishing the Ay-ibūr-šabû street.

Just as the only explicit mention of the Akītu festival taking place in the Neo-Babylonian period exists during Nebuchadnezzar II's reign, it is only through this king's royal inscriptions that we see how the stage, direction, and performance of the Akītu festival existed during the Neo-Babylonian Empire: through physical space, Nebuchadnezzar II gives importance to his renovating projects and participation in the Akītu festival. Via textual space he gives prominence to the gods first by nourishment from distant land, second by housing (built with exotic materials), and thirdly by protection by means of adornment of their cellae (9 i: 29- 51) and completion of city walls (9 ii: 2- 7), thus separating himself and Babylon from the outside world. After securing Babylon, he grants the same benefits to Borsippean gods, sans a description of the city walls. (9 ii: 18- 35).

Later in his life, he discusses the dozens of other sacred spaces for other gods along with their own protection (15 iv: 7- vi: 62), but only after describing his wide-reaching arm that takes from faraway lands (15: ii: 12- 29) for the purpose of offering exotic luxuries for the gods, particularly Marduk and Nabû (19 ii: 24- 34, vii: 10- 30). It is only in the Brisa inscription at the end of his reign that we see Nabû's cella within Babylon be given reverential treatment (19 iii: 49- 53). In the same inscription, we see that Nabû and his consort are given half of what Marduk receives (19 ii: 49- 53, vi: 1- vii: 20).

Comparing the order in which the two Akītu gods are arranged between Nabopolassar's mentioning of them (Nabû then Marduk) and Nebuchadnezzar's own preferential order, we see that Babylon, and thus Marduk, is given special importance over Borsippa during Nebuchadnezzar's reign. This is compounded by the one reference of the festival made by Neriglissar, who gilds with gold the dais in Borsippa for Nabû, which had been done for Marduk by Nebuchadnezzar II in Babylon decades prior (15 ii: 55-64). Transportation and procession of the gods seemed for Nebuchadnezzar II to be an act of completion rather than innovation or inspiration: he describes completing the processional way between the du<sub>6</sub>.kù and the Ay-ibūr-šabû street along with canal-routes (15 v: 40-50), originally started by his father. Of these

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<sup>96</sup> Schaudig 2010 p. 151

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* p. 153



processional ways, the king writes the god's movements in the causative š-stem: "I caused to ascend... I caused him to go in procession" (19 v: 32-36). This procession, however, is important enough to describe where the visiting god moves (19 vii: 21-52).

The king, as is tradition, leaves his reason for writing the inscription last: for both no. 9 and no. 15, the purpose is (re)building palaces, whereas no. 19 enumerates offerings for his gods with an emphasis on the spatial distance that which he discusses the importation of foreign materials and foodstuff that enrich the festival. The decision to live in Babylon in no. 15 comes "after Marduk created me for kingship and Nabû, his faithful son had appointed me over his dominion" (15 vii: 26-29). This domain, the "abode of my royal power, in the land of Babylon which is in the midst of Babylonia, from the Imgur-Bel to Libil-hegalla, the canal on the east, from the bank of the Euphrates to Ay-ibûr-šabû" (vii: 39-46) is where his father previously lived. Here, Nebuchadnezzar places his home in the center of the city; interestingly, the layout of these parameters, sans the Euphrates, is composed of projects that Nebuchadnezzar II completed in his father's stead (iv: 66- v: 11). The offerings for no. 19, which Da Riva concludes as being justification of imperial conquest of the west,<sup>98</sup> still places Babylon at its center.

In rebuilding the city and bettering the gods and their spaces — particularly those that are affiliated with the Akītu festival — Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar II, and Neriglissar are particularly transparent about their duties as king outside of religious fervor: the three kings all pray to Marduk for heavy tribute for themselves from the black-headed people they preside over. It is not until the final usurper of Neo-Babylonian Empire, Nabonidus, that we get to see this vision of Marduk and Babylon, with the king as the center and giver of both entities, shift dramatically. Nabonidus reveals a third god in the Akītu venue, Nergal, while discussing the festival only in the vaguest of senses: on the 10<sup>th</sup> day, while the gods are in the Akītu house, he gifts them an exorbitant amount of silver, gold, and temple slaves. Later, he mentions only offerings of flour in the E-dadi-hegallu, and after his return from Teima, the gods Marduk, Nabû, and Nergal fade away toward explicit reverence toward Sîn, who takes Marduk's epithets as gods of gods.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Da Riva 2012 p. 96

<sup>99</sup> Beaulieu 1989 p. 44f, 49f, 53f, 61f

### Chapter III: The Persian Period

The Persian Period hardly presents occasions in which the Akītu festival was performed, let alone mentioned. The following texts present occasions in which the Akītu would have most likely been performed or point toward its existence. Sections one and two focus on the role of the king during the early Persian period in both royal inscription and priestly accounts; the third section highlights evidence detailing actions that affected the elite (and thereby priestly) populace after Darius' reign.

#### 1. The Cyrus Cylinder and Verse Account

##### *The Cyrus Cylinder*

The form and function of the *Cyrus Cylinder* appears to mimic previous Mesopotamian kings' building inscriptions. Made out of clay and buried deep in the earth beneath the Imgur-Enlil, the *Cyrus Cylinder* was originally thought to have been only for the eyes of later kings and "read by the gods," though recent scholarship suggests that the text itself was known to a wider cuneiform-literate populace.<sup>100</sup> The text itself is written in a notably shoddy Late-Babylonian script; according to Irving Finkel, in viewing the text "simply as a scribal achievement, the *Cyrus Cylinder* is a relatively poor piece of work."<sup>101</sup> The royal inscription is composed of three parts:<sup>102</sup> lines 1-19 consist of the preamble, or establishment of cause; lines 20-36 discuss the victory and approval of Cyrus in Babylon; lines 37-45 discuss the rebuilding of Babylon, ending with the desire to keep the inscription safe.<sup>103</sup> The text's structure in this respect does reflect standard Mesopotamian clay cylinders, albeit with its own personal flair.

The text at first glance focuses on the bad-king/good-king dynamic between Nabonidus and Cyrus, though Waerzeggers proposes instead that the text serves better as "a manifesto of conditional collaboration by the vanquished [Babylonians], rather than a charter of goodwill by

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<sup>100</sup> Waerzeggers 2015 p. 190 n. 34; Finkel 2013 p. 18-24

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12

<sup>102</sup> Waerzeggers 2015 p. 191 suggests a bipartite structure, the first being "a condemnation of Nabonidus' reign, the second a celebration of Cyrus' accomplishments as new king of Babylon."

<sup>103</sup> Finkel 2013 p. 23f

the victor [Cyrus].”<sup>104</sup> Indeed, several factors within the cylinder, such as allusions to the *Enūma Eliš* in line 17 and 36, point toward the writing as an object that rectifies historical events from a Babylonian point-of-view rather than the cursory reading of Cyrus imposing his will upon the Neo-Babylonian Empire through a Persian perspective.<sup>105</sup>

The text opens with the condemnation of Nabonidus, his counterfeiting the temples of Babylonia and the systematic ruination of rituals within the temple system, particularly Marduk’s. The source of this animosity might be the typically thought Sîn-Marduk competition brought on by Nabonidus, but one must not forget that Nabonidus was also known to criticize other kings of the Neo-Babylonian period for their building projects, particularly Nebuchadnezzar II.<sup>106</sup> In Marduk’s choice of Cyrus, the Persian king is seen as a shepherd of justice and righteousness for “the black-headed people whom he had put under his care” (l. 13-14). Gutians, Medians, and Babylonians alike prostrate themselves and the years of conflict, such as the battle at Opis, are conveniently erased from the picture.

Cyrus’ figure in the second section, after introducing himself, discusses first his “sovereign residence within the palace amid celebration and rejoicing,”<sup>107</sup> second Marduk, third Babylon’s safety, and lastly the freeing of the Babylonians from their bonds, soothing their weariness (l. 23-26). Though initially presented as Marduk first finding Cyrus, this portion the text is on Cyrus as king firstly as an individual who establishes sovereignty in Babylon, and thereafter a seeker of Marduk,<sup>108</sup> his protection pervading outward onto the city and then the inhabitants that reside in and around Babylon proper. Cyrus then expands his reign to be considered by those in the surrounding areas “from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea” (l. 29). Through the return of the gods and “all of their people” to their rightful places (l. 30-36), Cyrus “enabled all the lands to live in peace.”

In the third section, which discusses the actions accomplished by the king,<sup>109</sup> Cyrus is seen increasing offerings (presumably Marduk’s), strengthening of the Imgur-Enlil, completing a quay, and noting the existence of a cylinder previously laid by Assurbanipal in a final building

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<sup>104</sup> Waerzeggers 2015 p. 191

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*; Finkel 2013 p. 135f; Schaudig 2001 p. 555 n. 906

<sup>106</sup> Schaudig 2010 p. 155ff; the *Verse Account* v: 16-17 also seems to echo this sentiment as being an issue in part.

<sup>107</sup> See Jursa 2007 p. 75 for the refutation of this reconstruction.

<sup>108</sup> This appears reminiscent to Neo-Babylonian inscriptions (see C12 in section 2.2).

<sup>109</sup> Cf: section 2.2 wherein this formula is also seen in Nebuchadnezzar’s inscriptions especially, though it remains a staple of typical building/royal inscriptions.

project.<sup>110</sup> This final section is corroborated to a degree: bricks that come from building projects in Uruk show evidence of Cyrus’ construction, as well as in Ešnunna and Akkad.<sup>111</sup> Michael Jursa suggests that the purpose of the cylinder as a whole, but particularly this end section, “is that the new rulers adopted a conscious policy towards these old royal acts [of grants or royal interference with cultic practices].”<sup>112</sup> Waerzeggers in agreement states that “the *Cylinder* and the bricks bear witness to his attempt to respect the routines of Babylonian kingship... [yet] neither of these texts can really be said to be true to the Babylonian spirit of piety. They rather celebrate Cyrus’ imperial program and drive home Babylonia’s submission.”<sup>113</sup>

### The *Verse Account*

The *Verse Account* is often coupled with the *Cyrus Cylinder* in both context and content.<sup>114</sup> Though the tablet is severely damaged, the text covers Nabonidus’ reign from his “unorthodox religious policy” and time spent in Teima, to Cyrus’ investment of Babylon. The fifth column mentions the 11<sup>th</sup> day of Nisannu (v: 2-28), wherein Cyrus discusses the symbol of the Esagil, which Waerzeggers cites as being the last day of the Akītu festival in 539/8 BCE.<sup>115</sup> Following Waerzeggers’ argument that this section is in fact Cyrus’ speech rather than Nabonidus’, Cyrus’ assertion that the Esagil is for Bēl rather than Sīn provides the view that the Persian king was seen as “liberator and restorer” when compared with Nabonidus.<sup>116</sup>

While the comparison of Nabonidus and Cyrus is the main subject at stake in the text, the secondary characters of Rēmūt and Zēriya, described respectfully as a *šatammu* and *zazakku*, remain elusive. Waerzeggers notes that these characters were freshly appointed just before Cyrus’ conquest of Babylon and were allowed to remain during the Persian period,<sup>117</sup> thus claiming that the reading of this passage and in particular their agreement of the king’s words

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<sup>110</sup> The phrases used in the inscription are reminiscent of palace and temple building inscriptions, though the actual building cannot be suggested. For a list of possible sites built by Assurbanipal in Babylon, see Jamie Novotny’s *Selected Royal Inscriptions of Assurbanipal* (2014) p. X

<sup>111</sup> Jursa 2007 p. 77f; Waerzeggers 2015 p. 195

<sup>112</sup> Jursa 2007 p. 78

<sup>113</sup> Waerzeggers 2015 p. 196

<sup>114</sup> Zawadski 2010 n.b. p. 142; Beaulieu 2007; Waerzeggers 2012b

<sup>115</sup> Waerzeggers 2012b p. 318

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* See n. 3 for opinions that differ from this reading.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* p. 317: “Both men retained their positions under the new regime for at least fifteen years.”

endorsed Cyrus and his orders.<sup>118</sup> Although she notes that “their loyalty must have been unquestioned, widely known and closely monitored,” there were a number of newly appointed priests in the last few years of Nabonidus that remained in power until Cambyses’ rule, and not only in Babylon alone: additionally, there was Nabû-mukîn-zēri, *šatammu*, and Nabû-ah-iddin, *bēl piqitti*, of the Eanna temple in Uruk; while Nabû-mukîn-zēri was indisposed after Cyrus’ 1<sup>st</sup> year, Nabû-ah-iddin remained until Cambyses’ 4<sup>th</sup> year.<sup>119</sup> In a letter between Rēmūt and said priests of the Eanna temple written in Nabonidus’ final year, the boilerplate greeting of a blessing from Nabû and Marduk is used.<sup>120</sup> If these figures were indeed relied upon during the transition years from an independent state to satrapy, what does this tell us of Cyrus’ early years, especially when these figures were indeed not established in his reign but during the villainized reign before him?

According to Jursa, M. San Nicolò’s initial conclusion in 1941 that Persian period administration hardly changed the previous Neo-Babylonian regime holds mostly true, but only for the first few years,<sup>121</sup> e.g. a major, but relatively ineffectual, change of the title ‘governor of the land,’ originally held by one of Nabonidus’ officials, was changed over to the position of ‘Governor of Babylonia and Across-the-River,’ handled by the well-attested Persian Gubāru within the first three years.<sup>122</sup> The author states that it was in the time of Darius that the state’s finances and tax system changed dramatically, calling for corvée work, transportation of foodstuff to Iran rather than Babylon, and an increase in *ilku* taxation.<sup>123</sup> It appears then that the later concern of temple practice and participation cannot be the case here; the issues raised still focus upon the previous king’s decrees.

A second point concerning these two actors deals not with characterization, but placement and action. Rēmūt, the royal secretary, stands in front of the king, whereas Zēriya, the administrator of the Esagil, kneels before him. They both “would confirm the king’s utterance... they would (even) bare their heads and declare, (as if under) oath: Ah! Now (only) do we

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*; see also Zawadski 2010 p. 151 n. 38: both authors argue against Kleber’s assertion that suggests a composition date in the 4<sup>th</sup> century during the rebellions of Nebuchadnezzar III and IV.

<sup>119</sup> Beaulieu 1993 p. 244; see also Jursa 2007 n.b. p. 82 for office changes around Nabonidus’ time.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*: YOS 3 145: Beaulieu suggests that because of this blessing, the letter comes from a Babylonian context (see n. 13). As an aside, this seems to betray the suggestion inside the Verse Account that the Esagil changed its housing from Marduk to Sîn.

<sup>121</sup> Jursa 2007 p. 79ff

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* p. 80

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* p. 86ff

understand, since the king has explained (it).”<sup>124</sup> According with Waerzeggers, “Zēria’s and Rēmūt’s confirmatory speech during the New Year’s festival was thus part of the public drama of regime change: the new ruler restores traditional practice, and local dignitaries endorse this restorative policy.”<sup>125</sup> This reading depends upon Waerzeggers’ first assertion that this scene takes place during the Akītu festival;<sup>126</sup> indeed, the sixth column does point toward a religious occasion with reference to sacrifice, increase in offerings, and prayer to the gods.

We must be careful of reading too much into this, however. If we suppose that Zēriya’s kneeling shows priestly confirmation and/or submission to the king then we must ask why it is the *šatammu* and not the *ahu rabû* or any other priest that performs this act for the king. The CAD suggests that in the Neo-Babylonian period “the *šatammu* no doubt was the highest priestly functionary as well as the chief administrator,” particularly in the Esagil of Babylon where there was no *šangû*;<sup>127</sup> yet, no single document outside of this text relates the *šatammu* with the Akītu. The scene recalls praise for the king by the administrator for the temple in particular: nothing points to this interaction to mean anything more than a display of public drama, regime change or not.

It should be further questioned as to why Cyrus, Zēriya, and Rēmūt all met to discuss the temple: the text explains that Cyrus’ decision to return its order back toward the worship of Marduk rather than Sîn. The text does not seem to be concerned with the degrees of power between the temple and king, considering the king’s decision is made with wholehearted agreement. I propose that this section, namely the interaction between Cyrus and the temple administrator, is written solely toward the purpose of showcasing Cyrus’ integration with the well-wishes of both gods and temple workers. Rēmūt’s visibility as royal secretary suggests that this interaction is political in nature, rather than religious.<sup>128</sup> The absence of supplication toward any one god, even with mention of sacrifice, suggests to me that the figure of Cyrus as restorer of tradition is much more pertinent to the account than his work as follower or representative of Marduk, as the *Cyrus Cylinder* attempts to establish.

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<sup>124</sup> Verse Account v: 25’-27’, Beaulieu’s translation (Beaulieu 1989 p. 215f); Waerzeggers 2012b p. 318

<sup>125</sup> Waerzeggers 2012b p. 319

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid* p. 318

<sup>127</sup> CAD š/2 p. 192

<sup>128</sup> Cf: Dandamaev 1994 p. 229ff and Dandamaev 1979 p. 589ff, which may suggest that this text was written after the reforms of replacing temple officials with administrators (see section 3 below), or that these reforms occurred earlier than supposed.

## 2. ABC 1A-1C

The only chronicle with an explicit date comes from Darius' 22<sup>nd</sup> year of reign, just at the turn of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The most complete of chronicles published, ABC 1 is a composite text composed of three separate and non-joining fragments<sup>129</sup> (henceforth titled 1A-1C) that cover the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century BCE until the first year of Šamaš-šuma-ukīn.<sup>130</sup> The texts' provenances are uncertain as "they were acquired in the confused period after [Hormuzd] Rassam's departure from Iraq when tablets with different provenances were available on the market," though Waerzeggers suggests 1A to belong to the Babylonian grouping judging by its colophon.<sup>131</sup>

1A and 1C both begin with Nabonassar's third year of reign, when Tiglath-Pileser III is crowned in Assyria; 1B makes mention of the Akītu festival being suspended prior to this line. Tiglath-Pileser III deports the gods of Šapazza<sup>132</sup> and a Borsippean revolt against Babylon is said to have taken place prior the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the Nabonassar's reign.<sup>133</sup> The events that i: 11-31 cover concern a shaky period of kingship over Babylon, from military coups and probable assassinations to Assyrian expansionism.

Merodach-baladan II is said to ascend the throne of Babylon in the month of Nisannu wherein we see the king attempt to aid the Elamites in their battle against Assyria in his second year (i: 33-37). The text notes that Assyria and Merodach-baladan II were at war for the king's first ten years of rule; two years later, Sargon II beats the king who then flees into Elam (ii: 1-5), taking the crown of Babylon in victory.

At this point the texts begin to vary: 1A and 1C follow Sennacherib's plundering of Merodach-baladan II's palace and royal treasury, establishment of Bēl-ibni, his death, and the subsequent battles and razing of cities in both Babylon and Elam (ii: 6-44).<sup>134</sup> In 1B, we see Sargon II taking the hand of Bēl in the thirteenth year of Merodach-baladan II; the following year we see him remain in Elam. In the fifteenth year, a plague affects Assyria, which the chronicler links with the gods of the Sealand returning to their sanctuaries (ii: 15-19). The three

<sup>129</sup> Brinkman 1990 p. 77ff, n.b. p. 79

<sup>130</sup> See Brinkman 1990 p. 78ff for compositional differences between the three texts.

<sup>131</sup> See also Brinkman 1990 p. 80 n. 41 for verbal forms suggesting Babylon as the topic of centrality in ABC 1A.

<sup>132</sup> Cf: ABC 2 ("Šapazzu") where Nabopolassar halts this from happening in his first year of reign.

<sup>133</sup> Cf: Waerzeggers 2010 p. 6-10, especially p. 7.

<sup>134</sup> Again, a link to ABC 2 can be made with the specific mentioning of Šamaš, the coincidence being an inversion of what is discussed (see n. 130). Šamaš is seen not leaving the Ebabbar whereas Nabopolassar is seen taking him to Babylon explicitly due to the Assyrian danger surrounding the city.

texts continue on to discuss the various insurrections, assassinations, sackings, etc. that occurred between these three powers.

Save the variance of information between the texts, several overarching aspects must be pulled out: 1) the civility enacted between Babylonia and Elam, 2) the alliance, or at least preference, of these two powers to rally against Assyria, 3) the Assyrian domination against these two powers, and 4) the usage of connecting events during warring years with interactions with gods. Much of this chronicle is shared in some form with ‘earlier’ accounts discussed in the Neo-Babylonian period, not including outright borrowing of lines between the texts.<sup>135</sup> The themes above appear especially as sympathetic toward Elam, the established imperial power of Anšan and Susa prior to the establishment of the Persian Empire. This sympathy, Brinkman warns, may come out of analysis via omission: in comparing ABC 14, which shares roughly 85% of the same information as 1A,<sup>136</sup> when there is discrepancy, the author notes that “in one instance... it is obvious that Chronicle 1A is wrong; and elsewhere it can be seen that Chronicle 1A was copied from a source that was damaged or otherwise defective, and that material has been added to that source, sometimes with insufficient precision.”<sup>137</sup> If this is the case, we may understand that 1A’s appearance of “a scribal attempt to introduce outside material” may be indeed for an ulterior reason, if nothing other than a narrative perspective between the three powers.

The Akītu festival is mentioned only once in the beginning of this text and its usage is not able to be determined. However, its singular appearance in the beginning of ABC 1B follows in line with earlier Neo-Babylonian chronicles in that the festival marks periods of military conquest.

### 3. Xerxes and Onward

Sixteen years after the writing of ABC 1A, revolts broke out against Xerxes during his second year of reign.<sup>138</sup> A huge number of private family archives are seen ending between the end of Darius’ reign and Xerxes’ first couple years: starting in the summer of Xerxes’ second year,

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<sup>135</sup> See Brinkman 1990 p. 91ff for the author’s discussion on the sharing of passages between chronicles.

<sup>136</sup> Brinkman 1990 p. 93

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Waerzeggers 2004



scribes additionally date texts to the ascension year of Bēl-šimânni in Dilbat, Borsippa, and Harru-mīlū, as well as Šamaš-eriba in Borsippa, Sippar, Kish, and Babylon.<sup>139</sup> According to Jursa, this was a time when privileged elites were removed from their positions and replaced with lesser known families “whose allegiance to the Persian rulers were not in doubt.”<sup>140</sup> Additionally, the supervision of temple property was no longer maintained by the temple but rather royal officials.<sup>141</sup> While he notes that there are certain aspects before and after these revolts that mark continuity, “as far as the old Babylonian ruling class is concerned, the revolts... mark a clear discontinuity, a radical break.”<sup>142</sup>

Through this, Xerxes came to be known as the destroyer of Babylonian cults. In a recent article by Amelie Kuhrt, the author addresses the claim that “Xerxes’ response to the revolts was to destroy the great Marduk sanctuary in Babylon along with looting its cult statue.”<sup>143</sup> She asserts that while Xerxes most likely did not destroy the temples, the classical sources that portray a negative image of the king “*could* reflect a Babylonian tradition hostile to him... [which] was not shared by all in antiquity.”<sup>144</sup>

This animosity between the temple and Persian power already existed throughout Darius’ reign: in the previous king’s decision to build a new capital, what would become Susa, he outsourced workers and resources from Babylonia and taxed “priestly colleges.”<sup>145</sup> An argument *ex silentio* by Kuhrt and Sherwin-White suggests that the Akītu festival may have occurred at some point;<sup>146</sup> this argument, on the other hand, can also say that while temples and god-statues may have remained, the privileged priests of the Persian period in cooperation with either Darius or Xerxes, kings who enacted taxes and corvée services, may not have taken place, considering

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<sup>139</sup> Waerzeggers 2004 p. 152-156; Waerzeggers 2014 p. 129ff

<sup>140</sup> Jursa 2007 p. 91; cf: Kessler 2004

<sup>141</sup> Dandamaev 1994 p. 229ff and Dandamaev 1979 p. 589ff

<sup>142</sup> Jursa 2007 p. 91; cf: Waerzeggers 2004 p. 162f

<sup>143</sup> Kuhrt 2014 p. 164

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* p. 169

<sup>145</sup> Waerzeggers 2014 p. 138

<sup>146</sup> Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1984 p. 76: “On two occasions the city of Babylon was sacked by Assyrian kings, its temples destroyed and the statue of Marduk removed or smashed. On both occasions the Babylonian chronographic material appears to have regarded these periods as ‘kingless’ [e.g. ABC 1 iii: 28]... Yet the [Ptolemaic] Canon, which has been shown to base itself on reliable local Babylonian material, gives Xerxes his full twenty-one regnal years. This in itself would tend to argue against a destruction of Babylonian temples and removal of the Marduk statue by him.”

how any sort of animosity against a potential king seems to disallow the god's from participating.<sup>147</sup>

There are singular documents that suggest that during the Persian period the New Year's festival continued: VAT 4959, discussed by Unger in 1931 in a footnote, notes that sacrifices were made on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> days of Nisannu to the statues of Marduk and Ninurta in Darius' first year of reign, though the festival is not directly named.<sup>148</sup> However, as Kuhrt notes, the only full royal attestations of the festival taking place is near the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE with Antiochus III, over 300 years after the end of Cyrus' first year discussed in ABC 7.<sup>149</sup>

#### 4. Analysis

The first few years of the Persian Period appear to be filled with hope for the Babylonians and particularly for the priesthoods. Polemical works were composed to compare without impunity Nabonidus' and Cyrus' reigns, especially their cult and military works. Cyrus, in lieu of Nabonidus, is seen as a conqueror and owner of lands (*Verse Account* v: 2-5) as well as the one who re-establishes Marduk in Babylon after the Esagil is converted to favor Šîn. He, although militaristically powerful, exudes peace outward for not just Babylonians, but for all cultures in the Mesopotamian region (*Cyrus Cylinder* l. 23-26). Though both accounts appear to be set up by separate groups, such was the case in the Neo-Babylonian period where the kings were the party that established royal inscriptions with the aid of the invisible hand of scribes, this is not the case; both texts are clearly borne out of temple hands and minds.

By the time of Darius, the honeymoon between Babylon and Persian rule ended: although the region of Elam appears sympathetic toward Babylonian life and vice-versa (ABC 1 i: 33-37), it is not Elam that rules over Babylon and ABC 1 does not seem to imply that the Persian rulers at that time are derivative of Elam proper. Rather, it seems that what was most at stake was the interaction between kings, military conquest, and the gods (ABC 1i: 3-5; ii: 1'-2'; iii: 2-5; 44-46).

As the 5<sup>th</sup> century continued on, greater discrepancies occurred between the temple and palace: though damage may not have taken place physically, the societal protection that the priests relied upon during the Neo-Babylonian period was crushed: private priestly archives end

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<sup>147</sup> Consider the absence of evidence for Nabopolassar's early years in ABC 2 or Nabû-šuma-iškun in ABC 15.

<sup>148</sup> Unger 1931 p. 155 n. 1; Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1984 p. 75

<sup>149</sup> Kuhrt 2014 p. 166

and as we will see in the Hellenistic period, grievances between the Persian state and local elite remained, especially with respect to rites and duties.

What is largely missing from these years of interaction between the temple and state is confirmation of the Akītu festival; we may spot glimpses of its existence and functionality, but largely it remains in a blind spot. There are many arguments that may suggest why this is the case, one of which not being that it did not exist. If, as in the Neo-Babylonian period, the product of cooperation between the state and temple dictated whether or not the festival would take place, there is a lot of room to suggest that the animosity formed between these two powers from Cyrus' reign to the mass death of archives could point toward purposeful halting of the celebration. On the other hand, when Xerxes replaced the elite families in the cities with pro-Persian affiliates, this disappearance would itself have disappeared. A second idea is that did occur, but its particular functions fell to the wayside in comparison to how the festival was used by both king and priest during earlier periods of rule, though ABC 1 points toward this not being the case. A final suggestion is that, since the exchange of power from temple priests to temple administrators who were particularly close with state administrators occurred and appears to have been written retroactively in Cyrus' reign in the *Verse Account*, the Akītu festival may have changed to accommodate a shift in focus from rites and practices to sacrifice and offerings, dispelling the unification of power between three centralized powers (temple, state, and gods) that existed within Babylon.

### Chapter III: The Hellenistic Period

The Hellenistic period is the only period in which cultic texts with relation to the Akītu festival are found. Since Thureau-Dagin's publication of *Rituels Akkadiens* in 1921, scholars have relied upon the four texts found in this volume: DT 15, 109, and 114, MNB. 1848, and later an unpublished fragment presented by Galip Çağırğan that suggests actions made by the temple on the first day of the festival. Concerning the latter of these texts next to nothing is known, whereas the former four are described as "our most important source for the public cult of Marduk in Hellenistic Babylon."<sup>150</sup> These texts were at the very earliest copied during the Seleucid era, though the presumption is that they have older origins. The first section focuses on these cultic texts, along with two other texts offered in subsequent publications concerning cultic activities during the Akītu festival; section two is concerned with chronicles separated by the periods the texts focus upon.

#### 1. Cultic Texts

The first three tablets, DT 15, 109, and 114 are constituted as being part of tablets 22 and 23 of a ritual series that is not limited to the Akītu festival.<sup>151</sup> According to Thureau-Dagin, DT 15 conserves information from columns 2, 5, and 6 of tablet 22, which concerns the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the festival, whereas DT 109 and 114 both cover majority of the same columns on tablet 23, or the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> days. MNB. 1848, on the other hand, covers columns 2-5 of tablet 23.<sup>152</sup> Because these texts come from illicit excavations, it is not possible to discuss in detail their find spots; however, Linssen does make the claim that "for the origin of texts both temple archives as [well as] private archives are possible."<sup>153</sup> In addition to these texts, Çağırğan utilizes BM 32654 + 38193 in order to reconstruct the lines recited by the putative *ahu rabû* in lines 69-79 of DT 15.<sup>154</sup> This text, published posthumously, concerns the creation myth known as Enmešarra's

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<sup>150</sup> Linssen p. 80

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *RAcc.* p. 128

<sup>153</sup> Linssen p. 9; n.b. Linssen takes this claim from Joachim Oelsner's *Materialen zur babylonischen Gesellschaft und Kultur in hellenistischer Zeit* p. 191-94. For a review of this text, see Laurie Pierce pages 136-138 in *AfO* 35/36 (1989/90).

<sup>154</sup> Çağırğan 1976 p. 7-9; Linssen p. 9

Defeat and dates to Seleucid/Parthian times.<sup>155</sup> The last addition to these texts is BM 32485, hand copied, transliterated, and translated by Linssen, which covers lines 235-8 and 463-471.<sup>156</sup> According to the author, it is a fragment of DT 109.<sup>157</sup> Thereafter, two texts, BM 41577 and BM 47902 + 48320, suggested by A.R. George and W.G. Lambert to have contexts that are contained to post-Persian Akītu ceremonial practice, are discussed.

DT 15, 109, and 114, MNB. 1848

In the still unpublished text proposed by Çağırğan,<sup>158</sup> the first of Nisannu begins as thus: at dawn, a *mubannû*-priest<sup>159</sup> with a key in hand goes into Bēl's courtyard. A *ginû ša harī*, possibly a "regular offering of the *harû*-vessel,"<sup>160</sup> of the house within the house of <sup>d</sup>X<sup>161</sup> is mentioned, as well as "water in the middle before..." (*mû ina libbi ana muhhi x x x*). After the priest goes to the Grand Gate (KÁ.MAH)<sup>162</sup> with his key, he approaches a cistern (BÚ) and opens its door: he throws something and water is mentioned; it is not certain if he is throwing water into the cistern or if this water is even the same as the water previously mentioned.<sup>163</sup>

The only other time the first day of Nisannu is mentioned with reference to the Akītu festival during the Hellenistic period occurs in a loan receipt for the payment of sheep for sacrifice: "1/3 mina and 1 shekel of silver for a loan without interruption for part payment (*tamṣītu*) of the Day One temple from 15 Adar to 15 Intercalary Adar... to Urak, the butcher, son of Bēl-etir, was given... 2 shekels for part payment of 3 regular-offering sheep, of which one (was offered) in the Akītu temple, one in the main gate (*babī rabī*) and one in the temple of Nabû

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<sup>155</sup> Lambert 2013 p. 281

<sup>156</sup> Linssen p. 215

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9

<sup>158</sup> Çağırğan 1976 p. 1

<sup>159</sup> CAD M/2 p. 158: cook (who prepares, arranges, and serves food to the gods), temple cook; the text breaks off after Mu-ba, so it is possible that a Mubarrû, or temple announcer, is meant. Linssen notes that *mubannû* priests take part in the Uruk Akitu festival during this time period, which suggests that "the *mubannû* not only prepared the bowls and dishes for the divine meal, but was also allowed to enter the temple" (Linssen 2004 p. 143). However, only four attestations of this figure exist, these being two of the cases.

<sup>160</sup> According the CAD, the only attestations of *ginû* that include the determinative *giš* comes from Middle Babylonian, which contextually suggests "normality, correctness" (CAD G *ginû* a p. 80).

<sup>161</sup> Probably Bēl.

<sup>162</sup> See George 1992 p. 405f

<sup>163</sup> Linssen suggests that the key is what is through into the cistern (Linssen 2004 p. 80).

(*ina bīt x bīt x hi šá<sup>D</sup>Nabû*)... 5/12 shekel for the purchase price of 2 (+X) cuts of meat for regular offerings for New Year's day (*nisanu ūm 1*)."<sup>164</sup>

The program for the second through fifth days is recorded in better detail. On the second day at four a.m. (1 *bēr mūši*), the *ahu rabû* washes himself with river water, pulls back the *gadalû*-curtain<sup>165</sup> before Bēl, and recites a prayer to the god [l. 6-32]. The first half of the prayer is a Sumerian-Akkadian bilingual [l. 5-17] and ends in Akkadian [l. 18-32]. Although the Sumerian is “obscure” for lines 15/16,<sup>166</sup> we see ties between the cities of Babylon and Borsippa in the Akkadian verse: Babylon is Marduk's throne/dwelling (*šubtu*), whereas the crown (*agû*) is Borsippa. At the end of the prayer, the *ahu rabû* asks for Marduk to establish freedom of service for the *šab kidinnu*, a privileged class of well-established citizens within Babylonian cities.<sup>167</sup>

Afterward, the *ahu rabû* opens the gates to allow the *ērib-bīti*-, *kalû*- and *nāru*-priests to perform their rites as usual. The putative *ahu rabû* (the text begins to break off here) does something<sup>168</sup> with a seal as well as the crown of Anu in the presence of Bēl and Bēltiya (l. 52) and a second prayer is said three times.

The second prayer is entirely in Akkadian and, though broken, gives us a couple of aspects to consider: 1) the prominence of curses, fate, and purification with Marduk and Babylon (*namburbû* [l. 57], *arrat* [l. 60], *šīmat* [l. 61], *ubbubu* [l. 67]), and 2) the comparison to the cities of Uruk and Nippur (ln. 69), and their loss of ritual control. While it is unclear who is cursing what, it appears that the wrong-doing enemies (*zamānu lemnūtu*) have control “in their strength” which has caused Marduk(?) to utter a curse which “cannot be altered” and a prophecy which “cannot be withdrawn.” Within a line of Babylon's mention [l. 56], a *namburbû* is mentioned, a ritual for warding off “portended evil.”<sup>169</sup> It appears, then, that within this prayer a separation is created between Babylon and the world outside its walls: while the E-udul is purified (*ubbub*), Uruk and Nippur are burnt and defeated (*qamā u kamā*), their foundations are “uprooted and cast

<sup>164</sup> McEwan 1981

<sup>165</sup> George 1992 p. 403

<sup>166</sup> CAD, A/1 p. 154a

<sup>167</sup> Bidmead p. 50ff; according to the author, *kidinnu* status “indicates the power of the urban citizens and the diminishing of the king's authority and his right to absolute sovereignty. With the end of the Assyrian empire the *kidinnu* disappeared except for a period during Nabonidus' rule” (p. 52). For the author, she attributes continuity between the end of the Neo-Babylonian Empire and the Persian Empire because “two letters requesting *kidinē* payments have been identified.”

<sup>168</sup> The only words visible within this context is *seat* (KI.TUŠ [ln. 47]) and he will place (*išakkan* [ln. 49], though this verb comes before mentioning the seal).

<sup>169</sup> CAD N/1 p. 224

into the water... their rites forgotten to distant days... their regular offerings do not take place... their divine decrees are scattered” (l. 70-73). Lastly, someone binds another (l. 79).

The section concerning Uruk and Nippur appears in the literary text “Enmešarra’s Defeat,” of which a Seleucid copy was recently edited and analyzed by W.G. Lambert.<sup>170</sup> This text describes the imprisonment and execution of Enmešarra and his seven sons as well as the actions and authorization of Marduk, Nergal, and Nabû thereafter. The section that is quoted in the prayer occurs after the execution of Enmešarra and the allotment of land to the gods in IV 19-27. The ending of the text is additionally pertinent:

“All the gods, the gods ... of Borsippa, Cuthah and Kish, and the gods of all the cult centers, come to Babylon to take the hand of the great lord Marduk and they go with him to the Akītu-house. The king offers a libation before them, he recites a prayer. Anu and Enlil from Uruk and Nippur to Babylon to take the hand of Bēl, and come they go in procession with him to Esiskur. With(?) them all the great gods come to Babylon. All the gods who go with Bēl to Esiskur are like a king whose army cannot be annihilated. The Spear-star is Marduk; Ninurta is Nabû; Bēl, Nabû [and Nergal] took [the lordship] of Anu equally.”<sup>171</sup>

In the section that mirrors the 2<sup>nd</sup> day’s prayer, IV 19-27, Lambert notes that, as opposed being said by the *ahu rabû*, the words are proclaimed by a voice from heaven (*ištu šamê ilsā zaqiqi*), whose parallels are found “more easily in the Bible and the Rabbinic *bath qôl* than in cuneiform.”<sup>172</sup> The towns of Uruk and Nippur belong to Anu and Enlil, whom Bidmead notes as being rivals to Marduk in the *Enūma Eliš*,<sup>173</sup> and within this text their destruction is “meant [to be] the end of the old Neo-Sumerian trinity of Anu, Enlil, and Ea, so leaving Babylon and Marduk to take over their previous hegemony.”<sup>174</sup> In addition, we see Marduk take the power of Enlil, Nabû takes Ninurta’s power, and Nergal the power of Erra (III:17-24). Lambert points out that antagonism exists between Uruk and Babylon during the Neo- and Late-Babylonian periods, visible namely in prophecy (SpTU13) and lamentation wherein “the very last word accuses Marduk of depriving Ištar of her spouse.”<sup>175</sup> The crown of Anu, mentioned prior to the second prayer (l. 50), in this respect, holds possible context to this allusion.

After two missing columns of approximately 76 lines, the third day is discussed. The *ahu rabû* wakes up at 3:20 am (1 1/3 *bēr mūši*), washes with river water and recites a prayer before

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<sup>170</sup> Lambert 2013 p. 281-298; the following paragraph follows his analysis and translation closely.

<sup>171</sup> vi: 1-21, see Lambert 2013 p. 297

<sup>172</sup> Lambert 2013 p. 283

<sup>173</sup> Bidmead 2002 p. 54

<sup>174</sup> Lambert 2013 p. 283

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.* ft. 4

Marduk. After a prayer, the *ahu rabû* opens the gates and assumedly the priests mentioned in day two perform their rituals as usual (l. 184-7).

At 9 am (1 ½ *bēr* ME.NIM.A), the high priest calls for a metalworker, woodworker, goldsmith and probably a weaver (mentioned only in the rations for days 3-6 in l. 198). With stones and gold from the treasury of Marduk, tamarisk, and cedar, the artisans are told to make two small statues of seven finger's height (l. 191-201). According to the text, one statue is made of cedar, the other of tamarisk, and both are mounted on four (?) shekels of gold adorned with *dušû*-stones. Their right hands are raised for Nabû, their left hands respectfully carrying either a snake or a scorpion.<sup>176</sup> They are covered in red garments, their loins girded with palm fronds. The two statues remain in the Temple of Madānu<sup>177</sup> until the sixth day when Nabû reaches the E-hursagtila wherein a market slaughterer (*tābih kari*)<sup>178</sup> strikes their heads. The statues are then thrown into cinders ignited before Nabû. For Linssen and Stol, these images represent enemies of Nabû, where they stay with Madānu as a prison sentence; for Bidmead they represent powers that threaten humanity.<sup>179</sup> Zgoll notes that these two interpretations are not mutually exclusive and also supplies the suggestion that they may represent the *gallû*- and *namtaru*-monsters discussed in a hymn to Nabû in VAT 13834+.<sup>180</sup> She also notes that because this act takes place in Ninurta's temple, the only certainty that can be made is that Nabû plays the role of his father's avenger; analogous to Ninurta's own role for Enlil, it is Nabû that takes over "Vollstreckung des Urteil."<sup>181</sup>

The fourth day<sup>182</sup> begins for the *ahu rabû* at 2:40 am (1 2/3 *bēr mūši*) who bathes, draws back the *gadalû*-curtain from both Bēl and Bēltiya,<sup>183</sup> and recites a hand-raising (ŠU.ÍL.LÁ) prayer to Marduk. Like the prayers before, the first half is bilingual and ends with only Akkadian. The prayer sets Marduk as a universal god that holds kingship, grasps lordship, who

<sup>176</sup> Bidmead 2002 p. 57f discusses the symbolic possibilities of the scorpion and snake.

<sup>177</sup> The epithet of the temple area of Madānu's within the Esagil is called "the house of the shackle which holds in check" (George 1992 p. 93).

<sup>178</sup> CAD K 222a: "slaughterer and seller (of prepared meat dishes)." Cf: Linssen 2004 p. 234

<sup>179</sup> Bidmead 2002 p. 55; Bidmead notes the expensiveness of the objects' wood as one of the reasons why it is specified for the Akītu festival. Her justification of the objecting being "human effigies" is supported by Black 1981 p. 45 and Çağırğan 1976 p. 208.

<sup>180</sup> Zgoll 2006 p. 29; for the text, see Lambert 2013 p. 346ff

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> Bidmead, van der Toorn and Grayson point toward the fourth day as "when the Akītu festival began" (Bidmead 2002 p. 59), while Zgoll suggests the 8<sup>th</sup> day, when the decree of destinies and procession takes place (Zgoll 2006 p. 42 table 2).

<sup>183</sup> The text does not spatially differentiate between Marduk and Zarpanītu, so it may be suggested that they are both together already in day 4.



crosses the heavens, heaps earth, measures water, cultivates fields, and grants the holy scepter to the king who reveres him.<sup>184</sup> The *ahu rabû* asks for the Babylonians mercy and favor (lit. “let light be set,” *liššakin namirtu*).

After this prayer, the *ahu rabû* recites a prayer to Zarpanîtu. Only in Akkadian, the prayer focuses on the goddess’ position as being most exalted of the goddesses and most brilliant of the stars as well as her social equality: she denounces and defends, impoverishes the rich, enriches the poor, saves prisoners, and “decrees the destiny for the king,” which may be compared to Marduk who “decrees the destinies of all the gods” (l. 243 and 263). In the prayer, the *ahu rabû* asks for Zarpanîtu to “speak for them [(your) subjects] in the presence of the king of gods, Marduk, so that they may speak of your praise... grant mercy to the slave who speaks well of you, take his hand in difficulty and need [and] prolong his life.” These two prayers, it seems, focus on the relationship between Marduk and the higher echelon of life, his dealing with gods, whereas Zarpanîtu is revered for her relationship with slaves, servants, and human lives. The *ahu rabû* then goes out to the grand courtyard (KISAL.MAH), turns north and “blesses the *ikû*-star,<sup>185</sup> E-sagil, image of heaven and earth for the E-sagil three times” (l. 273-275). He then opens the gates and the *ērib-bīti*-, *kalû*- and *nāru*-priests all perform their rituals (l. 276-278). After the second meal (“in the late afternoon”),<sup>186</sup> the *ahu rabû* recites the *Enūma Eliš* to Bēl; while he recites, the front of Anu’s crown and the seat of Enlil are covered (l. 279-284).<sup>187</sup>

The relationship between the *Enūma Eliš* and the Akītu has been noted by scholars since the beginning of Akītu festival studies. Most recently, Zgoll made comparisons between the structure of the literary text and the festival’s structure: preparations, god-gathering and procession, feast and presents for Marduk have all found parallels between the two occasions.<sup>188</sup> Additionally, she critically examined the role of the text within the festival itself, looking at the non-public, as is the current case, and (possible) public transmissions of the text. In the latter

<sup>184</sup> Zgoll highlights this prayer in particular for her comments on the agrarian elements of the festival, p. 45ff

<sup>185</sup> The Square of Pegasus, Reiner 1995 p. 138; Bidmead cites Horowitz’ *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* for pointing out the *ikû*-star as being “the new year’s star” (Bidmead 2002 p. 59).

<sup>186</sup> Lit. “that of the cool of the day;” Çağırkan suggests afternoon (p. 20), whereas Linszen suggests (early?) evening (p. 235).

<sup>187</sup> Bidmead 2002 p. 70: “[Anu’s] tiara... embodies the heavens. Because a tiara is worn on the head, it represents the above, the heavens, whereas Enlil’s resting place represents the terrestrial realm below the heavens. Enlil was the “earthly” god whose dominion lies over all governing powers and forces of nature. By concealing the objects it becomes clearly visible that Marduk now had dominion over heaven and earth and all the functions previously attributed to these gods. In his preeminence he has replaced Anu and Enlil.”

<sup>188</sup> Zgoll p. 43f

case, we only see evidence of the recitation of the text in a then-unpublished record found in the commentary of *Letters to Assyrian Scholars* by Simo Parpola, wherein the author mentions a private conversation with Lambert, who insisted that

“there exists in the collections of the British Museum a large tablet [BM 32206+?] doubtless forming part of the ‘*festkalendar*’ of Babylon, which gives in several columns detailed instructions about the cultic ceremonies performed in Babylon both in Tašrītu and the immediately preceding and following months... [The text] goes on to state that a great meal was offered to Bēl following the opening of the gate, and a couple of lines later tells that sections from Enūma Eliš were recited to Bēl by a chanter (nāru) on the same day.”<sup>189</sup>

The recitation during the Tašrītu Akītu festival gives way for scholars to suggest that, though there remains clear favor of linking the Akītu festivals with the text, there may have been also a general reading of the text for a variety of audiences, whether in full or in sections either by the *ahu rabû* or *nāru*. Bidmead brings up the claim that the *Enūma Eliš* may have been used similarly to liturgical texts used today in modern church services: whereas certain sections of the Bible were recited regularly, the same texts may hold a quintessential value when read during particular holidays.<sup>190</sup> In the text mentioned above, BM 32206+, this reading by the *nāru* serves a “special purpose[:] when the line v: 83 is reached,<sup>191</sup> mentioning the carrying of a present from Marduk’s mother to Marduk as an expression of thanks for his victory over Tiāmat, the *dumuniglala*-priest re-enacts this line by presenting a palm frond on a silver tablet to Marduk, a further emphasis on Kislev as a palm festival.”<sup>192</sup> As a last counter point, the verb “i-na-áš-ši,” which majority scholars translate as ‘recite’ is suggested by Linssen to possibly mean ‘to enact,’ coming from the verb *našû*, the usage of recite is only in reference to hand-raising prayers.<sup>193</sup> Zgoll’s argument of a non-public reading in this specific instance is to eventually “den Text auch ‘publikumswirksam’ zu Gehör bringen soll.”<sup>194</sup> In comparison to this Tašrītu festival tablet and our own Nisannu festival is a difference of action, or ritual and practice, and actor. In the *RAcc.* tablets, we do not have explicit meaning behind the complete recitation of the *Enūma Eliš* outside of covering of the front of Anu’s crown and the seat of Enlil.

<sup>189</sup> Parpola 1983 p. 186

<sup>190</sup> Bidmead 2002 p. 69; this line of thought comes from the myth-and-ritual school.

<sup>191</sup> V 81-84: “Mother Damkina, who bore him [Marduk], hailed him, with a clean festal robe she made his face shine. To Usmû, who held her present to give the news, [he entrusted] the vizierate of the Apsû and the care of the holy places.” Lambert 2013 p. 103

<sup>192</sup> Çağırğan and Lambert 1991 p. 91

<sup>193</sup> Linssen p. 235

<sup>194</sup> Zgoll p. 49

The last day covered explicitly is the fifth day, in which the *ahu rabû* wakes up at 2 am (2 *bêr* ME.NIM.A), washes himself with specifically water from the Tigris and Euphrates (l. 286) and enters the cella of Bêl. Drawing back the *gadalû*-curtain from Bêl and Bêltiya, he speaks a prayer to Marduk and then to Zarpanîtu.

The whole of Marduk’s prayer is almost entirely in Sumerian; the first half (289-300) is typically untranslated outside of Cohen’s attempt.<sup>195</sup> The second half begins with “<LUGAL>.DÌM.ME.ER.AN.KI.A *mušim* NAM<sup>MEŠ</sup> UMUN.MU UMUN.MU HUN” (l. 301); the title “lord of the heavens and earth” is found to be one of Marduk’s 50 names in the *Enūma Eliš*, but it is also seen attributed to Anu in a *taqribtu*-lamentation.<sup>196</sup> Second half of each line, translated “my lord, my lord, be calm” is repeated up to the last verse, whereas the first half of each line describes astronomical bodies and their attributes.<sup>197</sup> Immediately afterward, the *ahu rabû* recites a similar prayer for Bêltiya. For Zarpanîtu’s prayer, the cadences for the first few lines are the same as Marduk’s (HUN.A, “who is calm”), but varies thereafter with DÛG.DÛG, “who is very good/“(who is also the source of) wealth,” ŠUB.A.KE<sub>4</sub>, “who confers gifts,”<sup>198</sup> and MU.NE “whose name is my lady/this name [is] my lady.”<sup>199</sup>

The *êrib-bîti*-, *kalû*- and *nâru*-priests all perform their rituals after the *ahu rabû* opens the gates. At 1 double hour after sunrise (8:20 am), after setting the god’s first meal, a *mašmaššu*-priest is called, who participates in purifying the temple.

The putative *ahu rabû* beats a copper kettle-drum and moves a censer inside the temple, but not inside the cella of Bêl or Bêltiya (ln. 344). Upon finishing this, he enters the Ezida, Nabu’s cella, and purifies the area with censer, torch, and ritually-pure water, ending by sprinkling water from the Tigris and Euphrates (l. 348-9). He then scents the gates with cedar resin, places a silver censer in the middle of the cella’s courtyard<sup>200</sup> and places “aromatic ingredients” (*riqqî*) and cypress in it. The priest now calls a slaughterer who comes to the courtyard and decapitates a sheep, wherein the *mašmaššu*-priest, using the blood of sheep’s body, cleanses the temple. While doing so, the priest recites “incantations for the exorcism of the

<sup>195</sup> Cohen p. 444f

<sup>196</sup> Linssen 2004 p. 235

<sup>197</sup> Cf: Stol 1989 in NABU 89/3 no. 60 for sacred “philology” of the following stars and their attributes

<sup>198</sup> Cohen 1994 p. 445

<sup>199</sup> Translations by Çağırğan and Cohen respectively.

<sup>200</sup> See George 1992 p. 371

temple” (l. 355). The slaughterer then disposes of the sheep’s body in a river and in doing so faces west.

Upon completion, he leaves for the open country. The *mašmaššu*-priest now repeats this act but with the head of the sheep. These two figures are explicitly told not to enter the city “so long as Nabû is in Babylon” which is “from the fifth day up to the twelfth day” (l. 361-3). During this entire process the *ahu rabû* is told not to witness the purification process or else he is deemed impure.<sup>201</sup>

This all takes 40 minutes, for at 1 1/3 double hours after sunrise (9 am) the *ahu rabû* calls for an artisan who covers the Ezida with the “golden heaven,” taken from Marduk’s treasury by the high priest, from its crossbeams to its foundation. In doing so, the group recites a lamentation (l. 373-384) so as to purify the temple.

The lamentation names Asaluhhi,<sup>202</sup> the son of Eridu, Kusu,<sup>203</sup> Ningirima,<sup>204</sup> and Marduk. Asaluhhi, known as one of Marduk’s names,<sup>205</sup> dwells in the E-udul while Kusu is on his stool and establishes divine decrees.<sup>206</sup> Ningirima listens to the prayer and casts the spell, and Marduk purifies the temple, asked by the lamenters to kill the great demon, expelling it to his abode. Upon finishing, the artisans go out to the gate/door (l. 384).

The *ahu rabû* then goes before Marduk, [presenting?] a golden tray, wherein he places roasted meat and twelve usual loaves, filling it(?) with salt and honey in addition to four golden dishes. In front of this tray he places a golden censer (filled?) with aromatic ingredients and

<sup>201</sup> Bidmead makes the suggestion that the *ahu rabû* and *mašmaššu*-priest both share a similar purification ritual of water, noise, fire, and sacrifice (Bidmead 2002 p. 73).

<sup>202</sup> See Bidmead p. 75 n. 97 for further information on this name.

<sup>203</sup> This divine name is unclear to whom it references. The phonetic spelling is <sup>d</sup>kù.sù; on the one hand, the CAD (CAD K p. 602) and RLA (RLA 6 p. 382) both list a Kušû demon (spelled typically <sup>d</sup>ku-[ú]-šu/šú-[ú/um]) who is “a demon, often found in a group of from seven to nine generally called ‘Asakku, sons of Anu,’ which were defeated by Ninurta” (RLA) and an aquatic animal that is linked with Sumerian Kušû and kud.da: the first “occurs with the det. ku<sub>6</sub> ‘fish’... [and] is described as a terrifying animal living in the marshes... the kud.da [is] listed between turtles and crab [and] is an enemy of the fish” (CAD). Lambert, on the other hand, makes mention of a kù.sù several times in the background of conflicts in the *Enûma Eliš* (Lambert 2013 p. 209-217) with respect to Ninurta’s victory over Asakku, whose sons are equated also with Enmešarra (p. 211). On the other hand, a <sup>d</sup>kù.sù appears in the “Founding of Eridu” (Lambert 2013 366ff), presented on a tablet composed during the Neo-/Late-Babylonian period, wherein the being is called the “chief exorcist of the great gods” (p. 375). The last mention of <sup>d</sup>kù.sù is in “The First Brick” where <sup>d</sup>kù.sù, the chief priest of the great goods, is “to be the performer of your rites” (l. 38, p. 381); in another copy of most likely the same text, this job is given to Kulla (l. 15, p. 383).

<sup>204</sup> According to the Reallexikon, Ningirima was an incantation goddess that fell out of favor in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennia for Asalluhi/Marduk; he is characterized by water summoning, and snakes/fish. (RLA 9 pg. 363)

<sup>205</sup> See U 30495 below.

<sup>206</sup> Linssen 2004 p. 236

cypress. After making a wine libation (l. 394), he speaks to Marduk,<sup>207</sup> making reference to taking hands, the Akītu house, and raising one’s head. He clears the tray and calls the artisans, who “have it carried to Nabû” (*ana Nabû ušebelšu*) on the bank of the “Kunat-amassu-canal.”<sup>208</sup> According to Linssen, the artisans usher the king in for Nabû, placing him before the offering table, lifting up the leftovers “[as soon as] Nabû [goes out] from the ship Iddahedu.”<sup>209</sup> The artisans also set up or move or offer a water basin for the king to wash his hands and make him enter the E-sagila (*ušerrebū*).<sup>210</sup> The artisans yet again go out to the gate/door.

Upon arriving before Bēl, the *ahu rabû* goes out of the cella and lifts up<sup>211</sup> (*uṣṣī* [written È]) the scepter, circlet,<sup>212</sup> and mace [of the king(?)].<sup>213</sup> In addition to this, the high priest lifts up (*inašši* [written ÍL]) “his crown of kingship” (*agī šarrutišu*), taking the objects and placing them upon a seat before the god.” The priest goes out and strikes the king on the cheek (*lēt šarri imahhaš*), places something behind him, leads him before Marduk, pulls the king’s ears, and makes him kneel down upon the ground (l. 420-1). The king then speaks<sup>214</sup> what majority scholars call the Negative Confession:<sup>215</sup>

“[I have not] sinned, lord of the lands, I have no neglected your divinity,  
 [I have not] ruined Babylon, I have not ordered its dissolution,  
 [I have not] made Esagila tremble, I have not forgotten its rites,  
 [I have not] struck the cheek of any privileged subject (<sup>lú</sup>*šabi kidinnu*)  
 ... I have [not] brought about their humiliation,  
 [I have been taking ca]re of Babylon, I have not destroyed its outer walls!”

Bidmead covers the initial scholarly arguments about this passage: “the ‘ritual humiliation’ and the negative confession of the king have been interpreted as an act of atonement for the people, a symbolic death/resurrection of the king, an enthronement ritual, a rite of passage, and a rite of

<sup>207</sup> See Linssen 2004 p. 236 for reconstruction of l. 396 [dAMAR.UTU EN]MAH not supplied by Çağırın 1976 p. 32

<sup>208</sup> Linssen notes that he supplies Farber’s translation here, who notes that “Ein Kanal dieses Names ist sonst nicht bekannt. Die Lesung und Deutung der ganzen Passage ist unsicher.” (Farber TUAT II p. 221 n. 191a).

<sup>209</sup> Linssen 2004 p. 231

<sup>210</sup> Cf. the use of the š-stem here and also in the royal inscriptions during the Neo-Babylonian period.

<sup>211</sup> Linssen’s translation; Çağırın writes “to take away”. The CAD supplies both possibilities. See Sallaberger’s translation below for additional input.

<sup>212</sup> Sallaberger suggests ring (*gurum*)

<sup>213</sup> Bidmead makes the suggestion that these resemble the symbols of power that Marduk is presented in the *Enūma Eliš* before his battle with Tīāmat.

<sup>214</sup> Linssen suggests that the *ahu rabû* speaks this with the king (p. 232)

<sup>215</sup> Bidmead 79ff; the following is Linssen’s translation (p. 232)

reversal.”<sup>216</sup> According to earlier scholars like Frazier and Gaster, in the act of humbling oneself and removing kingly symbols from the actor, “the king atones for his people whose sin and transgressions he carries... he is the scapegoat, humiliated and forced to confess annually to atone for his subjects.” Additionally, myth-and-ritual scholars such as Eliade proposed “a reversion to chaos followed by a renewal of order[:] the king is reduced to a minimum of power, to the lowest descent of nature, to the chaos before creation.”

For J.Z. Smith, in separating himself from the idea that the festival was a reenactment of the *Enūma Eliš*, the negative confession binds the king with Marduk and the safety of Babylon: “destroy Babylon or Esagila, neglect Marduk, pervert kingship, and the world will be destroyed.”<sup>217</sup> He suggests that the text proposes “an apocalyptic situation” of moving from an apocalyptic pattern (“that the wrong king is on the throne, that the cosmos will be thereby destroyed, and that the right god will either restore proper native kingship or will assume kingship himself”) toward a gnostic pattern (“if the wrong king is sitting on the throne, then his heavenly counterpart must likewise be the wrong god”) specifically within a Hellenistic context.<sup>218</sup> He designates the first slapping of the king as not “validated by events... but rather is best understood as a desperate ritual attempt to influence events.”<sup>219</sup> In this sense, the focus on foreign rule is emphasized (“these were actions [described in the negative confession] of foreign kings who gained the throne of Babylon by conquest”).<sup>220</sup>

Most recently, Sallaberger made a new proposal of the king and the items described before the slapping ritual takes place: the items mentioned in the text (scepter [<sup>giš</sup>*hattu*(NÍG.PA)], circlet/ring [<sup>giš</sup>*kippatu*(GÚRUM)], mace [<sup>giš</sup>*mittu*(TUKUL.DINGIR)], and separately mentioned crown of kingship [*agī šarruti*]) in fact better fit gods than kings.<sup>221</sup> According to his argument, while the scepter and crown are used by both kings and gods, the ring and mace are only used by gods.<sup>222</sup> Additionally, his own translation of the verbs used for the exchange between priest and king are “presents” for *uṣṣī* and “brings” for *inašši*:

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<sup>216</sup> The following quotes come from Bidmead 2002 p. 79.

<sup>217</sup> Smith 1982 p. 94

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.* p. 95

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.* p. 92

<sup>221</sup> Sallaberger 2012; see co-authored section by Katharina Schmidt for evidence of this argument (p. 579ff)

<sup>222</sup> Sallaberger 2012 p. 572

“The insignia are thus taken from an unnamed place and are presented to the king, then are “brought in” before Bel and placed on the seat, the conclusion of the king’s report and the promise of the gods’ salvation is removed. While slaps were administered to the king before and after the dialogue with the god and priest respectively, the divine insignia were not visible: they [the insignia] were initially before Bel, while the king was still in the entrance hall, in the final punishment they were previously removed.”<sup>223</sup>

Missing thereafter are 3-5 lines (l. 431-433).<sup>224</sup> The text returns with the *ahu rabû* assuring that Bēl heeded the words just spoken by the king:

Do not fear [...]  
What Bel has ordered [...]  
Bel [will listen(?)] to your prayer [...]  
He will magnify your lordship [...]  
He will extol your kingship.  
At the *eššēšu*-day, do [... ]  
At the opening of the gate ceremony, cleanse [your] hands [...]!  
Day and night may [... ]  
Concerning Babylon, his city [... ] ... [... ]  
Concerning Esagila, his temple [...] ... [...]  
Concerning the citizens of Babylon, his privileged subjec[ts ...] ... [...]  
Bel will bless you with(?) [...]orev[er].  
He will ruin your enemy (and) overthrow your adversary.  
When he has spoken (this), the king [will rediscover(?)] his normal dignity.

The priest then strikes the king once more after giving the scepter, circlet, mace and crown to back the king. Marduk is pleased if tears fall, but angry if the king remains dry-eyed: if the king does not cry, “the enemy will rise and bring about his downfall” (l. 452). For Sallaberger the tears are meant for affection, the slap for representation of the transgressions not made to the *kidinnu*.<sup>225</sup> Lastly, left largely undiscussed by scholars is the usage of š-stem verbs in this passage: the king is not given any sort of autonomous movement and instead is brought into the temple compound by priests, is slapped, and for all intents and purposes entirely guided by the priests in this ritual.

The final ritual occurs 1/3 double-hour before sun-set (5:20 pm). The *ahu rabû* wraps forty reeds three-cubits in length with palm leaves. After “opening a hole”<sup>226</sup> in the grand courtyard, he places the reeds into the hole. He makes a libation of honey, ghee, and oil, places a reed and a white bull<sup>227</sup> before the hole. The king then lights the hole on fire (by means of the

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<sup>223</sup> *Ibid* p. 576

<sup>224</sup> Çağırğan states 3 (p. 34), Linssen says 5 (p. 232).

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>226</sup> *Ipettû*; lit: to open. Linssen suggests “to dig,” but this may not be the case.

<sup>227</sup> Cf: Bidmead 2002 p. 84 n. 126

reeds) and he along with the high priest recite a prayer that acknowledges the bull as divine, “which illuminates the dark” (l. 461). Only a few parts of lines are able to be made out: Girra,<sup>228</sup> and eating [the bull’s] thigh for Marduk.<sup>229</sup>

BM 41577

Published by A.R. George in 2000, this text deals almost certainly with the Nisannu Akītu festival.<sup>230</sup> The events detail most likely the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> day of the festival: although the beginning is largely broken, we see near identical actions of the days described above (ii 11’-13’). The putative *ahu rabû* prays first to Marduk and then to Zarpanītu; however, he calls Zarpanītu Inanna (iii 6-21; written <sup>d</sup>innin [MÛŠ]).<sup>231</sup> The prayer to the goddess focuses on her relation to “the road:” she is lovely in the street, travels “the path of the mountain”<sup>232</sup> as well as the path of Šuanna,<sup>233</sup> and most notably “with a bloodthirsty weapon”.<sup>234</sup> Within the text also is the allusion of a “path of alabaster,” which is a head-nod toward Persia (iii 16).

The second prayer for Marduk focuses on the god’s ability to bestow intelligence, speak in favor, revive the dead, dispel evil, take the hand of the fallen, and most notably “[for] the one whom the Asakku demon possesses and whose body it consumes – you cast your life-giving spell on him and drive out his sickness” (iv 11’-13’). We see here, compared with the roles of the god and goddess in the above texts, a role reversal: it is Marduk who takes care of the humans (with particular hand-taking expressions and apotropaic concerns), whereas Zarpanītu deals with a mythic battle and connections with areas outside of Babylon under the guise of Inanna.

<sup>228</sup> Translated by Linssen as “divine fires,” Girra is described as an apotropaic god that wards off those that can manipulate “evil powers” (RLA 3 p. 383f).

<sup>229</sup> Lines 463-471 are supplied by BM 32485, published in Linssen 2004.

<sup>230</sup> For evidence supporting this reading, see George 2000 p. 261

<sup>231</sup> See translation note on p. 269 as to why George chooses “innin” rather than “nín”.

<sup>232</sup> iii 13ff: “the literal ‘mountain’ kur can also signify the netherworld.” *Ibid.* p. 269

<sup>233</sup> iii 13ff: “Šuanna might be the common name of Babylon” *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> iii 18: “If understood at all correctly, this obscure line seems to allude to the purpose of Inanna’s journey to the mountain, that is, to do battle and shed blood. The mythological reference would then be to her battle with Mount Ebih, as commemorated in the Sumerian myth.” *Ibid.*



BM 47902 + 48320

W.G. Lambert published these tablets with an adamant suggestion to belong to the same series of tablets discussed above, although the format and division differ.<sup>235</sup> The end of the fourth column is duplicated by K 9876, an Assyrian text frequently used previously by Akītu festival scholarship. The actors present in the tablet are Marduk and Zarpanītu, Nabû, Nergal and his wife, Madānu, and lastly the king. The text is concerned with the presence of figures and the placement of gods in a particular space (“between the store houses they [will stand(?)]” in line I 10 and “Madānu will come and at the west wall the window of the store chamber of the Akītu which opens to the east...” in l. i 15-16). Column i focuses on the placement and preparation probably at the Esagil (“at the left of the cella of Nabû,” l. i 11) and the 12<sup>th</sup> day is mentioned conditionally (“the 12<sup>th</sup> day when Bēl departs,” l. i 20). The fourth column begins with the end of a recitation asking why Nergal is no longer in Kutha and further the speaker asks “did they not call you[,] Laz and Mammītum?” (l. IV 4) Laz/š, as well as Mammītum, are known as Nergal’s wife.<sup>236</sup> The reciter asks to be raised up so as to see Bēl, noting that anyone impure should not see him. Upon seeing [the god?], he is asked to be taken down, noting that “they have not looked upon the axe” (l. iv 6), which according to Lambert, “are weapons of the disobedient.”<sup>237</sup> The text, unfortunately mostly broken, trails off with Bēl taking his seat in the Esiskur, additional recitations being mentioned to other gods (Šarrat-Nipurri is named as well), and the identification of an *assinnu*-priest, but unfortunately not much else can be made out. The identification of Marduk’s seat in the Akītu house makes Lambert conclude that the events in this text take place sometime between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> day.

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<sup>235</sup> Lambert 1997 p. 52-56

<sup>236</sup> Cf: RLA 6 p. 506f where it is suggested by Lambert that Laš only appears after Kurigalzu II (14<sup>th</sup> century BCE), whereas Mammītum is evidenced to be Nergal’s wife from Ur III onwards.

<sup>237</sup> Lambert 1997 p. 56 n. iv 6. This evidence comes from Assurbanipal’s library, though it is “a section of an expository text dealing with the month Nisan and much concerned with Akītu festivals. Thus it appears that a weapon used In Marduk’s battle with Tiāmat (or perhaps Qingu) was on display in the Akītu house.” While this cannot be said to also be the case in Babylon, the act of displaying these weapons is striking.

## 2.1 Chronicles concerning earlier history

## ABC 7

The *Nabonidus Chronicle*, published as ABC 7, follows most of Nabonidus' reign from his first year until Cyrus' taking over of Babylon. The only surviving tablet comes from the Late-Babylonian Period as discussed by the text's first editor Sidney Smith.<sup>238</sup> Waerzeggers points out that "this means that our witness is at least two hundred years younger than the reality it is thought to reflect so adequately."<sup>239</sup> She argues that "no unease about the text's reliability as a source on sixth-century history is expressed... yet, Achaemenid historians have found at least one element in the text that calls for caution. In ii: 15 Cyrus is called 'king of Parsu' while this title only came into use under Darius I, some twenty years later."<sup>240</sup> Though the text's context comes from illicit digging, its modern locus is in "collection Sp 2 of the British Museum, a collection made up of materials coming from the late Babylonian Esagil 'library' ... in active use between the reign of Artaxerxes II [first-half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.] and c. 60 B.C.E."<sup>241</sup>

In the text itself, the New Year's festival is discussed after the sixth year, three years after the king's campaign towards Teima began.<sup>242</sup> From the seventh to eleventh years,<sup>243</sup> the Akītu festival is said to have been not practiced, though "the sacrifices to the gods of Babylon and Borsippa were offered in the Esagila and the Ezida as in normal times."<sup>244</sup> The text skips over the twelfth through sixteenth years, resuming again on the seventeenth and final year of his reign when "Nabû [went] from Borsippa to the procession of [Bēl. Bēl went out]" (iii 5').<sup>245</sup> It is here that Waerzeggers senses that a "narrative quality of the text emerges" between particularly the character and actions of Nabonidus and Cyrus:

"Whereas Nabonidus does not show up at his mother's funeral, Cyrus calls for an official period of mourning after his wife's death. Whereas Nabonidus disrupts the New Year festival years on end, Cyrus

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<sup>238</sup> Sidney Smith 1924 p. 98

<sup>239</sup> Waerzeggers 2015 p. 96, 103-106

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.* p. 96

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.* p. 104

<sup>242</sup> Beaulieu 1989 p. 149-169 n.b. p. 156 and p. 166.

<sup>243</sup> The eighth year is left blank by the scribe (l. ii 9).

<sup>244</sup> l. ii 7-8 for year seven, l. ii 12 for year nine, l. ii 20-21 for year ten, and l. ii 24-25 for year eleven.

<sup>245</sup> Zawadski 2010 p. 144 notes that the "tone is diametrically opposite" in the final written year. Waerzeggers fleshes out the stylistic markers of this final year in Waerzeggers 2015 p. 107f.

allows the festival to go ahead. Whereas Nabonidus collects the cult statues of Babylonia’s provincial deities in the capital, Cyrus sends them back home.”<sup>246</sup>

Nabonidus is said to have fled Babylon, and yet even under siege by the Shields of Gutium the rites of the Esagila were not interrupted; moreover, when Cyrus entered the city “peace reigned” and *harû*-vessels were filled before him.<sup>247</sup> After the mourning period of Cyrus’ wife, Cambyses enters Nabû’s Scepter House.<sup>248</sup> It does not say if Cambyses was able to take the scepter, but the <sup>lu</sup>É-PA “[did not let him take] the hand of Nabû because of his Elamite dress” (iii 25’-26’).

Contrast to the Neo-Babylonian chronicles, ABC 7 decorates and fleshes out other characters outside of the king: “the *ahu rabû*... protects the continuity of cultic life in the absence of Nabonidus.”<sup>249</sup> In addition to the military focus<sup>250</sup> seen in earlier chronicles and the appearance and importance of the priesthood, the Akītu festival in connection with Persian rulers seems to be ultimately negative in connotation. We see Prince Cambyses wear clothing of “Babylonia’s perennial enemy” and are thus not given the hand of Nabû,<sup>251</sup> though regardless the god goes to the Esagil (iii 28’). The final lines, although broken, preserve ominous imagery: water (?) clouds over and gates are in ruin. The *bīt mummi* that Cambyses leaves/enters (written: È) may have been a scribal house,<sup>252</sup> but it is known especially for crafting gods.<sup>253</sup> We know of the *bīt mummi* through the *mīs pî* ritual, wherein gods are revitalized through a mouth-washing ritual.<sup>254</sup> The last verb used, *šarāmu*, accordingly means to exercise influence, or plan, synonymous with *šamāru*, to strive or plot.<sup>255</sup> While it cannot be insinuated that Cambyses had anything to do with this ritual, the building’s presence remains elusive.

<sup>246</sup> Waerzeggers 2015 p. 107

<sup>247</sup> The *harû*-vessels appear in the Hellenistic period as a part of the Akītu festival (see van der Spek’s notes on iii. 19 of this chronicle). See Zgoll 2006 p. 58ff on the connection between a wider history of the *harû*-vessels and the Akītu festival.

<sup>248</sup> The E-gidru-kalama-sumu, also known as the *Nabû ša hare*; see ABC 17 below.

<sup>249</sup> Waerzeggers 2015 p. 113

<sup>250</sup> Zawadzki 2010 p. 145: “Retaining the reports from the first three years probably bore a very simple message: as long as the ruler was faithful to Marduk he remained – like his predecessors – militarily successful.”

<sup>251</sup> Waerzeggers 2015 p. 106

<sup>252</sup> CAD M/2 p. 197f; Lambert and George notes that this comes from Sumerian “umun” (Lambert 2013 p. 218, George 1992 p. 280). In the *Enūma Eliš*, *mummu* comes to represent the vizier of Apsû, though Lambert sees this appearance as purely aetiological (Lambert 2013 p. 219).

<sup>253</sup> Lambert 2013 p. 218f: “The house of the craftsmen where a god is created” and “We are the slaves of the temple of *Mummu* that creates god and king.” These quotes are Assyrian in context, but the role of the *bīt mummi* can be seen as shared between Assyrian and Babylonian cultures through evidence of ritual practice (see: Walker and Dick 2001).

<sup>254</sup> TuL 27, collated by Walker and Dick 2001 include two Neo-Babylonian sources, BM 47436 and BM 47445.

<sup>255</sup> CAD Š p. 92f and p. 101f

## ABC 17

Known as the *Religious Chronicle*, ABC 17 records three types of events: out-of-the-ordinary phenomena, political events, and cultic rituals. Found within the same archive as the *Nabonidus Chronicle*,<sup>256</sup> Waerzeggers stresses the continuity between the texts in that they share priestly figures within the narrative and focus upon “the same context of interruptions to the New Year festival... both texts share an interest in the E-gidru-kalamma-summa shrine.”<sup>257</sup> The time period discussed is tentatively between Nabû-šumu-lībur to Nabû-mukin-apli, who reigned at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium.<sup>258</sup> Within the text, the Akītu festival is described rather sporadically: in Ayaru, prepared lambs for Marduk’s procession are mentioned, as well as the king’s lack of libation before “the day of sacrifices” that *ahu rabû* (instead?) performed (ii 5). During the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth years of Nabû-šumu-lībur’s reign, Marduk’s chariot does not partake in the procession “from the third day of Ayaru to the month of Nisannu” (ii 16-17). The next year (the fifteenth), Bēl does not go out. During the seventh year of Nabû-mukin-apli’s reign, Arameans are described as being “belligerent (*nakāru*), so that the king could not come up to Babylon [and] neither did neither Nabû nor Bēl come out” (iii 4-6). The next year the same group of hostiles captured the Bab-nibiri and Kar-bel-maṭīti, and the king “did not offer the sacrifices of the Akītu festival.” The lack of sacrifice happens again in the 19<sup>th</sup> year; in the 20<sup>th</sup> year, and for nine years thereafter, the gods do not participate in the festival.

Within the text, the focus is not upon the Akītu festival or the god’s appearance so much as the events that surround the city: kings do not arrive or properly perform sacrifices and gods do not leave their cities, juxtaposed are appearances of demons in cellae; panthers, wolves, and deer come in through the walls that are seen jutting water and shifting; and an angered populace takes over areas governed by the king. We see a disruption of order in this sense: the walls of Babylon do not work for water, nature, or even sight. The king’s power is null and void; he does not beat back rebellion nor can he gather the gods in Babylon. If there was ever an apocalyptic vision, these bizarre and frightening moments should be considered as such. It is only through the *ahu rabû* that sacrifices continue and the temples are inspected. Like in the *Nabonidus*

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<sup>256</sup> Waerzeggers 2012a p. 291

<sup>257</sup> Waerzeggers 2015 p. 113f

<sup>258</sup> Van der Spek, “Mesopotamian Chronicles,” *Livius* <http://www.livius.org/sources/about/mesopotamian-chronicles/>

*Chronicle*, we see that it is the king's actions that initiate events around the temple all the while the priests within the temple attempt to maintain order and regulation.

## 2.2 Chronicles recording current events

The last pieces of textual evidence come from other chronicles that tentatively detailed a more current history. BCHP 2 mentions Marduk and Nabû as well as the great gate. In BCHP 4, we see Alexander, after a possible episode of mourning for his friend Hephaestion,<sup>259</sup> discuss the rebuilding of the Esagila as well of return of possessions to the temple.<sup>260</sup> BCHP 5 makes mention of offering to Sîn (l. 10-12) in addition to 10 sheep to Bēl, Nabû, and Bēltiya (l. 12'-14'). The temples of Marduk, Nabû, and Nergal in their respective cities are discussed in BCHP 6, tentatively dated to after 293 BCE when Antiochus co-ruled the Eastern region with Seleucus I, his father. Several ominous aspects come up, such as an actor falling during an offering "on the ruin of Esagila" (l. 5'); this same actor made the offering "in the Greek fashion" (PAD.<sup>d</sup>INNIN GIM GIŠ.HUR), a worrisome action.<sup>261</sup> Lightning strikes Eridu (l. 10) and dogs are mentioned (l. 2'). On the other hand, debris is removed from the Esagila by elephants (l. 8') and the temple's related structures are seen to be treated similarly.<sup>262</sup>

The Akītu festival, for being the prominent festival mentioned in earlier chronicles is nowhere to be seen. On the other hand, the temple places, namely the Esagila and its derivative areas, are discussed as projects that involve cleaning or receiving Greek-fashioned sacrifices, which is to say dilapidated in most respects. Sîn continues to bare relevance. The only instance of the Akītu festival possibly being mentioned is in BCHP 12, which discusses Seleucus III (225-222 BCE) presenting something for the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Nisannu (l. 3'). A massive gift is paid personally for 11 fat oxen, 100 fat sheep, and 11 fat ducks to be offered "for Bēl, Bēltiya, and for the *dullu* of King Seleucus" (l. 5'-7').<sup>263</sup> The traditional clues that point to this being for the Akītu are not there, but this gift falls in line with Persian evidence of is remotely related to the festival. Seleucia, rather than Babylon, is suggested as being the city of kingship (l. 13").

<sup>259</sup> It is ultimately beyond the scope of this discussion to consider the other readings of l. 8' with "šu-dur-" or "šu-tur-". See van der Spek's notes for this.

<sup>260</sup> See van der Spek's online notes on the temporal ambiguity of GUR.MEŠ.

<sup>261</sup> Van der Spek n. 9' mentions that this phrase is seen in five other cases.

<sup>262</sup> See BCHP 6 n. 9' for other instances. In BCHP 9, the Ay-ibûr-šabu is tentatively cleared, as in l. 22' of BCHP 8.

<sup>263</sup> Van der Spek n. 7'-8' for possible readings of this.

The final chronicle that should be mentioned, BCHP 14, deals with gold-theft from the Day-One Temple. We see a trustee (*bēl piqitti*) bring out gold from the temple (l. 9'-10') and the *šatammu* of the Esagila excise judgment upon the charged party (1"-4"). In an economic receipt (see Çağırğan no. 1 above), the Day-One Temple most likely was a temple different than the Akitu-house and may belong to worship outside of Babylonian practice.<sup>264</sup> However, the *šatammu* is still in charge of its constituency, namely its treasury, and its "trustee" still holds a title with particular Babylonian religious connotations. In this respect, we see that the Babylonian priesthood holds care and responsibility over compounds outside of their expertise.

### 3. Analysis

#### a. Cultic Texts

The cultic texts tell of the priesthood's agenda during the Akītu festival in the Hellenistic period. The actors are notably priests and especially the high priest of the Esagil; when the king appears, he is objectified: he is moved around the stage and propped up by the actions of the *ahu rabû*. These actions that the priests partake in concern three aspects: 1) kingship legitimization, 2) the purity and sanctimony of Babylon, its temples, and its people and 3) the establishment of a specific socio-political environment granted by both cosmic/divine and secular/state powers.

1) There are always two kings discussed during the Akītu festival: the king that manages the city and Marduk, the king of gods, who manages big-picture affairs. On the second day, the high priest first places Marduk and his royalty within the space of Babylon as his throne and Borsippa as his crown. He then, in alluding to Enmešarra's Defeat, establishes this space as a place of power: though wrong-doing enemies have control, Marduk is the god that curses, blesses, and decrees against these enemies for the protection of Babylon. This is juxtaposed with Uruk and Nippur, the cities seen with forgotten rites and uprooted foundations. On the fourth day, prior to the reading of the *Enūma Eliš*, Marduk is explicitly said to hold kingship and grant the scepter "to the king who reveres him." The *Enūma Eliš* itself is the epic that proclaims how Marduk received and accepted this power.

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<sup>264</sup> AB 244, published in McEwan 1981 p. 134f, shows separate sacrifices were made to the Day One Temple as well as to the Akitu temple.

It is on the 5<sup>th</sup> day that the two kings meet and this interaction is steeply divided via interpretation. If we can accept that the reading of humiliation, role-reversal, and other standard Myth-and-Ritual theories inherently miss a pivotal point in the interaction between king, high priest, and god in Bēl's cella, then we may read, following Sallaberger, that within the Akītu festival there is a tangible check-and-balance system between the three powers. It is the king and priest that supply a position of power onto Marduk through the annual gifting of god-king regalia and admission of protecting the people of Babylon and it is Marduk that then supplies the peace and allowance for these two figures to continue in their positions of power. This meeting could not be possible without any of the three persons: Marduk is shown to protect Babylon numerous times over and the king is the assurance of the god's strength by means of granting the king his scepter. However, it is not the king that handles the day-to-day with the god: it is only through the high priest that these kings meet and it is by the priest's strike that the king is ensured to obey his end of kingship.

By the end of this interaction, tears and all, the king becomes a willing participant in the festival: he aids the sacrifice with the high priest that evening in lighting a fire and eats a bull's thigh for the god. Both he and the high priest are seen praying rather than the previous priest-only prayer earlier that morning.

2) Whereas the cultic texts' agenda seems to propel itself toward this unity of three powers, their discussed concerns are not of themselves and their positions, but rather their respective subjects: Babylon the city, the Esagil temple, and the people that compose these areas. Although it appears that the populace is the general concern, a particular group called the *kidinnu* is especially focused upon within these texts. In the first prayer on the second day, just after establishing Marduk's residence, the *ahu rabû* asks for Marduk to establish freedom of service for the *šab kidinnu*. In the meeting between the three powers, the king assures Bēl that he did not strike the cheek of any of these subjects.

The temple itself, the dwelling place of the god, is interacted with in several different spaces, the most literal being simply the temple on the ground in which the events of the Akītu festival take place during the first week. On the fifth day, a complex series of rituals systematically clean the area of various impurities such as ritual purification by means of censer, torch, water, and blood. The two individuals that clean the temple-place with blood of a sheep are scapegoated to outside the city walls until the end of the festival. Special fabrics are taken

from treasuries and clothe the cella of Nabû; the actors that partake in this act help exorcise the area. The demon that lives in there is thusly killed by Marduk. Additionally, the Esagil is prayed to on a cosmological level in the fourth day when the *ahu rabû* prays to the *ikû*-star in addition to the numerous other astronomical bodies that embody Bēl and Bēltiya.

Lastly, the whole of Babylon, Marduk's throne, seen as a sanctuary that is protected and purified, remains as the background of the Akītu festival. In BM 41577 we see Zarpanītu take on the role of Inanna, where she protects the path to Babylon with "bloodthirsty weapons" whilst looking lovely in the process. Compared with Uruk and Nippur, Babylon appears to be the last beacon of hope, or perhaps a newly established beacon to replace the failing light of Uruk and Nippur, if we are to follow Lambert and Bidmead's interpretations of the second day. From an agricultural standpoint, which Zgoll points out repeatedly, it is by Marduk's hand that Babylon is given measured water and cultivated fields: he does not just protect the walls and those privileged to remain in them, but also the lands around them that are used to sustain the city's populace.

3) These two aspects fall into a very particular Babylon, one that has a specific hierarchical structure with little room for change. Within the pantheon of gods, the Akītu festival appears so surely set in stone as it holds Marduk as Babylon's god and likewise Babylon as the structural head of a body of gods and their respective cities. In BM 47902 + 48320, visiting gods are asked why they are in Babylon. The question is rhetorical: Marduk's placement begs for gods to visit in celebration of what may be seen as a lengthy inauguration. His wife has a complementary role; on the 4<sup>th</sup> day, the prayer to Zarpanītu shows her role in earthly matters: she grants mercy and works with slaves and servants of the human world. And when the figurines are made on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day — whether they represent beast, effigy, or portent — it is Marduk's son Nabû that watches their fate: with struck heads, they burn before him.

The emphasis on hierarchy follows through on a societal level as well. The *kidinnu* are excused on several kingly levels, both by the king and by Marduk. The high priest is asked not to share certain prayers with anyone else and the meeting between the three powers is for their privileged eyes only.



b. Chronicles

Though the chronicles during this period in their style appear to separate history from contemporary events, they as a whole focus on one underlying factor: the instability of kingship, safety, the sanctimony of the temple, and the difficulty of rectifying these troubles. In ABC 7 we see Nabonidus' visits to Teima for so many years being a thorn in the side of the Akītu festival; in response "the sacrifices to the gods of Babylon and Borsippa were offered in the Esagila and the Ezida as in normal times" (l. ii 7-8, etc.) by the priesthood. Cyrus, as the antithesis, allows the festival to take place and in return *harû*-vessels and peace are given to the king. Even though there appears to be ambivalence between the chroniclers and Cambyses, particularly his Elamite attire, the comparison between Nabonidus and Cyrus is clear.

In ABC 17, many troubling signs are seen throughout Babylon and even though we see similar reaction and preventative measures by the priesthood either in response or juxtaposition to these events, the appearance and actions of the priests are new within this time period: the appearance of the *ahu rabû* in l. ii 5 is especially odd considering the position did not exist during the reported time period. We see that kings do not arrive to perform their duties or ultimately perform properly and this last note is the through-thread that binds the chronicles that discuss current events during the Hellenistic period; even though the Akītu festival possibly peeks out only once in BHP 12, the placement of the actors and setting all involve those that would partake in the cultic texts above. They worship in Greek fashion, are seen clearing or falling over rubble in the temple, or otherwise are held duty to sentence a guilty gold-thief. This setting appears all too real and particularly disconcerting: in the only text that mentions actions that could have occurred during the Akītu festival, we see that only a large sacrifice is made and that Seleucia was the city of kingship, no longer Babylon.

## Chapter V: Conclusions

### 1. Synthesis of Material

#### a. Neo-Babylonian Period

When viewing the Neo-Babylonian accounts together, several functions of the Akītu festival form: 1) the creation of the Neo-Babylonian Akītu festival appears to be purposely annexed to the Empire itself rather than a continuity of practice from the Neo-Assyrian Empire or Babylon itself prior to Sennacherib's desecration of the city, 2) the act of the Akītu festival appears in line with prosperity and safety: the festival is noted as being absent during martial conflicts and is described as being proof of peace, 3) the development of the Akītu festival was a constant process that thrived off improvements, 4) Marduk, Nabû, and later Nergal, while key performers in the festival, have varying roles and importance depending on the ruler, and 5) the role of the temple is completely non-existent in performance, appearance, or significance.

1) There is purposefulness written in separating the Akītu festival at Babylon from the Assyrians, who struggled to control the region during the last decades prior to annexation. The (dis)appearance of the Akītu festival is actively written in the case of the chronicles. Šamaš-šuma-ukīn, though Assyrian by blood, is seen in possibly a favorable light, most likely because of his eventual revolt against his brother Assurbanipal; the regent in charge of Babylon, Kandalanu, is ignored almost entirely.<sup>265</sup> Additionally, the Neo-Babylonian kings, other than Nabonidus,<sup>266</sup> leave their building projects, offerings, and practice of the festival within their own timeframe. The only mention of previous Akītu festivals in Babylon is made by Nebuchadnezzar II in his comment of how he actively made no other city in Babylonia greater than that of Babylon or Borsippa in order to bolster the attention Marduk did not receive by previous kings (15 vii: 9-25).

When kings are described prior to the Neo-Babylonian period by chroniclers, they share remarkable consistencies with their Neo-Babylonian counterparts: the chronicles present history

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<sup>265</sup> On the other hand, the only time Šamaš-šuma-ukīn is mentioned is with reference to his war waged against his brother: nothing earlier is attested in terms of historic portrayal.

<sup>266</sup> Nabonidus is certainly the exception to this rule, who not only finds his way to discuss Naram-Sîn, but also criticizes Nebuchadnezzar II's building projects (Schaudig 2010 p. 155ff), which may be seen as a criticism on Neo-Babylonian religious ideology in general.

from the Kassite period until the destruction of the Neo-Assyrians consistent with the “rebellious” kings, sons of nobodies, of the Neo-Babylonian period; the kings separate themselves from their predecessors only through consistent presentation of gifts to Marduk or participating in the Akītu festival. While this supposes that Assyrians did participate in not just the festival but in the Marduk cult in general, the context seems to exist in a Babylon-central aspect; Assur is left out of the picture. The defining factor of who appears to participate in these actions belong to a group of kings that battled, if not the Assyrians, then other warring groups of people, from invading Arameans to cities along the Euphrates.

2) When Nebuchadnezzar II writes that he gathered “all men in peace” (9 iii: 24) under Babylon, he very well means subjecting his power over these men. Again, when he discusses his militaristic accomplishments only to bring up the goods and commodities for the gods of Babylon, particularly Marduk and Zarpanītu for the Akītu festival (19 iv: 55-57), the king is transparently excusing his military campaigns, which are “a continuation of Neo-Assyrian policies.”<sup>267</sup> We see Nabonidus continue this act of conflating military victories and the festival with his offering of 2,800+ temple slaves from Hume (8 ix: 31-50). On the other hand, we see a connection with the Akītu festival and its cancellation with respect to martial conflict. As discussed above, what we may be able to say from all this is that there is a strong militaristic connection with the Akītu festival and its performance during the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

3) Additionally, there hardly seems to have been a time during the Neo-Babylonian Empire that gives the impression of completion for the places of the Akītu festival. We learn of Nabopolassar’s palace being built along the unfinished Ay-ibūr-šabū street that Nebuchadnezzar II later finishes. New adornments for the chariots and boats that carry the gods down these streets and canals, in addition to cellas and gates lavished with precious metals and fresh wood. Offerings for gods increase during the prosperous times which the Neo-Babylonian Empire prided itself on existing in. Utensils and daises that are already coated in silver are redone with gold.

4) Nabopolassar always began, when referencing the two major Akītu gods, with mentioning Nabū before Marduk.<sup>268</sup> However, his son switches the names around. We find that Nebuchadnezzar II in general focuses and glorifies Marduk over Nabū through several means:

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<sup>267</sup> Da Riva 2012 p. 96

<sup>268</sup> Langdon 1905 p. 4

building projects that pertain to the Akītu festival are concentrated on Babylon and attention to the visiting god Nabû is on his appearance in Babylon. It is not until Neriglissar that Nabû's own dais in Borsippa is treated with the same quality gold as Marduk's (1 i: 33- 40). Comparing with the chronicles, this preferential treatment is not seen at all: both gods appear in junction with one another unless an event affects only one particular god or his city as was the case for Nabû-šuma-iškun (ABC 15).

In the perspective of royal inscriptions, the appearance of Nergal in Neriglissar's inscriptions appears novel, but we see Nergal and his city appear throughout the period as a whole and his (dis)appearance in the chronicles may be an indication of Babylon/Borsippa-centralization. Cuthah is attacked though the statue of Nergal is saved by Nabopolassar (ABC 2).

The last note is the separation of Nabû and Marduk with respect to their roles in the festival: in the royal inscriptions we see that Marduk is the god that calls individuals to kingship, yet it is Nabû, through the image and action of taking the god's scepter, that confirms and perhaps balances the act of answering the god's call to kingship and the actual acceptance, through the approval of the Nabû cult in Borsippa, of the putative ruler. We see that several leaders are called to rebel and go against certain powers, especially against Assyria, but it is only after Marduk and Nabû are mentioned by means of seeing the Akītu festival having taken place in abbreviated notation that the leaders are seen as becoming recognized as having any favorable clout.

5) The last note that needs to be mentioned is the complete absence of the temple in these records: only once are prebendary priests, high priests, or rituals discussed and that is the mention of the (re)establishment of the Nana cult in Uruk by Nebuchadnezzar II. Nabopolassar does not discuss the establishment of rites and rituals outside of his own desire to complete their performances. No king attributes his increase in offerings for anyone other than the gods. The abbreviation of the festival, taking Bēl by the hand, does not involve mention of any other participant other than the king. The processions are not described in a way that suggests that the king, let alone anyone else, leads the gods to and from the Esagila and E-siskur; the rituals that we will see later in the Seleucid period are not visible in any manner. The only mention of deeds by the kings written in royal inscriptions is that of offering to the gods and it is only Nabonidus who details on which day his gifts are given. Precious metals by the talent are given to gods and later the king makes mention of flour and meat offerings, which Nebuchadnezzar II also

discusses, but not in any particular timeframe.<sup>269</sup> Though the chronicles come from a priestly-context, the appearances of priests are non-existent.

#### b. Persian Period

By the time of Cyrus' arrival, we see that the feeling of ambivalence had formed against Nabonidus' rule. The contents of the *Cyrus Cylinder* and *Verse Account* showcase the varying degrees of frustration which the Marduk priesthood of Babylon particularly had with its final Babylonian king.

These texts are unfortunately quiet about the function of the Akītu festival even though they carry the information and tropes of the Neo-Babylonian period that otherwise would have mentioned the festival in some way. These omissions, I believe, are intentional. Cyrus in these first two texts is clearly established to appear in the guise of a Neo-Babylonian king first in the style of his royal inscription and second in his involvement with the gods and their dwellings. He returns gods to their temples and reestablishes links between original gods (Marduk) with their temple (Esagil); he establishes peace for all men and actualizes his reign in the same way Nebuchadnezzar II had (from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea); most importantly, he appears on a day that which is known to be a part of the Akītu festival (*Verse Account*), or arrives into the city amidst a celebration (*Cyrus Cylinder*); in doing so, he is connected to the festival albeit without any functional purpose. This meeting of king and city during the Akītu festival is essentially polemical: the evidence of how the Akītu festival is utilized by the priesthood in the Neo-Babylonian period is non-existent and its actors are not seen partaking in any religious occasions in the period after, even in the *Verse Account*. The only connecting factor between the Akītu and Cyrus in these accounts points toward re-establishing tradition through linking Marduk again with the Esagil. His position is removed entirely from anything outside of sacrifice, which is not exclusive to the Akītu festival, nor to Cyrus alone.

What is even more striking is the lack of congruency between these earlier two texts and ABC 1, which mimics the style of earlier Neo-Babylonian chronicles without any preferential

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<sup>269</sup> It may be suggested that Nabonidus in this context usurps attention through the provision of this momentous gifting on the tenth day when the gods are in the Akītu house, but we cannot ascertain where this exchange took place: the gifts might have been presented in the house itself or in the temple while the Akītu performance kept the temple's main attendants busy (see Lambert 1997 no. 1 below), but as of now neither conclusion can be reached.

Persian treatment. While it is possible that the Akītu is additionally discussed (in the case of ABC 1B) or makes its first appearance in a missing portion of ABC 1A or 1C, the text itself focuses on events between the three main imperial powers during the early 1<sup>st</sup> millennium. And while it sympathizes with Elam, the text does not appear to make this sympathy or the appearance of the Akītu its main concession; the whole of text appear to be concerned with editing events that chronicles of the previous period speak about: gods moving to and from cities due to warring crises and the threat of Assyria looming all around Babylon and Elam.

When we escape the temple-written context and look at cuneiform archives ending abruptly during Xerxes' reign, we can witness the silent commands of the state against the temple during this period. What caused this graphic exchange of families within the priesthood and their loss of power is beyond the scope of this paper, but the decision to instate Persian-sympathetic families in their stead helps give us an idea what this action was concerned with. Babylonia's elites were taxed, their workers outsourced and, while the suggestion that temples were destroyed may not hold any water, the aggravation felt by the priestly community may as well suggest that those who ran the temples themselves were affected greatly.

Our evidence of the Akītu festival taking place during this time is minimal; sacrifices are made on days that appear vital for the celebration of the festival (VAT 4959) during Darius' first year of reign, but the omission of the festival's name cannot allow us to state that it did happen, especially since the named gods sacrificed to are only Marduk and Ninurta; the names of Nabû, Zarpanītu, even Nergal or Sîn are missing.

From this material, it appears there were two main phases of the Persian period for the priests and the actualization of the Akītu festival: 1) From Cyrus to Darius and 2) Xerxes until Alexander's arrival. In the early Persian period, there appeared to be cooperation between the temple and the state, though it appears this was more hopeful and coated on by the temple for the sake of the state. This appears to be in response to Nabonidus' reign, whether or not this judgment of his reign is wholly fair. However, by the time Darius' reign ends, much had changed for the temples and this change effectively silenced the much of the priesthood.

c. Hellenistic period

When Linssen noted that “the Nisannu version [of the Akitu festival] follows the schedule used in the Neo-Babylonian period,” he is probably correct in that actions performed probably did not differ greatly between Hellenistic and Neo-Babylonian rule. Yet how these actions were interpreted, written about, and how the actors participated in these actions were given different foci in the Hellenistic period.

The dominance of kingship that pervaded the royal inscriptions and chronicles of the Neo-Babylonian period appears to have shifted toward the movement and actions of the priests – the king is moved by the priests, dictated what to pray where, which sort of gods grant what benedictions, and his various actions are sized up as othering, foreign in Jonathan Z. Smith’s words, juxtaposed with the rites and actions made by the priests. Looking at chronicles and cultic texts, both composed by priests and found within a temple context, it is difficult to receive perspective outside of this notion of a societally-powerful temple organization. We do not know how the Hellenistic kings felt or imagined how the Akītu festival worked alongside their own religious and political ideology, nor can we fully interpret the actions that are described in this period without priestly invention. While it may be suggested that this is due to what evidential material is made available to current scholars, it may also be suggested that this is due to cultural, political, and religious context of the period.

At the same time, the Akītu festival’s agenda is almost entirely focused upon kingship and its subsequent power over Babylon and its constituents. The king, the sanctity of Babylon, and the socio-political environment created by the three powers — Marduk, the king, and the priesthood — are all deeply engrained into the festival’s agenda. In the chronicles, we see that when one power slips up, almost always on the king’s side, the other two powers work in relation to their actions: either the priesthood doubles down its efforts in order to assure completion of works and rituals or the gods ultimately remain unhelpful and stay within their domains. In this particular light, the material in this case focuses on three main aspects: 1) the ambivalence between the temple and the foreign state power, 2) the temple’s power outside of state control, and 3) the temple’s duty toward the security of the Babylonians and their capital city of Babylon.

1) We see that the priests are in constant contact with the gods for the state's sake: in the *Religious Chronicle* and *Nabonidus Chronicle*, the priests are active and possibly antagonistic toward outside influence. Cambyses is not allowed to take Nabû's scepter due to his clothing and the *ahu rabû* supplies sacrifices when a Hellenistic king does not offer them. The power of the gods are what gives legitimacy to those that control the societal-level; the kings are shown to be guided and aided by the priests so as to ensure correct actions, not for the sake of the king but for the sake of the entirety of the performance.

2) Time and time again we witness the priestly-class participating in ritual acts in retaliation against absent or unideal state-functions. When a king does not participate in the Akītu festival, the *ahu rabû* performs sacrifices in his stead. Even in the king's participation, it is the hand of a priest that guides him through; this is even taken literally, as seen in the meeting between Marduk and the king. What should be noted is that the power that seemed to be taken from the elites in the Persian period appears again: the case of gold taken from a temple most likely affiliated with a non-Babylonian religion, the Day One Temple, is handled by the priests.

3) During political unrest, either from internal Aramean conflict or external conquest by Cyrus, the Akītu festival and its relevant spaces remain a point of contention: the walls of Babylon and the gods' dwellings are of a concern, especially when their protective measures are violated by (super)natural causes. The prayers made by the *ahu rabû* are especially worried about the sanctity of Babylon and its protection from both outside and inside forces: the established *kidinnu* pop up intermittently in order to assure their freedoms and status quo, the gods are asked to remove evil from their temples and the city as a whole. If the king does not weep or does not perform his actions dutifully, Babylon is faced with vulnerability.

The centrality of Babylon within this festival does exclude peripheral cities of near-equal importance: Uruk and Nippur, vital cities whose city-gods are granted powerful statuses, are seen as antitheses of Babylon due to theological differences. It is only Babylon and Borsippa that are shown to be key investitures by Marduk and his entourage even though gods from other cities, such as Nergal from Cutha, come to pay respect to the god. The gods as a whole participate in the establishment of Marduk as king of the gods, whose role, along with Zarpanītu, is to invest in the success and fruition of the Babylonian people through the removal of ill-omens and evils in addition to state-supported behavior and customs. At the same time, it is Seleucia which is now seen as the city of kingship, not Babylon.



## 2. Conclusions

The functionality of the Akītu as it is presented in these texts showcases a narrative that details several revealing aspects of the festival after Babylonian independence from Assyria in 626 BCE. The whole of the texts compose a thread between the temple and the state through the guise of priests and kings wherein the power dynamic shared between these two societal positions culminates with the celebration of the Akītu. When one spatially analyzes the festival, the visible overarching components that make up the Akītu are that of kingship, mythologization, and historicization. These three aspects are by no means static; they follow a progression in line with occupation by foreign power seen throughout the ancient Near East: what was seen as vital in record keeping and ritual practice was different for each successive conquering of Babylon even though the presentation of the festival most likely varied with little change. In reaction to the changes that occurred between Neo-Babylonian independence, Persian control, and Hellenistic occupation over Babylon, the context of the Akītu festival was altered both historically and contemporarily by both state and temple in order to adjust preferential treatment by the crown and to (dis)allow certain actions to be performed by selected kings based off of their relationship with the temple and its gods.

In the Neo-Babylonian period, the appearance of power in the hands of the priesthood was minimal; in their own texts (chronicles), the preservation of autonomy is scant and appears only in the form of the gods' decisions to participate or abstain from celebrating the New Year. When discussing kings, it is their military consequences that are highlighted, whether this means dealing with rebellion (either their own or against their rule), conquest, or invasion of foreign power. On the other hand, the kings of the Neo-Babylonian period assert themselves in the royal inscriptions as overtly pious and cautious of religious fervor: they discuss the want to perform rites, they decorate the temples of the gods over and over again, and most importantly any major military conquest is done by and in the name of their gods, particularly those affiliated with the Akītu festival. As noted by Schaudig, both Nabopolassar and Nabonidus share many similarities compared to the kings that separated their reigns – the act of legitimization during this period was engrained in the sphere of the temple interaction. The kings between the aforementioned bookend reigns, Nebuchadnezzar II and Neriglissar, focus on construction and revitalization

projects with a particular emphasis on their temple constructions rather than civil within this context.

If the Neo-Babylonian period looked like a golden age of the Akītu festival, this appearance was purposefully crafted. The various modes of legitimization — construction, conquest, and commitment to the gods and their domains — in comparison to the written history of the chronicles concerning Babylonia prior to Nabopolassar's reign showcase these three main strengths of kingship during this period. Nebuchadnezzar II displays his father's construction plans and accordingly completes them; what Nebuchadnezzar II doesn't finish with his own adornment for the gods of the Akītu festival, Neriglissar is seen adding with tangible wealth to the production. Nabonidus' own work with the festival, offering talents of silver and gold to the gods, show that the Akītu was never in final stages and instead thrived off improvements. Wood and food are taken from far-off places to feed and house the gods; the places from which these excursions are made appear as celebratory remembrances for the festival rather than the military conquests that they were.

The tendency to note when Akītu festival did not take place, primarily prior to Nabopolassar, actively separates Babylon prior to independence. The figures seen in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium such as Šuzigaš and Ninurta-tukulti-Ašur bear surprising resemblance to their modern counterparts of Nabopolassar and Šamaš-šuma-ukīn. Lesser prominent kings are dropped out of the history, such as Kandalanu and Sīn-šar-iškun, in order to create a seamless discrepancy between Assyrian dominance and Babylonian freedom. This, connected with the new construction plans made by the Neo-Babylonian kings display a variance in rule and kingly conduct that helped give way to seeing this period as a renaissance for religious and state spheres.

The most notable aspect that separates the Neo-Babylonian period with the periods thereafter is the lack of royal inscriptions; while the *Cyrus Cylinder* certainly goes against this claim, the written bias confirms that, rather than Cyrus emulating the style and preferential treatment of the priesthood, the priesthood instead instilled Cyrus as a redeemer and a ruler more preferable than Nabonidus and thus works on a different level than inscriptions written by Nabonidus or Nebuchadnezzar II. In comparison to the inscriptions Nabonidus left concerning the Akītu festival, the priesthood's favor for this final king seemed to slip toward disdain by the time of the Persian ruler's arrival; Cyrus' appearance in Babylon occurs during the Akītu and the

*Verse Account* suggests that Cyrus himself was a king that reinstated its legacy after the many years that Nabonidus neglected its performance. The imagery used to describe Cyrus during this time is reminiscent toward Neo-Babylonian rulers: the king, although a tough and militarily successful ruler, exudes peace, justice, and universal care for the people of the Near East and their gods.

However, by the end of Darius' reign and the consequential ruling of Xerxes, this written favor for the Persian empire shifted from wishful thinking to critical ambivalence. ABC 1 retells what has already been written about in the Neo-Babylonian period though apparently with a different timeline in mind. Less than two decades later two rebellions break out against Xerxes when a major break in the priesthood, its archives, and its protection from standard taxation and civil duties occurs. The Persian kings alter the power dynamics of the temples ensuring that their favor remained consistent over time. No longer was kingship about the revitalization of Babylon; Susa, with unwarranted help from the priesthood, moved the central strength kingship away from Babylon.

By the time the cultic texts and chronicles are written in the Hellenistic period, the authors of these texts appear to live in a very different political climate than the period prior. Cyrus returns with his written antithesis Nabonidus; Cyrus is continued to be celebrated, but the link with his son and Elam makes the comparison disconcerting, an issue unaddressed in the Persian period. Worry between the temple and events in Babylon pop up regularly between historicity and then-contemporary events. When there appears to be kerfuffle between the two powers, it is always the temple that attempts to rectify the wrong. At the same time, measurements of care are seen to be undertaken by the crown, such as clearing away debris from the temple sites.

The cultic texts at this point in time mythologize completely the intentions, actions, and outcome of the festival. While the interpretations of these events vary from scholar to scholar, the perspective of who participates in the festival is absolutely clear: how the priests view this festival is one that is run by the priesthood, managed and planned out by themselves; the king is a willing and important participant, but he is objectified nonetheless. Although the festival itself celebrates kingship both cosmically and locally, the paraded kingship is one of static presentation. There are only scant references to the Hellenistic kings partaking in the celebration and it is particular to gift-offering; this offering is not gold, adornment, or civil works but

sacrificial foodstuff and ritual practice. Even though the power of Babylon seems now in the hands of the temple, the effort to ensure their freedom and power is spattered throughout the rituals of the Akītu appears to be an anxiety: prayers are made for *kidinnu* and the gods ensure the stability of the city from both outside and paranormal danger.

It is primarily through the perspective of the priests that we see the Akītu festival develop outside of the Neo-Babylonian period and this is most likely because the Akītu festival, for being a time of kingship celebration, is inherently concerned with Babylon as the center position of power for both temple and state. When the state is removed from this picture, the Akītu festival struggles to maintain its prominence in the state's eyes: first Susa and later Seleucia are given the central focus of kingship and the temple attempts to balance this by maintaining polemical focus upon the actions of kings with relation to their participation in the festival.

Historically the authors of the chronicles attribute missed opportunities to martial strife, as was the case with Šamaš-šuma-ukīn, and contemporarily with the loss of god-favor, as is the case with Nabonidus and Cyrus. Through this act of historicizing kingship and the Akītu, the issue of kingship became problematic through the Persian period; it is not until the Hellenistic period that evidence appears of the festival taking place, at least occasionally. But by this time the functions used to assert the dominance and assurance of power by the state seems archaized, left to mythological allusions and religious perusal. Whether this was a progression already to be seen in the time of Cyrus or if this was managed by the hands of those elected by Darius and Xerxes remains beyond the scope of this paper.

### 3. Abbreviations and Bibliography

All abbreviations, unless noted, are standardized and may be found in the CDLI's webpage of abbreviations for the study of Assyriology:

[http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/doku.php?id=abbreviations\\_for\\_assyriology](http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/doku.php?id=abbreviations_for_assyriology)

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