

Honourable mention
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reevaluating the fall of Babylon

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Introduction

The world of the Ancient Near East had been divided among several key regions that vied for power with one another for over 2,000 years. However, in the reign of a single king from an otherwise minor country, most of the known world was brought under a single world empire. The campaigns of Cyrus the Great and the early expansion of the Persian Empire were unprecedented in human history. Yet, despite their importance, Cyrus' campaigns are generally poorly understood, and little is known about his broader strategic policies or how he implemented them. Perhaps the most momentous of these conquests was the capture of Babylon and the overthrow of King Nabonidus, which brought the cultural capital of the ancient world under Cyrus' control and ended the Jewish captivity. However, because of contradictory sources, there are serious uncertainties within the scholarship concerning how exactly Babylon came under Cyrus' control.

The issue lies in the disagreement between Herodotus and the Nabonidus Chronicle. Herodotus describes how, after a lengthy siege, Cyrus captured Babylon by diverting the water of the river Euphrates (which flowed through Babylon) into a basin,

sinking the water level enough to allow his men to enter the city through the dried-up river bed.¹ However, the Nabonidus Chronicle states that the city was captured without fighting.²

Herodotus, writing well after the events he describes, is understood to be relying on oral tradition and hearsay, and often transmits questionable folk stories.³ So for some scholars, it is easy to dismiss Herodotus entirely due to his clear contradiction of the more reliable Babylonian evidence and to interpret the chronicle's statement as meaning that the city surrendered voluntarily to Cyrus. Paul-Alain Beaulieu attributes Herodotus' story to popular myth,⁴ while Muhammad Dandamayev raises the point that there seems to be no direct archaeological evidence for Cyrus' siege of the city.⁵ But for others, like Pierre Briant, it is difficult to believe that the impressively fortified Babylonian capital voluntarily surrendered to a foreign conqueror.⁶ In addition, evidence of repairs made to a damaged gate has been used to suggest a more violent capture.⁷ Thus, there is serious ambiguity concerning one of the most significant events in the history of the Near East. This article presents a new resolution to this issue by reevaluating Herodotus and demonstrating significant parallels between the two supposedly contradicting narratives. It argues that Herodotus' story is actually supported by the Nabonidus Chronicle, and

¹ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.191.

² Albert K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles (Texts from Cuneiform Sources)*, (Eisenbrauns, 1975), 109-110. <https://books.google.ca/books?id=ydcGZA6k5nwC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

³ J.A.S. Evans, "Father of History or Father of Lies; the Reputation of Herodotus," *The Classical Journal* 64, no. 1 (1968): pp. 11-17. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3296527>.

⁴ Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon, 556-539 B.C.*, (Yale University Press, 1990), p. 226.

⁵ Muhammad Dandamayev, *A Political History of the Achaemenid Empire*, trans. W. J. Vogelsang (Brill, 1989), pp. 41-49.

⁶ Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, trans. Peter. T. Daniels (Eisenbrauns, 2002), p. 41.

⁷ Gauthier Tolini, "Quelques Éléments Concernant La Prise de Babylone Par Cyrus Le Grand (Octobre 539 Av. J.-C.)," *ARTA: Achaemenid Research on Texts and Archaeology* 2005, no. 3 (2005): pp. 1-13.

https://www.academia.edu/803050/_Quelques_%C3%A9l%C3%A9ments_concernant_la_prise_de_Babylone_par_Cyrus_le_Grand_octobre_539_av_J_C_ARTA_2005_003?source=swp_share

only makes a few minor errors in assumption. Ultimately, both accounts are found to transmit the same historical reality and interrelate with one another.

The Basin at Sippar

The first point linking the two narratives together is Herodotus' description of the basin which Cyrus used to drain the Euphrates River. He says that Queen Nitocris constructed a massive basin located not far from the river Euphrates, which was at a great depth and had a circumference of 420 stadia.⁸ Herodotus is not the only person to describe this reservoir, and Berossus seems to also independently address the same structure, saying that it was built by Nebuchadnezzar and had a circumference of 40 parasangs. The most significant point is that Berossus provides a specific location for the basin, saying that it was situated in the neighbourhood of Sippar.⁹ Although Berossus was a Hellenistic-era Greek writer, he is understood to be a very valuable source, and R. J. van der Spek writes "it is clear that he had access to chronicles, king lists ... and other cuneiform documents."¹⁰ For example, Berossus corroborates the detail found in a dynastic prophecy that Cyrus had relocated their king Nabonidus to another place¹¹ when he writes that Nabonidus was taken away to Carmania and given a governorship there.¹²

There are several indications that Berossus' reservoir at Sippar is likely the same basin described by Herodotus. Firstly, Herodotus adds that the basin together with some of Nitocris' other activities occurred "in that part where the entrance to the country was,

⁸ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.185.

⁹ Eusebius, *The Chronicle*, 1.11., identified as a fragment of Berossus' *Babylonaica* in Stanley Mayer Burnstein, *The Babylonaica of Berossus*, vol. 1 (Undena, 1978), p. 27. <http://prajnaquest.fr/blog/wp-content/uploads/Babylonaica-of-Berossus.pdf>.

¹⁰ R. J. van der Spek, "Berossus as a Babylonian Chronicler and Greek Historian," in *Studies in Ancient near Eastern World View and Society* (Eisenbrauns, 2008), p. 287.

https://www.academia.edu/4231478/Berossus_and_Greek_historiography?source=swp_share.

¹¹ Albert K. Grayson, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts*, (University of Toronto Press, 1975), pp. 28-36.

¹² Eusebius, *The Chronicle*, 1.14.

and the shortest way to it from Media.”¹³ This is an accurate description of the area around Sippar and Opis, which represented the northern edge of Babylonia (the geographic region, not the empire), near the narrow point between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Xenophon describes the Wall of Media, which was created to prevent a Median invasion, in this area.¹⁴ The wall’s existence is confirmed by the archaeological findings at Habl as-Sahar, and it is understood to have stretched from Sippar to Opis.¹⁵ It was also at Opis, the vital access point into Babylonia at the edge of the Median Wall, where the Babylonians positioned themselves against Cyrus’ attack.¹⁶ Likewise, the understanding that the reservoir used to divert the Euphrates river was located at Sippar, is supported by the fact that Sippar (modern Tell Abu Habbah)¹⁷ is indeed situated on the banks of the Euphrates. In Herodotus, the basin is described as being “at a very small distance from the river [Euphrates],”¹⁸ which is also an accurate description of Sippar.

Both sources also provide enormous figures for the size of the basin, with measurements for the circumference close to around 100 km. Herodotus says it had a circumference of 420 stadia,¹⁹ which depending on the measurement of the stadion (which was likely between 192 m to 209 m according to Edward Gulbekian’s study)²⁰ can range from 81 to 88 km. Meanwhile, Berossus gives a perimeter of 40 parasangs,²¹ which equates to 156 km per the definition of one parasang as four kilometres from Kenneth

¹³ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.185.

¹⁴ Xenophon, *The Anabasis*, 2.4.12.

¹⁵ R. G. Killick, “Northern Akkad Project: Excavations at Ḥabl Aš-Šaḥr.” *Iraq* 46, no. 2 (1984): pp. 125-29. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4200221>.

¹⁶ T. Cutler Young Jr., “The Rise of the Persians to Imperial Power under Cyrus the Great,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 4 (Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 39.

¹⁷ William Ward, “Sippara,” *Hebraica* 2, no. 2 (1886): p. 82. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/527500>.

¹⁸ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.185.

¹⁹ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.185.

²⁰ Edward Gulbekian, “The Origin and Value of the Stadion Unit Used by Eratosthenes in the Third Century BC,” *Archive for History of Exact Sciences* 37, no. 4 (1987): pp. 359-63.

²¹ Eusebius, *The Chronicle*, 1.11.

Mason's study of the distances found in Xenophon's *Anabasis*.²² Both are enormous and exaggerated sizes for the reservoir, but the point stands that both Berossus and Herodotus describe similarly sized basins capable of draining the Euphrates River. It is hard to believe there were multiple massive and well-known reservoirs that were all located along the Euphrates.

Herodotus says that the basin was created by an otherwise unattested queen named Nitocris. However, it seems that many of the notable structures created by King Nebuchadnezzar are often credited to Nitocris by Herodotus. For example, Herodotus says that Nitocris constructed the bridge across the Euphrates which connected the two halves of Babylon.²³ This structure was found in the archaeological exploration of Babylon and has been identified as a construction of Nebuchadnezzar.²⁴ Similarly, Herodotus credits her with the construction of various defences against the Median Empire.²⁵ Then, several inscriptions make it clear that "Nebuchadnezzar initiated a strenuous building programme to improve the defences of his country," including the "Median Wall."²⁶ Thus, the building projects of Nebuchadnezzar are typically credited to Nitocris by Herodotus. For these reasons, scholarship often identifies Nitocris either as Nebuchadnezzar²⁷ or as his daughter.²⁸ Then, Berossus says that the reservoir at Sippar was created by Nebuchadnezzar.²⁹ So when Herodotus ascribes this basin's creation to

²² Kenneth Mason, "Notes on the Canal System and Ancient Sites of Babylonia in the Time of Xenophon," *The Geographical Journal* 56, no. 6 (1920): pp. 468-81. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1780469>.

²³ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 186.

²⁴ John MacGinnis, "Herodotus' Description of Babylon," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, no. 33 (1986): p. 75. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43646520>.

²⁵ Herodotus, *The Histories*, p. 186.

²⁶ Killick, "Ḥabl Aṣ-Ṣaḥr," p. 125.

²⁷ Giovanni Bergamini, "Levels of Babylon Reconsidered," *Mesopotamia* 12 (1977): p. 136; Walter Baumgartner, "Herodots Babylonische Und Assyrische Nachrichten," *Archiv Orientalní* 18, no. 1 (1950): p. 96.

²⁸ Otto Ravn, *Herodotus' Description of Babylon*, (Nyt Nordisk Forlag, Kjøbenhavn, 1942). P. 38.

²⁹ Eusebius, *The Chronicle*, 1.11.

Nitocris, while Berossus says Nebuchadnezzar built it, this perhaps indicates that Berossus is describing the same basin as Herodotus.

Herodotus also includes the basin among the wonders of Babylon,³⁰ and in Berossus, the reservoir at Sippar is also listed among the famous constructions of Nebuchadnezzar, such as the hanging gardens.³¹ So in both texts, the basin is a well-known iconic landmark. It would be difficult to believe that one author would mention one famous massive basin and ignore another and that the other author would do the inverse. This basin that Herodotus describes is likely the same one that Berossus locates at Sippar. Herodotus' statements about the location of the reservoir match the area of Sippar, and both authors identify the reservoir as a massive and well-known Babylonian landmark.

The identification of this basin's location by Berossus then becomes important because it serves a key role in Herodotus' narrative. According to Herodotus, Cyrus first went to this basin (located by Berossus at Sippar) in order to execute his plan, and only then did his troops enter Babylon.³² Consequently, the Nabonidus Chronicle describes how Cyrus first secured Sippar (and no other city), before his forces captured Babylon two days later.³³ So it is significant that, just as Herodotus says that Cyrus used the Sippar basin to drain the Euphrates before entering Babylon, Sippar is also the one place captured by Cyrus shortly before his forces took Babylon according to the chronicle. This new detail of the basin at Sippar then begins to show the synchronicity between the two accounts. Cyrus' movements in the Nabonidus Chronicle are mirrored in Herodotus' story.

Another point is that Herodotus describes how Cyrus left the soldiers of his army at the spot where the river enters Babylon, while Cyrus himself withdrew to the basin with the non-combatant portion of his army (perhaps the workers and engineers) in order

³⁰ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1:pp. 178-188.

³¹ Eusebius, *The Chronicle*, 1.11.

³² Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1:p. 191.

³³ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, pp. 109-110.

to drain the river into it.³⁴ So according to Herodotus, as the river was being drained and Cyrus' soldiers entered Babylon, Cyrus was not with his troops at the city, but was away at the basin. In other words, Cyrus was not in Babylon when it was captured. Then, this detail is corroborated in the Nabonidus Chronicle, where it is actually Cyrus' general Ugbaru who captured and occupied Babylon with Cyrus' "shield-bearing" soldiers. In the chronicle, Cyrus himself was apparently absent during the taking of the city and only joined his troops in Babylon two weeks later.³⁵ Just as Herodotus shows that Cyrus was not with the troops when they captured Babylon (because he was at the basin), the chronicle has one of Cyrus' generals take the city in his absence. So both accounts are telling one and the same story. Cyrus' choice to divide his forces and do two things at once is also a known practice of his attested in other campaigns. According to Herodotus, after Cyrus had conquered Lydia, he sent his general Harpagus to conquer the Ionian cities, while Cyrus himself subdued the rest of Asia Minor.³⁶

Perhaps Herodotus has only made the slight mistake of having Babylon be Cyrus' starting point before heading to the basin at Sippar³⁷ when the Nabonidus Chronicle's order of events would suggest that Cyrus first captured Sippar and remained there with the engineers, while he sent his general with the army to capture Babylon.³⁸ Alternatively, the capture of Sippar precedes the capture of Babylon in the chronicle because Cyrus' men could not enter until he diverted the river into the Sippar basin. Regardless, the point that Cyrus sent his men and was not present for the capture is a significant similarity.

Another point is that Herodotus mentions how there happened to be a festival in the city on the day Babylon was captured, which distracted the Babylonians from Cyrus' actions.³⁹ The biblical Book of Daniel also describes how the Babylonians were engaged

³⁴ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.p. 191.

³⁵ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, pp. 109-110.

³⁶ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.153, pp. 177-178.

³⁷ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.191.

³⁸ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, pp. 109-110.

³⁹ Herodotus, *The Histories*, p. 191.

in festivities when the city was taken.⁴⁰ There was indeed a festival on the night in which the Nabonidus Chronicle records the Persian army entering Babylon, as has already been recognized in the scholarship. This was the Akitu festival for the moon god Sîn, to whom Nabonidus was an especially devoted adherent.⁴¹ The festival began on the 17th of Tašritu, while, the capture of Babylon is recorded as happening on the 16th of Tašritu; the eve of the festival.⁴² Nabonidus' regime was particularly dedicated to the controversial new religious policy favouring the moon god Sîn, who was the patron deity of Nabonidus' hometown of Harran.⁴³ So this festival was not simply an obscure occasion that happened to match the date of Babylon's capture, but was a significant and contemporarily relevant festival that would have certainly been celebrated in Babylon. Herodotus' accurate description of this festival, together with his account's parallels with the movements of Cyrus and his army in the Nabonidus Chronicle, presents unquestionable proof of his story's reliability. There are now multiple distinct connections between the two accounts, which cannot be ignored. Contrary to the previously established view, Herodotus is not presenting fantasy nor should his account be dismissed. Much of what he describes is corroborated in the other material.

The Inconsistencies between Herodotus and the Nabonidus Chronicle

However, there is still the issue of Herodotus' statement that Cyrus' maneuvers occurred during a prolonged siege of the city.⁴⁴ The Nabonidus Chronicle ultimately says the city was captured without a battle and was captured only two days after Sippar was taken.⁴⁵ Herodotus' mention of a siege is brief and serves as a prelude to the main strategy

⁴⁰ Daniel 5: pp. 1-4 (English Standard Version).

⁴¹ Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, p. 226.

⁴² Al Wolters, "Belshazzar's Feast and the Cult of the Moon God Sin," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 4 (1995): pp. 199-206. https://www.gilberthouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/BBR_1995_11_Wolters_BelshazzarsFeast.pdf.

⁴³ Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, p. 226.

⁴⁴ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.p. 190.

⁴⁵ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, pp. 109-110.

which his story describes.⁴⁶ Every other detail in Herodotus' narrative reflects the specific details in the contemporary texts far too accurately to be a coincidence. Perhaps, this error is simply Herodotus' own assumption that such a strategy must have happened in the context of a siege. Then, understanding that the idea of a siege was a minor erroneous assumption on Herodotus' part, and understanding that the Persian troops entered when the water was covertly drained, they would have been able to enter the city without the need for a siege.

In Ctesias' story about the siege of Sardis (quoted by Polyaeus), he describes how the Lydians were "seized with fear from the belief that their acropolis had already fallen to the Persians" and thus gave up.⁴⁷ Likewise, the Babylonians might have surrendered upon the sight of the entire Persian army already inside their walls. In Herodotus' narrative, the Babylonians felt secure in holding out against the Persians based on the strength of their walls and the provisions which they had prepared in advance.⁴⁸ So, once the Persians were already within the walls and their one hope had failed them, that was the end of any further resistance. Further, the siege also creates an inconsistency within Herodotus' own story. While he mentions a lengthy siege, he also specifically states that the Babylonians were unaware of Cyrus' movements and were caught by surprise.⁴⁹

In the biblical Book of Jeremiah, there is an interesting reference to the Babylonian soldiers having given up fighting while the enemy was within the walls.

The warriors of Babylon have ceased fighting, they remain in their strongholds, their strength has failed, they have become women, the warriors of Babylon have given up fighting ... one runner runs to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to tell the king of Babylon that his city is taken on every side.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.p. 190.

⁴⁷ Polyaeus, *Stratagems*, 7.6.10.

⁴⁸ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.p. 190.

⁴⁹ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.p. 191.

⁵⁰ Jeremiah 51:30-31 (English Standard Version).

The statement that the men gave up fighting is significant. “That his city is taken on every side.” perhaps reflects Herodotus’ statement that the outer sections of the city were taken before the inner parts.⁵¹ The specific reference to the city taken “on every side” indicates that this is not a metaphorical reference to the capture of the city overall, but perhaps a more specific reference alluding to the men giving up as the enemy is within the walls of Babylon. So the idea that the Babylonians surrendered upon finding the entire Persian army already within their walls might be corroborated in Jeremiah. Cyrus’ strategy should perhaps be understood as being designed to allow his troops to enter the city without a siege. Cyrus could thus claim to have captured the city without fighting since his means of getting his men into the city did not involve any actual combat, and since the inhabitants had no choice but to surrender upon the army’s entry.

The texts created under Cyrus’ rule (including the Cyrus Cylinder and the Nabonidus Chronicle) were intended to villainize Nabonidus and praise Cyrus.⁵² Elsewhere in the Nabonidus Chronicle, the text highlights how Cyrus’ troops did not disturb the religious rites in the city and kept the peace.⁵³ The statement that the city was taken without fighting is thus in the same league as the other instances where Cyrus professes his mercy and tolerance. When the text records that Cyrus’ troops did not create any trouble during the occupation, this is not proof that the Babylonians warmly welcomed the Persians in, but is simply Cyrus’ statement that they were not mistreated. Likewise, the reference to the capture of the city without a fight might not necessarily imply that the city invited the Persians in. In these statements, the text is trying to highlight Cyrus’ merciful behaviour. Gauthier Tolini argues that reconstruction activity at the Enlil gate several months after the capture of the city could serve as proof of damage during the forced entry by the Persian troops.⁵⁴ However, it is not necessary to assume a destructive entry that would damage a gate or the walls, since the draining of

⁵¹ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.191.6.

⁵² Amélie Kuhrt, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 8, no. 25 (1983): pp. 83-94.

⁵³ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, p. 110.

⁵⁴ Tolini, “La Prise de Babylone,” pp. 1-13.

the riverbed seems to have been specifically intended to allow Cyrus' soldiers to circumvent the city's defensive structures.

Cyrus' strategy, designed to let him capture Babylon without the need for a siege, is also consistent with his general practice in other campaigns. Throughout Cyrus' campaigns, he consistently worked to destroy his enemies' strengths through maneuvering, before any actual battle. During Cyrus' war against King Croesus of Lydia, after an even battle between the two armies, Croesus perceived that the war was over and returned to Sardis to disband his armies. Cyrus, understanding Croesus' intentions, lets Croesus disband his mercenary troops before marching to Sardis and catching Croesus by surprise. Then, as the battle at Sardis was about to commence, he positioned camels ahead of his infantry (taking advantage of horses' natural fear of camels) in order to disable the Lydian cavalry (Croesus' greatest strength). Thus, without any actual fighting, Cyrus maneuvered in such a way as to significantly reduce Croesus' numbers and debilitate his greatest strength. Only then did he destroy the diminished Lydian army in battle.⁵⁵ Similarly, Cyrus' strategy against the Scythians saw him pretend to flee from his camp, which was full of wine and other goods, where the Scythian army under the inexperienced son of Queen Tomyris entered the camp and got drunk. They were thus incapacitated and easily annihilated.⁵⁶ So Cyrus was specifically skilled in maneuvering in ways that disabled his opponents' strengths without fighting. In the case of Babylon, Cyrus completely circumvented his opponent's main strengths (the nearly impenetrable walls) by draining the waters and then entering through the riverbed; avoiding the need for a siege.

The reason Cyrus' method of entry into the city as described by Herodotus is not present in the Nabonidus Chronicle, is perhaps because of the way Babylonian chronicles record information. The following contains everything concerning the conquest of Babylonia in the chronicle:

In the month Tašritu when Cyrus did battle at Opis on the [bank of] the Tigris against the army of Akkad, the people of Akkad retreated. He carried off the plunder (and) slaughtered the people. On the fourteenth day, Sippar

⁵⁵ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.pp. 77-80.

⁵⁶ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.pp. 207-211.

was captured without a battle. Nabonidus fled. On the sixteenth day, Ugbaru, governor of Gutium, and the army of Cyrus, without battle entered Babylon.⁵⁷

The Nabonidus Chronicle lists events as concisely as possible. Notably, this chronicle and others like it are not concerned with stories of how battles or maneuvers were performed, but only briefly mention them and their outcome. Many riveting details concerning the maneuvers, formations, and interactions during the battle of Gaugamela fought by Alexander the Great are extensively reported on in classical sources, (such as Arrian).⁵⁸ Meanwhile, the same battle is only briefly accounted for in a Babylonian astronomical diary with the statement “opposite each other they fought and a heavy defeat of the troops [of the king he inflicted].”⁵⁹ Likewise, whatever complex tactics or maneuvers might have brought Cyrus victory at the battle of Opis are left out in the Nabonidus Chronicle. The chronicle recording the fall of Nineveh also omits the method of capture for the city, and simply says “they inflicted a major defeat upon a great people.”⁶⁰ The Babylonian chronicles are very concise, and are less interested in how a city was captured or how a battle was fought, but tend to record the event and when it happened. So the Nabonidus Chronicle omits Cyrus’ means of entering the city because it is not customary for this genre of ancient document to provide lengthy narrative digressions. Chronicles primarily provide a concise list of events and dates. Then, the Nabonidus Chronicle’s brief statements concerning the capture of Sippar followed by the capture of Babylon by Cyrus’ general should then be understood as the text’s way of transmitting the same story elaborated by Herodotus.

There are some other minor issues in Herodotus’ account that are worth briefly addressing. For example, Herodotus says Cyrus’ campaign against Babylon happened in

⁵⁷ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, pp. 109-110.

⁵⁸ Arrian, *The Anabasis of Alexander*, 3.pp. 11-16.

⁵⁹ Abraham J. Sachs and Hermann Hunger, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia*, vol. 1 (Austrian Academy of Sciences, 1988), pp. 176-79.

⁶⁰ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, p. 94.

the spring,⁶¹ but the chronicle describes how Cyrus entered Babylon in October.⁶² But it is clear elsewhere that Herodotus was under the impression that wars were organized in campaign seasons occurring in spring. One example is his statement that Croesus intended to renew the stalemated war with Cyrus in the next spring.⁶³ So, much like his view that Cyrus' strategy came about because of a siege, this minor detail might also be an assumption by Herodotus based on what he knew about the standards of war during this period. Another potential issue is Herodotus' statement that the battle preceding the capture of Babylon occurred right outside the city.⁶⁴ This perhaps contradicts the chronicle's description of the battle occurring at Opis,⁶⁵ which is a good distance away. But this is also a minor issue, likely prompted by Herodotus' misunderstanding or generalization concerning Opis' location relative to Babylon. Herodotus is generally understood to have never visited the region himself.⁶⁶ The point that should stand out, is the fact that Herodotus adequately describes the occurrence of only one battle that happened before Cyrus went to the basin and before the army captured Babylon. Likewise, in the Nabonidus Chronicle, there is only one battle (the battle of Opis) that precedes the capture of Sippar and Babylon.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Ultimately, Herodotus' oral tradition is not designed to accurately chronicle specific details, like precise dates or locations, but to tell a story. Consequently, the Nabonidus Chronicle has the opposite issue, and so the parallels and synchronism between the two accounts should show that the same historical reality is being

⁶¹ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.190.

⁶² H. Jacob Katzenstein, "Tyre in the Early Persian Period (539-486 B.C.E.)," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 42, no. 1 (1979): p. 25. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3209545>.

⁶³ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.77.

⁶⁴ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.190.

⁶⁵ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, p. 109.

⁶⁶ MacGinnis, "Herodotus' Description of Babylon," pp. 67-81.

⁶⁷ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, p. 109.

represented in two very different sources. Where Herodotus says Cyrus the Great used an enormous basin (located by Berossus at Sippar) to drain the Euphrates and allow his army to enter Babylon, the Nabonidus Chronicle also has Cyrus first capture Sippar before taking Babylon. While Herodotus describes how Cyrus was away at the basin when his army entered the city, the Nabonidus Chronicle also describes how the city was taken by Cyrus' general, and Cyrus himself only entered Babylon two weeks later. Then, Herodotus' statement that there was a festival in Babylon on the day the city was captured is a fact confirmed by the date of the Akitu festival for the moon god Sîn. These are remarkable parallels that cannot be ignored.

Likewise, the absence of Herodotus' story about the covert entry in the Nabonidus Chronicle may be a consequence of the conventions of Babylonian chronicles. These texts list notable events and dates while omitting lengthy narrative accounts of how battles or captures were achieved. Herodotus' statement concerning a siege seems to have been an assumption, based on Herodotus' presumption that such a maneuver must have happened during a siege. The very purpose of Cyrus' strategy might have been to allow his army to enter Babylon without a fight, and this supports the statement of the chronicle that Babylon was captured without battle. This and other errors by Herodotus are minor, especially given the other more startling parallels between his details and the cuneiform accounts. Not only do these findings show that Herodotus' story might be true after all, but they also resolve a serious inconsistency that has been complicating the understanding of this extremely important historical event. The natural parallels between the two accounts create a much clearer picture of the fall of Babylon, and there is now finally harmony between the classical and cuneiform texts.

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