THE SEED OF WISDOM

Essays in Honour of
T. J. Meek

"With them the Seed of Wisdom did I sow"
RUBAIyat XXVIII (FITZGERALD)

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I. The Reign of Nebuchadnezzar I:

*A Turning Point in the History of Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*

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A HISTORY OF ancient Mesopotamian religion has not yet been written. All who concern themselves with this subject know that many changes took place within it between 3,000 and 300 B.C., but the time is not yet ripe for attempting an historical description of its development. The difficulties are a lack of material for many crucial periods and a conservatism which obscures and mitigates the effect of change. For example, Sumerians were succeeded by Babylonians, but although the one language superseded the other in everyday use at the beginning of the second millennium B.C., Sumerian was dominant in religion for about a thousand years longer, as Latin was to be in the Middle Ages. Such slow development frustrates the research worker who would like to pinpoint the moment of the introduction of new ideas and practices. This paper, in honour of T. J. Meek, one of whose permanent contributions to Assyriology was the publication of numerous bilingual fragments including many of religious content, is devoted to advancing the theory that one of the greatest changes in the course of Babylonian religion can be fixed in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I.

The rise of Marduk to headship of the pantheon was certainly a remarkable change in Babylonian religion. It is well known that the city of which he was the god was utterly obscure until Hammurabi made it the capital of Southern Mesopotamia. Marduk himself had no prestige of purely religious origin and was as obscure as his town until its First Dynasty achieved an unexpected glory. By the time of Nebuchadnezzar II Marduk and his son Nabû were the supreme gods of Mesopotamia; and not only in that country were the greatest honours heaped on them, but outside its borders, among the Hebrews for example, Bel, "the Lord *par excellence*, and Nebo symbolized the power of Babylon.

In this ascent to power Marduk did not simply replace an earlier god. Enlil, it is true, was once considered the highest power in the
Sumerian pantheon. However, his city, Nippur, had only religious and never political influence. Perhaps for this reason among others the preserved accounts of councils of Sumerian gods do not show Enlil as an out and out autocrat. On the contrary, a quite democratic procedure was followed. But Marduk’s supremacy was absolute. The Epic of Creation shows how, in the framework of a council like that of the Sumerian gods, he demanded that if he were to rescue the gods from Tiamat’s threat, he should assume absolute power. This has sometimes been obscured by a misinterpretation of one line (II 127 = III 62, 120):

May I like/instead of you decree fates.

The “fates” were rules under which the universe—the gods included—functioned, so power to change them was supreme authority. The translation “like” would make Marduk only one among equals, but Heidel has convincingly argued that “instead of” is correct. The rest of the story confirms that Marduk was proposing to take over all power from his elders. When he was victorious and surveyed the scene, he at once proceeded to reorganize the universe to his own specification without consulting any other god. He gave the Tablet of Fates to Anu (V 69), and assigned functions to all the gods (Tablet VI). He held all might and all right.

In another sense, too, Marduk was thought of in terms which exceeded the attributes of Enlil. A small god-list published in 1996 identified Marduk with a selection of the major members of the pantheon. Despite the controversy which it aroused at the time, and even more recently, there is no escape from its plain meaning. It belongs to the well-known triple-column type of god-list, in which the ordinary name of the god in the central subcolumn is identified with a special name on the left, the particular emphasis of which is explained on the right. Thus, to take one line only,

\[ 4 \text{nin-urta} = \text{marduk} = \ddot{s} \text{d al-li} \]

\[ \text{(CT 24 50, BM 47406, obv. 3)} \]


can be paraphrased: Ninurta (is the name of) Marduk (as god) of the pick. This list then does manifest a syncretism of sundry gods with Marduk. Nor is this the only case. A prayer to Marduk begins by explaining various major members of the pantheon as aspects of him: Sin is his divinity, etc. The most elaborate example—two fragments of a tablet containing a hymn to Marduk—has hitherto escaped notice. On one side of the tablet is a series of sections each of which identifies a particular aspect of Marduk (unfortunately in each case the word is broken off) with another deity, who is qualified with his usual epithets. An edition of the relevant lines is given in the appendix to this article. Thus Marduk did not simply replace another god. His supremacy was verging on monotheism, though some prefer to call it pantheism. This was a distinction not afforded to Enlil.

This case promises to be rewarding to chronological investigation. As the god of the royal city, and so in a special sense the king’s god, one could expect frequent mention of Marduk, and since there was a long tradition of not mentioning a deity without some description, one should be able, with the help of the abundant royal dedicatory inscriptions, to fix the period in which Marduk assumed royal power over the gods.

An orthodox opinion has been current for some time. It is that Marduk was exalted to his supremacy when Hammurabi made Babylon the political capital of Southern Mesopotamia. The phrase “microcosm—macrocosm” has been evoked in support of this view. However, it is well to remember that neither of these words is Babylonian, and that a case rests not on appeals to general principles of doubtfulness, but on precise evidence. The evidence quoted in favour of this idea is usually the Prologue to Hammurabi’s code of laws, which begins by stating that Anu and Enlil decreed for Marduk “supreme rule over all the peoples” (\( \text{iššu kiššat} \ niššu \)), and “made him great among the Igigi-gods” (in Igigi ǘ₃.ur₃.tā’i₃.u₃). The conclusion commonly drawn from these phrases is not sound exegesis. It was over the peoples, not over the gods, that Marduk was given authority. No Babylonian would have confused peoples and gods. Marduk did not, as in Enuma elīš, present his terms and get the previous rulers in heaven to abdicate in his favour. On the contrary, he was appointed by Anu and Enlil, and they appointed him only over the peoples. This was a limited promotion by superiors, not a take-over. The second

phrase supports this interpretation. Marduk was made great “among” (in), not “over” (eli) the Igigi-gods. His greatness was that of one among a number. Once this distinction has been grasped, everything falls into place. The military success of Babylon at once made the city the political capital of Southern Mesopotamia. Thereby the city god Marduk ruled the peoples, but not necessarily the gods. Ravn and Schmokel,6 without going into an exposition of the Prologue to the laws, have demonstrated that throughout the First Dynasty of Babylon Marduk was an insignificant god, the former from date formulae, the latter from personal names including the name of a deity. These scholars could have extended their researches into all the royal inscriptions and literary works from the same period: Marduk is never the supreme god. Enlil, or Anu and Enlil, remain heads of the pantheon. Although the beginning of the following Cassite dynasty is undocumented, there is no shortage of inscriptions, dedicatory and on boundary stones, from the last two centuries of Cassite rule. A careful study of these indicates no change in the position. Enlil, or Anu and Enlil, are still supreme in the pantheon, and Marduk still occupies a subordinate position. The first evidence of a change to be found in any official source comes from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I, the fourth king of the following Second Dynasty of Isin, c. 1100 B.C. In a boundary stone from this reign Marduk is called “king of the gods” (far ilimri). After this time Marduk’s kingship over the gods is commonly attested.8 In the light of the evidence presented below it is claimed that every reason exists for believing that Marduk’s exaltation took place precisely in this reign.

A change of this kind could have come about as the result of the insight of one man, or one group of men, who pressed the case with such vigour that conviction and effort alone won the day. Yet such a case would hardly succeed unless current sentiment was in some measure prepared for the change. Revolutionary ideas, like plants, need watered soil in which to grow. Alternatively, the change could have come almost spontaneously. Trends over the previous centuries could have so moulded the climate of thought that only the slightest suggestion was needed for the idea to be accepted. Nebuchadnezzar the First’s reign is so little known that all knowledge of persons likely to have been involved has perished. The most we can do is to show that the circumstances of this reign were so exceptionally propitious to such a change that the evidence already presented can be accepted as giving the correct picture.

The ground for such a change had been prepared in the first place by Hammurabi. Whereas Marduk had been the least important of the gods before, he then had assumed a position among the great gods. The political situation in Southern Mesopotamia changed, due to Hammurabi, much more completely than he could ever have anticipated. The land had been made up of city-states, united if at all only for short periods under the suzerainty of a particular city. Henceforth Babylon remained politically supreme. As the centuries passed the mutual respect and tolerance of the various cities diminished in the face of Babylon’s continuing imperial power. The idea of one city being by divine right the capital surrounded Babylon with myth and legend. Whereas Eridu had been considered the first city in Sumerian tradition,10 and Sippar was called “the eternal city” in the time of Hammurabi’s son,11 in neither case was this done in any exclusive spirit; however, all such marks of distinction were attributed to Babylon in the late Cassite period. An inscription of one of the Kurigalzu calls Babylon “the eternal city,”12 and the Weidner Chronicle,13 which is certainly no earlier than the Cassite dynasty, considers Babylon the first city, as did Enuma elš. An inscription of Nebuchadnezzar I refers to Babylon by the title “the holy city.”14 Such an elevation of the city, which had certainly taken root in the Cassite period, must have provoked the question why, if Babylon was the first city, should its god be inferior to those of Nippur and Urak. The position of the city in cosmology must have been one factor in Marduk’s rise to pre-eminence.

Probably the second factor was that the Cassite period had witnessed an example of religious imperialism quite foreign to the tolerance of the Sumerian city states. The fact that Enlil, the Sumerian god who wielded most power, resided in a city of no political consequence is a patent example of the respect in which the Sumerians held the established religious order. There was, then, no precedent for Mar-

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2F. Thureau-Dangin, in RA, XXXIX, 6, 1, 9.
3A. Boezi, in RA, XXIX, 98, 1, 4.
4H. G. Güterbock, in ZA, XLII, 47 ff.
5R 30, no. 1, 9 and 11.
duhk's elevation. But this was provided by the Cassite kings. They came into the country as foreigners, but settled down and adopted the culture of their conquered land. Their religion is little known, but they did bring with them gods of their own, in particular the pair Suqamuna and Simaliya, from whom they professed descent. The kings made no attempt, apparently, to alter the established religion, but they did persist in worshipping their own gods while accepting whatever blessings the local deities might afford them. Only one text shows anything of the way in which the royal household integrated the Cassite with the Mesopotamian pantheon. It is a clay tablet with an inscription of the last Kurigalzu, damaged and badly edited so that its importance has escaped notice.14 It begins with a mention of "the creator gods," a reference to Suqamuna and Simaliya as the creators or begetters (the Akkadian banû covers both senses) of the dynasty. Then it describes how the great gods all assembled in the shrine of this Cassite pair to invest Kurigalzu with the trappings of royal office. The implication of this is not in doubt. The inferior assembly in the house of the superior. In Sumerian times such an assembly would have taken place in Ekur in Nippur. There is no doubt that Mesopotamian gods took part in this ceremony, for the term Igigi occurs, and the mention of several such gods later in the inscription shows that Kurigalzu was not exclusive in religion. Still clearer is the statement that the king hearkens to Samaš (probably identified with the Cassite sun god), and Anu, Enlil, and Enki also hearken to him (i.e., Samaš). The leading trinity of the old pantheon is now subject to other gods.

Such a situation, even if its influence was not felt outside the narrow court circle, could well have sown seeds in the minds of the priests of Marduk, who lived close to the scene of these innovations. Their own god could with much better claim head the pantheon. So long as the Cassites ruled, such an idea would never gain official support. The tolerance of the Cassites for the native gods would not extend to such a length. But privately the idea could flourish, and evidence for such a development is not lacking. The personal name Marduk-šar-lādāni, "Marduk-is-king-of-the-gods," occurs on a document from the reign of Kudur-Enlil.14 Names of this type had flourished since early in the Old Babylonian period when, curiously, Sin is the god most commonly so described. Only in the late Cassite period is Marduk used in this type of name, which soon afterwards dropped out of use altogether. Thus the first assertion of Marduk's supremacy comes from an unofficial source.

When the Cassites and their gods were finally driven out, the priests of Marduk could not set in motion any plan to elevate their patron within the pantheon. He was no longer in Babylon; his statue having been carried off by plunderers to Elam. Such a transportation of the divine statue indicated the god's displeasure with his city in that he had chosen to reside elsewhere. Only in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I did the fortunes of Babylon recover enough for an attempt to retrieve the statue. This king undertook a successful campaign in Elam and returned with the precious statue.

The impact of this return on the period cannot be overestimated. Three accounts of it are preserved. The first is on a contemporary stone tablet recording a gift of land to a certain Samuel and his son,15 priests who had fled from the attacking Elamite king. According to this document it was primarily to avenge these two people that Nebuchadnezzar undertook his campaign, which happened also to result in the recovery of Marduk. We may doubt if this document is really balanced in its statements. It is simply stressing those items relevant to the donation of land. No doubt it was more than two refugees that made Nebuchadnezzar set out on a serious campaign. The other two texts are literary. The one, of which only the beginning is preserved, is written in Akkadian poetry.16 It begins with Nebuchadnezzar and his men praying to Marduk in Babylon. The king asks how long the god will reside in a foreign land, and in reply he receives a revelation from heaven. The text breaks at this point but part of the message is that Elam is to be given over to him. With only ten complete and ten damaged lines it is difficult to say much about this text, but it reads like a short historical epic. The other literary text is bilingual, and one fragment was published by Professor Meek himself.17 It is one of those bilingual texts written in very long lines on

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14T. Clay, in The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania (BE), Series A: Cuneiform Texts, XIV, 121, 3.
15A. Bošler, in RA, XXIX, 93 E.
17Cf. 13 48, H. Winckler, ADP, I, 542 f.
18KL 1904-10-9, 96=BM 99067 was published by Meek in American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures, XXXV (1919/19), 139. He noted that it restored the text IV RF 20, no. 1, and in fact it has now been joined to K 3444. K 3317 + 3319 was also used in the text of IV RF 20, no. 1. Two additional pieces belonging to this work have been identified by the present writer: K 5101, a piece not belonging to either of the other copies and Sp. II, 384=BM 35000. A translation of IV RF 20, no. 1 is given by Hahn in Beiträge zur Assyriologie, V, 939–44.
unusually wide and short tablets that are characteristic of texts from the Second Dynasty of Isin. The Sumerian is late, influenced strongly by the Akkadian. Although four incomplete copies are known, three from Ashurbanipal's library and one from Seleucid Babylon, only the ends of the lines are preserved. The narrative, if one may so speak of highly poetic imagery, begins with a description of victory in battle. So abruptly does it read that one is tempted to ask if this can really be the opening of the work. Perhaps there was a set of tablets and this is not the first. The story continues with a description of the piety of a certain god's slave, who gives himself no rest until he has seen his master's lofty form. His prayers were heeded, for the divine master (who is later named as Marduk) consented to return from "wicked Elam" to Babylon, where he was received amid universal acclaim and the bestowing of bountiful gifts. Although Nebuchadnezzar's name does not occur in the preserved portions of the text, there is no other king to whom it could refer. There is an account of a campaign of Nebuchadnezzar I in Elam on a boundary stone,\(^{30}\) but this does not mention the recovery of Marduk's statue and may refer to another occasion.

As a hypothesis we suggest a direct relationship between this return of Marduk's statue to Babylon during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I and the first occurrence of a statement of Marduk's supremacy in an official document of the same king. In the nature of the case the evidence can only be circumstantial. The ground was prepared during the Cassite period. Indeed, a personal name already asserts the doctrine during the latter half of the Cassite dynasty. There is good reason for doubting if the doctrine could have been proclaimed officially under Cassite rule. The immediately following years were inauspicious, since Marduk was manifesting his displeasure with his city. His return from Elam must then have been the first opportunity. Public attention was directed to him on this occasion, and amid the rejoicing and abundance of praise and presents what could have been more appropriate than the ascription to him of supreme authority in heaven and underworld? The bilingual text calls him "Lord of Lords."

If this hypothesis is correct, we may surmise that the priests of Enlil in Nippur would have given no willing assent to the new arrangement of the divine hierarchy. There is one more document from Nebuchadnezzar the First's reign that seems to betray a certain resentment at the change. It is a boundary stone from the vicinity of Nippur.\(^{31}\) It begins with a psalm of praise to Enil, a unique feature, for no other boundary stone begins with praise of any god. Right at the opening Enil's supremacy over the other gods is asserted in terms perhaps stronger than in any other text:

Enil, the lofty lord, the aristocrat of heaven and underworld, the noble, the lord of all, king of the great gods, who has no god who can rival him in heaven or underworld, at the giving of whose command the Igigi show submission and reverently heed...

It has long been acknowledged that Nebuchadnezzar I marks a revival of Babylonian power and culture after the Cassite decadence. It now appears that for religious reform also he deserves something of the esteem more usually accorded to his better known namesake of the sixth century.

### APPENDIX

Ebeling published KAR 304 and 337 as "mythologischer Text" and "Hymnus an Marduk," respectively. A connection was suspected by the present writer, who observed that the reverse of each piece contained sections with epithets of different gods. An examination of the originals in Berlin, thanks to the courtesy of Dr. G. R. Meyer, Director General of the Staatliche Museen, Berlin, confirmed that they are parts of the same tablet, though they do not quite join. A small gap has to be put between them. The juxtaposition of the reverses is quite simple, thanks to the rulings which separate the sections. Ebeling omitted one in his copy, between lines 16 and 17 of KAR 304. The juxtaposition of the obverses is not so simple. After much patient endeavour the present writer concluded that in all probability line 9 of KAR 337 is continued by line 5 of KAR 304. But it seemed just possible that lines 10 and 5 respectively should be the matching ones. The discovery of the connection of the pieces has not, unfortunately, solved all problems. The two pieces are badly damaged and the uncertainty as to just how wide the gap between them should be prevents any major attempt to restore the lines. Certainly this is a most important text about Marduk, but only the discovery of more pieces will permit substantial progress. Thus we only offer a tentative edition of the sections of particular interest for our immediate purpose. Some improved readings were obtained by collation, and these are marked with exclamation marks.

\(^{30}\)King, Boundary Stones, pp. 29-36.

\(^{31}\)W. J. Hinke, in BE, series D, IV, 142.
8... he took firm control [...]
9... authority over everything that is [...]
10... bow beneath him [...]
11... wide [...]

12... apart from him all [...]
13... who does clever things [...]
14... Emili [...]
15... wide, broad [...]

16 Your [...] is Adad, who overshadows the whole extent of the lands, dark [...]
17 [At] whose bellow heaven and earth [...]. tremble [...]
18... the sea [...]
19 Canal supervisor of heaven and earth, the open country (?) [...]

20 Your [...] is Nannar [...]. of day and night, the [...]
21 [At] his rising he gives decrees [and] raises his symbol [...]
22 Whose sign no one knows [...], who is equipped with horns [...]
23 Whose station [in] heaven is awesome, without whom the fate of the peoples is not decided [...]

24 Your [...] is Šamaš, the light of heaven and [...]. the great gods [...]
25... the sum of everything, who directs the [black]-heads, who turns the peoples' darkness to light [...]
26... which extends over everything, with splendour [...]

27 Your [...] is Ninurta, the mighty lord [...]. of the storm] flood, the rider of the tornado [...]
28 [In] whose terrible battle [...]. not [...]
29 [...]. fierce Girra [...]. [...]

8... x-šu tí-mu-u[r...
9... t]-rit gi-mir ka-[l(a...
10... ša-pa]-šu kam-[l]x [...
11... x nēšaršu[...

12... x ul-la-ua-uk-[šu nap]-š[ar...
13... ba-nu]-a-nig-ka-]-ni[...
14... e]-in-lu e-xxxx [...]
15... x kiš x [...]. raps[N]-ša[...

2 16 [x x]a 4-adad e-rim si-bi-[l]p ma-[t]-a-a ti ur-ru]-l[up [...]
3 17 [ša ina ša-g]-li]-mi šu šašme u e-ešet[im]-š[u [...]. ú i-tar-ru-ru [...]
4 18 [...]. x a-ab-hu x-xxxx [...]. šu hu[l]p x-xxxx [...]
5 19 [gá]-gall kašme u e-eretitim]-š[u[ [...]. x-xxxx-ku-đu [...]

6 20 [x x]ka 4-nunnal-š[u x-xxxx [...]. x u]-ni u mišš mu- [...]
7 21 [a]-na] ta-mar-ti]-šu purusha i-nam-di-[n]-ma] sa-ad-da in-adi]-ki-ši [...]
8 22 [ši l]-l]-šu la i-lam]-ma-du mam?-m[u]-na?] x-x-ša na-ša qamemš[ [...]
9 23 [ša ina] kašme nuna-as-as-šu ra-ša-šu (ina b) l]-šu ki]-ma] šu]-mumš [...]
10 24 [x x]ka 4-nu]-ša mu-úr šaš-me]-šš [...]. me ri x x l]-ša]-miš rabšaššša x [...]
11 25 [x x] na]-ša ka]-la mu-ta]-šr [sal-ma]: qaqqati mu-nam-šir ik-let [...]
12 20 [x x] ka]-la]-ma sa]-šu ša]-lam]-m[a]-t [...]. x x ri]-šu lu x [...]

13 27 [x x]ka 4-ut. u]-lu lu]-b[u]-šu gaš-ru x [... a]-šu]-bi-ši kaš-me]-šš [...]
14 28 [ša ina] ša]-še-[š]-u da]-nu-šu zaq m[š [...]. x-a]-ši la l]-šu [...]
15 29 [x x] x-šu 4-bilgi ez-zal x [...]. šar x [...]

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