

## DANIEL 3: EXTRA-BIBLICAL TEXTS AND THE CONVOCAION ON THE PLAIN OF DURA

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Commentaries on Daniel have frequently separated the historical chapters (1, 3-6) from the prophetic chapters (2, 7-12) and attributed the former to an earlier origin as far as their historical context is concerned.<sup>1</sup> When one looks for a political context with which to connect one of the historical chapters, therefore, the Neo-Babylonian period presupposed in some of them deserves consideration along with the later periods. The purpose of this study is to suggest that when such consideration is given to chap. 3, two Neo-Babylonian texts provide a relatively reasonable context with which to connect this remarkable episode.

The third chapter of Daniel tells how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refused to bow down to the great image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up on the plain of Dura. Nebuchadnezzar placed the image there and then summoned all of Babylonian officialdom to its dedication. As a part of that dedication, the officials assembled were to bow down to the image and worship it. As officials in the Babylonian government, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were also summoned to this scene, but they refused to perform the obeisance required. Looking at this scene from the historian's point of view raises the question of what this scene was about in the first place. What was involved from the Babylonian point of view?

<sup>1</sup>J. G. Gammie, "The Classification, States of Growth, and Changing Intentions in the Book of Daniel," *JBL* 95 (1976): 191-204; H. L. Ginsberg, *Studies in Daniel* (New York, 1948), pp. 27-40; J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, No. 16 (Missoula, Mo., 1977), p. 11.

### 1. *The Loyalty-Oath Nature of the Convocation on the Plain of Dura*

One piece of evidence pointing toward the nature of the meeting is to be found, in my opinion, in the list of persons in attendance. Seven different classes of Babylonian officials are listed in Dan 3:2-3, and everybody included was some sort of official in the Babylonian government. The list seems well-nigh all-inclusive. It appears, then, that this service was conducted specifically for all of Babylonian officialdom, and that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego only incidentally happened to be present by virtue of belonging to that group.

Having identified the nature of the persons who were in attendance, we must next look at what they were required to do during this ceremony, since their actions may give indication of what was involved in this service. They were required to bow down to and worship the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. The image could have been one of Nebuchadnezzar himself, but it seems more likely that it would have been an image of Marduk, the god of Babylon. By bowing down to the image and worshiping it, a person would also pledge allegiance and loyalty to it and what it represented. In a certain sense, therefore, this scene could be viewed as a loyalty oath on the part of all of the civil servants of Babylon.

Why would such a loyalty oath have been administered to them? The most obvious and likely reason is that some of these officials either had been disloyal to Nebuchadnezzar, or were suspected of having been disloyal, at some time before they were summoned to this ceremony. On this basis, we might well look for evidence of a rebellion in Babylon during Nebuchadnezzar's reign as the background for the ceremony.

Prior to the publication of Nebuchadnezzar's chronicle, only a hint of such a rebellion was known from historical sources, and his reign appeared to have been one monolithic and undisputed rule in Babylon for all of the 43 years of his kingship. This picture has changed, however, with the publication of his chronicle, whose entry for the year 595/594 B.C. states,

21. In the tenth year the king of Akkad (was) in his own land; from the month of Kislev to the month of Tebet there was rebellion in Akkad ....

22. .... with arms he slew many of his own army. His own hand captured his enemy.<sup>2</sup>

The hint that such a revolt had occurred was previously known from a contract tablet.

What may be an indirect indication of the revolt is given by a contract tablet from Babylon dated in the eleventh year of Nebuchadnezzar. This tells of the confiscation and disposal of the property of Baba-aḥu-iddina, son of Nabū-aḥḥe-bullit, who had been tried by court-martial and, on being found guilty of breaking the royal oath and of insurrection, had been condemned to death and executed. Since Nabū-aḥḥe-bullit had received these lands as a special favour from Nabopolassar it may well be that his son was of sufficient status to be the leader of the revolt mentioned in the Chronicle for this year.<sup>3</sup>

Since the revolt recorded in the chronicle occurred late in Nebuchadnezzar's 10th year and this contract tablet was written in his 11th year, the events referred to in these two texts most likely were related. Exactly how long this revolt lasted is not stated specifically in the chronicle, but it covered parts of two months. The army appears to have been the source of this trouble rather than the officials in government. The chronicle states that "many" in the army were slain at this time, which seems to indicate that this revolt was more than just a small-scale affair. In fact, the problem was sufficiently serious for the king to be involved in hand-to-hand combat. The reference to the enemy whom Nebuchadnezzar captured with his own hand has been interpreted as referring to the unidentified rebel leader. Since the chronicle only states that Nebuchadnezzar captured him and not that he killed him, it is possible that this rebel leader was bound over to the trial referred to in the contract tablet from the next year.

If the record of this revolt in the chronicle were the sole piece of evidence available for proposing a relationship between that revolt and the events of Dan 3 as a consequence of it, the case for

<sup>2</sup>D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (626-556 B.C.) in the British Museum* (London, 1956), p. 73.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 37.

such a relationship would not be very strong. One could argue, in this case, that the occurrence of a revolt in Nebuchadnezzar's reign was only chance—and a rather good statistical chance at that, in view of how long he reigned. Other pieces of evidence that support such a relationship are available, however, from both biblical and Babylonian sources.

## *2. Biblical Indication of the Revolt against Nebuchadnezzar*

The biblical source in this case is Jer 51:59-64. This refers to the prophetic scroll against Babylon that Jeremiah gave to Seraiah to take to Babylon when the latter accompanied king Zedekiah there. Upon his arrival in Babylon, according to Jeremiah's instructions, Seraiah was to read all the words of the scroll against Babylon and then cast it into the Euphrates bound with a stone as a symbol of the fact that Babylon was to sink and no more rise again. The prophecy itself is a side point here, since our particular interest is the fact that Zedekiah made a trip to Babylon in the 4th year of his reign.

Why did Zedekiah have to make this trip? The text does not answer this question, but the overarching reason undoubtedly was to insure that Zedekiah would continue to serve Nebuchadnezzar as a loyal vassal. This concern on Nebuchadnezzar's part may have arisen for any one of several reasons: (1) Zedekiah may have failed to pay his share of the tribute that Nebuchadnezzar collected in the west after the revolt had been put down, but if that were the case, Zedekiah might have been punished more severely; (2) Zedekiah might have been suspect for other reasons; (3) all of Nebuchadnezzar's vassals in the west might have been suspect, with Zedekiah simply included in those suspicions. On the other hand, Nebuchadnezzar may not have had any reason to suspect his western vassals, but simply wanted to make sure that they did not get any encouragement to revolt because of the revolt that had taken place against him on his home ground in Babylon. Whatever may have been the precise reason for Zedekiah's travel to Babylon, it is clear that he returned from Babylon to Jerusalem, for he ruled over Judah for another seven years before Nebuchadnezzar finally brought his kingdom and reign to an end.

Thus there is some supplementary evidence from Jer 51:59-64 that soon after the revolt referred to by the chronicle, Nebuchadnezzar attempted to insure the loyalty of the kings who were vassal to him. A comparison of the dates connected with these two events points up this fact. The chronicle dates the revolt in Babylon in the 9th and 10th months of Nebuchadnezzar's 10th year, or December of 595 and January of 594 B.C. Zedekiah's trip to Babylon occurred in his 4th year, according to Jer 51:59. Nebuchadnezzar installed Zedekiah on the throne of Judah in Adar, 597 B.C. Reckoning Zedekiah's regnal years from the fall dates, his first full official year of reign commenced in the fall of 597 B.C.<sup>4</sup> This means that the 4th year of his reign, when Zedekiah journeyed to Babylon, began in the fall of 594 B.C., or a little less than a year after the revolt against Nebuchadnezzar had taken place.

Given the close chronological collocation of these two events, it seems reasonable to connect them as cause and effect. Thus, Zedekiah's travel to Babylon would have occurred as a result of Nebuchadnezzar's attempt to insure Zedekiah's loyalty following the revolt in Babylon.

The passage in Jeremiah does not mention the month of the year in which Zedekiah left for Babylon, but a refinement in that date can be suggested on the basis of information available from the chronicle. At the end of Nebuchadnezzar's 10th year (595/594 B.C.), the year in which the revolt in Babylon occurred, he made a trip west to collect the tribute from his western vassals. The chronicle does not refer to the army as accompanying him at that time, and D. J. Wiseman interprets this to mean that he left most of his forces at home.<sup>5</sup> Is it possible that Nebuchadnezzar left his army in Babylon at that time to insure the stability of the situation there so soon after the revolt against him had been suppressed?

In any event, Nebuchadnezzar did take the army with him on his next campaign west in his 11th year (594/593 B.C.), and such a show of force could have provided an added inducement for the

<sup>4</sup>For the identification of the fall-to-fall calendar as the one in use during the last years of the kings of Judah see S. H. Horn, "The Babylonian Chronicle and the Ancient Calendar of the Kingdom of Judah," *AUSS* 5 (1967): 12-27.

<sup>5</sup>Wiseman, p. 36.

vassal kings in the west to accompany him back to Babylon to pledge their allegiance to him. Nebuchadnezzar left Babylon with the army on this campaign in Kislev or December of 594 B.C., less than two months after the fall New Year that began Zedekiah's 4th regnal year. From the convergence of these chronological factors, we can surmise that Zedekiah and other western vassals who may have accompanied him were escorted to Babylon by the army early in 593 B.C., which was also early in Zedekiah's 4th year of 594/593 B.C., fall-to-fall reckoning.

The movement in favor of revolt that arose in the west at this time can be seen, in part, as a response to the revolt against Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. As far as Zedekiah's first four years of reign are concerned, there is little reason to suspect that Zedekiah was anything other than loyal to Nebuchadnezzar. The first information we have about him after his return from Babylon, however, is that he hosted a conference in Jerusalem for envoys from the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon, who came to plot rebellion against their Babylonian master (Jer 27). Jeremiah brought the message to these envoys and the kings who had sent them that they should submit to Nebuchadnezzar and not revolt against him. This political conference is dated "in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah," which should be narrowed down to his 4th year, according to the dateline on the succeeding chapter which connects it with chap. 27—"In that same year, at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fifth month of the fourth year" (Jer 28:1). The formula dates both of these chapters in Zedekiah's 4th year, with the events described in chap. 27 probably occurring shortly before those in chap. 28 which were dated to the 5th month.<sup>6</sup> If this interpretation is correct, the conference probably was convened in the late spring or summer of 593 B.C., according to a fall-to-fall year, after Zedekiah's return from Babylon. Although that trip was intended to insure his loyalty, it appears to have had the opposite effect. With a revolt having occurred in the east and another one brewing in the west, it is no wonder that Hananiah prophesied a return of the exiles to Jerusalem within two years (Jer 28:3).

<sup>6</sup>J. Bright, *Jeremiah*, Anchor Bible, vol. 21 (Garden City, N.Y., 1965), p. 195.

The role that Egypt played in these affairs should be noted. Psammetichus II came to the throne in 595 B.C. and brought with him a new policy toward the rulers in Phoenicia and Palestine.<sup>7</sup> By the end of October of 593 B.C. we find Psammetichus waiting at Elephantine, where he received the first news of victory from his expedition to Nubia.<sup>8</sup> Aside from Egyptian regulars and Greek mercenaries, there were also "men of other tongues" with that expedition, as indicated in an inscription from Abu Simbel and confirmed by the presence of Semitic names written in Phoenician script among the graffiti there.<sup>9</sup> It has been forcefully argued that the Jews who "had been sent out to fight in the army of Psammetichus against the king of the Ethiopians," referred to in the Letter of Aristeas, were sent to fight under Psammetichus II instead of Psammetichus I.<sup>10</sup> It is possible, then, that Tyrians, Sidonians, and Judahites (and Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites?) were fighting with Psammetichus' army in Nubia by the end of 593 B.C. If so, the decision to send them must have been made earlier that year, perhaps at the meeting in Jerusalem or as a result of that conference.

In such case, it is not surprising that Psammetichus went on a tour of Phoenicia and Palestine in the next year, 592 B.C. The tour was peaceful; at least there is no indication that major numbers of military forces accompanied him, and it is not even certain that the army had returned from Nubia at the time of his departure. Obviously, then, Psammetichus expected a cordial reception, and apparently he received it. This could only have led to strengthening his ties with his Asiatic neighbors.<sup>11</sup> A treaty regarding reciprocal military action could well have played a part in strengthening those ties, especially since the Asiatics had already carried out their part of such an agreement. Thus, Zedekiah had an ally in whom he

<sup>7</sup>R. A. Parker, "The Length of the Reign of Amasis and the Beginning of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty," *Kush* 8 (1960): 208-212; M. Greenberg, "Ezekiel 17 and the Policy of Psammetichus II," *JBL* 76 (1957): 304-309.

<sup>8</sup>K. S. Freedy and D. B. Redford, "The Dates in Ezekiel in Relation to Biblical, Babylonian and Egyptian Sources," *JAOS* 90 (1970): 476.

<sup>9</sup>M. Greenberg, p. 307.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*; Freedy and Redford, p. 476.

<sup>11</sup>Freedy and Redford, p. 479.

trusted for support in case Nebuchadnezzar returned, and at that time Psammetichus may have looked like a formidable ally after his convincing victory over the Kushites. It was probably at this time that Zedekiah decided his course of action for the future.

These, then, are the events which occurred in Egypt and Syro-Palestine following the revolt in Babylon mentioned in the chronicle:

Dec. 595 - Jan. 594	—Revolt in Babylon suppressed
Early 594	—Nebuchadnezzar collects western tribute
Late 594	—Nebuchadnezzar and his army march west
Early 593	—Zedekiah travels to Babylon and back (Jer 51:59)
Spring 593	—Conference on revolt in Jerusalem (Jer 27) Troops sent to assist Psammetichus II?
Summer 593	—Hananiah prophesies return of exiles in two years (Jer 28)
Fall 593	—Psammetichus' army victorious in Nubia
592	—Psammetichus tours Phoenicia and Palestine

The revolt in Babylon need not be considered the direct cause of all of these events, but it seems likely that it did have its effect in the west. Most important for our consideration here is Zedekiah's trip to Babylon, which trip appears to have been part of a program to prevent the revolt of Nebuchadnezzar's western vassals in the wake of the revolt against him at home, as mentioned earlier. Not only did that program fail, but it appears to have aroused a reaction in the opposite direction, as evidenced by the subject of the conference in Jerusalem, which probably was held shortly after Zedekiah's return from the east.

These later moves toward revolt need not concern us further here, but Zedekiah's trip to Babylon can be seen as part of a loyalty program for foreign kings that we see promulgated for Babylonian

officials in the third chapter of Daniel. There is an interesting Babylonian inscription which brings these two aspects of Nebuchadnezzar's loyalty-oath program even closer together.

### 3. *Inscriptional Evidence of the Loyalty Oath*

This intriguing evidence comes to us in the form of an undated text from the time of Nebuchadnezzar, written in five columns on the five sides of a clay prism. The prism was found at Babylon and now resides in the Istanbul museum.<sup>12</sup> The first three columns of this text are devoted to Nebuchadnezzar's relations with the gods, and the last two columns contain a list of more than fifty officials of various ranks whom Nebuchadnezzar appointed. In the first column Nebuchadnezzar describes how much he had done for the gods by rebuilding their temples and supplying them with offerings. Many of the main figures in the Babylonian pantheon are mentioned in this column. In the second column he tells how Marduk gave the lands, both Babylonia and the lands beyond, into his hands and how the tribute from those lands had poured into his coffers. The third column contains Nebuchadnezzar's prayer to Marduk that he might continue and extend his rule over the lands. The list of officials begins at the bottom of the third column, and it has been adapted here from E. Unger's transliteration and German translation and A. L. Oppenheim's English translation:<sup>13</sup>

I ordered the (following) court officials in exercises of (their) duties to take up position in my (official) suite:

#### I. COURT OFFICIALS (*mašennim*)

1. Nabu-zêri-iddinam, chancellor of the kingdom
2. Nabu-zêri-ibni, general of the army
3. .....naḥ, in charge of the palace
4. Sin-šarri-...., in charge of the temple
5. Atkal-ana-Mâr-Esagila, .....
- (break at the top of column four)
6. Ina-qibit-Bêl-akša, ....
7. Bêl-ereš, ...

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<sup>12</sup>E. Unger, *Babylon, die heilige Stadt nach der Beschreibung der Babylonier* (Berlin, 1931), p. 282.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 282-294; *ANET*, pp. 307-308.

8. Ardia, in charge of the palace harem
9. Bêl-uballiṭ, secretary of the palace harem
10. Zillâ, chief of palace protocol
11. Nabu-aḫi-uṣur, chief of a detachment of light troops
12. Mušallim-Marduk, Nabu-ušibiši, Eribšu and Nabu-bêl-uṣur, overseers of the slave girls
13. Nabu-zêri-ibni, the cupbearer
14. Nergal-rizua, chief of the musicians
15. Ardi-Nabu, secretary of the crown prince (i.e., Amêl-Marduk)
16. Ea-idanni and Rîmûtu, chiefs of provisioning
17. Nabu-mâr, šarri-uṣur, commander of ships
18. Ḥanunu, chief of the royal merchants

## II. OFFICIALS (*rabûti*) OF THE LAND OF AKKAD

1. Ea-daian, governor (*šakin*) of the Sealands
2. Nergal-šarri-uṣur, the *Sîn-māgir* official
3. Emuq-aḫi, of the land of Tupliāš
4. Bêl-šumi-iškun, of the land of Puqudu
5. Bibiea, the Dakurean
6. Nadin-aḫi, official of Dêr
7. Marduk-šarri-uṣur, of the land of Gambulum
8. Marduk-šarrani, official (*bêl piḫati*) of Sumandar
9. Bêl-lidarum, the Amuqanean
10. Rîmûtu, the regular governor (*šaknu*) of the land of Zame
11. Nabu-êtir-napšate, governor (*šaknu*) of the land of Iaptiri  
(break at the bottom of column four and at the top of column five)

## III. OFFICIALS (*Ē.BAR*) OF TOWNS

1. Ilabbitsu, "official" of ....
2. Mušeziḫ-Bêl, "official" of ....
3. Šumkinum, "official" of the town Dûr-[Iakin]
4. Bania, "official" of the town Limetum
5. Marduk-zêri-ibni, "official" of the town Mat-akallu
6. Šulâ, "official" of the town Nimid-Laguda
7. Šumâ, "official" of the town Kullab
8. Nergal-zêri-ibin, "official" of the town Udannum
9. Marduk-ereš, "official" of the town Larsa
10. Nabu-kin-apli, "official" of the town Kissik
11. Bêl-upaḫḫir, "official" of the town Bakušu

IV. DISTRICT (*qipi-*) OFFICIALS

1. Ibâ, official (*bêl piḫati*) of the town Dûr-.....
2. Šalambili, official (*bêl piḫati*) of .....
3. Ziria, official (*bêl piḫati*) of .....
4. Zabina', district officer of .....
5. Šumâ, district officer of .....
6. Adad-aḫi-iddinam, district officer of the town .....
7. Nabu-zêri-ukin, of the land A[.....]
8. Anim-ipuš, district officer of .....
9. Bêl-šum-iškun, district officer of the town N[i.....]

## (V. WESTERN VASSAL KINGS)

1. King of the land of Tyre
  2. King of the land of Gaza
  3. King of the land of Sidon
  4. King of the land of Arvad
  5. King of the land of Ashdod
  6. King of the land of Mir [.....]
  7. King of the land of .....
- (break at the bottom of column five)

This list of officials is divided up into five sections, each of which is demarcated by a label, with the exception of the last group—the foreign kings. This exception may have occurred because the personal names of these kings were not given and the title of “king” or *šarru* listed for each of them contrasted directly with the titles of the officials in the preceding section. The groups listed successively in these sections can be seen, in general, as extending outwards from Babylon geographically and downwards through the ranks of the bureaucracy.

The first group includes those leading officials who served at the court in Babylon. This group is labeled as *mašennim*, which probably is cognate with Hebrew *mišneh*, “second,” i.e., ranking next to the king or, perhaps, next to the king’s prime minister. Each individual in this group had his own title, and *mašennim* is present in only one of those titles, that of Ardia who was in charge of the harem. Unger thinks that only two names have been lost from this section at the top of the fourth column, but his is a

conservative estimate, and more names could easily have been lost in that gap.<sup>14</sup>

The second group includes those officials who served in various localities throughout the land of Akkad, not at court in the capital. The designations for these individuals vary within a narrow range. "Governor," *šaknu*, is the term applied to three of them, another three of them were named only with the place where they served, two of them were referred to with gentilic titles, and one was identified as a *bêl piḫati*. Nergal-sharri-ušur, the *Sîn-māgir* official, undoubtedly was the same person who later became king of Babylon (559-556 B.C.), the Neriglissar of the classical historians.

The officials in the third group were labeled collectively and individually with the same title, LÚ É.BAR or *amêluÉ-maš*. Unfortunately, the precise meaning and translation of this term is not known.<sup>15</sup> It has been speculated that they were religious functionaries,<sup>16</sup> but this is far from certain. These individuals were listed with the names of their cities or towns.

The fourth group, the *qipi*-officials, were also listed with the cities or towns in which they served, and their title has been translated "district official." This title was used for all but three of the individuals listed in this section, and those three were referred to as *bêl piḫati*.

The bottom of the prism has been preserved on three sides, but unfortunately it is damaged at the bottom of the fourth column and missing at the bottom of the fifth.<sup>17</sup> It appears that only a couple of names of foreign kings could have been lost at the bottom of the fifth column, but a larger number of names of officials could have been lost from the top of that column.

All of the surviving names of the cities where the listed kings ruled were located on the coast, two in Philistia and three in Phoenicia. For that reason one might also look to the Mediterranean coast as the location for the damaged place-name beginning with *Mir*-.

<sup>14</sup>E. Unger, p. 290.

<sup>15</sup>ANET, p. 308.

<sup>16</sup>E. Unger, p. 292.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., plates 55-56.

Nebuchadnezzar obviously ruled over more kings in Syro-Palestine than just those that are listed here as located on the coast. This raises the possibility that the rulers of these coastal cities were picked out to be included in this list for a special reason. The Mediterranean Sea formed the westernmost extent of Nebuchadnezzar's empire at this time, and a listing of the rulers of these coastal cities could express the fact that his political control extended all the way to, and along, that western boundary. This suggestion finds some support from the fact that the first official listed in the second section of the list was the governor of the Sealands, the one who ruled over that part of Nebuchadnezzar's territory which extended down to the Persian Gulf, known as the Lower Sea, whereas the Mediterranean was known as the Upper Sea. In the second column of this text Nebuchadnezzar had pointed out the fact that Marduk had given him all the lands from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea, i.e., from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. Thus, the territory governed by the first official listed in the second section of this text and the kings on the Mediterranean coast listed at the end of this text delimited the farthest extent of Nebuchadnezzar's territory at that time.

#### *4. The Nature of the Prism Text's Listing of Officials*

From these general observations on this text we may turn to its more specific connections, potentially, with the third chapter of Daniel. In the first place, the extraordinary nature of this text does not appear to have been fully appreciated or to have received the attention it deserves. Lists of governmental officials are known from other times and places in Mesopotamian history, but they generally occur in ration lists, and none is so comprehensive as this one, nor do any occur in a context comparable to this one.

The comprehensive nature of this list can be seen from the fact that it appears to give at least a representative sampling of officials from the major echelons of civil servants and from many of the areas under the control of the government of Babylon. With good reason, then, Unger has referred to this text as "Der älteste Hof- und Staatskalender der Welt."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 282.

As far as context is concerned, this list is prefaced, as we have noted earlier, by almost three full columns of text in which Nebuchadnezzar told how much he had done for the gods and how much the gods had done for him, plus a prayer by him to his god.

The importance of the list, as emphasized by its context and comprehensive nature, raises the question of what occasion gave rise to recording it. The passage in the text immediately preceding the list may be of some assistance in this regard: "I ordered the (following) court officials in exercises of (their) duties to take up position in my (official) suite."<sup>19</sup> Such a statement appears to imply that these appointments were all made at approximately the same time. In view of the large number of individuals listed, it may be that some of these appointments were reconfirmations of earlier appointments. However, regardless of whether these persons were all new appointees or whether some were old appointees now being reconfirmed, this listing certainly represents a comprehensive review and overhaul of the personnel of the Babylonian bureaucracy.

Why would such a review or overhaul have been carried out on such a scale? Three possible explanations come to mind: negligence, financial scandal, or the fomenting of disloyalty and rebellion. One may expect that a certain amount of incompetence and fraud was a continuing problem to the administration of government in ancient times, in Babylon as well as elsewhere. Sporadic occurrences of negligence or financial fraud, however, do not appear to provide an adequate explanation for the comprehensive scope of the activity involved here. That leaves us with the probability that these appointments were made in response to the threat, realized or potential, of disloyalty and rebellion among the ranks of the Babylonian civil servants. If that is the case, it seems reasonable to identify this list and the action it represents as a response to the revolt mentioned in the entry of the chronicle for Nebuchadnezzar's 10th year.

There is one particular piece of evidence from the list that especially lends support to such an interpretation, namely, the inclusion of the foreign kings at the end of the list. Again, the

<sup>19</sup>*ANET*, p. 307.

unusual nature of this part of the list should be stressed. Why would a list of foreign kings be attached to a list of Babylonian civil and military servants? What did they share in common that they should both be included in the same list? Both groups were servants of Nebuchadnezzar, but this fact alone hardly provides reason enough for listing them together.

Beyond this, however, both groups shared the potential of rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar. Vassal kings, as we know from various historical sources, were particularly prone to rebel, especially at times of weakness in the homeland of their suzerain.

Here we may mention again the evidence regarding Zedekiah's trip to Babylon referred to by Jeremiah (51:59). Zedekiah would fit in very well with the kings listed at the end of this text. His royal residence was not located on the coast, as were theirs, but the territory delimited in this way certainly included his kingdom. We can easily see Zedekiah as a member of this group, therefore, even though he was not specifically named as such in the surviving portions of the text.

If Zedekiah made a trip to Babylon to express his loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar, it seems reasonable to suggest that he did not travel there alone, but may have been accompanied by other kings from the west. The presence of the Babylonian army in the area by early in 593 B.C., Zedekiah's 4th regnal year, adds some emphasis to this suggestion, as I indicated earlier. In that case, the western kings listed at the end of the text appear to have been likely candidates for membership in such a group. It is interesting to note in this connection that two of the kings listed, from Tyre and Sidon, also sent envoys to the conference on revolt that was held in Jerusalem after Zedekiah returned from Babylon (Jer 27:3). Such a trip east may have had an effect upon them similar to that upon Zedekiah.

The suggestion here, then, is that the foreign kings listed at the end of this text were not just listed there because they were servants of Nebuchadnezzar, but because they had to give evidence that they were faithful to him at this time. This they did by traveling to Babylon to pledge their allegiance, as Zedekiah did, according to Jer 51:59-64. Thus the comprehensive overhaul of the personnel of the Babylonian bureaucracy as implied by this list and the extraction of a pledge of loyalty from the vassal kings at the

end of this list can both be seen as fitting responses to an immediately antecedent revolt in Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar does not state here that such a revolt occurred, but a statement of this kind is hardly to be expected, and his lavish praise of the gods at the beginning of this text could be seen as an expression of appreciation for the successful suppression of the revolt. I would further suggest that this revolt was the same as the one referred to in the entry in the chronicle for Nebuchadnezzar's 10th year, 595/594 B.C. The inclusion of Zedekiah among the western kings listed at the end of this text contributes, by implication, an added dimension to this matter by suggesting a date for this list, inasmuch as he made the trip east to Babylon in his 4th year, 594/593 B.C. This text would then be dated to 593 B.C. or shortly thereafter.

### 5. Prism-Text Names and Biblical Parallels

Having suggested such an origin for this text, we can now examine some of the information available about different individuals listed in it. There are five persons in this list to whom we should pay particularly close attention:

#### *Nabu-zêri-iddinam (See List, I.1)*

Nabu-zêri-iddinam is the person named at the head of the list. This means that he probably was the most important official listed at the time when this text was drawn up. In all likelihood, as Unger has pointed out,<sup>20</sup> Nabu-zêri-iddinam was the same person as the Nebuzaradan who burned Jerusalem after it was conquered (2 Kgs 25:8-10), who deported the Judahites captured at that time (v. 11), and who excluded Jeremiah from that deportation (Jer 39:13). In the Hebrew of these passages Nebuzaradan is called the *rab ṭabbahîm*, which literally means "chief of the butchers," but which had the wider connotation of "chief of the king's bodyguard" (the RSV has correctly translated it as "captain of the guard"). *Rab naḥtimmu* is the title given to Nabu-zêri-iddinam in the Babylonian list, which literally means "chief of the bakers," but which had the wider meaning of "imperial chancellor."<sup>21</sup> As Unger has noted, the

<sup>20</sup>E. Unger, p. 289.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

biblical and Babylonian titles given to Nebu-zaradan/Nabu-zêri-iddinam correspond, essentially, in meaning. Thus we have here the butcher and the baker, but not the candlestick maker, and it seems very likely that they were the same individual.

Assuming that such an identification is correct, and if Nabu-zêri-iddinam was first appointed to the office in question around the time this list was drawn up, then we can date this list prior to 586 B.C., because he would have to have been appointed to that office in the Babylonian list before he could have functioned in that capacity at the conquest of Jerusalem. This harmonizes well with the date of 593 B.C. suggested above for this list.

### *Nergal-šarri-ušur (II.2)*

Another person common to this list and to the biblical record of the conquest of Jerusalem is Nergal-šarri-ušur, the later Babylonian king known by the name of Neriglissar. In this Babylonian text he is referred to as the man, or officer, of Sîn-māgir, the second person named in the second section of this list. Sîn-māgir was located in northern Babylonia, and the use of this place name in titles of officials goes back to the days of the kings of Isin early in the second millennium B.C.<sup>22</sup>

Nergal-šarri-ušur appears as Nergal-šarezer in Jer 39:3 and 13, as a Babylonian official—the *rab māg*—who cooperated with Nebuzaradan in settling affairs in Judah after the conquest of Jerusalem. His name appears twice in Jer 39:3, apparently due to a ditto-graphy. In the first instance he is referred to there as the *samgar* (Nebo attached to this word by the Massoretes belongs with the rest of the personal name that follows it), and in the second instance he is identified as the *rab māg*. Vocalization aside, *samgar* in this verse is a perfect equivalent of Sîn-māgir from the Babylonian list on the basis of an assimilation of the *nun* to the *mem*. The same assimilation is also attested in the Babylonian spelling of *si-im-ma-gir*.<sup>23</sup> *Māg*, found in both Jer 39:3 and 13 may be a short form, or it may be a corruption of this longer title. The conclusion noted above

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>23</sup>ANET, p. 308.

about the date of this Babylonian list can also be reached here on the basis of the presence of Nergal-šarri-ušur/Nergal-šarezer in these two sources.

*Ḥanunu (I.18)*

From these Babylonian officials we may turn to the matter of the biblical personalities known from the incident recorded in the third chapter of Daniel. If the loyalty oath given during that episode was administered as an after-effect of the revolt in Babylon in 595-594 B.C., and if this list of Babylonian officials resulted from a shake-up in the personnel of the bureaucracy there for the same reason, then we might expect some correspondence between the persons mentioned in the third chapter of Daniel and those listed in this text. The first name that attracts attention in this connection is the last name in the first section of the Babylonian list, Ḥanunu. Oppenheim has noted that this is a western name, but he calls it Phoenician: "It is certainly no accident that the *rab tamkāri*, 'chief trader,' was a high official at the court of the Babylonian kings, an office which was held under Nebuchadnezzar II by a man called Hanūnu, i.e., Hanno, a typical Phoenician name."<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps Ḥanunu was not Phoenician; perhaps he was Judahite instead. Hananiah was one of the three Hebrews who went through the experience recorded in Dan 3, and as a result "the king promoted Shadrach [Hananiah], Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon" (Dan 3:30; cf. 1:7). As officials who served in "the province of Babylon," therefore, we might look for these individuals in the first section of this text, and that is where we find Ḥanunu. The principal philological objection to such an identification is that the name Ḥanunu in this Babylonian list does not contain the Yahwistic element in his name, as "Hananiah" does in Daniel.

The foregoing observation brings up a discussion of biblical names that are built upon the root *hnn*, "to be gracious." This root is found in four forms in this cluster of names; "Hanan" for nine individuals, "Hanani" for five individuals, "Hananiah" for fourteen individuals, and "Hananel" for one individual. Names of this

<sup>24</sup>A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago, 1964), p. 94.

type were particularly common during the late Judahite monarchy, the exile, and after the exile. As such, they are found especially in the books of Jeremiah, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles. While some persons with names of this type are referred to as having lived in earlier times according to Chronicles, the only direct reference to an individual with a name of this type earlier is the mention of Hanani, who lived late in the tenth or early in the ninth century B.C., according to 1 Kgs 16:1 and 7.

Of special importance here is the evidence for the use of by-forms of names from this root as different names for the same individual. This is particularly evident in Neh 7:2, which has been translated (RSV), "I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many." The grammatical problem here is that there are five singular elements in this sentence which would lead one to expect one personal name, but two personal names are actually present. The best solution to this problem is to take the *waw* or conjunction between these two names as an explicative *waw* that equates them.<sup>25</sup> Following that interpretation, the first part of this verse should be translated, "I gave my brother Hanani, *that is*, Hananiah the governor of the castle, charge over Jerusalem. . . ."<sup>26</sup> A parallel example of the use of the *waw* in this way has long been recognized in 1 Chr 5:26, "So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, *even* the spirit of Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, . . ."

The same situation appears to be found in some of the fifth-century-B.C. papyri from Elephantine in Egypt. Five of those texts (Nos. 21, 30, 31, 33, and 38) refer to an individual by the name of Hanani—and also Hananiah—who played an important role in the affairs of the Jewish community there.<sup>27</sup> It seems more likely that we are dealing with by-forms of the name of one and the same individual in these letters than that those names represent two separate persons.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup>W. Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, trans. by A. E. Cowley (Oxford, 1909), p. 484.

<sup>26</sup>C. G. Tuland, "Hanani-Hananiah," *JBL* 77 (1958): 160.

<sup>27</sup>See the translation of these papyri according to their respective numbers in A. E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford, 1923).

<sup>28</sup>C. Tuland, p. 160.

If we find by-forms of this name in the OT books mentioned above and in the Aramaic papyri from Egypt, then there is good reason to suggest that we may be dealing with by-forms here, with Hananiah's name appearing with the Yahwistic element in the third chapter of Daniel, and without that element in this Babylonian list—perhaps because the Babylonian scribes preferred to dispose of that divine element in his case.

It may be asked here why the Babylonian scribes who compiled this list used a form of Hananiah's Hebrew name instead of his Babylonian name Shadrach. This is a question which cannot be answered directly, except to observe that this seems to have been the case.

#### *Ardi-Nabu (I.15)*

It has long been noted and well-nigh universally accepted in the commentaries that the name Abed-Nego in Dan 3 is transparently a corruption of Abed-Nebo/Abed-Nabu, "servant of Nabu." This conclusion seems sound and is accepted here, not on the basis of a phonetic shift, nor of an orthographic change, but as a deliberate distortion of the name of the Babylonian god. Apparently it was distasteful to the biblical writer to have a faithful and proper servant of Yahweh named after a Babylonian god, so the name of that god was intentionally altered. The change involved in this case was ever so slight. Instead of using the *beth* with which this name was ordinarily written, the letter next to it in the alphabet—*gimmel*—was substituted for it, thus yielding the intentional corruption of Nego for Nebo/Nabu.

The *ʿabed* in Abed-Nego's name means "servant" in Hebrew and Aramaic, but these are West Semitic languages, and it would have been more natural for the Babylonians to use the Akkadian or East Semitic equivalent for "servant" when giving him a name of this type. The older form of this word was *wardum*, and is found, for example, in the name of the eighteenth-century-B.C. king of Larsa, Warad-Sin, whose name meant "servant of (the moon god) Sin." By Neo-Babylonian times, however, the *w* had been dropped and mimation had been lost, so that this word became *ardu*.<sup>29</sup> The

<sup>29</sup>*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, ed. I. J. Gelb, vol. A, pt. II (Chicago, 1968), pp. 243-251.

Akkadian equivalent of West Semitic ‘Abed-Nabu in this period, therefore, was Ardi-Nabu, which also means “servant of Nabu.” This is precisely the name of the person listed in the first section of the prism text as secretary to the crown prince Amêl-Marduk (I.15).

On this basis I would suggest that what we may have in Azariah’s case in Dan 3 is not a direct transliteration of his Babylonian name, but an interpretation or translation of it. The identification of an exiled Hebrew as the official who may have served the crown prince is of some interest in view of the fact that 2 Kgs 25:27-28 indicates that when Amêl-Marduk (Evil-Merodach) came to the throne, he acted in a kindly way towards the exiled king of Judah: “In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, graciously freed Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison; and he spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon.” If Amêl-Marduk’s secretary in his earlier years was an exile from Judah, as the equation of Abed-Nebo with Ardi-Nabu suggests, the influence which that secretary may have exercised upon the crown prince could explain his favorable attitude toward Jehoiachin when he became king.

#### *Mušallim-Marduk (I.12)*

It is more difficult to identify the name of an official in the prism-text list that might match with Mišael/Mešak in Daniel. The principle proposed above on the basis of Nego/Nebo—that the divine elements in these Babylonian names have been deliberately altered—may offer some assistance here. Utilizing that principle calls attention to Mušallim-Marduk, the person named in the first section of this list as the first overseer of the female slaves of the palace.

It should be noted from Daniel that this exile’s two names appear to have been relatively similar. They differ mainly in regard to the final element where “El” for God has been replaced by a *k*. If that *k* comes from the name of a Babylonian god, then Marduk is certainly the best candidate for that god. This would suggest something like Miša-Marduk, but better sense can be made out of this name if the

whole Hebrew name Mišael is adapted into the participial form of *mušallim*. Thus there is a way, leaving vocalization aside, to get from Hebrew Mišael to Mušal[lim-Marduk] in this Babylonian list and to Meša[llim-Mardu]k in the possible adaptation of the latter in Dan 3.

### 6. Summary

The evidence discussed above from and relating to the third chapter of Daniel can now be summarized by way of the following chart:

1. **Dec. 595 - Jan. 594**—The Revolt: “In the tenth year the king of Akkad (was) in his own land; from the month of Kislev to the month of Tebet there was rebellion in Akkad. . . . With arms he slew many of his own army. His own hand captured his enemy.”
2. **594/593**—The Loyalty Oath: “Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to assemble the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image . . .” (Dan 3:2).

#### 2a. *The Prism-List Officials*

Installation and  
Confirmation

Officials at the Court:

Mušallim-Marduk  
Ardi-Nabu  
Ḫanunu

Officials of Akkad  
Officials of Towns  
Officials of Districts  
Western Vassal Kings:  
The King of Tyre  
The King of Sidon

#### 2b. *The Biblical Data*

“Then the king promoted Šadrach, Mešach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon” (Dan 3:30).

= Meša[llim-Mardu]k?  
= Abed-Nego/Nebo  
▣ Hanan[iah]

“Zedekiah king of Judah (went) to Babylon, in the fourth year of his reign” (Jer 51:59; 594/593 B.C., fall-to-fall year).

3. **Late Spring 593**—Jerusalem Conference on Revolt (Jer 27).  
This was after the vassal kings' return from Babylon.
4. **Summer 593**—Hananiah prophesies return of the exiles in two years (Jer 28).
5. **Fall 593**—Psammetichus' army with Semites victorious in Nubia.
6. **592**—Psammetichus makes grand tour of Phoenicia and Palestine.
7. **589**—Hophra succeeds to the throne of Egypt.
8. **Jan. 588**—Nebuchadnezzar lays siege to Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25:1).
9. **Summer 586**—Jerusalem falls to Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 25:3-8).

According to this outline of events, the episode described in the third chapter of Daniel should be dated sometime during the interval between the spring of 594 and the summer of 593 B.C. After Nebuchadnezzar suppressed the revolt in Babylon early in 594, he made a brief visit to the west to receive the tribute which had been collected that year. He did not leave for the west with the army again until the ninth month of the next Babylonian calendar year, or December of 594 B.C. This period between the spring and the end of 594 would have been the first of two possible intervals during which this episode could have occurred. The unusually late date in 594 when Nebuchadnezzar and the army left Babylon for the west should be noted in this connection, as it would have allowed ample time for the episode in question.

Zedekiah—and the other vassal kings from the west who may have accompanied him—did not journey to Babylon until early in 593 B.C., when the Babylonian army was in the west to escort him there. This time would have provided the other occasion on which this episode may have occurred. The date suggested for the events of Dan 3 revolves, therefore, around the question of whether the vassal kings from the west attended this ceremony, or some similar event around the same time, or whether they attended another function there the next year. Since the list in Dan 3 contains only

officials of the Babylonian government and does not include any vassal kings, a date in 594 B.C. seems preferable for the episode described in Dan 3, with the journey of the vassal kings to Babylon occurring in the next year, 593 B.C.