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## **Edited by:**

Edward Anson ✦ David Hollander ✦ Timothy Howe  
Joseph Roisman ✦ John Vanderspoel ✦ Pat Wheatley ✦  
Sabine Müller



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# Alexander the Great and the Kingship of Babylon

Andrew W. Collins

Alexander the Great's adoption of oriental modes of kingship has been an important research topic in modern scholarship.<sup>1</sup> After the overwhelming victory at Gaugamela, the ancient city states of Mesopotamia became part of Alexander's empire. This was the second region in which a large ancient Near Eastern state with living traditions of kingship fell under Alexander's sway (the first had been Egypt). The Macedonian army marched directly to Babylon after the battle of Gaugamela, and Alexander was met before the city by the populace, the priests and rulers, who surrendered the city to him.<sup>2</sup> In Babylon, Alexander forged reasonably close relations with the local elite, and did his best to conciliate the priestly class and legitimise his kingship through native traditions. He also appears to have considered Babylon as the future capital of his Asian empire. However, there were crucial limits to Alexander's ability to be a legitimate king by local Babylonian standards.

I intend below to analyze Alexander's relations with the Babylonian elite and his immersion in Babylonian traditions of kingship, by examining (1) the native form of kingship in Babylon, (2) Alexander's actions at Babylon in 331 BC, and (3) Alexander's return to Babylon in 323 BC.

## 1. Babylonian Kingship<sup>3</sup>

As in Egypt, Babylon had very ancient traditions of kingship, but had considerably greater experience with foreign dynasties and conquerors than the Egyptians did. By origin, Babylon was a Mesopotamian city state that rose to prominence after the Amorites conquered the region c. 2000 BC. The great Third Dynasty of Babylon (c. 1570 BC–1153 BC) was a family of Kassite foreigners from the Zagros mountains; and later rulers included Aramaeans or families from the city of Isin, as well as native Babylonians.<sup>4</sup> These alien dynasties had ruled Babylon long before the later Assyrian and Persian conquerors, and all of them were heavily influenced by Babylonian cultural and political traditions. It is, however, the Neo-Babylonian empire (609–539 BC) and the later Persian rule over Mesopotamia that is directly relevant to Alexander's interaction with the Babylonian conception of kingship. The Babylonians had of course inherited ancient traditions of kingship from the Sumerians and Akkadians.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> The literature is vast. For a sample, see the following: Bosworth (1980b), Hammond (1986), Hamilton (1987), Fredricksmeier (2000), Olbrycht (2004), Olbrycht (2010), Lane Fox (2007), Collins (2008), Collins (2012a), Collins (2012b) (on Alexander's relationship to Iranian royal traditions); Burstein (1991) and Collins (2009) (on Alexander and Egyptian kingship).

<sup>2</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 3.16.3–4.

<sup>3</sup> For literature, see Lutz (1924) 435–53; Frankfort (1948) 215–76; Eddy (1961) 101–32; Brandes (1979); Oates (1979) 26–28; Black (1981); Ries (1986) 44–55; Kuhrt (1987a); Kuhrt (1987b); Kuhrt (1990); Kuhrt (1995) 604–607; Herz (1996); Lambert (1998) 54–70; Jones (2005) 336–42; Jursa (2007).

<sup>4</sup> Lambert (1998) 62–63; Kuhrt (1987b) 23–30.

<sup>5</sup> Oates (1979) 26.

Sumerian King List recorded that the kingship had descended from heaven after the mythical flood, but had passed to a succession of cities by the divine will of Enlil, the great god of the Sumerian pantheon.<sup>6</sup> The king (Sumerian, lugal) combined the roles of war leader, judge, and chief priest.<sup>7</sup> The Mesopotamian tradition of kingship—of which Babylon was naturally a part—had an extraordinary range of royal titles, including ‘king of Sumer and Akkad’ (LUGAL KUR *šume-ri ú ak-ka-di-i*), ‘great/mighty king’ (LUGAL GAL), ‘king of the four quarters’ (LUGAL *kib-ra-a-ti er-bé-et-ti*), and the rather pompous ‘king of the universe’ (LUGAL *kiš-šat*).<sup>8</sup>

In the centuries that preceded Alexander’s conquest, the king participated in an official succession ritual, which is known from a fragmentary poem commemorating Nabopolassar’s defeat of the Assyrians. Here we have the following account:

The princes of the land being assembled, Nab[opolassar *they bless*],  
Opening their fists [they ...] the sovereignty.  
Bel [Marduk], in the assembly of the gods, [*gave*] the ruling-power to  
[Nabopolassar].  
The king, the reliable command [...]  
‘With the standard I shall constantly conquer [*your*] enemies,  
I shall place [*your*] throne in Babylon.’  
The chair-bearer, taking his hand, ... [...]  
They kept putting the standard on his head.  
They had him sit on the royal throne [...]  
They took the royal seal [...]  
The eunuchs, the staff-bearers [...]  
The officers of Akkad approached the cella.  
When they had drawn near, they sat down before him [(and)]  
The officers in their joy [*exclaimed*]:  
‘O lord, O king, may you live forever! [May you conquer] the

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<sup>6</sup> For a translation of the Sumerian King List, see Chavalas (2006) 82–85.

<sup>7</sup> Lambert (1998) 55–57.

<sup>8</sup> Frankfort (1948) 226–30.

land of [your] enemies!

May the king of the gods, Marduk, rejoice in you ...”<sup>9</sup>

Although the account is not completely clear, we can see that there were important elements to the ceremony: the presence of the great nobles; the formal proclamation of the king’s rule by the god Marduk; the divine blessing; the giving of royal symbols (the standard and royal seal); and the installment of the king on the throne, surrounded by his courtiers. As in Egypt, royal legitimacy depended on the favour of the national god who selected the king to be the intermediary between the divine and human worlds. If this ritual continued into the fourth century BC, we have no evidence that Alexander ever participated in it.

The Babylonian king was also elected by Marduk.<sup>10</sup> By the first millennium BC, Bel Marduk had risen to the position of supreme god in the local pantheon, by replacing Enlil, the earlier Sumerian deity.<sup>11</sup> In Babylon, the main centre of the worship of Marduk was the Esagila temple complex which included the Etemenanki ziggurat.<sup>12</sup> Esagila, as in all Mesopotamian temples, was also a place where the priests engaged in religious, economic and scientific activities. Every temple had a ‘house of learning’ where the Babylonian priests engaged in their famous astrological and astronomical research. Alexander did show concern for Marduk’s temple and his priesthood, but it is unclear how many concrete measures were taken by the king in his promises to restore the temples before 323 BC.<sup>13</sup>

In the Neo-Babylonian period, the king was not regarded as divine.<sup>14</sup> Divine kingship had briefly existed in the Mesopotamian conception of kingship, but thousands of years before Alexander’s time. The Akkadian king Naram-Sin (2254–2218 BC) is described as a god in a contemporary inscription, and had his own temple in Akkad.<sup>15</sup> His son Shar-kali-sharri occasionally had the divine determinative attached to his name.<sup>16</sup> The Third Dynasty of Ur also followed this form of divine cult: in the period from the reign of Shulgi (2095–2049 BCE) to Shu-Sin, the kings were described as gods and given religious offerings.<sup>17</sup> With the Amorite conquest of Mesopotamia, however, these earlier ideas of divine kingship were extinguished,

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<sup>9</sup> Grayson (1975b) 84–85.

<sup>10</sup> Herz (1996) 32.

<sup>11</sup> Lambert (1984) 1–9.

<sup>12</sup> Hdt. 1.181–183; Strabo 16.1.5; Diod. 17.112.3.

<sup>13</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 7.17.2–3. See below Section 2.

<sup>14</sup> Jones (2005) 331. For recent studies of divine kingship in Mesopotamia, see Brisch (2008).

<sup>15</sup> Chavalas (2006) 20–21.

<sup>16</sup> Lambert (1998) 59.

<sup>17</sup> Jones (2005) 332.

apparently because the tribal Amorites did not approve of such an exalted view of their earthly king.<sup>18</sup> We can only speculate on how Alexander's later demand for divine honours was received in Babylonian culture if they too were expected to participate in this practice, when such a tradition had effectively been dead for centuries.<sup>19</sup>

In religious matters the king had a very great role as the main priest. He personally participated in major cult acts.<sup>20</sup> One major ceremonial role of the king was his participation in the *akitu*, the New Year festival of the city in honour of Marduk.<sup>21</sup> Our principal texts for this were written in the Hellenistic period, but they may well reflect the basic structure of the ceremonies as they existed in the time of Alexander.<sup>22</sup> In Babylon, the New Year began at the time of the spring equinox (c. 21 March), and the *akitu* occurred for the first twelve days of the Babylonian month of Nisan (although it should be noted that the use of a lunar calendar, with the intercalary months, sometimes caused the date to vary by as many as two months by modern reckoning).<sup>23</sup> The festival consisted of twelve days of religious, ritual and social ceremonies. The initial five days involved mere cult and temple preparations. The great ritual acts during which the king was present took place from the eighth to eleventh days of Nisan. We can summarise some of the more important events of the *akitu* that had significance for the Babylonian conception of kingship, as follows:

(1) Day 4:

The king would journey to Borsippa, ten miles from Babylon, to bring the cult statue of the god Nabu, the first-born child of Marduk.<sup>24</sup>

(2) Day 5:

The king and the statue of Nabu arrived at the Esagila temple, and the high priest took away the king's royal insignia (staff, ring, mace and crown). In a remarkably humiliating aspect of the ritual, the king was struck in the face by the high priest,

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<sup>18</sup> Lambert (1998) 61.

<sup>19</sup> I refer here to the divine cults established in some Greek city-states at the end of Alexander's life (Bosworth [1988a] 288–90) and the report that Alexander wished to be worshipped as the third god of the Arabians, which appears already in Aristobulus' history (Arr. *Anab.* 7.20.1; Strabo 16.1.11; Aristobulus *FGrH* 139 F 56). Another possible problem for Alexander was that he was clean shaven, which was contrary to Babylonian royal traditions. See van der Spek (2003) 53: 'it must have been very awkward [sc. for the Babylonians] to have a beardless king. Babylonian kings always had beards and beardless persons were normally servants, eunuchs. Alexander must have seemed very effeminate to the eyes of the Babylonians'.

<sup>20</sup> Bidmead (2002) 163.

<sup>21</sup> For bibliography, see Black (1981) 39–59; van der Toorn (1990) 10–29; Bidmead (2002).

<sup>22</sup> See now the textual edition and translation of *RAcc.* 127–154 and *BM* 32485 in Linssen (2004) 215–237.

<sup>23</sup> Black (1981) 41. Thus the date could fall somewhere between the 16 March and 31 April.

<sup>24</sup> Bidmead (2002) 59–62.



who then led him to the sanctuary of Marduk and pulled the king's ears to force him to kneel before the god. At this point, the king recited an oath before Marduk, assuring the god of his sinlessness, piety and blamelessness. Receiving his royal insignia back, the king was once again struck across the face by the high priest. If the violence of the blow produced tears, this was actually considered a sign of Marduk's favour.<sup>25</sup>

(3) Day 8:

The high priest offered Marduk holy water and then sprinkled this water on the king. The king then performed a libation for Marduk, and, taking 'Bel by the hand', brought the deity to the courtyard. In the shrine of the destinies, the god was believed to be present when omens were delivered about the course of the New Year. There followed the great procession through Babylon in which the king naturally showed off the splendour of his armies and court. The god was then taken to the separate *akitu* building for a series of religious rituals.<sup>26</sup>

That the *akitu* festival was closely connected with legitimising the king's rule is certain, and his correct participation ensured the prosperity of the land and the favour of the gods.<sup>27</sup> Some scholars have argued that the ritual of the *akitu* involving the king 'taking Bel by the hand' was in itself a rite of royal investiture and that Alexander was elevated to the position of legitimate Babylonian king by undergoing the rite.<sup>28</sup> But it is now clear that this phrase was a general expression used to describe the entire *akitu* itself, and the act of 'taking Bel by the hand' was only one ceremonial part of the procession of Marduk from his temple of Esagila.<sup>29</sup> This was not a succession ritual per se. Although the last known celebration of the *akitu* was the occasion in 538 when Cambyses, as crown prince of Cyrus, took part in the festival,<sup>30</sup> there is a text from Seleucid times which describes events on the second, third, fourth and fifth days

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<sup>25</sup> Lambert (1998) 65; Bidmead (2002) 70–85.

<sup>26</sup> Bidmead (2002) 88–93.

<sup>27</sup> Bidmead (2002) 163.

<sup>28</sup> Schachermeyr (1973) 282: '[sc. Alexander] became Babylonian prince, exceptionally even before the New Year's festival in the spring. Hitherto it was at this [sc. festival that] the native kings first 'grasped the hands of Marduk' in order to legitimise their throne' ('wurde [sc. Alexander] babylonischer Fürst, ausnahmsweise noch vor dem Neujahrsfest im Frühling. Zu diesem erst hatten bisher die heimischen Herrscher ja stets „die Hände des Marduk ergriffen“, um ihren Thron zu legitimieren'); Lane Fox (1973) 248: 'At the priests' suggestion, [sc. Alexander] paid sacrifice to the city's god Bel-Marduk, presumably clasping the hand of his statue to show that he had received his power like the old Babylonian kings, from a personal encounter with the god'; Bosworth (1988a) 87. See Fredrickmeyer (2000) 146 for a more balanced view.

<sup>29</sup> Black (1981) 45.

<sup>30</sup> Black (1981) 42.



of the *akitu* copied from an earlier document.<sup>31</sup> It is not impossible that a version of the festival survived into Seleucid times. Nevertheless, we have no direct evidence that Alexander participated in this rite if it was performed in his time, and it is to Alexander's actions in Babylon in 331 BC that we now turn.

## 2. Alexander at Babylon (331 BC)

Alexander's march on Babylon has been elucidated by a fragment of the *Astronomical Diaries*, as follows:

/U4\ 11-KÁM ina <sup>uru</sup>UD.KIB.NUN.<sup>ki</sup> t̃è-e-mu šá<sup>1</sup>A-l[ek-sa-an-dar-ri-is ....]  
[x x] a-na É<sup>meš</sup>-ku-nu ul er-ru-ub U<sub>4</sub>-13.KÁ[M ....].

On the 11th [18 October 331], in Sippar an order of Al[exander, ....]  
[....] 'I shall not enter into your temples'.<sup>32</sup> On the 13th [20 October 331] ...<sup>33</sup>

By 18 October, Alexander had advanced to the neighbourhood of the city of Sippar, and he then sent word to Babylon most probably announcing that he would not allow the looting of the Babylonian temples or homes. He received Mazaeus' surrender, but nevertheless marched into Babylon under arms (Curt. 5.1.19), probably around the 21 October or slightly later.<sup>34</sup> As he approached Babylon, Curtius reports that a great part of the population gathered on the walls of the city 'eager to identify the new king' (*avida cognoscendi novum regem*).<sup>35</sup> Curtius provides an account of the king's entry in battle order into the city and his reception,

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<sup>31</sup> Pritchard (1955) 331–34.

<sup>32</sup> There is some controversy over the sense of the word 'é' ('house'), but I follow the reading 'temple' of Bernard (1990) 526 and Boiy (2004) 104–105. Cf. Sachs and Hunger (1988) 179. The line could also be translated as 'I shall not enter into your houses' (i.e., sack them). See also the translation by B. van der Spek: <[http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp-alexander/astronomical\\_diary-330\\_02.html](http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp-alexander/astronomical_diary-330_02.html)>.

<sup>33</sup> The text is preserved on the reverse of cuneiform tablet BM 36761 in the British Museum. For text and translation, see Sachs and Hunger (1988) 178–179 (no. -330, rev. lines 6–7).

<sup>34</sup> Boiy (2004) 105. This event is certainly mentioned in a fragmentary line of the *Astronomical Diaries*: 'Alexander, king of the world, [came? in]to Babylon [....]' (Sachs and Hunger (1988) 179 [no. -330, rev. line 11]).

<sup>35</sup> Curt. 5.1.19.

which is more detailed than Arrian's (*Anab.* 3.16.3) brief summary,<sup>36</sup> and which is worth quoting at length:

*Magi deinde suo more carmen canentes, post hos Chaldaei Babyloniorumque non vates modo, sed etiam artifices cum fidibus sui generis ibant; laudes hi regum canere soliti, Chaldaei siderum motus et statas vices temporum ostendere. Equites deinde babylonii ... ultimi ibant. Rex armatis stipatus ... ipse cum curru urbem ac deinde regiam intravit. Postero die suppellectilem Darei et omnem pecuniam recognovit.*

Then the Magi came, who were chanting hymns in their way, and after them the Chaldaeans, not only the prophets of the Babylonians, but also musicians with their own kinds of instruments, who were accustomed to sing the praises of the kings. The Chaldaeans used to explain the movements of the stars and the appointed changes of the seasons. The Babylonian cavalry ... were last to follow. Alexander accompanied by armed guards ... himself entered the city in a chariot and the palace. On the following day he inspected Darius' furniture and all his wealth (*Curt.* 5.1.22–23).

Curtius' description lists the three great religious classes in Babylon, all of whom were associated with the institutions and rites of Babylonian kingship. The procession which greeted Alexander on arrival in Babylon was presumably the official reception accorded to the legitimate king. A reading of Curtius (5.1.20), however, reveals that the lavishness of the welcome was orchestrated by Bagophanes, the Persian official in charge of the city's citadel and treasury.<sup>37</sup> The same type of greeting had also been accorded to the Assyrian conqueror Sargon II in 710 and to Cyrus the Great himself in 529.<sup>38</sup> Alexander's decisive victory at Gaugamela and the hopelessness of any serious Persian defence were very probably the main cause of the city's surrender, rather than significant Babylonian disaffection with Achaemenid rule.<sup>39</sup> Curtius (5.1.39) notes that the king stayed in the city for thirty-four days,<sup>40</sup> and the Macedonians were billeted in the city, though the people were friendly.<sup>41</sup>

According to the ancient sources, relations between the new king and the Babylonian priesthood were cordial. Arrian has the following account:

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<sup>36</sup> The fact that the basic details of Alexander's reception by the Babylonians also stand in Arrian suggests that the tradition was already reported by Ptolemy and Aristobulus and is historical, not some fiction of Cleitarchus.

<sup>37</sup> Atkinson (1994) 35.

<sup>38</sup> Kuhrt (1990) 122–23. For Cyrus' entry, see Grayson (1975a) 110. The Babylonians also offered Sargon the 'remnants' of the divine offerings, an act only granted to the king. See Oppenheim (1977) 189.

<sup>39</sup> See Kuhrt (1990) 126; Boiy (2004) 104.

<sup>40</sup> See also Diod. 17.64.4.

<sup>41</sup> Diod. 17.64.3–4.

Ἀλέξανδρος δὲ παρελθὼν εἰς τὴν Βαβυλῶνα τὰ ἱερά, ἃ Ξέρξης καθεῖλεν, ἀνοικοδομεῖν προσέταξε Βαβυλωνίοις, τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ τοῦ Βήλου τὸ ἱερόν, ὃν μάλιστα θεῶν τιμῶσι Βαβυλώνιοι.

Arriving at Babylon, Alexander gave orders to the Babylonians to rebuild the temples that Xerxes razed to the ground, especially the temple of Bel (Marduk), whom of the gods the Babylonians honour most of all (*Anab.* 3.16.4; see also 7.17.2).

In Babylon, the political instability and succession of rulers from different families in much of the first millennium BC had led to a special emphasis on the divine election of the king by the god Marduk.<sup>42</sup>

However, that Xerxes destroyed the temples or neglected them has been questioned,<sup>43</sup> and today many argue that such a temple destruction by Xerxes is fiction.<sup>44</sup> This view perhaps needs some minor modification. Recent evidence suggests that the rebellions of Bêl-šimânni and Šamaš-eriba, which are most probably to be dated to 484, caused Xerxes to take punitive measures against the Babylonian elite and priesthood.<sup>45</sup> It is at this period that the Babylonian archives mysteriously suffer a sharp break in the areas of the rebellion, and these archives are associated with the aristocracy that was involved in the temple institutions.<sup>46</sup> That the ancient sources wish to paint Alexander's behavior as the antithesis of Xerxes' cruelty should not blind us to the possibility that the Esagila temple may have suffered minor damage under Xerxes and neglect under the later Persian kings, a neglect which, as Boiy notes, left the Etemenanki ziggurat in a state of disrepair by Alexander's time.<sup>47</sup> However, it remains true that the Classical and later Babylonian tradition about Xerxes was naturally hostile to him and exaggerated his role, with the Babylonians perhaps even inventing the story that Xerxes had destroyed the entire temple.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Kuhrt (1987b) 43–44.

<sup>43</sup> Wilcken (1932) 140; Lane Fox (1973) 248; Schachermeyr (1973) 282; Badian (1985) 437; Bosworth (1988a) 87.

<sup>44</sup> Kuhrt and Sherwin-White (1987b) 69–78; Kuhrt (1990) 122; Boiy (2004) 67. See now Linssen (2004) 13–14. The story could have arisen from the warning given to Alexander by Belephantes, a chief priest of the Babylonians, whose name may be preserved as *Bêl-apla-iddin* in an astronomical diary (Sachs and Hunger [1988] 220–229 [no. -321]), when he advised Alexander not to enter Babylon in 323. See Diod. 17.112.3 and van der Spek (2003) 46, n. 16.

<sup>45</sup> Waerzeggers (2003–2004) 162 and Baker (2008) 100–116.

<sup>46</sup> Waerzeggers (2003–2004) 156–159. See Waerzeggers (2003–2004) 160: the 'number of archives affected by the phenomenon is large but seems to be restricted to a specific layer of society: the traditional Babylonian elites who played a leading role in the religious and civil ... administration of the northern Babylonian cities since pre-Achaemenid times'.

<sup>47</sup> Boiy (2004) 67.

<sup>48</sup> van der Spek (2006) 267–269.

Alexander's concern with the temples allowed him not only to distance himself from Persian rule and profit from local disaffection, but also to associate himself with the local Babylonian traditions of kingship. However, as we have seen, we have no evidence to show that Alexander was involved in the celebration of the *akitu*, the crucial festival and ritual associated with the kingship.<sup>49</sup> While there are strong indications that Alexander participated in the royal ritual of sacrifice to Bel at Babylon, in order to gain the god's support, this action was hardly the same as undergoing the strict ceremonies for accession as a new Babylonian king. An account of the sacrifice exists in Arrian, who reports that 'the king met the Chaldaeans, and carried out all their recommendations on the Babylonian temples, and in particular sacrificed to Bel (Marduk), according to their instructions'.<sup>50</sup> Herodotus (1.181) had equated Bel with Zeus, and so it is, moreover, not difficult to think that Alexander regarded Marduk as the local name for the Greek god.

One method by which a Babylonian king could legitimise his rule was the initiation of public works, restoration of temples, and attention to the performance of the temple cults.<sup>51</sup> Alexander's concern with the temples, then, was not only a royal benefaction, but also a fundamental part of his duties as the new king, and a way to obtain further divine blessing for his rule from the native priesthood, since all building work required favourable omens from the gods.<sup>52</sup> That these measures were sincere attempts by Alexander to conform to the local traditions of kingship is reasonable.

But some evidence suggests that his policy was more rhetoric than substantive action. Alexander did not pay for the work from his own money, but required the temple itself to fund the repairs, and perhaps he only made promises of future, rather than immediate, action,<sup>53</sup> as it is clear that little work had been done when Alexander returned to the city after his

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<sup>49</sup> See van der Spek (2003) 52: 'The Babylonian New Year Festival (1–11 Nisan) took place 14 – 24 April 323 BC. There is not a single hint in our sources that Alexander took part in the ceremonies. If Alexander had fulfilled his duties, it would certainly have been mentioned. How should we interpret this? A variety of solutions to the problem are possible. The first is that Alexander arrived only after 24 April 323. This would mean that Alexander's stay in Babylon lasted only a maximum of seven weeks. Alexander might have waited until 28 April, as suggested above. Another solution may be that the substitute king, who was ritually the real king, did the honours. Finally, one might consider the possibility that the physical participation of the king in the ritual had fallen into abeyance'.

<sup>50</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 3.16.5: ἔνθα δὴ καὶ τοῖς Χαλδαίοις ἐνέτυχεν, καὶ ὅσα ἐδόκει Χαλδαίοις ἀμφὶ τὰ ἱερὰ τὰ ἐν Βαβυλῶνι ἔπραξε, τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ τῷ Βήλῳ καθ' ἃ ἐκεῖνοι ἐξηγοῦντο ἔθυσεν. For commentary, see Bosworth 1980: 316.

<sup>51</sup> Kuhrt (1987b) 46.

<sup>52</sup> Kuhrt (1990) 127.

<sup>53</sup> van der Spek (2006) 270–271; Bosworth (1980a) 314.

campaign in India (*Anab.* 7.17.2–3).<sup>54</sup> In 323, years after the first visit to Babylon, Alexander fulfilled his promise by ordering 10,000 troops to commence work on the repairs, though when the king died it was still far from complete.<sup>55</sup>

Although there is no evidence that Alexander ever participated in the succession ritual known from Neo-Babylonian times, he did receive standard Babylonian royal titulature. The *Astronomical Diaries* preserve the title ‘Alexander, the king who is from the land of Hani [Greece]’ (A-le[k-sa-a]n-dar-ri-is LUGAL šá TA mat Ḫa-ni-i<sup>56</sup>)—an obvious expression of his position as a foreign king. But we also find the following traditional Babylonian titles: ‘Alexander, king of the world’ (A-lek-sa-an-dar-ri-is LUGAL ŠÚ<sup>57</sup>; Akkadian, šar kiššati) and ‘Alexander, the king of all countries’ ([ .... A-lek-sa-an]-dar-ri-is LUGAL KUR-KUR).<sup>58</sup> However, the impetus for this seems to have come from local initiative, rather than from Alexander’s own policy, just as in Egypt local priestly traditions entailed that he was given conventional pharaonic titles in temples.<sup>59</sup>

The reception Alexander received in Babylon was favourable, but he nevertheless continued the type of administrative arrangements he had made in Egypt. This involved the separation of the civilian, military, and the financial administrations of the satrapy.<sup>60</sup> Notably, the Persian Mazaeus was allowed to remain as the satrap of Babylonia,<sup>61</sup> but military power was delegated to Apollodorus of Amphipolis and Menes of Pella.<sup>62</sup> The new satrap was apparently allowed to mint coins, both the famous lion staters with Mazaeus’ name in Aramaic and a second series without the name added.<sup>63</sup> The fact that Mazaeus briefly continued the Persian tradition of coin types which, after his death, become the standard currency in Babylon attests to the special status that Babylonia was allowed under Alexander.<sup>64</sup> Mazaeus died c. 328 and

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<sup>54</sup> Arrian (*Anab.* 7.17.2–3) states that Alexander had ordered the removal of the earth around the temple in order to rebuild it. There are in fact four cuneiform texts that document the payment of tithes to clear the debris around Esagila (Boiy [2004] 110). These documents are dated to 327 and 325 BC by van der Spek (2006) 270. Cf. Boiy (2004) 110–111. See van der Spek (2006) on the temples in the Hellenistic period.

<sup>55</sup> Strabo 16.1.5; van der Spek (2006) 274.

<sup>56</sup> Sachs and Hunger (1988) 191 (no. -324, left edge, line 1).

<sup>57</sup> Sachs and Hunger (1988) 179 (no. -330, rev. line 11).

<sup>58</sup> Sachs and Hunger (1988) 181 (no. -329 B, obv. line 1).

<sup>59</sup> Collins (2009).

<sup>60</sup> For Egypt, see Arr. *Anab.* 3.5.7.

<sup>61</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 3.16.4; Curt. 5.1.44. Bosworth (1980a) 314–15.

<sup>62</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 3.16.4; Curt. 5.1.43; Diod. 17.64.5. See also Lane Fox (1973) 249; Brandes (1979) 91; Bosworth (1988a) 87; Boiy (2004) 107–108.

<sup>63</sup> Le Rider (2003) 274–76 and Boiy (2004) 108. Cf. Bosworth (1980a) 314–15.

<sup>64</sup> Le Rider (2003) 276–77 concludes that the minting of the lion staters was a privilege Alexander accorded to Mazaeus before the surrender of Babylon through negotiation, and that this mint at Babylon was continuously active

was replaced by Stamenes (*Anab.* 4.18.3).<sup>65</sup> Babylon itself received a garrison commander in Agathon of Pydna with 700 troops,<sup>66</sup> and the power of the purse was given to Asclepiodorus, son of Philon.<sup>67</sup>

All in all, Alexander's relations with the Babylonian elite were apparently cordial, but the evidence for his involvement in the explicit rituals and ceremonies associated with the kingship during his first visit is limited.

### 3. Alexander's Return to Babylon (323 BC)

Alexander's second visit to Babylon did not occur until the final year of his life. At this point, Alexander's rule seems to have begun to provoke at least some hostility from the Babylonians, which some feel is reflected in the Babylonian 'Dynastic Prophecy', which might have a negative view of Alexander.<sup>68</sup> However, the text is fragmentary and interpretation difficult, and some suspect that the prophecy reflects the increased hostility of the Babylonians to the Macedonians *after* the disastrous wars of the Successors, so that it does not properly reflect native opinion in 323.<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, tensions in Alexander's relationship with the Babylonians most probably did surface after the death of Hephaestion, when Alexander formed an extravagant plan to construct a grand funerary monument for Hephaestion, and planned, or perhaps even started, to demolish a part of Babylon's city wall for the project.<sup>70</sup> Although Diodorus speaks of the tomb as having been completed (*Diod.* 17.115.1), it is unclear how far the work on the wall

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during the years of Mazaeus' rule. Mazaeus also issued darics and double darics, gold coins in the Achaemenid tradition. See Le Rider (2003) 279–84.

<sup>65</sup> In Curtius' account (8.3.17), the new satrap is called Ditamenes, which appears to be a corruption of Stamenes (Bosworth [1995] 123). The Macedonian Archon appears as the satrap shortly before Alexander's death (Heckel [2006] 43), and perhaps his appointment was connected with Harpalus' flight (Badian [1961] 17–18).

<sup>66</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 6.16.5–6; *Diod.* 17.64.5; *Curt.* 5.1.43.

<sup>67</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 3.16.4. See also Arist. *Oec.* 2.2.34 on Antimenos of Rhodes, who may have later replaced Asclepiodorus.

<sup>68</sup> Grayson (1975) 24–37; Sherwin White (1987) 10–14; van der Spek (2003) 311–342; Kuhrt (2007) 462–463. See also Briant (2002) 863–864 and Shayegan (2011) 49–60.

<sup>69</sup> Briant (2002) 864.

<sup>70</sup> *Diod.* 17.115.1–5. For other sources, see Arr. *Anab.* 7.14.8; *Plut. Alex.* 72.5 with Hamilton (1969) 201; and *Justin* 12.12.12 with Yardley and Heckel (1997) 279–280. Diodorus' account in Book 17.115.1–5 appears to have been derived from Cleitarchus. See Bosworth (1988b) 206–207. It may be that Hephaestion's pyre was different from his actual tomb as planned by Alexander, but Koldewey's (1914) 310–311 belief that he found the remains of Hephaestion's pyre inside Babylon's city walls should be treated with strong scepticism, since the artificial platform in question is probably the remains of an agora. See Schmidt (1941), 832–834, Potts (1997) 279, and Boiy (2004) 12, 75 on this point.

demolition or construction of the actual building had proceeded when Alexander died, and the final tomb was either far from complete or never seriously begun, given that Perdiccas had the plans for the ‘completion of Hephaestion’s pyre’ (συντέλειαν τῆς Ἡφαιστιῶνος πυρᾶς) quashed (Diod. 18.4.2).<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, even a *plan* to remove a considerable portion of Babylon’s wall can hardly have impressed the Babylonian elite.<sup>72</sup>

During the king’s journey to Babylon after Hephaestion’s death, he was met by the Chaldaeans. They warned him not to enter the city, owing to an unfavourable omen from the god Marduk.<sup>73</sup> According to Aristobulus, the king did attempt to heed their advice, but was prevented by the difficulty of the approach from the direction which the priests had suggested.<sup>74</sup> Arrian reports that Alexander had personal suspicions that the Chaldaeans’ warning was given to make him avoid the city, because the priests did not want to divert the revenue from Marduk’s temple to the restoration work (*Anab.* 7.17.1–4). However, the Chaldaeans were long accustomed to advise the king on unfavourable omens and the methods by which he could forestall any threat to himself or the kingdom; it is thus far more likely that their warning had been given in good faith.<sup>75</sup> In the end, however, the king ignored their advice, which may have caused a strained relationship with the Babylonian priests.

Diodorus (17.116.4) provides us with an account of another curious incident that was most probably directly related to the Chaldaeans’ warning. He relates that a man was found sitting on Alexander’s throne, wearing his royal robe and diadem. The king consulted his seers for interpretation and put the man to death, since they advised that the execution would

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<sup>71</sup> Bosworth (1988a) 164; Bosworth (1988b) 204–207; Hammond (1995), Palagia (2000). For older scholarship, see Schachermeyr (1954) 127–38 and Wüst (1959). Cf. McKechnie (1995) 432, n. 71, who argues that Hephaestion’s funeral was actually held at Ecbatana (as in one version in Aelian *VH* 7.8), and that the story of his funeral in Babylon in Diodorus 17.115.1–5 was derived from Ehippus of Olynthus (as in Hammond [1983] 75), and was a fiction of Ehippus (McKechnie [1995] 428–430). Furthermore, the story of Alexander’s plans to demolish part of Babylon’s walls was a fiction with its origin in a real demolition of the walls of the acropolis of Ecbatana for Hephaestion’s pyre there. This theory founders on (1) the explicit statements in Arrian and Diodorus that Hephaestion’s funeral was in Babylon, (2) the unreliable nature of Aelian’s brief note, (3) that McKechnie’s ([1995] 424) argument that Arrian in *Anab.* 7.14.8 was ‘apparently making use of a quite narrow range of accounts’ is unconvincing, and (4) that too much is read into the statements of Plutarch and Justin. Neither Plutarch nor Justin explicitly states that Hephaestion’s funeral happened in Ecbatana, and both have brief and hasty accounts that do not really contradict the tradition in Arrian and Diodorus.

<sup>72</sup> See Bosworth (1988b) 205, n. 82 on this point.

<sup>73</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 7.16.5–18.6; Curt. 10.4.6; Diod. 17.112; Plut. *Alex.* 73; Just. 12.13.3; App. *B Civ.* 2.153.

<sup>74</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 7.17.5–6. Plutarch (*Alex.* 73.1–2) and Diodorus (17.112) preserve a variant tradition in which the Chaldaeans gave this omen to Nearchus who communicated it to the king.

<sup>75</sup> Smelik (1978–1979) 96; van der Spek (2003) 55–51; Boiy (2004) 112. Diodorus (112.3) records that the Babylonian priests also urged Alexander to rebuild the ‘tomb of Bel’ in order to avoid the unfavourable omen. See van der Spek (2003) 48–52 for the astronomical signs that may have been interpreted by the priests as bad omens.



prevent the danger that the omen forecast. Arrian states that the eunuch chamberlains around the throne did not remove the man because of a Persian custom (*Anab.* 7.24.3).<sup>76</sup> But, when properly related to Babylonian royal traditions, there is a very strong case that the Classical sources were describing a *Mesopotamian* substitute king ritual, rather than any Persian custom. This was an ancient Babylonian apotropaic rite that protected the king by transferring whatever danger he faced onto another man who was briefly made king.<sup>77</sup> The Chaldaeans had presumably effected this rite in order to divert the danger faced by Alexander after he ignored their warning and entered the city.<sup>78</sup>

A.B. Bosworth has argued that Alexander's concern for Babylon and its political traditions led him to install his brother Philip Arrhidaeus as the official local king of Babylonia (*šar Bābili*) from 324/3 BC.<sup>79</sup> This interesting theory was derived from the discrepancies between the figures given for the length of Philip's reign in various sources: both the *Saros Canon* and the king list of Uruk give a period of six years for Philip's rule, but other documents refer to the eighth year of his reign.<sup>80</sup> Bosworth solved this problem by rejecting the view that the eighth year mentioned in these documents was merely posthumous dating, and instead argued that Philip's first year was 324/3 BC as a local Babylonian king. Attractive as this theory is as a way of demonstrating Alexander's genuine respect for Babylonian political institutions, it must be rejected on two grounds. First, the astronomical diaries all place Philip's first regnal year in 323/2 BC, the same year he was chosen Macedonian king after Alexander's death.<sup>81</sup> Secondly, no cuneiform document can be found which provides evidence of any kingship in Babylon for Philip in the year 324/323.<sup>82</sup>

Despite this, there is some evidence that Alexander regarded Babylon as a type of 'capital' of his Asian empire and possibly one of the future capitals of a vaster imperial realm. Strabo reports that the king transferred the wealth of Persis to Susa, but 'did not regard Susa as a royal residence, but rather Babylon, which he intended to build up still further',<sup>83</sup> and that Alexander explicitly preferred Babylon, since it surpassed other cities in terms of size (Strabo 15.3.10). Later, after the capture of Ecbatana, Alexander transferred his imperial treasury—and all the wealth of the Achaemenids stored in Susa, Persepolis, and Pasargadae—to the city of Babylon, although he unfortunately made a disastrous choice in the appointment of Harpalus

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<sup>76</sup> See also Diod. 17.116.2–4; Plut. *Alex.* 73.7–9.

<sup>77</sup> Parpola (1983) XXII–XXXII; van der Spek (2003) 51; Panaino (2000) 43; Briant (2002) 863.

<sup>78</sup> Smelik (1978–1979) 102–107; Boiy (2004) 113.

<sup>79</sup> Bosworth (1992) 75–79.

<sup>80</sup> Bosworth (1992) 75–79; Boiy (2004) 114.

<sup>81</sup> Boiy (2004) 115.

<sup>82</sup> Boiy (2004) 115.

<sup>83</sup> οὐδὲ τοῦθ' ἡγεῖτο τὸ βασιλείον, ἀλλὰ τὴν Βαβυλῶνα, καὶ διενεοῖτο αὐτὴν προσκατασκευάζειν (Strabo 15.3.9).

as supervisor of the money.<sup>84</sup> Although Schachermeyr rightly questioned the idea that Alexander ever regarded Babylon as a single 'capital' in the modern sense, even his skepticism conceded that the city was probably envisaged by Alexander as the centre of his Asian empire.<sup>85</sup>

A final sign of Alexander's regard for Babylon was his use of Babylonian priests. Plutarch records that the sight of an omen that particularly revolted Alexander caused him to have himself purified by the Babylonians who were present on his campaigns for this purpose.<sup>86</sup> Alexander's regard for the abilities of Babylonian priests – despite his suspicion of their motives in the last year of his life – was rather similar to his use of Egyptian seers, whom he highly respected for their skill in astrology (Curt. 4.10.4).

### Conclusion

Unlike the Persians, who had little experience with foreign kings, the Babylonians had a long history of non-native dynasties. This, along with Alexander's interest in the Babylonian temples (which was a fundamental part of the native ideology of kingship), allowed him to win over the priests and fulfil the local criteria for a legitimate king to some degree. In the final year of Alexander's reign, there were signs of discord, but the Babylonian priests were concerned enough about their new king to institute a substitute king ritual. Alexander in turn had planned to make Babylon one of his royal capitals. As in Egypt, Alexander's relations with the local elite were reasonably successful, but there were always limits on how deeply he involved himself in native royal traditions, as we have no evidence for his involvement in the most important local ceremonies of investiture and kingship.

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<sup>84</sup> Diod. 17.108.4; Ath. 13.595a–f.

<sup>85</sup> Schachermeyr (1970) 74–77. See in particular Schachermeyr (1970) 76: 'Was Alexander mit Babylon beabsichtigte, war also etwas anderes. Nicht Hauptstadt sollte die Kapitale sein, wohl aber die gewaltigste Zentrale in ganz Vorderasien. Hierfür eignete sie sich geographisch, kommerziell, kulturell und als Sitz erhabener göttlicher Mächte. Ein ähnliches Zentrum war für die Levante bereits in Alexandria im Entstehen. Ein drittes würde vielleicht einmal in Syrakus oder Karthago aufblühen. Doch keines würde Hauptstadt sein, denn das Haupt dieses Reichs war nicht eine Stadt, nicht eine Beamtenzentrale, sondern allein Alexander, wo immer er weilte.'

<sup>86</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 57.4: ἐκαθάρθη μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν Βαβυλωνίων, οὓς ἐξ ἔθους ἐπήγετο πρὸς τὰ τοιαῦτα ... . On the Chaldaean, see Hamilton (1969) 158; Thomsen (1988) 93–101.

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