

THE LAST IMPERIALIST IN THE RELIGIO-POLITICAL ENTANGLEMENT OF ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA: NEBUCHADNEZZAR II

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Makale Bilgisi

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Abstract

The late 7th century BCE marked the beginning of a distinct era for the lands of Mesopotamia. The Neo-Assyrian Empire, which had expanded its dominion through transboundary campaigns triggered by imperialist policies and thus reached the zenith of its power, began to decline due to internal and external challenges. In this period of disintegration, Babylon emerged as the foremost power to capitalize on Assyria's vulnerability. The policies pursued by Nabopolassar, who spearheaded the independence of Neo-Babylon, and later by his son Nebuchadnezzar II, who transformed the state into an empire, would bring significant developments in Mesopotamian history. Nebuchadnezzar II, the most prominent king of the Neo-Babylonian period, implemented an entirely expansionist agenda to expand his borders and consolidate his power, particularly in the region's strategic locations. Egypt's encouragement of smaller kingdoms, especially the Kingdom of Judah, to rebel against Babylon often forced Nebuchadnezzar II to suppress these uprisings. Ultimately, Nebuchadnezzar II's wrath

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against Egypt-aligned Judah resulted in a particularly harsh action. The conquest of Jerusalem and the subsequent deportation of large segments of the Judahite population to Babylon left enduring scars on Judahite cultural memory. In his policies, Nebuchadnezzar II consistently claimed the support of the god Marduk. The Marduk-centric military power became the most legitimate instrument of Nebuchadnezzar II's imperialist expansion. This article aims to reveal the effects of Nebuchadnezzar II's understanding of faith on state administration and the reflections of this situation, especially on the people of Judah and the region.

Keywords: The god Marduk, Heavenly Religion, Babylon, Jerusalem.

Eski Mezopotamya'da Din-Siyaset Sarmalında Son Emperyalist: II. Nebukadnezar

Geniş Özet

MÖ VII. yüzyılın sonları, Mezopotamya toprakları için farklı bir sürecin başlangıcıydı. Emperyalist politikaların tetiklediği, sınırları aşan seferler sayesinde hâkimiyet alanını genişleten ve böylece gücünü zirveye taşıyan Yeni Asur İmparatorluğu, karşılaştığı iç ve dış sorunların etkisiyle güç kaybetmişti. Taht kavgaları ve iç isyanlar, devlet otoritesi üzerinde tahribata yol açmıştı. Bu istikrarsızlık doğal olarak, yönetim mekanizmasını dış etkilere karşı savunmasız bıraktı. İmparatorluğun, çağdaşlarına sağladığı üstünlük günden güne erirken, değişen siyasi koşullarda yeni rakipler ortaya çıkarmaktaydı. Asur'un parçalanma sürecinde, bu zafiyetten yararlanmayı başaran ilk rakip, Babil oldu. Zira Babil, Yeni Asur kralları tarafından bölgede siyasi ve askerî politikaların uzun yıllar hedefi olmuştu.

Asur kralı Asurbanipal ile en geniş sınırlarına ulaşan Yeni Asur İmparatorluğu, onun ölümünden sonra zayıflamıştı. Bu süreçte Nabopolassar'ın, Medler ile kurduğu ittifak neticesinde Ninive'nin düşmesine katkıda bulundu. Asur'un bölgedeki gücü sona ererken Nabopolassar, Harran'a kaçan ve Mısır desteği ile direnmeye çalışan son Asur kralı II. Assur-uballit'i ve ardından Mısır ordularını MÖ 605'te mağlup etmeyi başardı. Bu Nabopolassar'ın ve Yeni Babil'in Mezopotamya'da hâkimiyetini ilan etmesi anlamına geliyordu. Sık sık Asur baskınlarıyla karşılaşan Babil, Nabopolassar'ın doğru zamanda yaptığı hamle ile bu baskıya bir son verme şansını da yakalamış oldu. Artık Babil'i bekleyen yalnızca bağımsızlık değil aynı zamanda bölgenin yeni siyasi gücü olma fırsatıydı. Böylece, Mezopotamya'daki bu hegemonya mücadelesinde Asur İmparatorluğu düşerken Babil yükselişe geçti. Nabopolassar'ın Yeni Asur yönetimine karşı başlattığı isyanın başarıya ulaşması yeni bir dönemin kapılarını açmıştır. Nabopolassar'dan sonra tahtı devralan oğlu II. Nebukadnezar dönemi ise devletin siyasi gücünün zirvesi olarak tanımlanacaktı.

Yeni Babil'in bağımsızlığını başlatan Nabopolassar'ın ve sonrasında devleti imparatorluğa dönüştüren oğlu II. Nebukadnezar'ın izlediği politikalar, Mezopotamya tarihinde önemli gelişmeler getirecekti. Yeni Babil döneminin öne çıkan kralı II. Nebukadnezar, sınırlarını genişletme ve bilhassa bölgenin stratejik konumlarında gücünü perçinlemek adına sömürüye dayalı bir politika izledi. Yeni Babil kralının izlediği siyaset esasında yüzlerce yıl devam etmiş olan Asur geleceğinden farklı değildi. Amurruların ve Babil şehrinin tanrısı olan ve Hammurabi ile ün kazanan tanrı Marduk, yeniden yıldızı parlayan bir tanrı olacak ve II. Nebukadnezar'ın siyasi başarılarında ve Babil emperyalizminin meşrulaştırılmasında temel rolü üstlenecekti. Bir başka ifadeyle yıllarca devam eden ve Asur emperyalizminin meşru kılıcı olan tanrı Asur'un yerinde artık Babil'in millî tanrısı

Marduk oturacaktı. Nebukadnezar ile Mezopotamya coğrafyasında otorite kurmayı başaran Babil devleti din-siyaset sarmalında adım adım yayılma sürecine girerken beraberinde de pek çok riski göze alıyordu. Çünkü, Mısır tehlikesi bir yana Babil'in egemenlik alanında pek çok etnik kökeni barındıran geniş bir coğrafya bulunuyordu.

Mezopotamya'da bölgenin güç dengelerini her an değiştirebilecek olan hamleleri yapmak üzere bekleyen rakipler hiç eksik olmamaktaydı. Bunların başında özellikle Yeni Asur dönemi sona ererken fırsat kollayan Mısır, Asur'dan kalan alanların Yeni Babil kontrolüne geçmesiyle hedefine ulaşamamıştı. Ancak Mısır'ın hedefinden vazgeçmediği kısa sürede anlaşılmıştı. Mısır artık Yeni Babil'in Mezopotamya topraklarındaki en güçlü rakibi olarak her fırsatta atağa geçiyordu. Böylece çağın iki büyük devletinin karşı karşıya gelmesi kaçınılmaz bir hâl almıştı. Bu etmenler ile II. Nebukadnezar ilk yıllarını bölgenin stratejik konumlarında yer alan ve olası tehditleri barındıran Mısır, Suriye ve Filistin hattını kontrol etme çabasıyla geçirmiştir. Zira bölgedeki otoriteyi sağlamadan hedefinde olan Anadolu seferlerine yönelmesi büyük bir risk barındırmaktaydı. Bunun yanı sıra Mısır'ın başta Yahuda Krallığı olmak üzere daha küçük krallıkları Babil'e karşı isyana teşvik etmesi II. Nebukadnezar'ı sık sık bu ayaklanmaları bastırma çabasına itti. Nihayetinde II. Nebukadnezar'ın Mısır yanlısı Yahuda'ya karşı bu öfkesi oldukça sert bir eylem ile sonuçlandı. Kudüs'ün fethinden Yahuda halkının Babil'e sürgününe dek uzanan bu süreç, Yahuda halkının zihninde travmatik izler bıraktı. II. Nebukadnezar, Suriye-Filistin hattını kontrol etmek adına Mısır ile karşı karşıya gelmiş ve MÖ 605 yılında Karkamiş'ta Mısır kuvvetlerini mağlup etmiştir. Askeri seferlerinde ulaştığı başarıyla gücünü pekiştiren II. Nebukadnezar, sıradaki hedefi olan Kudüs'e ilerlemiştir. MÖ 592 yılında kral ve soylular dahil olmak üzere esir ve ganimetlerle dönmüştür. Böylece II. Nebukadnezar, devletinin hâkimiyet alanını Sumer ve Akad ülkesine genişletmiş; Kudüs'ten Asur topraklarına, Kilikya'dan Basra Körfezi'ne dek uzanan güçlü bir imparatorluğa dönüştürmüştür. Marduk merkezli askeri güç, II. Nebukadnezar'ın emperyalist yayılmasının en meşru aracı oldu. Ne var ki, Marduk'un gücü de Babil devletinin siyasi çıkmazları, iç ve dış tehditleri giderek artarken tanrı Marduk'un da gücü doğal olarak kırılmaya başladı. Yeni Babil devletinin siyasal başarısında din faktörü nasıl baş roldeyse, çöküşünde de ana etken oldu. Zira Nebukadnezar'ın şiddetle takip ettiği Yahuda halkının semavî inanç anlayışı kuvvetle muhtemel Mezopotamya toplumlarında kısa sürede taraf-tar buldu ve köklü Mezopotamya devlet yönetim anlayışını temelden sarsmaya başladı. Asırlardır devam eden görünen tanrı destekli sömürüye dayanan bu yönetim anlayışı, Nebukadnezar'dan sonra hızla çözülmeye başlamıştı. Belki de Yeni Babil kralının Yahuda halkına gösterdiği kin ve nefretin temelinde Mısır yanlısı olmaktan çok bu halkın sahip olduğu inanç anlayışı yatmaktaydı.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tanrı Marduk, Semavî Din, Babil, Kudüs.

Introduction

Babylon experienced its first brilliant period in the XVIII century BC when Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC) united the Sumerian and Akkadian countries under his rule. This consolidation of power peaked with the conquest of Mari, then the Assyrian State's with-

drawal to vassal status and the expansion of its dominion to the north of Iraq. However, this power of the Babylonian Empire, led by Hammurabi, ended during the reign of his son Samsu-iluna, who took the throne after his death, and the state could only maintain its existence within the borders of Babylon.¹ The old Babylonian state came under the rule of the Kassites after the capture of Babylon by the Hittite king Murshili I in 1595 BC and experienced a Middle Kingdom period in Mesopotamia until 1115 BC. Subsequently, Babylon came under the influence of the Assyrian kings as the Central Assyrian state made itself felt in Asia Minor.²

Assyria and Babylon, two important civilizations in the history of Mesopotamia, are well known for their prolonged conflicts that had been going on for many years. In particular, the aggressive policies of the kings who ruled during the Neo-Assyrian period led to increased unrest in the region. Eventually, Babylon was overshadowed by Assyrian rule until the liberation movement of Nabopolassar (626-605 BCE). However, Assyria's dominance in the region ended with a rebellion, and the Babylonians emerged as a new central power in Mesopotamia. The rule of Babylon continued until the defeat of the last king, Nabonidus, by the Persian king Cyrus the Great in 539 BC.³

The Babylonian Chronicles, which began in 744 BC,⁴ shed light on the political atmosphere in the region. Another important source is the Old Testament, which provides information about the looting of the Jerusalem temple and the period leading up to Nebuchadnezzar II's end of the Kingdom of Judah in 587 BCE. In addition to these state-centered narratives, the private archives of the Egibis, one of the distinguished families of the period, also convey remarkable information about this period of Babylon.⁵ Further significant evidence is found in the temple archives of two major cultic

¹ Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon as World Capital", *Journal of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 3, (2008), 5-12.

² Ekrem Memiş, *Eskiçağ'da Mezopotamya* (Bursa: Ekin Basım Yayın, 2012), 140.

³ Amelie Kuhrt, *Eskiçağ'da Yakındoğu Yaklaşık MÖ. 3000-330*, trans. Dilek Şendil (İstanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2017), II/ 257.

⁴ Babylonian Chronicles (ABC no.1)- The Chronicles are annals written in Akkadian covering the years 744-668 BC. It is about the political events that affected the Babylon region. There are three different copies of the tablets preserved to this day, the best preserved of which dates back to 500-499 BC. For more information, see; Kuhrt, *Eskiçağ'da Yakındoğu*, II/257.

⁵ Kuhrt, *Eskiçağ'da Yakındoğu*, II/258.

centers: the Eanna temple complex dedicated to the goddess Ištar in Uruk, and the Ebabbar temple of the sun god Šamaš in Sippar, northern Babylonia.⁶ In line with the sources of the mentioned period, we can evaluate the policies of Nebuchadnezzar II, the famous king of Neo-Babylon, who marked the period.

The End of Assyrian Rule and the Establishment of the Neo-Babylonian State

The Assyrian State, which had an important place in the political history of Mesopotamia, ended after the brilliant period called the Neo-Assyrian Period (911-612 BC). While the Assyrians expanded the borders with the successful military campaigns of ambitious kings during this period, their enemies naturally increased. For the Assyrian kings, Babylon was an extension of their empire rather than a provincial center. The kings of the Sargonid Period, in particular, saw themselves as the legitimate kings of Babylon and tried to make Babylon a royal capital.⁷

Following Nabopolassar's self-declaration as king, he began a struggle against he started a battle against Šîn-šar-iškun, who succeeded Ashurbanipal.⁸ At the same time, the fact that the warrior king Nabopolassar, who aspired to Babylonian rule, was a former Assyrian governor triggered polarization in the Assyrian administration.⁹ Ultimately, the collapse of Neo-Assyria, the mighty empire of Mesopotamia, left lasting effects on the memories. The idea that the punishment of the gods rewarded the personal ambition, arrogance, and crimes of the kings also draws attention in the texts of Nabopolassar, who is considered the founder of Neo-Babylon, and later Nebuchadnezzar II, who trusted the wisdom of the gods and emphasized his piety. This was considered a powerful argument by the subsequent kings, who used it to highlight the state's basic identity and establish the founding story.¹⁰ It is also important because

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⁶ Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "The Neo-Babylonian (Chaldean) Empire", *The Encyclopedia of Empire*, ed. John M. MacKenzie (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2016) 2.

⁷ Beaulieu, "Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon as World Capital", 9; Yasin Topaloğlu – Serhat Uslu, "Asur Devleti'nin Yıkılışı ve Medler", *Eski Mezopotamya'nın Siyasi Tarihi*, ed. L. Gürkan Gökçek vd. (İstanbul: Değişim Yayınları, 2020), 292-302.

⁸ Beaulieu, "Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon as World Capital", 5.

⁹ L. Gürkan Gökçek, *Asurlular* (Ankara: Bilgin Kültür Sanat Yayınları, 2015), 222.

¹⁰ Eckart Frahm (ed.), *A Companion to Assyria* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 191.

it demonstrates that elements of religion and belief manifest themselves in every period of history and every area of life.¹¹

Babylonia sought an alliance to end the already weakening Assyrian domination permanently. Babylon found this quest in the support of the Medes and Scythians, and the Assyrians, who were forced to retreat to the north, could not avoid defeat with the fall of the capital Nineveh in 612 BC after the attacks of the Babylonian-Medde-Scythian alliance and a siege that lasted for three months.¹²

The Neo-Babylonian State and Nabopolassar

With the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and its withdrawal from the political stage, the Neo-Babylonian Empire (626-539 BC) rose in the region. With the accession of Nabopolassar to the throne, Babylon continued the imperialist policies left over from Assyria and started raids on Anatolian lands.¹³ Because the plans of the kings who ruled in Mesopotamia on the Anatolian geography were a policy that continued for ages. The main reasons for this policy are that Anatolia has rich mines, timber, stone, and a workforce. These relations came to the fore in the first millennium BC, especially politically.

Nabopolassar, the owner of the new Babylonian throne, made his first move on Assyria, which would make a name for himself on the political stage. The Babylonian Chronicles record that these military campaigns were carried out jointly by the Babylonian and Median forces from 610 BC. A letter from Nebuchadnezzar II, son and heir apparent of Nabopolassar, to the priests of Eanna of Uruk; "The king (Nabopolassar) set out for Harran; a large Median army is with him..." statements. This statement shows the alliance of Babylon and Media.¹⁴

¹¹ Abdurrahman Küçük vd., *Dinler Tarihi* (Ankara: Berikan Yayınevi, 2011), 43.

¹² Joan Oates, Babil, çev. Fatma Çizmeli (Ankara: Arkadaş Yayınları, 2004), 135.

¹³ Mehmet Kurt, *Yazılı Kaynaklara Göre MÖ I. Binde Mezopotamya-Anadolu İlişkileri* (Ankara: Murat Kitabevi, 2007), 172; Şeyma Ay Arçın, "Orta Babil Krallığı (Kassitler) ve Babil'de İkinci İsin Hanedanlığı-Yeni Babil Krallığı", *Eski Mezopotamya'nın Siyasi Tarihi*, ed. L. Gürkan Gökçek vd. (İstanbul: Değişim Yayınları, 2020), 280-284.

¹⁴ Francis Joannès, "L'Asie Mineure méridionale d'après la documentation cunéiforme d'époque néo-babylonienne", *Anatolia Antiqua* 1 (1991), 261-266.

The statements in the texts about the independence struggle of the Neo-Babylonian State allow us to have an idea about the process:

“...In the month of Iyyar, the Assyrian army landed in Babylon. On the 12th of the month of Tisri, when the Assyrian troops attacked Babylon, the Babylonians, who came out of Babylon on the same day, fought against the Assyrian army, heavily defeating the Assyrian army and capturing its booty. For a year, there was no king in the country. On the twenty-sixth day of Marcheswan, Nabopolassar sat on the Babylonian throne. (This) It was the beginning of Nabopolassar's reign. The gods of the land of Susa, whom the Assyrians had taken and settled in Uruk, allowed Nabopolassar to return to the city of Susa in the month of Adar.”¹⁵

Nabopolassar asserted his dominance in Mesopotamia, defeating the last Assyrian king, Assur-uballit II, who fled to Harran and tried to resist with Egyptian support, and then the Egyptian armies in 605 BC.¹⁶ It is known that Nebuchadnezzar II, as crown prince, organized expeditions in different regions simultaneously with his father, Nabopolassar. In 607 BC, Nebuchadnezzar II captured and plundered mountain fortresses with his troops, returning to Babylon with heavy booty. After this lucrative return, his father Nabopolassar set out to eliminate the threat of the Egyptian armies on the Euphrates valley. He marched to Kimuḫu, west of the Euphrates River, a little south of Carchemish, and captured and plundered it in 607 BC. The city of Kimuḫu was strategically located for river crossing, and its capture by the Babylonian king meant to hinder Egypt's advance in the region. Nabopolassar then advanced to the east bank of the Euphrates River and sent troops to the small towns of Šunadiri, Elammu, and Daḫammu, which guarded the river gorge. These towns provided a connecting line to the Suḫu and ẖindanu regions downriver.¹⁷

The statements in the text from the period of Nabopolassar emphasize the divine source of the power he had in his conquests:

¹⁵ Donald John Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings (626-556 BC) in the British Museum* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1961), 51.

¹⁶ Kemalettin Köroğlu, *Eski Mezopotamya Tarihi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016), 200.

¹⁷ Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings*, 21.

“By the words of Nebo and Marduk, who supported my sovereignty, and by the great furious weapons of the terrible Girra, who dispersed my enemies, I conquered Subari, and when I turned its land into a heap of ruins...”¹⁸

After the capture of Kimuḫu in 606 BCE, progress continued for the city of Carchemish. Neo-Babylon conquered most of the territory ruled by Assyria. Thus, after the fall of Assyria, it was inevitable that Babylon and Egypt would face each other for control of the region.¹⁹ Under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar II, son of Nabopolassar, Babylon was the victor of the battle with the Egyptian forces for Carchemish in 605 BC, and the Egyptian army was forced to retreat to Hamat. Babylon, the new ruler of Mesopotamian politics, would be one of the most powerful states in the region until the Persian invasion in 539 BC.²⁰

The Neo-Babylonian State During the Reign of Nebuchadnezzar II

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Nebuchadnezzar II ascended the throne of Babylon, and he expanded his sphere of influence in the region and managed to make a name for himself with his military campaigns. Egypt, which wanted to have a say in the politics of Asia Minor, encountered Babylon, which settled in most of the Assyrian lands and was gradually rising. Psammethikos I, the first king of the so-called Late Period (664-332 BC), in which political unity was restored in Egyptian history, sought ways to protect his political future against the changing balance of power. Meanwhile, on the death of Psammethikos I, his son Nekho II ascended the throne of Egypt, preparing to face his new rival, Nebuchadnezzar II.

Nekho II, king of Egypt, defeated the Kingdom of Judah in the territory of Megiddo, seized part of the Syrian-Palestinian line, and continued his advance westward, but was met with the intervention of Nebuchadnezzar II.²¹ In addition, excavations at Carchemish show that this city was under strong Egyptian influence during the

¹⁸ Stephan Langdon, *Building Inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire Part I Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1905), 49-54.

¹⁹ Marc Van de Mieroop, *History of the Ancient Near East ca.3000-323 BC* (USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 276.

²⁰ Joannès, "L'Asie Mineure méridionale", 261.

²¹ Turgut Yiğit, *Eski Mısır Tarihi* (Ankara: Bilgin Kültür Sanat Yayınları, 2019), 156.

reigns of Psamtik I and Nekho II before its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar II in 605 BC.²² Nebuchadnezzar II, who defeated Egypt at Carchemish on the banks of the Euphrates in 605 BC, continued his westward advance by removing Egypt from Syria and Palestine.²³ This battle, considered the first and most important victory of Nebuchadnezzar II, destroyed Egypt's power in Western Asia.

“Under his (Marduk's) supreme protection, I have crossed distant countries, distant mountains from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea, steep roads, unpaved roads, roads that are cut off and impossible to attain, impassable roads, without thirst (without water sources) and subdued those who disobeyed, took my enemies captive, gave the land a good government, and made the people prosper...”²⁴

The victory of Carchemish gave Nebuchadnezzar II control of the Syrian-Palestinian line. In this way, the process leading to the conquest of Jerusalem, one of the region's most important centers, began. It is known that Jehoiachin, a subject of the Egyptian king Nekho, surrendered to the king of Babylon, and some Jews were taken captive to Babylon.²⁵ Before embarking on the campaign, Nebuchadnezzar II forced the small states of Syria and Palestine to submit to Babylonian rule and send tribute. Thus, it is thought that the cities of Damascus, Tyre, and Sidon recognized the Babylonian rule. Jehoiachin's surrender to Nebuchadnezzar II in 605-604 B.C.E. ended the direct control of Judah by King Nekho II of Egypt. However, loyalty to the king of Babylon would last only three years, and revolts would begin again at the instigation of Egypt. Later, it is known that Nebuchadnezzar II advanced to Ashkelon and plundered the city. Nebuchadnezzar II, who strengthened his dominance with successful military campaigns, advanced to Jerusalem, his next target. He returned in 592 BC with captives and booty, including the king and nobles.²⁶ As a result, Nebuchadnezzar II expanded the dominion of his state to Sumer and Akkadian. It cre-

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²² Siegfried H. Horn, "The Babylonian Chronicle and the Ancient Calender of the Kingdom of Judah", *Andrew University Seminary Studies (AUSS)* 5/1 (1967), 19.

²³ Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings*, 24.

²⁴ Robert Francis Harper, "The Old and New Testament Student Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon (604-561 BC)", *JSTOR XIV* (July 1899), 4.

²⁵ Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings*, 25-26.

²⁶ Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings*, 28.

ated a powerful empire that stretched from Jerusalem to Assyria, from Cilicia to the Persian Gulf.²⁷

In the texts transcribed by Rawlinson²⁸, Nebuchadnezzar II describes himself;

"I am the first son of Nabû-abla-usur (Nabopolassar), king of Babylon, supreme prince, favorite of Marduk, supreme pater, lover of Nabû, judge, possessor of wisdom, seeker of the path of his divinity, fearful of his lordship, daily contemplating the decoration (restoration) of Esagila and Ezida, and constantly taking care of pious affairs for Babylon (Babylon) and Barzippa (Borsippa), tireless attendant, wise, pious, restoring Esagila and Ezida." He introduced it with his statements.²⁹

The expansion policies of the Mesopotamia-based Neo-Babylonian Empire also meant an attempt to control the region's strategic centers and international trade routes. In addition, the presence of a person named Hanno of Phoenician origin, who had the title of *rab tamkari ša šarri* (chief merchant of the king) in the clay prism found in the northern palace of Babylon and dating back to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, reveals the systematic structure of the expanding trade networks and the employment of foreigners. The Akkadian equivalent of Hanno, a Phoenician name, is *Ḫanūnu*, indicating that it was an important function of the Phoenician merchants. Although it is known that Tyre was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar II in 574 BC, there is no clear information about the disruption of these commercial activities. This shows that the Neo-Babylonian Empire did not hinder its regional interests.³⁰

The western expeditions, which had an important place among the policies of Nebuchadnezzar II, were mainly made for the supply of iron mines, which were an essential material in producing weap-

²⁷ Beaulieu, "Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon", 6.

²⁸ For more information, see. Henry Creswicke Rawlinson, The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia I: A Selection from the Historical Inscriptions of Chaldea, Assyria and Babylonia I/ (PDF: Internet Archives East India House Inscription (EIH), 1861), 53-64.

²⁹ Harper, "The Old and New Testament Student", 3.

³⁰ Adolf Leo Oppenheim, "Essay on Overland Trade in the First Millennium BC", *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*/21 (Special Volume Honoring Professor Albrecht Goetze, 1967), 253-254; Beaulieu, "Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon", 6-7.

ons. In this direction, the target was the territory of Cilicia. In the texts of Nebuchadnezzar II, it is recorded that the campaigns against Hume and Pirindu (593-591 BCE) extended to the borders of Lydia. Texts from the temple of the goddess Ištar in southern Babylon at Ebabbar in Sippar and Uruk indicate that control there was over raw materials and workmanship in particular. In the 10th year of Nabopolassar's reign, iron ore was brought from Hume to be used to construct the Temple of Uruk. It should be noted that the king's expeditions were not only for the supply of minerals or products, but also for the empire's labor force in construction, weaving, and various crafts.³¹

Nebuchadnezzar II, who ascended the new Babylonian throne, spent the first decade of his reign centered around Egypt, Syria, and Palestine, which were strategically located in the region and included the most immediate possible threats. After the king established political control in the area, he turned his attention to Anatolian expeditions. First, Nebuchadnezzar II's armies marched against Hume and Pirindu. It can be thought that the purpose of the Cilician campaign was to consolidate the western campaigns. However, it is known that after the death of Nebuchadnezzar II, his successors again organized expeditions to the region.³² It is known that during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, who conquered the lands of Hume, which are associated with the iron mine in the texts, the western border of the Neo-Babylonian Empire reached the territory of Lydia.³³ Although most of the fragments of the tablet published by the British Museum, which contain three columns of cuneiform text on each side, are damaged, the statements in Column V contain information about the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II. The text mentions the name of Egypt in the first place when listing the king's conquests, which points to Nebuchadnezzar II, the first king of Babylon to rule Egypt. Egypt is given as the southwesternmost border of the empire, while Hume, Pirindu, and Lydia, which form the northwestern borders, are also listed. The places mentioned in the text are attributed to Nebuchadnezzar II because they are counted not only as imperial borders but also as conquests.³⁴

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³¹ Joannès, "L'Asie Mineure méridionale", 263-264.

³² Kurt, *MÖ I. Binde Mezopotamya-Anadolu İlişkileri*, 173.

³³ Joannès, "L'Asie Mineure méridionale", 266.

³⁴ Wilfred George Lambert, "Nebuchadnezzar King of Justice", *Iraq* 27/1 (Spring 1965), 2.

Nebuchadnezzar II, who had the ideal of recreating Babylon, benefited from the resources of the lands he dominated in his intensive construction and restoration. So much so that in the document, which refers to the restoration of the South Palace, the main royal palace of Babylon³⁵, it clearly expresses the tribute and labor supply with the following statements;

"From the upper sea to the lower sea; All the lands, to which my lord the god Marduk, by his supreme command, had given me, brought their heavy tribute in his presence. I gave them hoes and imposed the curse of drudgery on them to build the palace called the "People's House of Wonders," which is the residence of my kingdom."³⁶

In the said restoration, courtiers, high-ranking officials, notables of the period, vassal kings from the Levant region, and the kings of Tyre, Sidon, Gaza, and Ashdod.

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The Source of Nebuchadnezzar II's Power: The God Marduk and Imperialist Expansion

From the records of Nebuchadnezzar II's construction activities, it is understood that the cities under his rule had responsibilities to the king. Chief among the duties was to carry out obligations such as transporting workers and building materials to Babylon and bearing other costs. In other words, it is possible to say that in almost every city in the area of domination of the empire, there are certain obligations at the point of supplying various resources according to the conditions of the city. Earlier, it was seen that the policies of the Assyrian kings, which were similar to the provincial system, were also carried out by Nebuchadnezzar II. The wording in the texts of Nebuchadnezzar II is not as harsh as the language used by the Assyrian kings, but it is manifested in praise and complete submission to the god Marduk.³⁷ In other words, Nebuchadnezzar II preferred a more moderate style while taking his power from Marduk in his policies.

³⁵ The document in question is called "Nebuchadnezzar's Court Document or Court Document". It was given this name because it included administrative officials and courtiers of the period. For detailed information, see; Beaulieu, "Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon", 8.

³⁶ Beaulieu, "Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon", 8.

³⁷ Beaulieu, "Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon", 8.

The god Marduk played an essential role in the ancient Mesopotamian belief system and was the patron god of the city of Babylon from the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC. According to cuneiform sources, over time, he assumed the powers of Asarluhhi, the local god of the city of Eridu and the son of the god Enki. He began to be referred to as the son of Enki/Ea by the society.³⁸ According to the expressions used by Nebuchadnezzar II in a text of the construction of the palace in Babylon called the "Palace of the North", the devotion to Marduk, the national god of the Babylonians, is important in terms of showing that he was integrated with the city of Babylon. However, it is stated that the god Marduk guarded the main entrance to the town and that it was his fortified city.

"My residence in Babylon had become unsuitable for my royal status. Because the fear of my lord Marduk was in my heart, I did not change his street, I did not change the location of his temple, nor did I close the irrigation canal to enlarge the center of my kingdom in Babylon, his fortified city..."³⁹

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As can be understood, Nebuchadnezzar II did not put the god Marduk at the forefront even in his restoration activities. Likewise, the god Marduk was the vehicle that provided the impetus for his military campaigns and legitimized them. Finally, King Nebuchadnezzar II, like the Assyrian emperors, turned west, where the fertile land and caravan routes intersected. Between 605 and 604 BCE, when Nebuchadnezzar II's army was advancing upstream of the Euphrates River toward Carchemish, it is likely that the Egyptian forces withdrew from Kimuḥu and the city of Quramati to the south of it.⁴⁰ Egypt's quest to dominate the line of Palestine was a significant threat to Nebuchadnezzar II. To cut this connection, he turned his direction to Jerusalem and began the expeditions that would be remembered as one of the most important periods in Jewish history. Nebuchadnezzar II, who made the first expedition in 597 BC, set out on his second campaign in 587 BC with the rebellion that broke out shortly after.⁴¹ The revolt movements in Judah, with the sup-

³⁸ Okay Pekşen, "İnanç ve Tanrılar", *Eski Mezopotamya'nın Kültür Tarihi*, ed. L. Gürkan Gökçek vd. (İstanbul: Değişim Yayınları, 2022), 264.

³⁹ Beaulieu, "Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon", 9.

⁴⁰ Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings*, 23.

⁴¹ Beaulieu, "Neo-Babylonian (Chaldean) Empire", 1.

port of Egypt in the region, were damaging the authority of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. In 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar II deposed the local king and replaced him with a king of his own choosing, exiling part of the population to Babylon.⁴²

The Neo-Babylonian kings, who began to regain their political power in Mesopotamia, would not ignore the gains of commercial activities. Cities such as Babylon, Sippar, and Borsippa underwent a significant change along the Euphrates River. Of course, all this work was quite costly. Therefore, to cover the costs of construction and restoration, Nebuchadnezzar II continued the exploitative traditions of the Assyrian kings. As was customary, the king took advantage of groups of artisans and workers by resorting to extortion, plunder, and exile methods.

The cities of Babylon became major commercial centers, especially during the Neo-Babylonian period. However, the fact that the Neo-Babylonian kings left the temple administration in the cities to the monopoly of the families from Babylon can be considered as a strategy that increased loyalty to the center. In addition to the indigenous people of Babylon, the Aramaic and Chaldeans, seminomadic groups of West Semitic origin, also began to gain strength in the countryside through tribal organization. The fact that some Babylonian kings in the VIII and VII centuries BC linked their ancestry to the Chaldeans can be perceived as an indication of this strengthening. Another example that proves this situation is that the Chaldean Bit-Yakin tribe in the south supported the Babylonian side in the struggle against Assyria. The Neo-Babylonian Empire is also often referred to as Chaldean. At the same time, the Bible identifies Nebuchadnezzar II as king of Babylon and king of the Chaldeans, and claims to have invaded Judah with the armies of the Arameans and Chaldeans.⁴³

In 604 BC, Nebuchadnezzar II turned his attention to the important coastal city of Ashkelon, which suffered the destruction of Babylonian armies. Babylonian sources indicate that the western military expeditions to Phoenicia and the roads connecting it with

⁴² Mieroop, *History of the Ancient Near East*, 276; Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings*, 67-69.

⁴³ Adolf Leo Oppenheim, *Mesopotamia* (USA: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 60-73.

Jordan and Northern Arabia proceeded according to the purpose of domination. Of course, these roads were important as networks connecting different geographies and where long-distance trade activities took place.⁴⁴

The Etemenanki Inscription, one of the construction inscriptions from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, describes the renovation of the ziggurat in Babylon and provides a list of the workers who worked there. After the text mentions the soldiers or workers (ābē) of Šamaš and Marduk; It speaks of the participation of those from the lands of your, Uruk, Larsa, Eridu, Kullab, Nēmed-Laguda, and Ugar (considered Ugar-Šallu). Then the districts of Larak, Puqūdu, Bīt-Dakkūri, Bīt-Amukāni, and Birātu are listed, and finally Dēr, Agade, Arrapha, and Lahīru. All of them are referred to as "the whole country of Akkad and Assyria from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea, the governors of Hatti, the kings of Eber-Nāri".⁴⁵ It is seen that the people living in the territories ruled by Nebuchadnezzar II took part in the affairs of the empire, and the king once again emphasized divine support.

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"I have summoned to me the peoples who dwell far away, to whom my lord Marduk has commissioned me, and whom the hero Šamaš has given me; From all countries and inhabited from the upper sea to the lower seas, from distant lands, from distant settlements, kings of distant mountains and distant regions living in the upper and lower seas, with their power [šīrtu] Lord Marduk stuffed my hands to bear his yoke, and I also summoned Šamaš and Marduk's subjects to build E-temin-anki.

..... [I summoned] the [people] of the land of Suedin, the kings of the distant region on the upper seashore, and the kings of the distant region on the lower seashore, and the princes of the Hittite country beyond the Euphrates, and those in the west, over whom I ruled by order of my lord Marduk, brought great cedar trees from the mountain of Lebanon to my city Babylon. I forced all the people of the scattered settlements that

⁴⁴ Beaulieu, "Neo-Babylonian (Chaldean) Empire, 4-5.

⁴⁵ John MacGinnis, "Mobilisation and Militarisation in the Neo-Babylonian Empire", *Studies on War in the Ancient Near East: Collected Essay on Military History* - AOAT 372, ed. Jordi Vidal (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 154.

Marduk had bestowed on me to serve for the construction of E-temin-anki and placed the dupšikku on them...⁴⁶

Vanderhooff, in his comment on the list Puqūdu stated that Bīt-Dakkūri, Bīt-Amukāni, and Birātu were cities or tribal areas in central Babylon. At the same time, Dēr, Arrapha, and Lahīru were east of the Tigris and south of Lower Zab. He pointed out that the kings of Eber-Nāri explicitly referred to the kings of the Phoenician coastal states. In contrast, the governors of Hatti referred to the governors of the interior of Syria.

In the texts of the Nebuchadnezzar II period; There are the cities of Babylon, the tribal confederations in the west, the provinces east of the Tigris such as Arrapha, Zamua, Lahīru, Dēr, the governors of the Syrian provinces (māt Hatti), the kings of the coastal cities of Phoenicia and Canaan, and the island kings who ruled in the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf.⁴⁷ On the other hand, it is understood that the aforementioned administrators and centers fulfilled their obligation to participate in the actions of Nebuchadnezzar II, which was probably an obligation. This practice may have been planned to maintain the flow of resources in the Neo-Babylonian Empire's economy and keep every region within the empire's borders under control. As a matter of fact, MacGinnis stated that the provincial system in the Neo-Babylonian Empire, unlike the Assyrian Empire period, proceeded in the form of collecting tribute in the sovereign regions of the kings in Babylon, which reveals the most prominent aspect of the foreign policy of the Babylonian state.⁴⁸

The sustainability of the expansionist policy pursued by Babylon undoubtedly depended on military campaigns. But a strong army was needed for this action. Temples played a leading role in the military's supply of manpower. This practice, which we learn mainly from construction texts, has undoubtedly evolved into transferring troops, weapons, and equipment in the case of military campaigns. It is understood that most of the soldiers provided by the temples consisted of archers; their equipment included quivers, bows, arrows, and daggers, and artisans in the service of the temple

⁴⁶ Langdon, *Building Inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire*, 149.

⁴⁷ MacGinnis, "Mobilisation and Militarisation", 154-156.

⁴⁸ MacGinnis, "Mobilisation and Militarisation", 156.

manufactured these. Akkadian and Cimmerian bows, arrows, spearheads, temple blacksmiths, and leather workers were manufactured and repaired here.⁴⁹ These practices ensure the continuity of the production of equipment and weapons, while showing that the Babylonian kings were prepared for their campaigns. It also reveals how the workforce is systematically used after successful expeditions. The records obtained at Sippar, an essential part of the Babylonian domination area,⁵⁰ are primarily about agricultural production and cost, and are insufficient for bow fiefs.

In Nebuchadnezzar II's military strategy, Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean were the priority regions. In fact, this region has never lost its importance in the historical process. The leading states of the age, Egypt, Assyria, and the Hittites, fought relentlessly for this geography that opened to the Eastern Mediterranean and where caravan trade routes intersected. Likewise, in 599 BC, the king marched with his army into Syria. He collected booty from the cities under his rule, and extorted tribute from various Arab tribes through desert raids, as the Assyrian kings had before.⁵¹ Thus, the policies of the Neo-Babylonian period were shaped by defeating the enemies and providing the resources needed by the state, rather than covering long-term plans, especially in the newly conquered lands, in a continuation of Assyrian imperialism.⁵²

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With the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar II in 597 BC, the Egyptian king Nekho II's policy of halting the Babylonian advance was jeopardized. After the death of the Egyptian king Nekho II, his successors continued similar policies. Psammetikos II, who ascended the throne in Egypt, attacked Phoenicia around 590

⁴⁹ MacGinnis, "Mobilisation and Militarisation", 157-158.

⁵⁰ John MacGinnis, *The Arrows of the Sun: Armed Forces in Sippar in the First Millennium BC* (Glashütte: Islet-Verlag, 2012), 23.

⁵¹ The Assyrian kings Sargon, Sennacherib and Asarhaddon chose to negotiate with the Assyrian provinces in order to gain more effective control over the desert tribes that constantly harassed the western Assyrian provinces. They did not neglect to take advantage of the power of the belief system by using the Arab gods to capture them. Shortly after his accession to the throne, Ashurbanipal had established a firm grip on the neighboring tribes. Three of these major tribes allied themselves with his rebellious brother Šamaš-šum-ukin. He lost control of the desert borders where the tribes in question were. For more information see, Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings* 32.

⁵² Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *A History of Babylon 2200 BC - AD 75* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 235.

BC, while Apries (588-568 BC)⁵³ attacked Sidon from the land and the city of Tyre from the sea.⁵⁴ It is understood that Egypt is still on the alert to dominate the Syrian lands, continuing to seize the slightest opportunity against the Neo-Babylonian kings.

Some tribes in the eastern part of Syria and Judah gained independence and allied with the Egyptian king Nekho II. However, Nebuchadnezzar II was determined to take control of the western Syrian desert and maintain his dominance over the regions heading south towards Egypt.

Nebuchadnezzar II besieged Jerusalem in 597 BC and succeeded in capturing the city. Jehoiachin's uncle, named Mattaniah, officially known as Zedekiah, was chosen by Nebuchadnezzar to succeed King Jehoiachin of Jerusalem. This meant that he obeyed Nebuchadnezzar II with an oath of allegiance and loyalty. After the city was captured, the Temple of Solomon and the royal treasures, Jehoiachin's family, state and military officials, and nobles, were taken to Babylon as hostages. Hebrew sources speak of probably ten thousand hostages, including about a thousand artisans and seven thousand trained soldiers.⁵⁵ Of course, it is natural that the more qualified of these people should be considered in the service of the empire. The workers involved in the construction activities were also used for agricultural production in peacetime. It is also known that mercenaries of various origins were also included in the Neo-Babylonian army.⁵⁶

However, some time after the Jerusalem expedition of the king of Babylon, rebellions arose in the lands of Elam. Zedekiah took advantage of this opportunity to ally with the Egyptian king Apries against Nebuchadnezzar II to gain independence. He also negotiated with the rulers of the cities of Edom, Moab, Tyre, and Sidon for an alliance against Babylon, but he did not send the tribute he was obliged to send to Babylon. Thereupon, Nebuchadnezzar II

⁵³ For more information see, Yusuf Ziya Özer, *Mısır Tarihi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1987), 311; Afet İnan, *Eski Mısır Tarihi ve Medeniyeti* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1987), 160.

⁵⁴ Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings*, 31-32.

⁵⁵ Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings*, 32-33.

⁵⁶ MacGinnis, "Mobilisation and Militarisation", 160; Okay Pekşen, "Asur ve Babil Kralları Tarafından İsrail ve Yahuda Krallıklarının Halklarına Uygulanan Sürgünler", *Tarihten İzler İlkçağlardan Modern Döneme*, ed. Osman Köse (Ankara: Berikan Yayınları, 2018), 21-36.

marched again on Jerusalem (587 BC). Although the Egyptian king Apries came to the aid of besieged Jerusalem, the Babylonian army managed to breach the walls of Jerusalem. Zedekiah, who escaped, was captured, and his sons were killed in front of his eyes. He was then gouged out, chained and taken to Babylon. The temples were plundered, the city walls were destroyed, and thus the Kingdom of Judah ceased to exist. In the following years, the governor of Babylon was killed due to a revolt in the lands of Judah in 582 BC. Nebuchadnezzar II intervened, and more Judahs were expelled.⁵⁷ However, unlike the Assyrian emperors, the king of Babylon boasted of constructing and restoring temples by bringing artisans from the countries he conquered, rather than exaggerating such military achievements. Of course, any achievement was attributed to the god Marduk:

The statements in one of the texts in which Nebuchadnezzar II describes the temple building activities are quite remarkable;

“At that time, for the temple of Lugal-Marada, Sir, who is at Marada, whose ancient foundation no king has seen since the old days, I sought and saw its ancient foundation, and fixed its foundation on the pedestal of my ancient ancestor, king Naram-Sin. I made an inscription with my name and put it in it.”⁵⁸

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“I lifted my hand and prayed to the lord of lords, the merciful Marduk, and my prayer arose: 'O lord of the land, divine Marduk, hear my words; can I enjoy the magnificence of the house I have built; Can I reach white old age in Babylon, can I enjoy the generations to come; In it I can receive the heavy tribute of the kings of all regions and all peoples. In it, may my descendants rule over the dark-headed peoples forever.’”⁵⁹

Upon the death of Nebuchadnezzar II, who transformed Neo-Babylon into an empire, in 562 BC, Amēl-Marduk (562-560 BC), Neriglissar (560-556 BC), and Lābāš-Marduk (556 BC) ascended the throne of Babylon, respectively. However, we do not have

⁵⁷ Mieroop, *History of the Ancient Near East*, 276; Şeyma Ay Arçın, *İsrail ve Yahuda Krallıkları Tarihi Atalar Devrinden Asur ve Babil Hakimiyetine Kadar* (İstanbul: Ayışığı Yayınları, 2016), 87; Harper, "The Old and New Testament", 6.

⁵⁸ Langdon, *Building Inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire*, 69.

⁵⁹ Langdon, *Building Inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire*, 89.

enough information about the short-term reign of these kings. The accession of Nabonidus (555-539 BC), who made important changes after Nebuchadnezzar II and was known to be of no royal origin, as the last king of the Neo-Babylonian Period, was a turning point in the history of Babylon. Unlike previous kings, Nabonidus was loyal to the moon god Sin. This situation opened a different period for the history of Neo-Babylon.⁶⁰ An attempt to break Marduk's power, which had been going on for thousands of years, would undoubtedly have been highly contradictory in Babylonian society.

In the turbulent political history of Mesopotamia, the balance of power has constantly changed, and the influence of belief systems has been undeniable in this process. It is seen that Nebuchadnezzar II, who transformed the Neo-Babylonian state into an empire and left deep traces in history with his actions, followed similar policies to the Assyrian kings. However, in the historical records of the Neo-Babylonian kings and especially Nebuchadnezzar II, the temple construction and restoration works were brought to the fore. The Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II is in complete submission to the god Marduk, keeping himself in the background as king and emphasizing his piety. So much so that while the Bibles describe in detail that the armies of Nebuchadnezzar II suppressed the revolt of Judah, conquered Jerusalem and exiled the Judahs to Babylon, the Babylonian archival texts confirm these events with indirect records.⁶¹ The inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar II do not provide information about this event, which left deep traces on Jewish history.

Of course, it was not surprising that Egypt, which threatened Nebuchadnezzar II in the region and encouraged and supported rebellions at every opportunity, repeated these actions through the Kingdom of Judah. However, the steps taken to definitively eliminate this conflict, which is generally considered a political-economic conflict of interest, have been quite severe. One of the reasons for Nebuchadnezzar II's harsh treatment of the people of Judah may have stemmed from their understanding of the Abrahamic faith. It would have been inevitable that the political understanding based on exploitation and Marduk would be shaken to its

⁶⁰ Mieroop, *History of the Ancient Near East*, 278.

⁶¹ Karen Radner, *A Short History of Babylon* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 119.

roots with this heavenly religion, because the strong influence of belief systems on society was a fact known to the rulers for a long time. An analogy of these ruthless reflexes of Nebuchadnezzar II appears with Judeo-Greek religious tensions during the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero (37-68 AD). With the outbreak of the Jewish revolts in 66 AD, the process leading to the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans began.⁶² Although written sources have prevailed in different geographies, they show that in almost every period of history, state policies have been supported and shaped by religious belief elements that are the common denominator of societies.

Conclusion

In the history of Mesopotamia, the expansionist policies pursued by the kings of the Neo-Assyrian Empire period in the first millennium BC left deep traces on Babylon, one of their rivals in the region. As a matter of fact, after the Neo-Assyrian period was over, the Babylonian kings continued the Assyrian tradition and became an important power of their age. The kings of the Neo-Babylonian State essentially continued the religion-centered policies pursued by the kings of the Neo-Assyrian State. The only thing that changed was that Marduk replaced the god Assyria. Marduk, who had been strengthened by the Old Babylonian king Hammurabi and made a national god, reappeared with the Neo-Babylonian domination and in a much stronger way.

The Neo-Babylonian State, which took shape under the leadership of Nabopolassar, who initiated the independence movement against Assyrian domination, turned into a great empire during the reign of his successor and son, Nebuchadnezzar II. During this period, the state reached its widest borders. The king had taken control of the entire region, which he called the “fertile crescent”. This also meant that the state dominated the trade routes that reached the Eastern Mediterranean. Behind the dominance and the fertile lands was the god Marduk. The god Marduk played a leading role in almost all of the royal inscriptions.

⁶² Muammer Ulutürk, “Kuşatma Altındaki Kudüs: Yahudi Tarihçi Josephus’un Gözünden Yahudi-Roma Savaşı (MS 66-73)” *Diyanet İlmî Dergisi*, 60/4 (Kudüs ve Mescid-i Aksâ 2024), 1383.

Written sources representing the Neo-Babylonian period were naturally mainly dealt with by Nebuchadnezzar II. However, the documents he left show that he was more moderate than the Assyrian kings. Rather than showing his military achievements and the brutal aspects of the state, the king preferred to talk more about the reconstruction and renovation works. However, this style was an exception for the Kingdom of Judah. This harshness was probably because the Kingdom of Judah was on the side of Egypt, the main rival at the time. Because Egypt was the biggest competitor in the Mediterranean and continental field, another reason for this oppression of the land of Judah must have been their Abrahamic faith. The source of this reaction to the people of Judah was probably the possibility of fundamentally undermining the legitimacy of Nebuchadnezzar II's imperialist policies and the prestige of the god Marduk. Nebuchadnezzar II's exile of the elite of the people of Judah and his brutal execution of the king remained a trauma in the memory of the people of Judah.

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The administrative strategy of the Neo-Babylonian Empire was a policy based entirely on the exploitation of Marduk. Especially during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, the expeditions to the west expanded the borders of the state, and labor and raw materials were obtained from the conquered places, which were used in the construction of the city of Babylon. The king shaped all his policies by attributing them to the god Marduk. The king's expansionist actions and references to Marduk in the construction processes of the state were constantly repeated. After all, the king used Marduk as a means of legitimacy. The king of Babylon based his power on ruling, reconstruction, and restoration activities on Marduk, and he attributed the source of everything he owned to Marduk. Therefore, the imperialist practices of the Babylonian kings, especially Nebuchadnezzar II, provide an important example of using religion as a tool.

As a result, throughout history, civilizations have developed some policies to have a say in the political life of the period, while maintaining and reflecting the power they have gained have followed similar ways. The elements of religious belief are used at the point of continuity of the power in question, and the belief factor is sometimes perceived as a threat to them. Although the rulers have

changed in the political picture over time, their goals have led them to follow similar policies in the religion-politics spiral.

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