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Where Did the Persian Kings Live in Babylon?

John Curtis

As is well-known, principally from contemporary sources such as the Cyrus Cylinder, the Nabonidus Chronicle and the Verse Account of Nabonidus, the Achaemenid Persian[1] king Cyrus the Great captured Babylon on or around 12 October 539 BC. Thereafter, the city was effectively under Persian control until the conquest of Alexander in 331 BC**,** although there were rebellions in the reigns of Darius in 522-521 BC and Xerxes in 484-482 BC. Babylon became one of the most important centres of the Achaemenid empire, together with Persepolis, Pasargadae, Susa and Hamadan, and, as we know from cuneiform sources, Babylon prospered economically under the Persian kings and was an important administrative centre.[2] In the late Achaemenid period there was probably also a mint at Babylon (Meadows 2005: 202, 206, nos 363-64). The city was the seat of a Persian satrap or governor, and according to classical sources the Persian kings spent several months of each year in Babylon.

In view of this 200-year Persian domination of the city, it is very surprising that the archaeological record for this period appears comparatively meagre compared with the preceding Neo-Babylonian and succeeding Seleucid periods. The evidence for building activity at Babylon in the Persian period is also quite limited.

1 In this paper the terms Persian and Achaemenid are used interchangeably.

2 The wealth of Babylon in the Achaemenid period is also attested, for example, by Herodotus (I.192; III.92).

To start with the archaeological evidence, it is apparently quite sparse, or at least it has not yet been fully recognised, which is particularly surprising considering that the residential district known as Merkes continued to be occupied during the Achaemenid period (Koldewey 1914: 240, 311-12) and there is plentiful evidence for graves of the Achaemenid period (Strommenger 1964). There are archives of tablets, but they are private archives and temple archives, and the administrative or satrapal archives, if they existed, have not been discovered (Briant 2002: 71).[3] Also, the precise provenance of most of the tablets from Babylon is unclear (Reade 1986a).[4] There are occasional discoveries of interest. For example, there are fragments of a round-topped stele of Darius (Seidl 1976; 1999)[5] showing on one side Darius with his foot on a prostrate Gaumata with two rebel kings roped together in front of him, as on the Bisitun relief. The text on the reverse of the stele apparently reproduces the Babylonian version (or part of it) of the Bisitun inscription. A badly mutilated lump of white stone, apparently in the form of addorsed bull protomes and perhaps a column capital (impost block) of Achaemenid date, was found in an east courtyard of the Southern Palace of Nebuchadnezzar (Haerinck 1997: 30). There is also a hoard of silver currency, found by Hormuzd Rasam, probably at Babylon in 1882, which included coins, a silver jar handle in the form of a winged bull, a silver earring and a silver bowl (Reade 1986b). Haerinck (1997**:** 32-33) has pointed to clay figurines that may be of Achaemenid date (Koldewey 1914: figs 150, 151),[6] and there are sporadic examples of published pottery vessels that are probably Achaemenid (e.g. Fleming 1989: fig. 3G, with references). Koldewey (1914: 267) notes that metal finger-rings, often with engraved bezels to be used as stamp-seals, became common at this period. Animal designs were particularly popular. Beyond this, there is not a great deal.

The evidence for building projects is not very much more informative. In the Cyrus Cylinder, Cyrus is at pains to stress that after capturing

3 See also Pedersén 2011. For references to tablets from the reigns of Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius and Artaxerxes with topographical information about Babylon, see George 1992: passim.

4 Around 25 of the Achaemenid period tablets from Babylon now in the British Museum, ranging in date between the reigns of Cyrus and Artaxerxes III, have interesting stamp-seal impressions. See Mitchell and Searight 2008: passim. See also Altavilla and Walker 2016.

5 See Koldewey 1914: 166. It was found in the Kasr mound, in the area of the Northern Palace.

6 It is possible that some of the many figurines from Babylon published as Late Babylonian or as Hellenistic-Parthian (e.g. Karvonen-Kannas 1995, Koldewey 1914: 277-86) might in fact be Achaemenid period.

Babylon he did not destroy the city, and this impression is confirmed in the Verse Account. Likewise, there is no evidence in the archaeological record of a destruction at this time. On the contrary, Cyrus apparently undertook some rebuilding work. In the Cylinder, he says, 'I strove to strengthen the defences of the wall Imgur-Enlil, the great wall of Babylon, and I completed the quay of baked brick on the bank of the moat which an earlier king had built but not completed its work' (Finkel 2013: 7, lines 38-39).[7] He also apparently restored an important building, but the text is broken at this point (lines 42-3). Thereafter, the textual evidence for Achaemenid building work at Babylon is sparse. Herodotus (III.159) says that, following his recapture of Babylon after the city had revolted, 'Darius destroyed their walls and reft away all their gates, neither of which things Cyrus had done at the first taking of Babylon.' However, Darius may also have constructed a new palace at Babylon according to a tablet dated to the 26th year of his reign (Briant 2002: 170, 908). According to late Greek and Roman authors, particularly Diodorus, Strabo, Arrian and Aelian, Xerxes sacked the temples in Babylon after the Babylonian revolts of 484-482 BC, but the evidence for this is disputed. It is accepted by George (2010) but rejected by Kuhrt (2010).[8] Then, as we shall see, there is a Persian-style building (the '*Perserbau*') probably built by Artaxerxes II, but this is much too small to have been a royal residence or an important administrative centre. So, where did the Persian kings live when they were in Babylon and where was their principal administrative centre?

As we have seen, Cyrus did not destroy Babylon, and in the Cyrus Cylinder, he says (line 23), 'I founded my sovereign residence within the palace (at Babylon) amid celebration and rejoicing' (Finkel 2013: 6, line 23). There are also references in Xenophon's *Cyropedia* to a palace or palaces in Babylon at the time of Cyrus. Thus, Cyrus visits the fictional Cyaxares (VIII, v. 17) and tells him that a palace has been selected for

7 This seems to be in contrast with the statement by Berossus that Cyrus demolished the outer city-wall after he captured Babylon (quoted by Reade 2000: 202; see also Rollinger 2013: 143-47), unless we presume that Cyrus repaired the inner city-wall while at the same time dismantling the outer city-wall. For archaeological evidence for the (re)building of some of the walls of Babylon in the Achaemenid period, see Koldewey 1914: 177, 182, no. 13.

8 According to Arrian (III.16.4-5), after the Battle of Gaugamela, Alexander hastened to Babylon which surrendered to him: 'On entering Babylon Alexander directed the Babylonians to rebuild the temples Xerxes destroyed, and especially the temple of Baal, whom the Babylonians honor more than any other god. . . . At Babylon too he met the Chaldaeans, and carried out all their recommendations on the Babylonian temples, and in particular sacrificed to Baal, according to their instructions.' On Xerxes and Babylon, see Waerzeggers and Seire 2018.

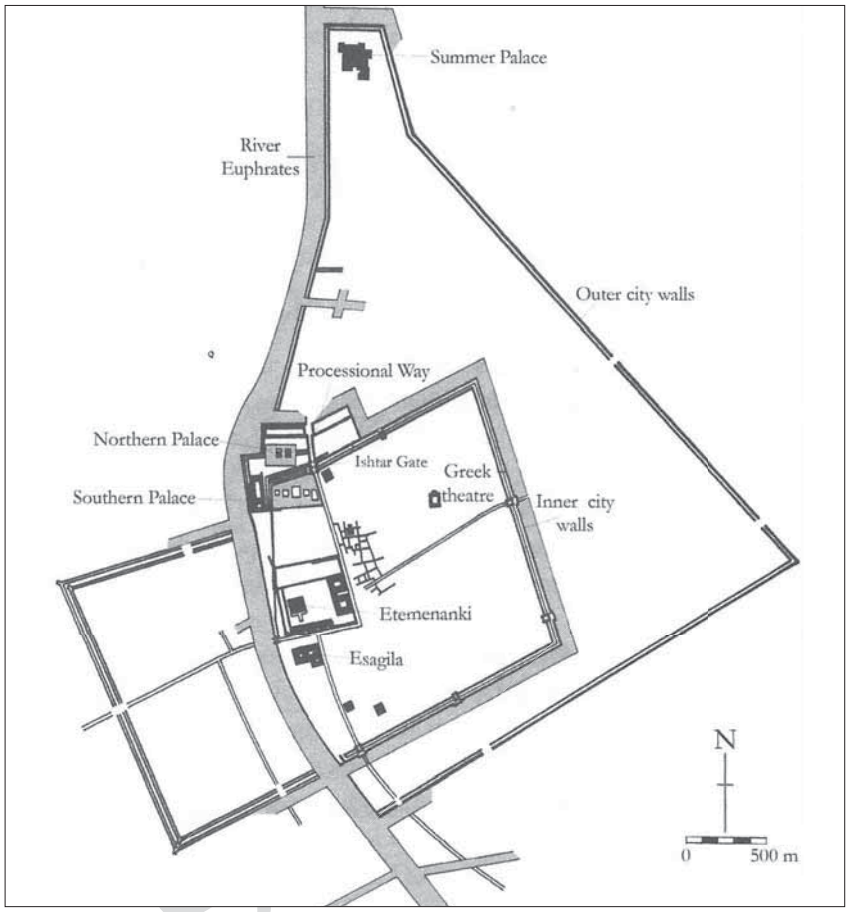

Fig. 1. Plan of Babylon showing location of principal palaces (from Seymour 2014: map 2).

him in Babylon, so that he might occupy a residence of his own whenever he goes there, and we are told (VII, v. 57) that, after Cyrus had captured Babylon, he 'moved into the royal palace and those who had charge of the treasures brought from Sardis delivered them there'. The implication is that Cyrus simply took over a palace or palaces formerly used by the Neo-Babylonian kings (Fig. 1) and that he (and his successors) made use of them as residential and administrative centres. But is this likely and plausible? Would the Achaemenid kings have been content to live and work in buildings which were so closely associated with their displaced predecessors and where there were constant reminders of their erstwhile

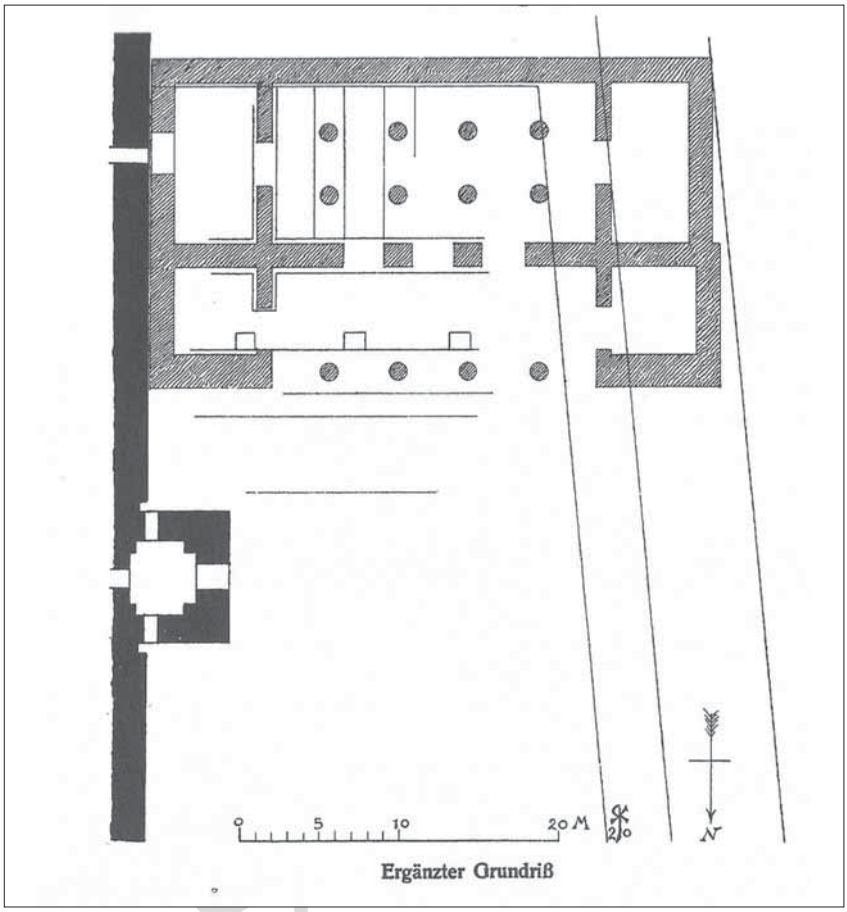

Fig. 2. Plan of the Persian building at Babylon
(from Koldewy 1931: pl. 28).

presence in the form of the inscriptions and so on. It seems unlikely, so let us examine the evidence for royal residences at Babylon in the Achaemenid period.

Let us start with the one building at Babylon that is indubitably Persian. This a small palace or pavilion measuring just 34.80 metres by 20.50 metres on the west side of the Southern Palace of Nebuchadnezzar, known as 'the Persian building' or the '*Perserbau*' (Koldewey 1914: 127-31; 1931: 120-25). It has been studied in detail by Haerinck (1973). The superstructure of the building was not preserved, but the plan and associated material were recovered by the German excavators (Fig. 2). It

consists of an inner hall with eight columns which is accessed through a portico on the north side with four columns. The inner hall is flanked by two side rooms, and the portico by two corner towers. The columns are thought to have been of wood, but the column bases were partly preserved. In the inner hall they were bell-shaped but in the portico they consisted of a simple torus. Two fragments of a stone inscription of Artaxerxes II were found in this building (Koldewey 1914: 128-29, fig. 78; Wetzel, Schmidt and Mallwitz 1957: 71, pl. 26, top).[9] The badly damaged impost block referred to above may also have come from this palace. Fragments of stone indicate that originally there were carved reliefs associated with this palace decorated with figural and floral designs. Pieces of glazed brick were also found, with representations of spearmen ('the immortals') and floral designs. These brick fragments were made from sintered quartz in the Achaemenid fashion and not from baked clay as in the Babylonian fashion. The foundations for the floor consisted of a 60-centimetre deep deposit, with the thickest, lowest level made up of pebbles, and pieces of burnt brick, clay and limestone (Haerinck 1973: 112-13; Koldewey 1914: 128). The two levels above this were made in the same fashion but with finer pieces, and the top surface consisted of a very hard, two-millimetre-thick red-coloured layer made of lime and fine gravel.

The different features of this building – the columned hall, the glazed brick decoration, and the red floors – are clear indications that it must be of Achaemenid date. The apadana-style plan finds many parallels in the Achaemenid world (see Stronach 1987) and glazed bricks made from sintered quartz are familiar from Susa and Persepolis. Red cement-like floors are a hallmark of the Achaemenid period and occur at both Susa (Perrot 2013: figs 55, 145) and Persepolis (Schmidt 1953: passim[10]). It is sometimes thought that this palace was built in the reign of Darius (e.g. Haerinck 1975), but the consensus now seems to be that it dates from the time of Artaxerxes II (Haerinck 1997: 28; Briant 2002: 908).

The purpose of this Persian building is quite unclear. In view of its small size, it can hardly have served any useful ceremonial, administrative or residential function, and it is tempting to see it as some sort of pavilion built for the recreation and relaxation of the Persian king or the satrap. However, perhaps it can be better understood in the context of the vast 600-room palace to the east of it, known as the Southern Palace of Nebuchadnezzar and restored at huge expense on

9 Other Achaemenid period inscriptions on fragments of stone from Babylon are also illustrated in Wetzel et al. 1957: pl. 26.

10 For references, see index under 'red-surfaced flooring'.

the orders of Saddam Hussein during the Iraq-Iran war. This restoration was on a gigantic scale, so that now the main entrance to the palace is through a reconstructed arch 30 metres high and many of the walls have been rebuilt to a height of eighteen metres. Herman Gasche (2013) has recently made the very interesting suggestion that the western parts of this building, known as the '*Westhof*'and the '*Anbauhof*, were built or rebuilt during the Achaemenid period. He bases this hypothesis on the presence of an architectural feature known as the '*salle à quatre saillants*'. This consists of a room on one side of a courtyard with four pilasters arranged as symmetrical pairs toward the ends of the long sides of the room. There is a wide entrance between the courtyard and the room with four pilasters. It is usually supposed that the purpose of these pilasters is to enable large rooms to be covered over with mud brick vaults. The pilasters would have supported transverse vaults at either end of the room and a barrel vault for most of the length of the room between the two pairs of pilasters. Gasche maintains that the combination of these features, that is the four-pilaster room and the wide entrance, is a distinctively Iranian plan that is first evidenced at Susa in the second millennium BC and found later in the Palace of Darius at Susa (Gasche 2013: fig. 482).

Michael Roaf earlier studied the '*salle à quatre saillants*' and concluded (1973: 91) that:

> after its early appearance in the Middle Elamite period, for six centuries we lose sight of the '*salle à quatre saillants*' with its characteristic four pilasters and entrance on the long side leading on to a courtyard. In the seventh century BC, however, there is a change in Neo-Assyrian palace design, which may be because of the introduction of this architectural form.[11] Thereafter the '*salle à quatre saillants*' has a wide distribution, being found in the Neo-Babylonian southern citadel at Babylon, in Darius's Palace at Susa, at Lachish, and at Persepolis in the fifth century BC.

It is not certain, then, that the appearance of the '*salle à quatre saillants*' at Babylon is a hallmark of Iranian influence but, given that the extreme western part of the Southern Palace is a later addition, it is at least plausible. The later building work is evidenced by the fact that the eastern walls of the *Anbauhof* are not bonded with the western walls of

11 Gasche argues (2013: 437) that the Elamite/Achaemenid and Assyrian forms of this plan are different and independent of each other.

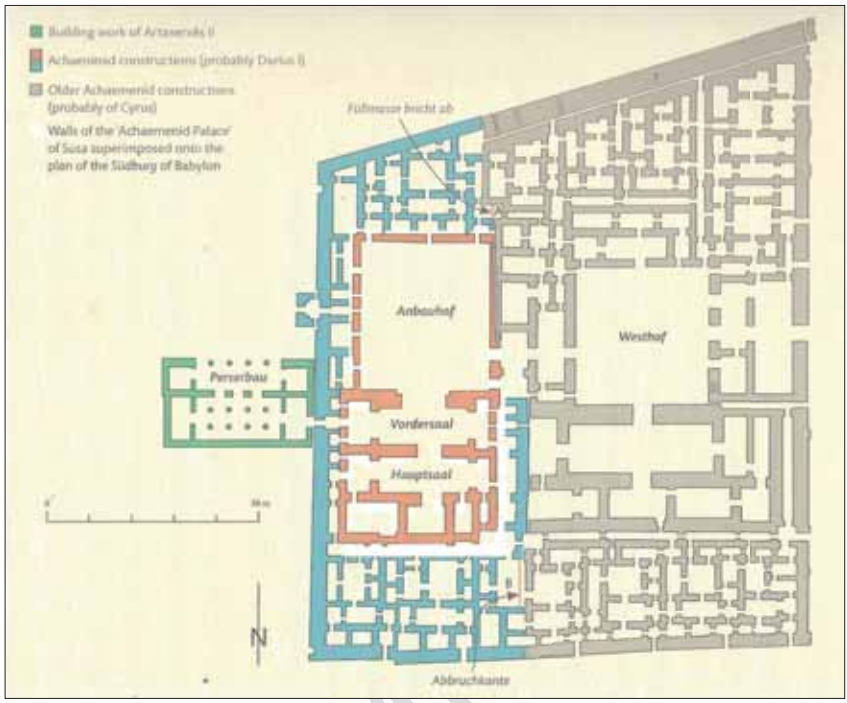

Fig. 3. Plan of the western part of the Southern Palace (from Gasche 2013: fig. 481).

the *Westhof* (Fig. 3; Gasche 2013: fig. 481). Of course, it might be argued that any later building work in the Southern Palace could have happened in the reigns of Neriglissar or Nabonidus, and this possibility cannot be excluded. Nevertheless, Gasche's argument does seem quite compelling.

There is further evidence for later building work, in this case almost certainly Persian, in the central part of the Southern Palace. In court 36, just to the south of the Throne Room, were two brick-built surrounds for the bases of palm trunk columns (Koldewey 1914: 108-9, fig. 66; and 101, fig. 63). These sockets were covered with plaster and have been compared with columns at Persepolis.[12] The columns presumably supported a roof or awning that that was a later addition to the courtyard. In the central courtyard (*Haupthof*) of the Southern Palace, Koldewey

12 In the Persepolis report, Schmidt (1953: 28) notes that these column supports found at Babylon can be compared with columns encased in plaster shells found in the Treasury at Persepolis.

found post-Babylonian remains consisting of a brick-built tower 11.50 metres square and with walls 3.25 metres thick. Inside were the remains of an altar (?). Koldewey (131: 77) speculates that this building might have been a small temple of the Persian period. Haerinck (1987: 141) compares this building with the temple at Nush-e Jan, the Zendan-e Soleiman at Pasargadae, and the Kabeh-e Zardusht at Naqsh-e Rustam. Erich Schmidt had apparently suggested it could be a fire temple. In any case, it seems likely that that the building was of the Persian period. It seems, then, that the central part of the Southern Palace was certainly in use during the Persian period and probably also the western part. The whole Southern Palace could have been a residential and administrative hub in the Persian period, in which case the small apadana-style building next to it might have been intended as nothing more than a place of escape for the Persian king and dignitaries.

At this point it is interesting to reflect on the fact that Saddam Hussein spent millions of dinars rebuilding the Southern Palace, and the building was opened with great fanfare during the Babylon Festival of 1988. According to Sir Terence Clark,[13] British Ambassador to Iraq 1985-89:

> The diplomatic corps was seated in the Processional Way, by then heavily restored, and we listened to hymns of praise to President Saddam Hussein for Iraq's victory over Iran and to a father recounting to his son the story of the greatness of Nebuchadnezzar, which he likened to the greatness of Saddam. We watched as rows of soldiers and girls dressed in Babylonian costumes marched before us down the Processional Way, accompanied by lit torches and music played on 'Babylonian' instruments, to the far end where two tall palm trees carried the profiled portraits of Nebuchadnezzar on one and the remarkably similar portrait of Saddam on the other.

The great irony here is that Saddam may have been restoring a building that was at least partly Persian.

Gasche also notes the presence of the same architectural feature – that is the four-pilaster hall opening off a courtyard with a wide entrance – in the west court of the Northern Palace of Nebuchadnezzar (the *Hauptburg*) (Fig. 4; Gasche 2013: fig. 489, left) and in the west court of the Summer Palace (Fig. 5; Gasche 2013: fig. 489, right). He therefore concludes that there is evidence for Persian building or rebuilding in both these palaces.

13 Personal communication.

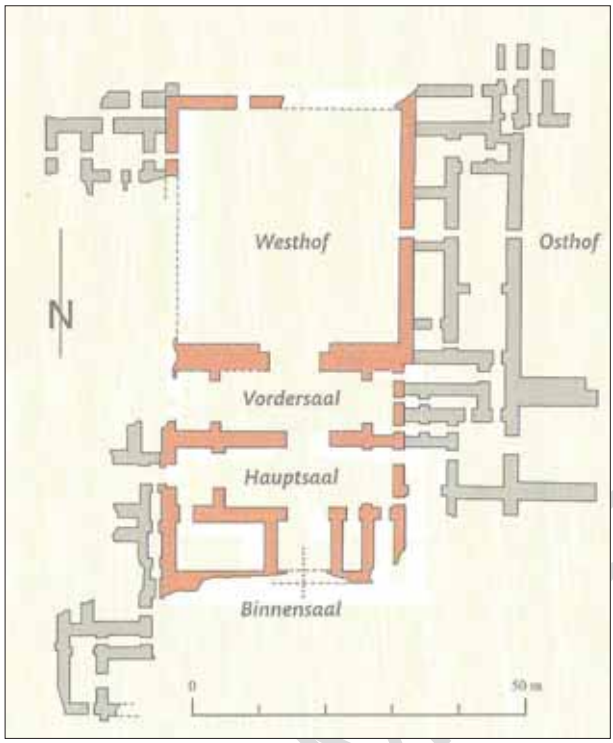

Fig. 4. Plan of the western part of the Northern Palace (from Gasche 2013: fig. 489, left).

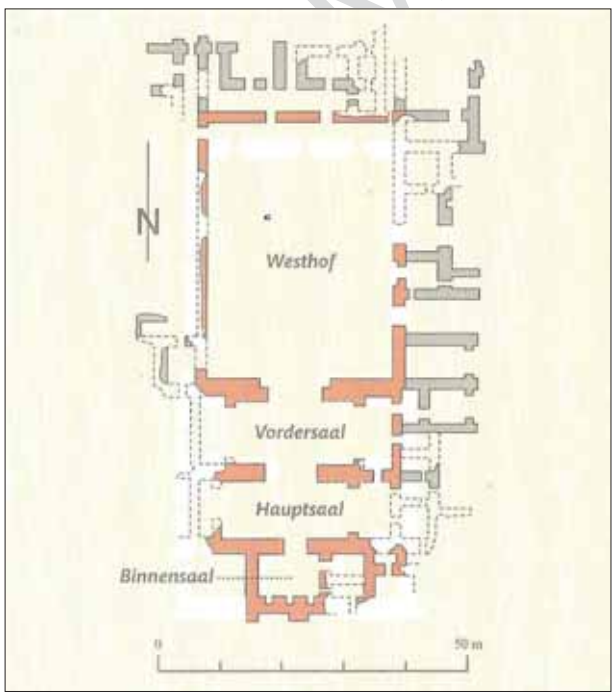

Fig. 5. Plan of the west court of the Summer Palace (from Gasche 2013: fig. 489, right).

Fig. 6. View of Tell Babil from the south. Photo J.E. Curtis.

If Gasche is correct – and his theory appears to be quite convincing – the west parts of the Southern Palace, the Northern Palace and the Summer Palace were all modified, or even built, in the Achaemenid period. However, would these palaces with their ostentatious decoration and close association with the former Babylonian regime, at least in the first two cases, have been suitable places of residence for the Persian king and his court? This seems unlikely, even with the addition of the so-called Persian building.

If we exclude the Southern and Northern Palaces of Nebuchadnezzar, there is no obvious location in the central area of Babylon, on either side of the Euphrates, where the Persian kings might have had a substantial palace of their own. This leaves us with Tell Babil (or Tell Mujelibè) often referred to as the Summer Palace of Nebuchadnezzar, in the most northerly point of the outer town, just within the outer city-wall and originally flanked on the west side by the River Euphrates (Fig. 6).

In his inscriptions, Nebuchadnezzar talks principally about the Southern and Northern Palaces (Beaulieu 2017: 9-10), particularly the latter, which is also described by the Babylonian priest Berossos writing at the beginning of the third century BC as follows:

> He [Nebuchadnezzar] built in addition to his father's palace another palace adjoining it. It would perhaps take too long to describe its height and general opulence, except to say that, despite its extraordinary size and splendor, it was completed in fifteen days. In this palace he built high stone terraces and made them appear very similar to mountains, planting them with all kinds of trees, thus constructing and arranging the so-called Hanging Garden, because his wife, who had been raised in the regions of Media, longed for a mountainous scenery. (Rollinger 2013: 148)

Both Rollinger (*ibid.*) and Stronach (2018: 474-75) believe that this Northern Palace was also the likely site of the hanging gardens.[14] So, the two major palaces at Babylon are definitely associated with Nebuchadnezzar, but what about Tell Babil? In one inscription, a stone cylinder in the British Museum, Nebuchadnezzar refers to the building of a great palace in the north part of the city (Langdon 1905: no. XIV, col. 3, 11-29).[15] It is this reference that has led Koldewey and others to identify Tell Babil/Tell Mujelibè as 'the Summer Palace of Nebuchadnezzar'.[16] The case for this identification is certainly strong, but I submit that it is not quite proven. At least, the matter warrants further investigation. Let us now consider the archaeological evidence.

Tell Babil is described by Robert Koldewey as follows:

> The mound rises with a steep slope to the height of 22 metres above the plain.[17] Its area forms a square of about 250 metres (i.e. 250m x 250m), and this hill, consisting of broken brick

14 For an alternative view, see Dalley 2013.

15 Langdon writes (1905: 19): 'No.14 is remarkable, because it contains the first mention of two new palaces built by the king, one between the inner and outer walls north of the old palace, and one north of the city on the hill now called Babil. . . . It is remarkable that we have no trace of this northern palace in the later inscription 15, nor as yet in any other inscription. Perhaps the scribes of no. 15, ever jealous of the glory of Marduk, chose to suppress all reference to a palace situated outside the sacred precincts and in [a] part of Babylon looking towards the ancient seat of Shamash of Sippar. At any rate, 14 is the sole source of information concerning this great palace and bulwark north of the city, which, like a phantom, appears in these few lines (col.3, 11-29) and then vanishes entirely from trustworthy history.'

16 See also Finkel and Seymour 2008: 67, and 99, n. 111; and Beaulieu 2017: 10.

17 On 27 February 2009, GPS coordinates at the highest point of the mound were noted as 140' ASL, N 32°33.950', EO 44°25.504'.

Fig. 7. An inspection of Tell Babil in February 2009. Photo J.E. Curtis.

> or clayey earth, is pierced by deep ravines and tunnels, while on the north and south-west remains of walls of very considerable height are still standing, with courses of mud-brick held together by layers of well-preserved reed stems (Koldewey 1914: 10).

He comments (*ibid.*) on 'the astonishingly deep pits and galleries' occurring in places that 'owe their origin to the quarrying for brick that has been carried on extensively during the last decades'.

This extensive quarrying for bricks is still evident today,[18] although the quarrying no longer continues, and the mound is very much disturbed, to a considerable depth in places, so much so that on a brief inspection it is difficult to make much sense of the stratigraphy or of any building plans there might be (Fig. 7). Clearly visible, however, are, firstly, great blocks of brickwork with reeds or reed matting between the courses and, secondly, blocks of walling with pieces of brick (not complete bricks) set in gypsum mortar and with further gypsum mortar between the courses

18 I visited Tell Babil on 27 February 2009 as part of a UNESCO inspection of Babylon. There was rolled barbed wire all around the base of the site, and our party was told that no visitors or local people were allowed to access the site. It was protected by two guards. No recent damage was observed, and just one firing-point was noted, facing south-east on the crest of the mound. It was an oval trench, 2.40m x 1.20m, c. 0.70m deep. GPS coordinates were 113' ASL, N 32°33.936', EO 44°25.531'. See Van Ess and Curtis 2009.

Fig. 8. Inspecting brickwork at Tell Babil in February 2009. Photo J.E. Curtis.

Fig. 9. Brickwork at Tell Babil with reed matting between the courses in February 2009. Photo J.E. Curtis.

(Figs 8-9). These latter blocks of walling are faced with plaster. Around the site there is an abundance of glazed pottery in green or turquoise, either glazed on one surface or on both surfaces. There are also fragments of glass, kiln wasters, and fragments of monochrome glazed bricks.

The sites of ancient Babylon, in general, and Tell Babil, in particular, were visited by a number of early travellers, some of whom undertook limited excavations.[19] As many of these accounts are now difficult to access, and are relevant for our survey, we shall quote from them as appropriate.

19 For a summary of the various excavations undertaken in Tell Babil from the early nineteenth century onwards, see Reade 1999: 57-63.

Let us start with Claudius James Rich, who wrote in 1815:

> The summit (of Tell Mujelibè) is covered with heaps of rubbish, in digging into some of which, layers of broken burnt brick cemented with mortar are discovered, and whole bricks with inscriptions on them are here and there found: the whole is covered with innumerable fragments of pottery, brick, bitumen, pebbles, vitrified brick or scoria, and even shells, bits of glass and mother of pearl. (Rich 1815: 29, quoted in Seymour 2014: 136)

In the course of his excavations, Rich found a number of tunnels and passages, and burials including a well-preserved skeleton in a wooden coffin (Reade 1999: 59-61).

Robert Ker Porter (1821-22: II, 340-341) did not excavate here but made some interesting and, as we shall see, prescient observations:

> The Mujelibè . . . is only second to the Birs Nimrood in being one of the most gigantic masses of brick-formed earth that ever was raised by the labour of man. It is composed of these sun-dried materials, to the present height of 140 feet. . . . Regular lines of clay brick-work are clearly discernible along each face. . . . From the general appearance of this piece of ruin, I scarcely think that its solid elevation has ever been much higher than it stands at present. I have no doubt of its having been a ground-work, or magnificent raised platform, (like that of Persepolis, though there it was of the native rock;) to sustain habitable buildings of consequence.

Layard, who excavated briefly at Tell Babil towards the end of 1850, rediscovered the tunnels and passages investigated by Rich, and found more coffins and inscribed stone slabs of Nebuchadnezzar (Layard 1853: 502). In addition,

> numerous deep trenches opened on the surface of the mound, and several tunnels carried into its sides at different levels, led to no other discovery than that of numerous relics of a doubtful period, such as are found in large numbers, in a more or less perfect state, amongst all Babylonian ruins, especially after heavy rains have washed away the loose soil, or have deepened the ravines. The most interesting were arrow-heads

> in bronze and iron, small glass bottles, some colored, others ribbed and otherwise ornamented, and vases of earthenware of various forms and sizes, sometimes glazed with a rich blue color. (Layard 1853: 503)

Unable to make much sense of the ruins on the surface, however, Layard determined to attack the mound at its base. In his own words (Layard 1853: 504-5):

> It was thus evident that the remains of the original edifice, if any still existed, were to be sought far beneath the surface and I accordingly opened tunnels at the very foot of the mound nearly on a level with the plain. A few days' labor enabled me to ascertain that we had at last found the ancient building. On the eastern side the workmen soon reached solid piers and walls of brick masonry, buried under an enormous mass of loose bricks, earth, and rubbish. We uncovered eight or ten piers and several walls branching in various directions, but I failed to trace any plan, or to discover any remains whatever of sculptured stone or painted plaster.

He further surmised (1853: 503) that above the 'enormous mass of loose bricks, earth, and rubbish' covering the original building was some kind of fortification which he dated to the Seleucid period:

> Upon that great heap, over the fallen palace or temple, was probably raised one of those citadels, which formed the defences of a city built long after the destruction of the Babylonian empire and its magnificent capital, and which resisted the arms of Demetrius Poliorcetes. Of that stronghold the thick wall of sun-dried brick on the northern side is probably the remains.

He rightly recognised the graves as belonging to the Seleucid period or later (Layard 1853: 503).

J.P. Peters, the excavator of Nippur, who visited Babylon in 1885 and 1889, described Tell Babil as follows (1897: I, 208-210):

> In one place I observed well-made columns of bricks, the spaces between which had been built up later, thus turning a construction resting upon piers into a solid mass. In another

> place I noticed a doorway which had been filled with rubble brick, after which a solid structure of brick had been erected in front of it. . . . Bitumen was used as a mortar in a portion, at least, of these brick structures; and the impressions in the bitumen showed that sometimes mats had been placed between the layers of brick. On top of the masses of baked brick was a mass of unbaked brick, about thirty feet of which I found in place. Between the layers of the unbaked bricks were thin mats. . . . There were occasionally palm beams thrust in among the unbaked bricks to strengthen the construction. Near the doorway, which I have described above, Hilprecht picked up a brick of Nabopolassar. All of the other bricks which we found here . . . bear the name of Nebuchadnezzar. . . . In the diggings on the mound, as well as on the surface, I found fragments of green glazed pottery, sometimes imbedded in bricks. . . . There were everywhere fragments of enamelled bricks, and these looked as though they had been exposed to the action of fire in a great conflagration.

These accounts, then, provide the background to the German excavations at Babylon between 1899 and 1917. What they discovered was an artificial platform about eighteen metres in height, that was 'so constructed that the building walls throughout are continuous and of the same thickness above and below, while the intermediate spaces are filled up to the height of the palace floor with earth and a packing of fragments of brick' (Koldewey 1914: 11). Layard was mistaken in believing that the original building was at ground level, and what he excavated was the artificial platform, with brick walls and piers with brick infill between them.

On top of the artificial platform was a monumental building with 'many courts and chambers, both small and large' (Koldewey 1914: 11). The published plan (Fig. 10; Koldewey 1932: pl. 32) shows part of a building, probably a palace, with two large courtyards (*Westhof* and *Osthof*) and on the east side of the east courtyard an intrusive burial chamber with alcoves, presumably of the Parthian period. Some small additions to the plan in the north-west part of the building were made by Iraqi excavations in the 1970s (Nasir 1979: 157, plan 3). Koldewey tells us that:

> the floor consists of sandstone flags on the edge of which is inscribed 'Palace of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, son of Nabopolassar, King of Babylon'. There are also many portions

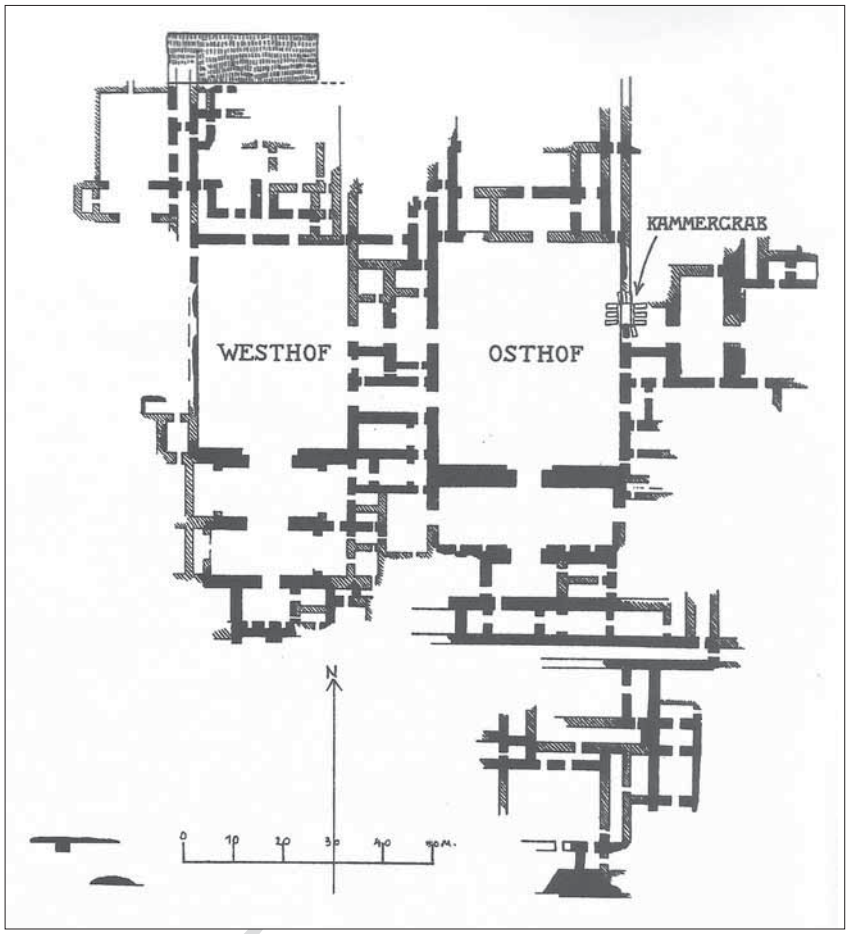

Fig. 10. Plan of the palace building on Tell Babil (from Koldewey 1932: pl. 32).

> of a limestone pavement that consists of a thick rough under stratum, and a fine upper stratum half a centimetre thick, and coloured a fine red or yellow. . . . All the bricks stamped with the name of Nebuchadnezzar . . . were either laid in asphalt or in a grey lime mortar. (Koldewey 1914: 11)

Koldewey concluded (1914: 11) that it was 'impossible to doubt that Babil was a palace of Nebuchadnezzer's'. He based this on the presence of the sandstone flags and the bricks inscribed with the name of Nebuchadnezzar, and the reference in the Nebuchadnezzar inscription

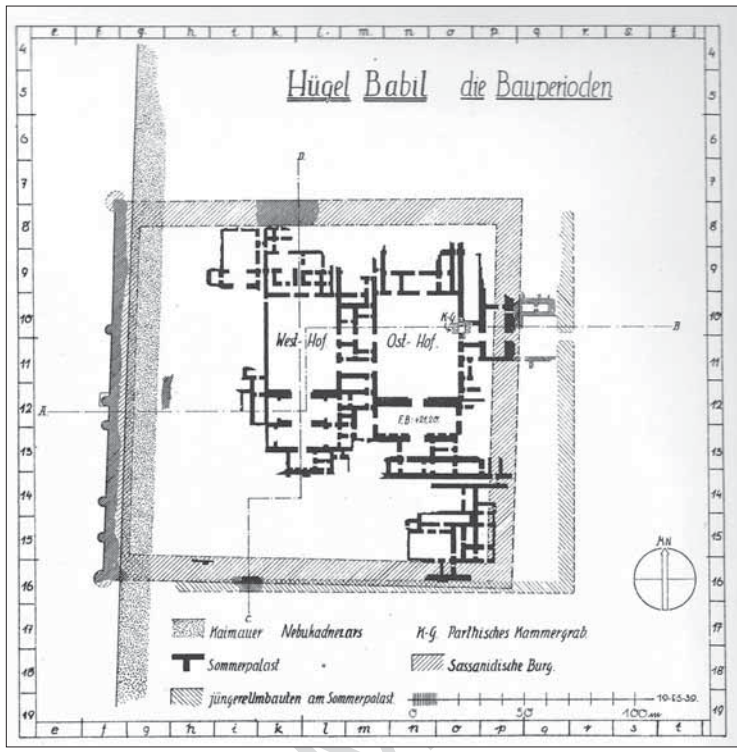

Fig. 11. Plan of the palace and the later fort on Tell Babil (from Wetzel et al. 1957: pl. 13).

to his building a great palace in the north part of Babylon that we have considered above. This identification is reflected in the modern name of the building as 'the Summer Palace of Nebuchadnezzar'. But was it?

Before considering this, let is deal with the structure(s) above the monumental palace building. This was a square fort-like building (Fig. 11; Wetzel, Schmidt and Mallwitz 1957: pl. 13), dated by Koldewey (1914: 10) to the Sasanian or Islamic period, and by other scholars to the Parthian period (for references, see Reade 1999: 62-63). My personal preference, based on the form of the plan, would be for the Sasanian period, but the date of this later structure does not concern us here.[20] Our preoccupation is with the palatial building and its date.

20 We have already noted the presence of possible Parthian material. Architectural ornaments, including an antefix, may be of Hellenistic date (Wetzel et al. 1957: pls 23c and 23d; André-Salvini 2008: no 209 on p. 262).

As we have already noted, red cement-like floors are a feature of the Achaemenid period, and according to Koldewey many portions of the floor in the monumental building consisted of 'a thick rough under stratum, and a fine upper stratum half a centimetre thick, and coloured a fine red or yellow'.[21] There can be no doubt, then, that the palace was either built in the Achaemenid period or reused in the Achaemenid period. There are two further reasons for suggesting an Achaemenid association. The first is the plan of the building. As noted by Gasche, the room on the south side of the *Westhof* is a '*salle à quatre saillants*', which in his view is a hallmark of Achaemenid architecture. Secondly, there is the fact that the palace is built on an artificial mound eighteen metres in height.

Very often in the Achaemenid period, monumental buildings were constructed on an elevated platform, or *takht*, that might have been adapted from a natural feature (as at Persepolis), or built up artificially (as at Pasargadae, with the Tall-e Takht), or created by levelling and remodelling an existing mound (as at Susa), or by building a massive mud-brick platform on an existing mound (as at Tepe Sialk). At Persepolis, a raised terrace measuring about 455 metres by 300 metres was cut from the mountainside, while at Pasargadae a raised platform was created with an outer face of massive stone blocks and a central core of limestone chips (Stronach 1978: 11-23). This platform was apparently created by Cyrus as part of a building programme, probably for an elevated palace, that was aborted when attention switched to Persepolis and Susa. At Susa, the whole of the top of the Apadana Mound was leveled to create a *takht* on which to build the massive palace of Darius (Perrot 2013: fig. 100). It is possible that the massive brick platform uncovered by Ghirshman at Tepe Sialk (Ghirshman 1954: 83-84) (sometimes mistakenly thought to be a ziggurat) and the terrace at Masjid-e Soleiman (Ghirhman 1954: 122, fig. 49) were also both platforms (*takht*s) created in the Achaemenid period. There is, then, good evidence that in the Achaemenid period, royal palaces and other buildings were constructed on elevated platforms. Of course, this does not prove that the artificial mound of Tell Mujelibè dates from the Achaemenid period, but the similarity with Achaemenid platforms, as observed by Ker Porter, is striking.

Whatever the date of the platform, Babylonian or Achaemenid, it seems beyond doubt that there was an Achaemenid-period building on top of the artificial mound, but whether it was the original building

21 Koldewey remarks (1914: 128) that the red floors in the Persian building and in Tell Babil were 'made in exactly the same fashion'. Haerinck (1973: 113) also notes the presence of red floors in the Babil mound and sees it as a sign of Persian period occupation.

or whether it was on top of a Nebuchadnezzar building, or whether the Nebuchadnezzar building was modified and reoccupied in the Achaemenid period, are all matters for conjecture. It is worth noting, however, that bricks and fragments of brick with Nebuchadnezzar inscriptions were apparently found in the fill of the artificial mound. The implication must be that the debris used to build up the mound came from a disused Nebuchadnezzar building, which makes it rather unlikely – although not impossible – that the first building on top of the artificial mound also dates from the time of Nebuchadnezzar, although it could be from late in his reign. It is also possible that the inscribed sandstone flags and the Nebuchadnezzar bricks that were apparently found in association with the palace were also reused. Lastly, it might be argued that, if the original palace was of Achaemenid date, we might expect it to have been built in the Persian style, perhaps incorporating a column hall. However, the main part of Darius' palace at Susa is built in the Babylonian style, and like the North Palace it incorporates a '*salle à quatre saillants*' that in the view of Gasche is an Achaemenid feature. It is tempting to agree with Gasche that because of the '*salle à quatre saillants*' and the red floors the Summer Palace could be 'the work of one of the forebears of Artaxerxes II' (Gasche 2013: 448) but[22] the evidence at present remains inconclusive.

For the time being it does not seem possible to take this argument any further. The cuneiform evidence is strong, but not conclusive. Further excavation in the Tell Babil mound might clarify the matter but, as noted, the site is badly disturbed. Further study of the small finds from this area might also pay dividends. For example, it would be helpful to know whether the many fragments of glazed brick are made of clay in the Babylonian manner or of sintered quartz like the Achaemenid glazed bricks. It would be convenient for our hypothesis if it could be demonstrated that Persian kings, perhaps from the time of Darius onwards, spurned the great Babylonian palaces at ground level

22 The question of where Alexander might have stayed when he was in Babylon is also of interest but similarly unresolved. After the Battle of Gaugamela Alexander hastened to Babylon and stayed there for about a month before proceeding to Susa. After an eight-year absence he returned to Babylon following his Indian campaign and died there in 323 BC. Plutarch records (*Lives*, Alexander, LXXVI) that in the later stages of his last illness he was 'carried to the palace on the other side of the river', where he died. This account seems to be corroborated by Arrian (*Anabasis*, VII, 26) who states: 'Thence he was carried on his couch to the river, and embarking on a boat sailed across the river to the garden'; a few days later he 'was carried from the garden to the palace'. The problem with these accounts is that as far as is known the palaces are all on the east side of the river.

and preferred to live in a newly constructed palace on an elevated site to the north of the city, but this must remain conjecture for the time being. All we can definitely say at present is that the presence of red plaster floors and the '*salle à quatre saillants*' featuring in the Southern and Northern Palaces and the Summer Palace show that all these buildings were occupied or reoccupied in the Persian period. It would be gratifying to be able to conclude that the Summer Palace was a Persian-period construction on top of an artificial mound or *takht* but while this remains a possibility the evidence available at present is equivocal.

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