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Manuscript and archive: who wrote and read Babylonian chronicles?

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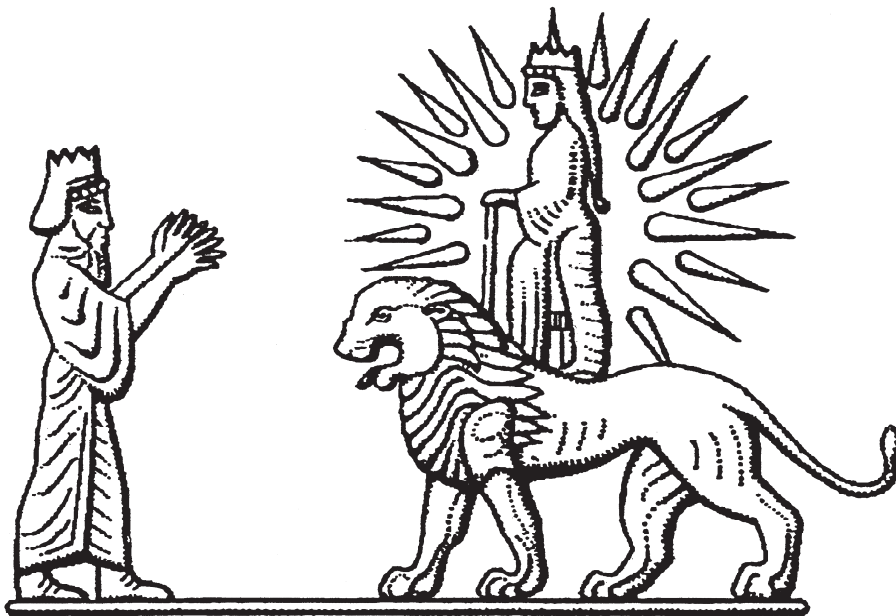
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Conceptualizing Past, Present and Future

Proceedings of the Ninth Symposium
of the Melammu Project Held in Helsinki / Tartu
May 18–24, 2015

Edited by
Sebastian Fink and Robert Rollinger



Melammu Symposia 9

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Manuscript and archive: who wrote and read Babylonian chronicles?

Caroline Waerzeggers¹

The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga famously defined history as “the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of its past. (...) It comprises every form of historical record; that of the annalist, the writer of memoirs, the historical philosopher, and the scholarly researcher.”² In Mesopotamia, “historians” used many forms for this purpose since the late third millennium BC, including annals, epics, royal letters, pseudo-autobiographies, prophecies, chronicles and lists. In this paper I will focus on chronicles, a genre of history writing that became popular in first millennium BC Babylonia.

“In the fifth year, the king of Akkad (remained) in his country. He strengthened his numerous chariotry and cavalry.”

“In the sixth year, in the month of Kislev, the king of Akkad mustered his troops and marched on Hatti. In Hatti, he dispatched his troops and they went in the direction of the desert. They carried away astonishing riches, cattle and the gods of the many Arabs. In the month of Adar the king returned to his country.”

“In the seventh year, in the month of Kislev, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched on Hatti, and set up his quarters facing the city of Yehud. ...”

ABC 5: 8’–12’ (translation by Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 229–31).

This passage illustrates some of the key characteristics that present-day scholars attribute to the genre. Written in a compact and terse style, the “chronicles”

¹ Abbreviations: ABC = A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (TCS 5; Locust Valley, N.Y.: J. J. Augustin, 1975). This article was written within the framework of ERC CoG Persia and Babylonia (682241). It reworks some of the material presented by the author in “Facts, propaganda, or history? Shaping political memory in the Nabonidus Chronicle,” in *Political Memory in and after the Persian Empire* (ed. J. M. Silverman and C. Waerzeggers; SBLANEM 13; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 95–124. I am grateful to the organizers of Melammu and to Rocío Da Riva (chair of a session on authorship) for their kind invitation to the conference.

² Johan Huizinga, “A Definition of the Concept of History,” in *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer* (ed. R. Klibansky and H. J. Patton; Oxford: Clarendon, 1936), 1–10 (9–10).

present year-by-year accounts of noteworthy events. These are mostly high-impact events – such as the accession and death of kings, battles and rebellions, festivals and lootings, and plagues and famines – but sometimes lesser happenings are reported too, such as historical price data, the appearance of wild animals in cities, and weather conditions. Whenever independent testimony is available to corroborate these reports, for instance from archival texts or royal inscriptions, their reliability can generally be confirmed. For this reason, the chronicles are often held to be objective accounts, based on detached observation. Although the precursors of the genre can be traced to Sumerian literature, chronicle-writing was a particularly productive activity in Babylonia in the first millennium BC.³

Assyriologists have identified c. 45 texts so far that can be considered products of this activity. The texts were composed between the late seventh and second centuries BC. There is, and should be, unease about lumping together all these texts in a single category: even within the parameters of format, style and subject matter set up by modern scholarship, individual compositions differ considerably from one another; it is unlikely that anybody in antiquity would have recognized these texts as a distinct group.⁴ Some chronicles treat the (distant) past, others are about contemporary events. Some chronicles have a clear thematic focus; others are more general in orientation. Some chronicles are written on large, columned tablets, many others survive on small, contract-type tablets. Some chronicles treat long stretches of history, many others focus on a single reign or even small parts thereof. In view of this variety, the notion of “chronicle” has heuristic value only if the constructed nature of the corpus is borne in mind.

Who wrote and read chronicles? Because of their heavy focus on the acts of kings, it could be suggested that the king or a royal chancellery had an active hand in their composition, but this is unsupported by the evidence as it currently stands. The texts offer no direct clues about the identities of their authors or their sponsors: they contain no address, no statement of purpose, no dedication. They are authorless texts, or at least, this is how they present themselves. Colophons are rare and not informative about authors; they do, however, reveal to us the figure of the “scribe” or “copyist” – the person who produced the manuscript. This information allows us to approach the topic of readership as a function of the text’s reception or circulation at a certain moment in time and place.

³ On the Babylonian chronicles, see in particular Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*; John A. Brinkman, “The Babylonian Chronicle Re-visited,” in *Lingering over Words, Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran* (ed. T. Abusch et al.; Harvard Semitic Studies 38; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 73–104; Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Chroniques mésopotamiennes* (Paris, 1993); Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles* (SBLWAW 19; Atlanta: SBL, 2004); Robartus J. van der Spek, “Berossus as a Babylonian Chronicler and Greek Historian,” in *Studies in Ancient Near Eastern World View and Society Presented to Marten Stol on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (ed. R. J. van der Spek; Bethesda, 2007), 277–318; Caroline Waerzeggers, “The Babylonian Chronicles: Classification and Provenance,” *JNES* 71 (2012): 285–98; <http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/chron00.html>.

⁴ Brinkman, “The Babylonian Chronicle Revisited”.

So far, only two chronicles with a colophon are known, both of them written in the 6th century BC.⁵ This evidence tells us that at that time “private” individuals cultivated an interest in chronicles and that they may have kept copies in their “private” archives.⁶ One colophon reveals that Ea-iddin, the son of a certain Ana-Bēl-ēreš of the Ur-Nanna family, copied the first tablet of a “series” of chronicles in Babylon in 500 BC (ABC 1A). In this case, we do not know where this tablet was stored, but it was certainly not at court or in an official chancellery, simply because no such material was found at the time when the tablet was retrieved from the site of ancient Babylon.⁷ The second chronicle manuscript that reveals the name of its copyist is ABC 15. This tablet was written by a certain Nabû-kāšir of Borsippa’s Ea-ilūta-bani clan.⁸ Although no personal library of this man has survived, there is reason to believe that the tablet was kept in somebody’s private collection. This is based on the fact that most of the tablets from Borsippa, and in particular its chronicle corpus, have survived in archives of “private” individuals.⁹ More precisely, these individuals can be identified as members of the temple community – priests, who, though depending on royal sponsorship, did maintain their own critical discourse on the exercise of royal power.¹⁰ In short, based on current evidence, we cannot say much about the “official” status of sixth century chronicles as histories produced at the behest of, or sanctioned by, the king or some royal chancellery. The circulation of these texts rather points to an environment physically removed from the court, but in association with it through the temples and their priesthoods. The inclusion in these chronicles of military setbacks suffered by the Babylonian state has long alerted scholars to the fact that royal control on the composition of chronicles may have been limited in this period.¹¹ On the whole, the interplay between state and temple in the creation of chronicles remains

⁵ ABC 1A and ABC 15. The Weidner chronicle (ABC 19), which also has a colophon (Hanspeter Schaudig, “The Colophon of the Sippar Text of the ‘Weidner Chronicle’,” N.A.B.U. 2009/15), is rather a literary letter than a chronicle (see a.o. Brinkman, “The Babylonian Chronicle Revisited,” 76).

⁶ Brinkman, “The Babylonian Chronicle Revisited,” 75; Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 40–41; Robartus J. van der Spek, review of Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, in RBL 09/2005; Waerzeggers, “The Babylonian Chronicles,” 294–6.

⁷ G. van Driel, “The British Museum ‘Sippar’ Collection: Babylonia 1882–1893,” ZA 79 (1989): 102–117 (106–7).

⁸ A. R. Millard, “Another Babylonian Chronicle Text,” *Iraq* 26 (1964): 14–35 (32).

⁹ Waerzeggers, “The Babylonian Chronicles”.

¹⁰ Paul-Alain Beaulieu, “Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of His Stelas from Harran and Babylon,” in *Representations of Political Power: Case Histories from Times of Change and Dissolving Order in the Ancient Near East* (ed. M. Heinz and M. H. Feldman; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 137–66 (140–42).

¹¹ And their objectivity, as a consequence, substantial; see among many J. J. Finkelstein, “Mesopotamian Historiography,” PAPS 107 (1963): 461–72; passim in Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*; Amélie Kuhrt, “Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography,” in *Congress Volume Oslo 1998* (ed. A. Lemaire and M. Sæbø; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 257–79 (267).

difficult to capture in the sixth century chronicle corpus, and the matter requires a more focused discussion.

What about the chronicles of the Hellenistic period? Bert van der Spek concluded that these chronicles were a “database” of facts compiled by astronomers for the purpose of divination, locating authors and readers within a single, narrowly defined professional community.¹² This suggestion is based on the close connection that existed in the Hellenistic and Parthian periods between chronicles (recorded on single tablets) and *Astronomical Diaries* (integrating various types of observational data). The link between these two groups of texts is in evidence at a number of levels: through archival connections (the texts were part of the same collections), stylistic similarities (idiom and spelling), topics, and structural connections (they develop according to complementary patterns).¹³ The conclusion that the authors of the chronicles and those of the *Astronomical Diaries* were identical seems inevitable.

But transferring this conclusion to the entire chronicle body is problematic. The chronicles never existed as a group.¹⁴ While some chronicles indeed exhibit close links to the *Diaries*, not all of them do. Chronicles written in and about the earlier Neo-Babylonian period existed in manuscript populations where no *Diaries* were present: there, no complementary patterns developed and no exchange of information took place, at least not in any verifiable way.¹⁵ The composite and artificial nature of the chronicle corpus as a modern philological construct demands that questions about audience and author are asked not at the level of the genre, but at the level of the individual text, or at the very most, at the level of the manuscript group. Only if clusters of chronicles existed as a unit in antiquity (as can be argued, for instance, for many of the Hellenistic chronicles edited online by Finkel and van der Spek at livius.org) can wholesale statements be warranted.

In this paper, I propose to take a step back and direct the question of authorship and readership at a single, famous exemplar: the *Nabonidus Chronicle*.¹⁶ I will use this text as a case study, in order to illustrate possible approaches to the topic of authorship/readership in the absence of any direct

¹² Robartus J. van der Spek, “Darius III, Alexander the Great and Babylonian Scholarship,” in *A Persian Perspective: Essays in Memory of Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg* (eds. W. Henkelman and A. Kuhrt; Achaemenid History 13; Leiden: NINO, 2003), 289–346 (289–91).

¹³ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*; Philippe Clancier, *Les bibliothèques en Babylonie dans la deuxième moitié du Ier millénaire av. J.-C.* (AOAT 363; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2009), 203–4; van der Spek, “Berossus”, 284; Reinhard Pirngruber, “The Historical Sections of the Astronomical Diaries in Context: Developments in a Late Babylonian Scientific Text Corpus,” *Iraq* 75 (2013): 197–210.

¹⁴ Waerzeggers, “The Babylonian Chronicles”.

¹⁵ In Borsippa, no *Diaries* or related astronomical material have been found so far, Joachim Oelsner, *Materialien zur babylonischen Gesellschaft und Kultur in hellenistischer Zeit* (Assyriologia VII; Budapest: Eötvös University, 1986), 229–230.

¹⁶ Editions by Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, no. 7 and Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, no. 28. An online translation by Bert van der Spek is available on www.livius.org.

information supplied by the authorless text. By no means will my conclusions be automatically applicable to all chronicles. On the contrary, the fundamental point that I wish to convey in this contribution is that such overall statements are bound to be mistaken as long as chronicles are treated ahistorically as a single corpus. I will argue that the manuscript – in our case, the clay tablet carrying the text – supplies a historically defined point of entry into these questions, and in doing so this paper fits the trend that sees a growing awareness of the materiality of texts, scribal agency, manuscript cultures, and the archive in Assyriology and other historical disciplines in recent years.¹⁷

The chronicler as eye-witness?

Although the question of authorship is never explicitly addressed, scholars assume that the author of the *Nabonidus Chronicle* must have lived at the time of the events he is talking about, that is, in the reigns of Nabonidus and Cyrus. He, or they, would have composed the *Chronicle* from observation or memory, either faithfully rendering facts or shrewdly manipulating them.¹⁸ While differently implicating the author(s) in the political process (as neutral bystanders or as complicit actors), these scenarios share a basic confidence in the authority of the text as eye-witness report. There are two interpretative frameworks that make a contemporary author for the *Chronicle* such a compelling figure.

The Babylonian Chronicle Series

Most (modern) historians place the *Nabonidus Chronicle* within a longer series of Babylonian chronicles that, when complete, is thought to have provided an uninterrupted history of Babylonia from Nabonassar down to the Seleucids. The *Nabonidus Chronicle* would then only be a section of a much longer historical account.

Although its origins are older, the notion of the “Babylonian Chronicle Series” originates with Grayson.¹⁹ He observed that one of the surviving Babylonian chronicles identifies itself in its colophon as the first of a series and that it begins its account somewhere in the early part of Nabonassar’s reign.²⁰

¹⁷ A few titles in this literature are Eleanor Robson, “Reading the libraries of Assyria and Babylonia,” in *Ancient Libraries* (ed. J. König et al; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 38–56; Laurie E. Pearce, “Materials of Writing and Materiality of Knowledge,” in *Gazing on the Deep: Ancient Near Eastern and Other Studies in Honor of Tzvi Abusch* (ed. J. Stackert et al.; Bethesda: CDL Press, 2010), 167–179; Joshua Englehardt (ed.), *Agency in Ancient Writing* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2013); Matthew Fisher, *Scribal Authorship and the Writing of History in Medieval England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012).

¹⁸ See Waerzeggers, “Facts, propaganda, or history?” for a discussion of current approaches to the *Nabonidus Chronicle*.

¹⁹ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*.

²⁰ This chronicle is confusingly known as “the Babylonian Chronicle” – following Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*. He identified it as the first element of the “Babylonian Chronicle Series”, hence numbering it “ABC 1”. Note that the chronicle exists in three exemplars according to Grayson, but that Brinkman, “The Babylonian

This seemed to square well with a statement by Berossos saying that this same king destroyed the records of his predecessors “so that the enumeration of the kings of the Chaldeans started with him”;²¹ indeed, so does the king list in the much later handy tables of Ptolemy’s *Almagest* (2nd c. AD).²² Grayson considered the “first” chronicle to prove the historicity of the Hellenistic tradition about Nabonassar as an innovator of record-keeping. Whether this conclusion is warranted, is debated; for us, more important are the implications of this reconstruction on the issue of authorship. Apart from dating the inception of the chronicle tradition to a very precise moment in time, Grayson’s scenario suggests that the king had an active hand in getting the project started. This places the figure of the chronicler under direct supervision of the king, who would have ensured the continuation of the project from one generation to the next. Grayson identified up to twelve chronicles produced under this project, the *Nabonidus Chronicle* one of them. Placed within the context of this “continuous register of events”²³ produced by the “anonymous relay from generation to generation of the Babylonian scribal schools”,²⁴ the author of the *Nabonidus Chronicle* naturally emerges as a contemporary recorder, keeping track of events as they happened charged in the spirit of his master and his master’s masters before him.

Empirical data gathering

In addition to being a contemporary person, the author of the *Nabonidus Chronicle* is often imagined as an impartial recorder of facts – a profile which is potentially at odds with the idea that chronicle-writing emerged as a royal initiative. Here, a second interpretative framework is at work: that of the *Astronomical Diaries* as source of the chronicles. It was Grayson who put forward the idea that the chronicles are *Diaries* minus the astronomical, price, and river-level data. The implication is that the empirical method of data-gathering underlying the *Diaries*, equally applies to the chronicles. This explains why modern historians have such confidence in the chronicles as “impartial historical documents” written by authors who were “not trying to convince their readers of some particular idea.”²⁵ As to our question of authorship, this further

Chronicle Revisited,” has questioned whether chronicle 1a, 1b and 1c represent the same text.

²¹ G. De Breucker, “Berossos Between Tradition and Innovation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* (ed. K. Radner and E. Robson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 637–57 (645).

²² W. W. Hallo, “The Nabonassar Era and other Epochs in Mesopotamian Chronology and Chronography,” in *A Scientific Humanist. Studies in Memory of Abraham Sachs* (ed. E. Leichty et al.; Philadelphia, 1988), 175–90.

²³ Van der Spek, “Berossus,” 277.

²⁴ Mario Liverani, “Later Mesopotamia,” in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing. Volume 1: Beginnings to AD 600* (ed. A. Feldherr and G. Hardy; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 29–52 (45).

²⁵ Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 11. This idea that the Babylonian chronicles are unbiased records of the past has had a popular reception, e.g. Robert Drews, “The Babylonian Chronicles and Berossus,” *Iraq* 37 (1975): 39–55 (39–40); van

strengthens the idea that the *Nabonidus Chronicle* was written by a contemporary author working from observation and direct experience.²⁶

The manuscript and its community of users

The situation is not that straightforward, however. Already one of the first editors of the text pointed out that the only surviving manuscript of the *Nabonidus Chronicle* dates from the Hellenistic (or perhaps even Parthian period)²⁷ and that the witness of the text is at least two hundred years younger than the facts talked about. Was the process of transmission carried out by passive and un-intervening copyists, and can the (imagined) 6th century impartial observer-author be salvaged? The occurrence of at least one anachronism suggests that some alterations happened in the course of transmission,²⁸ either as a corrupting effect of bad copying or as a conscious intervention in the text by later scribes. When dealing with the question of author and audience, this problematic is essential. Which author and audience should we pursue: the author who wrote that putative, but elusive, original and *his* readers? Or the scribes who changed the original text, through incompetence or on purpose, and *their* readers?

If the only tangible thing we have is a manuscript, I propose to use this as the horizon of our discussion – and let any presumed original rest beyond our capacity (at least for the time being). After all, the moment when a manuscript is produced is the only moment in a text's lifespan that we can access – it is the one time when we know a text was both written *and* read, whether it came about through slavish copying or through creative engagement. In the manuscript, production and consumption of the text come together.

What do we know of the manuscript of the *Nabonidus Chronicle*? The tablet was purchased by the British Museum in 1879 from Spartali and Co.²⁹ Without excavated context, its origins cannot be identified precisely, but there are some

der Spek, "Berossus," 277–284; Beaulieu, "Nabonidus the Mad King," 138; Amélie Kuhrt, "Cyrus the Great of Persia: Images and Realities," in *Representations of Political Power: Case Histories from Times of Change and Dissolving Order in the Ancient Near East* (ed. M. Heinz and M. H. Feldman; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 169–91 (176); R. J. van der Spek, "Cyrus the Great, Exiles, and Foreign Gods: A Comparison of Assyrian and Persian Policies on Subject Nations," in *Extraction and Control: Studies in Honor of Matthew W. Stolper* (ed. M. Kozuh et al; SAOC 68; Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2014), 233–64 (254–55).

²⁶ The dependency of the chronicles on the Astronomical Diaries has been critiqued by Brinkman, "The Babylonian Chronicle Revisited" and Waerzeggers, "The Babylonian Chronicles," 297–8.

²⁷ Sidney Smith, *Babylonian Historical Texts Relating to the Capture and Downfall of Babylon* (London: Methuen, 1924), 98. The later date is added here because of the lifespan of the Esagil archives and libraries, which extends into the post-Seleucid period (see below); it was not suggested in the original study by Smith.

²⁸ Waerzeggers, "Facts, propaganda, or history?," 104.

²⁹ Julian Reade, "Introduction. Rassam's Babylonian Collection: The Excavations and the Archives," in E. Leichty, *Catalogue of the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum. Volume VI. Tablets from Sippar 1* (London: British Museum Press, 1986), xii–xxxvi (xv).

clues pointing to an approximate location. Sidney Smith noted that the paleography of the script points towards the Seleucid period as its time of writing and that Babylon was “undoubtedly” the place where the tablet had been “obtained from”.³⁰ The latter claim can be confirmed on the basis of the other materials that the British Museum purchased from Spartali alongside the *Chronicle*, and also more generally by means of the excavation history of Iraq in the latter half of the 1870s.³¹ The clay tablets that were dug up in Babylon in that period are mostly astronomical in nature and seem to have been produced in close proximity (physically as well as intellectually and economically) to the Esagil temple.³² Apart from the astronomical corpus, other types of text, including historical literature, are fairly well represented in these archives or libraries. The active lifespan of this corpus, judging from the turnout rate of astronomical texts, falls roughly in the period between Artaxerxes II and 60 B.C.E., with some earlier and later activity.³³ It is likely that we should situate the production of the manuscript of the *Nabonidus Chronicle* in that general time frame. In this period, the Esagil temple was the site not only of an elaborate sacrificial cult in honour of Bel and his divine household, but also a centre of astral science and other forms of knowledge, where the sons of a dozen local clans led a life dedicated to learning and worship.³⁴ This was the context which saw the emergence of the *Babyloniaca* of Berossus, today the best-known work of history produced by this community,³⁵ but there are several dozen clay tablets that attest to a lively production of historical writings in Babylonian cuneiform as well.³⁶ In a first instance, we should read the only surviving manuscript of the *Nabonidus Chronicle* against the backdrop of this literary environment.

³⁰ Smith, *Babylonian Historical Texts*, 98.

³¹ Van Driel, “The British Museum ‘Sippar’ Collection,” 106–7.

³² See Mathieu Ossendrijver, *Babylonian Mathematical Astronomy: Procedure Texts* (New York: Springer, 2012), 6–8 for a short introduction to the archival context of the astronomical texts. Earlier, van Driel had suggested an “official” (i.e. temple related) source for these tablets, while leaving their exact provenance open for discussion (“The British Museum ‘Sippar’ Collection,” 107).

³³ For the manuscript’s place in these libraries, see Clancier, *Les bibliothèques en Babylonie*, 448; Waerzeggers, “The Babylonian Chronicles,” 291. On the dating of the libraries’ active timespan, see Francis Joannès, “De Babylone à Sumer: Le parcours intellectuel des lettrés de la Babylonie récente,” *Revue Historique* 302/3 (2000): 693–717 (703).

³⁴ Mathieu Ossendrijver, “Astronomy and the Babylonian Scribal Families,” in *Brill’s Companion to Hellenistic Astronomy* (ed. A. Bowen and F. Rochberg; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

³⁵ Van der Spek, “Berossus”.

³⁶ Geert De Breucker, “Heroes and Sinners: Babylonian Kings in Cuneiform Historiography of the Persian and Hellenistic Periods,” in *Political Memory in and after the Persian Empire* (ed. J. M. Silverman and C. Waerzeggers; SBLANEM 13; Atlanta: SBL, 2015), 75–94; Caroline Waerzeggers, “Babylonian Kingship in the Persian Period:

The other texts that remain of this community can be used to capture the voices, the conversations, and the ideas that circulated at the time when our manuscript was produced. While we are not necessarily looking at the moment of the *Chronicle*'s inception as a work by its author,³⁷ we are minimally looking at a time when the *Chronicle* was deemed relevant and meaningful enough to be (re)produced. In the manuscript's textual environment, we find traces of an active interest in the figures of Nabonidus and Cyrus among the scholar-priests of Esagil. They wrote about this episode in Babylonian history often and creatively. The vibrancy of their conversations can be seen most clearly in the fact that they re-worked the theme multiple times, in different genres, and with different opinions and explanations. Berossus's *Babyloniaca* discusses the episode as one event in a long and elaborate history of Babylonia from creation to the present. The *Dynastic Prophecy* collects it among other instances of dynastic change that happened in the past but that are prophesized about the future. The *Nabonidus Chronicle* zooms in on the reign of Nabonidus and the first years of Cyrus, a time frame shared with the *Verse Account* of which a copy may have been available in the same learned community at Babylon. Other compositions focus more specifically on Nabonidus, such as the *Royal Chronicle* and an unidentified fragment of a literary text.³⁸ In addition to these literary texts, original inscriptions dating to the time of Nabonidus were also still around in the later period, and could be consulted, used and re-worked.³⁹ The lively interest in this episode of Babylonian history was, moreover, shared by other communities, outside of Babylon and outside the cuneiform cultural sphere.⁴⁰

What does this tell us about the issue of authorship and readership of the *Nabonidus Chronicle*? First, on the issue of authorship, the cultural context of the manuscript alerts us to the fact that there was more occasion for scribal agency in the period when the manuscript was produced than usually assumed. What form this agency took is difficult to say – compilation, modification, and creation or all possible – but it is certain that copying was not the only mode of production that can explain the manuscript's presence in the archives or libraries associated with the Esagil temple in the late Persian to Parthian periods. This invites us to reflect on assumptions about the identity of the author as a single, sixth-century individual. The history of the text may be more complex, perhaps involving multiple authors who did not all live at the time of the events talked

Performance and Reception," in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context* (ed. J. Stökl and C. Waerzeggers; BZAW 478; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 181–222 (209–219).

³⁷ Although we might be, as I argued in "Facts, Propaganda, or History?"

³⁸ See for an edition of the *Royal Chronicle* and the fragmentary literary text Hanspeter Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros' des Großen samt den in ihrem Umfeld entstandenen Tendenzschriften. Textausgabe und Grammatik* (AOAT 256. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001), 591–5 and 474–5.

³⁹ Waerzeggers, "Facts, Propaganda, or History?"

⁴⁰ Caroline Waerzeggers, "The Nabonidus Prayer in the Light of Hellenistic Babylonian Literature," in *Jewish Cultural Encounters in the Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern World* (ed. M. Popović et al.; JSJSup 178; Leiden: Brill, 2017).

about in the chronicle. Given the active interest in Nabonidus literature in the late Persian and Hellenistic periods, we should allow for the possibility that the *Chronicle* too was, to some degree or other, created or recreated at that time. Second, on the issue of readership, the archival context of the manuscript of the *Nabonidus Chronicle* enables us to identify one, specific community of readers of this text. In how far this community should be considered identical to the text's intended audience is difficult to say, as it depends on how one answers the questions about the text's creation that I just discussed. Less problematic is the notion of the scribe as audience:⁴¹ the production of the manuscript is a moment when the reception of, and engagement with, a text materializes into an object that we can study.

Conclusion

In this contribution, I attempted to steer away from one-size-fits-all models of authorship and readership in the Babylonian chronicles. As this corpus is a modern product of philology, a more nuanced evaluation – one that is appreciative of diversity – is desirable. Taking the *Nabonidus Chronicle* as an example, I have shown how, in the absence of any direct evidence on authors and readers, production and consultation might be aligned in the physical and intellectual space of the archive. This approach does not attempt to capture the moment of a text's inception but to understand the particular moment in its life cycle when the present manuscript came into being. By restoring manuscripts to the communities that produced them, we might begin to understand why a text was read and reproduced – when and by whom.

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⁴¹ This notion was developed with regard to medieval historiography by Fisher, *Scribal Authorship*.

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