

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php



BABYLON AT THE TIME OF THE EXILE.

THE capital importance of the city of Babylon for the history of Western Asia and indirectly for the history of the entire Occident has received additional emphasis from the recent progress of Assyriology. Interest in Cuneiform studies, at first largely confined to Assyria, has continually inclined toward Babylon, more especially to ancient Sumer and Akkad, where the literature and art of Western Asia were created. Babylon appears in history at the time of the Semitic dynasty of Agade [2800 B.C.] and was probably an ancient Sumerian settlement called *Ká-dingira* or "gate of god," which, translated into the language of the Semitic conquerors, became *bāb-ili* or *bāb-ilé*.¹ Soon after the founding of the Canaanitic dynasty of Sumu-abu about 2230, Babylon was made the capitol of the Semitic empire then known as Sumer and Akkad and remained the centre of political, religious and literary influence until the Persian conquests of Cyrus the Great.

In the last epoch of Babylonian history, commonly known as the Neo-Babylonian Empire, 626-538 B.C., the city enjoyed a peculiar position of pre-eminence in Asia, whose significance can scarcely be over-estimated. A movement now began in the temple schools of the ancient cults such as Nippur, Ur, Erech, Sippar, Barsippa, and especially in Babylon itself, which may be called the Babylonian Renaissance. New literary forms were created, the archaic Sumerian writing revived, and essentially all the poetry, history and lexicography of the past collected and re-edited.

¹ Naturally the Hebrew etymology for Babylon in Genesis xi. 9, where the name is explained from a root בבל, "be in confusion," is a popular and legendary derivation out of which may have grown the story of the Tower of Babel and the Confusion of Tongues. At least two languages, Sumerian and Semitic, were spoken in Mesopotamia before Babylon existed.

A PLAN OF BABYLON ACCORDING TO RECENT EXCAVATIONS AND NEWLY-DISCOVERED TEXTS.¹

-  Arahtu Canal.
 Wall Imgur-Bel and Nimitti-Bel.

- A'—C'. Street Aiburšabum.
 a. The gate *Bābu-ellu*.
 c. The *Ištar* gate.
 e—e. *Libilhegallu* Canal.
 d. Temple of *Ninmah*.
 f. Temple of *Ninib*.
 g E-kidur-inim, temple of *Zarpanit*.

- a—c. The street *Ištar-lamassi-umānišu*.
 B'—I. Street for *Nebo's* entrance from *Bar-sippa*.

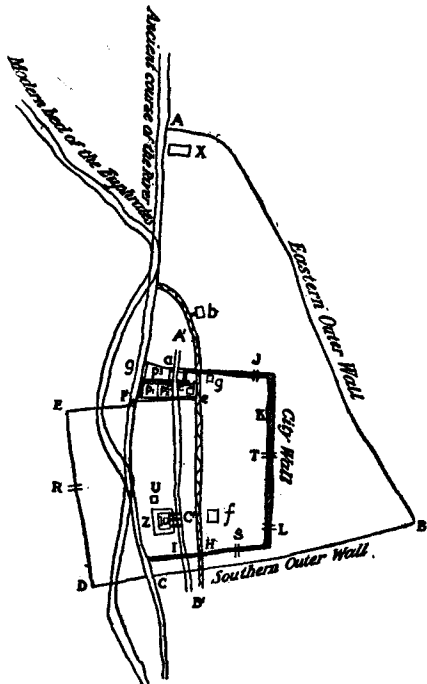
- b. Temple of sacrifices (?).
 I. The *Anu* Gate, or *Ikkibšunakar*.

- J. The *Ninib* or *Zamama* gate (?).

- L. The *Enlil* gate (?).
 S. The gate of *Sin* (?).
 R. The gate of *Ramman* (?).
 T. The gate of *Šamaš* (?).

- P. Palaces, see plan B.
 Z. *Esagila*, see plan C.
 X. Northern palace in the ruins of modern *Babil*.

- U. The location of the modern mound *Šahan*, possibly the site of the treasure house.



The scholar can with difficulty distinguish in the astonishing mass of literary and scientific work, which the Neo-Babylonian period has bequeathed to us, what is original and

¹ Note that the city wall consisted of two walls. The inner wall or *Imgur-Bel* was the real city wall; the outer city wall ran parallel to the inner line of defence, and at a very short distance from it. The map indicates both walls as a single construction which must not be taken literally. The line A-B-C bears the special designation, *Eastern Wall*, in the inscriptions, and this term is retained here. Topographically one should call it the outer wall.

what is copied from the classical age [*circa* 2560–1800]. At any rate the schoolmen, although good historians and astronomers, may scarcely be called the founders of a powerful literature such as marked the era of Hammurabi. Especially characteristic of their new editions and historical compilations is the tendency to redaction. Scribes did not hesitate to change proper names, cleverly omit or insert phrases, alter pronouns and genders, and to insert whole sections bodily into older documents. From the point of view of the mathematical and historical sciences, the period of the Exile represents the best of Mesopotamian and Semitic culture. On the side of the plastic arts the architects of Nebuchadnezzar the Great [604–561] produced at least one notable achievement in creating wall decorations with glazed bricks, an art zealously pursued by their Persian conquerors in the palaces of Persepolis.

The immense learning and the literary methods of the scribes of Babylonia certainly made a great impression upon the Hebrews who lived as captives in various parts of Babylonia. The long historical redactions of Nebuchadnezzar's scribes, whose cylinder inscriptions must have been exposed in public places throughout the empire, had some influence in the later methods of the Hebrew schoolmen who collected the documents of the Old Testament into its present form. Indeed the most notable literary compilation of the period is engraved upon the rocks of Wadi Brisa in the valley of the Orontes, probably by the scribes who attended the army that captured Jerusalem in 586.

We may not assume that the captives of Judah were settled at the capitol itself. Tablets found by the American Expedition in Nippur mention the canal *ka bāru*, the Chebar of Ezekiel. Professor Hilprecht has also made it probable

that the Hebrews who settled in the vicinity of Nippur named some of their towns after ancient cities of their own land; he cites the following places near Nippur and their Hebrew equivalents, *ḥa-aš-ba-[an]*¹=Hešbān and *iš-ka-lu-nu*=Askalon. The occurrence of the names of Hebrew towns in localities where Hebrews are known to have lived and to have entered actively into the social life of the communities in the times of Artaxerxes I. and Darius,² leads to the inference that the Hebrews at Nippur in the Persian period were descendants of the Hebrews of the Exile. Although Ezekiel and a considerable group of exiles lived at Nippur yet the king Jehoiachin must have been held in nominal imprisonment at Babylon, where he was released by Evilmerodak about 560. We may at any rate reasonably suppose that Hebrews resided at the capitol, although, so far as I know, no Hebrew names have been found in contracts from that city.

In 1899 the German Oriental Society, subventioned by the German Emperor, to whose interest in Assyriology much recent progress is due, began systematic excavations on the ancient site of Babylon. The result has been to confirm the Cuneiform records concerning the topography of the city and to discredit the Greek historians almost entirely. In fact an accurate description of the city must be founded upon the inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian kings Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar, Neriglissar and Nabuna'id, more especially upon those of the first two mentioned. Before passing to the reconstruction and

¹ Hilprecht, *ḥa-aš-ba-a*.

² For a long list of Hebrew names in contracts of this period, see Hilprecht, *Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania*, vol. ix. p. 27. This material is utilized by the last edition of *Gesenius-Buhl-Zimmern*. Among interesting Hebrew names found in contracts from Nippur are, *Ḥaggā*, Biblical Haggai; *Ḥananjāma*, Biblical Ananias (Hanajah); *Šamšānu*, Biblical Simeon; *Minjāmini*, Biblical Benjamin.

description of the ancient city as we now know it to have been in the time of the Exile, we must notice a few earlier essays upon the subject. Until the appearance of Weisbach's, *Das Stadtbild von Babylon* in the *Alte Orient*, 1904, Heft 4, popular and even scientific descriptions of Babylon had been based upon Oppert's fantastic outline which seems in turn to have followed Herodotus. Oppert had the opportunity [in 1851] of studying and excavating on the site itself, so that scholars naturally relied more or less upon his reconstruction. According to him the two parallel city walls Imgur-Bel and Nimitti-Bel¹ measured about ten English miles on each side and enclosed a square forty miles in circumference. This plan is reproduced by Baumstark in *Pauly's Real-Encyclopedia* (1896). Oppert's plan nearly equalled the absurdities of Herodotus himself, who gave 120 stadia [about 14 miles] for each of the sides. The statements of Ctesias and Cleitarchus are less pretentious [total circumference about 360 stadia], while Philostratus agrees with Herodotus. The article on Babylon by E. Pannier in Vigouroux's *Dictionnaire de la Bible* [1893] not only follows Oppert but gives a picture of the Hanging Gardens, a phantom of Greek writers, who probably refer to the new palace of Nebuchadnezzar, upon whose roof may have been placed a few plants and shrubs. The short account of Babylon by Robert W. Rogers in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* makes no reconstruction, but says that the inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar confirm Herodotus, a statement made also by Dr. Pinches in the *Encyclopedia Biblica*

¹ The names mean "Enlil was merciful," and "The foundation of Enlil." I have transcribed *Bél*, not *Enlil*, according to the universal custom. The name is invariably written *Enlil*, not *Bél*, but what can the Aramaic letters NB, found upon bricks by recent excavators, mean unless the reference be to the outer wall *Nimitti-Bél*? Enlil, the god of Nippur, was frequently used simply for *bél*, "lord," more especially for Marduk as "lord."

of Cheyne and Black.¹ There is no article on the Subject in Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*. Finally we may mention the article on Babylon by Hommel in his *Grundriss der Geographie und Geschichte des Alten Orients*, which unfortunately sets forth the impossible theory that the temple and tower of Marduk stood north of the palace. Hommel, in fact, turned the city exactly upside down. [A short account of recent results may be found in King and Hall's *Egypt and Western Asia in the Light of Recent Discoveries* (1907), pp. 165 f. and 474-7].

The Germans began their investigations [1899] upon the south-eastern side of the palace mounds, and soon located the Nebuchadnezzar palace [marked p 2 on Plan A]² in which the remarkable hall of columns and wall decorations were uncovered. In the course of the researches in this part of the mound the workmen came upon a considerable section of the principal street Aiburšabu, which ran north and south by the eastern wall of the palace. This discovery fixed at once the general contour of the city; for the inscriptions mention at least two city gates through which this street passed, and both the palace and the Temple of Bel in their topographic relation to it. Soon afterwards the highest hill of the ruins at the northern end of the *Kaşr* or palace mounds yielded the important information that the northern projection of the palace stood there [p 3]. The inscriptions, moreover, made it clear that the city walls passed between the northern and southern sections of the palace from the river to the Ištār Gate; and as the street already discovered passed through this gate the excavators could fix its site with mathematical

¹ A similar article by Pinches in Smith's *Bible Dictionary*.

² This *résumé* of the Expedition does not follow the exact order in which all the discoveries were made in point of time, but the general order given by me is correct.

certainty. When the massive walls of this double gate were at last laid bare the eastern continuation of the city walls could be ascertained ; but much obscurity still rests upon the probable line of direction pursued by this wall when it passed this point.

Most important for the topography of the city were the results at the hill Homera [κ on Plan A], where sections of the city wall came to light. This find settled the long-standing dispute as to whether the city wall included more than the palace hill or not. According to recent accounts of the experts in charge of the operations, they have succeeded in determining minutely the outlines and construction of the original palace [P'] as well as the city wall so far as concerns the palace hill. The excavations upon the Amran Hill, or the site of the temple [Z] have settled the question as to its position ; but the actual finds have been disappointing. The famous Tower of Babel seems to have been mutilated beyond recognition. Across the way from the temple hill to the east in the ruins called Aswad has been located the temple of Ninib, the god of war ; the temple of Ninlil, the consort of the earth-god of Nippur, has been discovered near the Istar gate east of the palaces.

Since Weisbach and Hommel's works [both in 1904, but Hommel used the *Stadtbild* of Weisbach] the German excavations have gone steadily forward ; and we are now able to give the general plan of the city with much greater accuracy than Weisbach could do five years ago. In the following discussion I shall eliminate the Greek sources entirely, they are positively useless. The Cuneiform inscriptions relating to the topography of Babylon have been recently edited by the writer of this article, *Building Inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire* [1905]. Since this book appeared, Weisbach has published an edition of the famous *Wadi Brisa* inscription from a new collation which

he made while official Assyriologist to the German Oriental Society. His new text has been invaluable in determining the topography of Babylon. A German edition of my book containing all the royal inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire is now passing through the press; and I shall give the references to this edition in all cases where texts are cited.¹ The reports of the excavations have been published in *Mittheilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft*, abbreviated MDOG. As I am not in communication with any of the officials either in Berlin or Babylon, new finds may exist which would modify this article.

In ancient times the Euphrates passed through the city in nearly a straight line from north to south. Already, however, in the days of Neriglissar² the river had begun to wear its course westward and had to be straightened by that king. Since the Greek period, when kings transferred their seat of Empire to Antioch and Babylon fell a prey to neglect and plunder, the river has continued to wear its way westward, so that it no longer flows past the walls of the palace and chief temple.³ The mounds of the ancient outer wall, called by me in my translations the Great Eastern Wall,⁴ can still be traced nearly the

¹ The numbering of inscriptions in the English edition has not been changed in the German edition, although a great many new inscriptions have been added.

² Neriglissar, No. 1, col. i. 41-ii. 5.

³ The map of the modern city to which my description has reference is that of Weisbach in *Stadtbild*, reproduced by Hommel, *op. cit.* 331, and Hilprecht (after Koldewey) in *Explorations in Bible Lands* (separate sheet). In the transcription of the modern Arabic names of the mounds I follow Weisbach, who knows the dialect of those parts better perhaps than any Assyriologist; he was for a considerable time the resident Assyriologist of the Expedition.

⁴ Finished by Nebuchadnezzar and referred to by him so often that one gathers the impression that he regarded it as the most important of his public works. See Nebuchadnezzar, Nos. 4, 5; and, I ii. 12-21; 9 ii. 1-9; 13 ii. 25-34; 14 ii. 57-iii. 10; 15 vi. 22-38 and 19 B vi. 46-59. This wall was wrongly identified by previous writers with the city wall proper.

whole distance about the city east of the river. The mound begins at the old bank of the river, now filled with sand, about a mile north of the ancient City Wall,¹ runs east-east by south about six hundred yards, then pursues a south-south by east direction for 4,200 yards. Here the wall turned at a right angle and ran straight to the river, reaching it a short distance south of the great temple of Bel-Marduk.² The official description which Nebuchadnezzar caused to be written concerning the wall reads as follows:—"To strengthen the defences of Esagila, that the evil and the destroyer might not press against Babylon, that the attack of battle might not draw near to Imgur-Bel, the wall of Babylon, that which no king had done before me, I did, in that in the outskirt of Babylon, a great wall to the east of Babylon, I constructed about the city. Its moat I dug and attained to the water-level. I saw that the moat-wall which my father had fixed was inadequately constructed. A great wall which like a mountain cannot be moved I built with asphalt and burnt-brick and with the moat-wall of my father I joined it. Its foundation upon the bosom of the abyss I placed. Its top I raised mountain-like. To fortify the flanks of the city I made it three-fold. A huge protecting rampart for the foundation of burnt-brick I laid down, upon the bosom of the abyss I built it and placed its foundation record."³

¹ By city wall I mean always Imgur-Bel and Nimitti-Bel which formed one construction.

² This wall is marked A-B-C on the plan. The ruins of Esagila are marked Z. *Esagila*, the Sumerian name of Marduk's temple, means, "temple of the lifting of the head." The famous seven-staged tower of Babel stood in the court of Esagila east and north of the main building (or chapel of Marduk, *Ekuu*) and bore the name *Etemen-anki*. The term *Esagila* refers properly to the entire temple including all the shrines and the tower. See for a detailed description farther on. "Esagila" denotes in this article the entire temple structure.

³ The *temenu* or inscribed cylinder placed in the walls of foundations. The above inscription is taken from a *temenu*.

The defences of Esagila and Babylon I strengthened and created an everlasting name for my reign.”¹

The section east of the river had, therefore, the shape of a huge triangle. The smaller and much less important part of the city west of the river seems to have existed only in the late period. Its wall, whose remains are still visible, enclose a rectangle with the ancient river. The southern wall [D-C on the plan] met the river exactly opposite the end of the Eastern Wall. The north wall joined the river nearly opposite the palace.² The ends of the western rectangular section measured about a half mile, the western wall parallel to the river measured about a mile. Nebuchadnezzar seems to have been the first to enclose the city west of the river, but the rampart [C-D-E-F] he does not dignify with the name *dûru*, or wall, but calls it simply a *kâru* or moat-wall. The inscriptions do not mention any wall along the river from the northern end of the Eastern Wall as far as the City Wall, which joined the river just north of the old palace at G. The greatest circumference of the city, therefore, was only seven miles, or, if we add the unprotected river's edge, eight miles at the utmost.

The outline which has just been given holds good for the late period only. When the inscriptions speak of Babylon they mean simply the ancient city within Imgur-Bel. It will be observed from the language of the inscription translated above that Babylon is distinguished from Esagila. From this one might infer that the City

¹ The other accounts state that this Eastern Wall ran 4,000 cubits, or about a mile and 45 rods, east of the city, meaning, I suppose, the nearest point of this wall directly east of the Arahtu Canal (?).

² On the plan the modern name of the ruins of the Palace is *Emdschelibe*, more commonly designated, however, by *Kasr*, the Arabic word for “palace,” and applied to the lofty ruins of Nebuchadnezzar's new palace in the northern end of Emdschelibe.

Walls did not include the great temple area [Z] of Esagila, but the temple of Ninib, which stood very near to it in the hill *Ishan il-aswad* [f] is said to be within Babylon and the tower, Etemenanki, is called the tower of Babylon, so that we may be safe in assuming that the huge City Wall, which the excavators found to be more than twenty-two feet thick in places, actually included both the palace and the temple Esagila. I lay considerable emphasis on this statement, which is here made for the first time, since the entire topography of the city depends upon where we locate the City Wall. The two principal mounds of the ruins are those of the palace and those of Esagila [Z].¹ East of the palace ruins at K the Germans excavated a Greek theatre and found considerable sections of both city walls. A long wall in ruins can still be traced from the hill K or *Ishan il-aḥamer* southward until it loses itself in the open field not far from the Eastern Wall. This is evidently the eastern line of the ancient city or Imgur-Bel and Nimitti-Bel.

“Babylon,” designated the city within the City Walls; the north-west corner, which, as we shall soon see, was especially protected by canals on three sides and the river on the west, contained the palace, and was distinguished from the city itself by the term *irṣit bābili*, “Land of Babylon.” This famous palace of the kings of Sumer and Akkad occupied the north-west corner of the city; the city wall not only formed its northern defence but stood between the palace and the river, or rather actually formed the western wall of the palace. I venture to give the following plan of the old palace.

¹ The modern Arabic name for the southern ruins is *Ishan Amran ibn Ali*, or hill of Amran, son of Ali, named after the Mohammedan saint whose tomb lies upon the western summit of the temple hill.

built over. At any rate the new palace was built against the wall itself and the excavations have revealed the great stairway which led down from the northern addition into the throne-room of the Old Palace.

The vast ruins of the temple hill at Amran have been disappointing. In fact, the greatest possible confusion still exists concerning the tower of Babylon and the shrine of Marduk. To add to our perplexity the only tablet which gave a description of this most interesting of all ancient sanctuaries has mysteriously disappeared. It was read by George Smith at Constantinople and a résumé was published by him in the *Athenæum* of February 12, 1876. Most curious and conflicting reconstructions have been made from Smith's sketch of the tablet; among the most ingenious is the plan of Hommel, *Geographie*, 321.

One gathers from the description left by Smith that the great square platform on which stood the tower and chapels was placed within two concentric courts which were not square. Six gates opened on to the inner area from the middle court. The names of four of these are preserved in the inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar and Neriglissar. The following three lists contain the names of these gates.

SMITH.

1. The Grand Gate.
2. Gate of the East.
3. The Great Gate.
4. Gate of the Colossi.
5. Gate of the Canal.
6. Gate of the Tower View.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

1. Gate of Ea.¹
4. Gate of the Colossi.
5. Gate of Plenty.
6. Gate of Observation.

NERIGLISSAR.

2. Gate of the East.
4. Gate of the Bird Colossi (West).
5. Gate of Plenty (North).
6. Gate of Observation (South).

Smith's translation of No. 6 *bāb tabrāti* is not quite accu-

¹ *bāb-nun-abzu*. It is possible that Smith's 1 or 3 is identical with Nebuchadnezzar's *bāb-nun-abzu*. He may have overlooked *abzu*.

rate; he certainly had the same name before him which has been preserved in the inscriptions. The Gate of Plenty, *bāb hegalli*, is an abbreviation of *bāb libil-hegalli*, "Gate of the Libil-hegallu canal," which Smith seems to have read on the tablet. The Libil-hegallu canal flowed north of the temple, hence this gate must be identified with the northern gate.¹ The Gate of the Colossi is certainly the western gate, and the Gate of Observation the southern gate. I shall venture to give a plan of the temple of Marduk reconstructed after Smith's description and the few notices in the inscriptions. The excavations have thrown little light upon the problem.

PLAN C.

THE TEMPLE OF MARDUK.

A. Gate of Plenty, facing the Libil-hegallu Canal.

B. Eastern Gate.

C. Gate of the Colossi.

D. Gate of Observation.

E. Gate of Ea.

F. The Great Gate [so Smith].

a-b-c-d, raised platform *kigallu* on which stood the chapels and tower.

Z. The stage tower, Etemenanki.

M. Chapels of Marduk and Zarpanit. Perhaps many smaller chapels to other deities.

N. Chapels of Nebo and Tašmet and fourteen smaller chapels. The chamber of destiny or Dulazag was in this building. [Weisbach places Dulazag near the gate *Bābu-ellu*.]

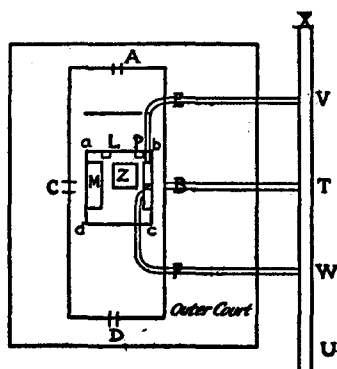
L. Chapel of Nusku the fire-god.

P. Chapel of Ea, god of incantations and patron of the water cult [Karragina].

BT. The walk leading from Aiburšabum to the temple, not mentioned in any inscription.

VE. Walk leading from the Chamber of Destiny to the street Aiburšabum, made of breccia stone described in Neb. 15 v. 12-20.

U-W-F-N, street called Nabu-daiān-niši-šu, "Nebo, judge of his people," made for Nebo, who entered Babylon from Barsippa through the southern gate, see Neb. 19 A vii. 49.



¹ We shall see in the case of the city gates that the Babylonians chose their names from the locality which each faced.

Herodotus described the tower Z as having eight stages but his statement probably included the platform. The bases of these towers were usually so arranged that the corners faced the cardinal points, not the sides. I have, however, drawn the outline Z with the sides to the cardinal points, since Smith's description states clearly that the platform a-b-c-d was so built. Herodotus gave the sides of the base or first stage as one stadium or 604 feet. Smith gave 270 feet, but the scribes of Nabopolassar determined the sides of the base at one *aba ašlu*.¹ The *ašlu* has been fixed at 120 cubits or 180 feet by Hilprecht. The word *aba*, which in any case determines the word *ašlu*, being unknown, the measurement must regrettably remain uncertain.² The following are Smith's figures for the stages.

- 1 Sides 270 feet, height 99 feet.
- 2 Sides 234 feet, height 54 feet.
- 3 Sides 180 feet, height 18 feet.
- 4 Sides 153 feet, height 18 feet.
- 5 Sides 126 feet, height 18 feet.
- 6 Sides 99 feet, height 18 feet.
- 7 Sides 72 feet, height 45 feet.

It will be observed that the stages 3-7 decrease in size each by 27 feet, and that the last stage formed a sort of spire, within which was built a sanctuary. According to Herodotus nothing adorned this room but a bed and a golden table; at night a female devotee of the god Marduk slept there.

S. LANGDON.

(*To be concluded.*)

¹ Nabopolassar, I, II, 26.

² One must also take into consideration the possibility of Nebuchadnezzar's having enlarged the base, but his own account [No. 17] states that he did nothing more than build upon the lower part [30 cubits high] left by his father.