

# **NEO-ASSYRIAN TEXTS FROM NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S BABYLON: A PRELIMINARY REPORT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Some of the latest Neo-Assyrian texts so far excavated were unearthed by Koldewey already in 1903 in the South Palace built by Nebuchadnezzar II in Babylon. A short description of the finds together with a preliminary treatment of one of the texts will be given here. Noteworthy are the capacity units *sa* and *ak*.

## **1. NEO-ASSYRIAN TEXTS FROM NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S REIGN FOUND AT TELL ŠĒḤ ḤAMAD**

During Hartmut Kühne's excavation in 1992 at Dur-Katlimmu (modern Tell Šēḥ Ḥamad) in northeast Syria, a group of four quite unexpected clay tablets were unearthed in a late Neo-Assyrian – early Neo-Babylonian private house (Kühne 1993). The texts were quickly studied and published (Postgate 1993, Röllig 1993ab, Brinkman 1993, Fales 1993). The reason for their quick publication and the great interest among scholars were that they were written with Neo-Assyrian script, language, and legal formulas, but dated to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, years 2 and 5, during the following Neo-Babylonian period.

At the time of their excavation, these texts were considered to be the latest Neo-Assyrian written texts unearthed so far. As will be shown here, clay tablets with Neo-Assyrian script of similar or even slightly later date may have been unearthed some 90 years earlier.

## **2. NEO-ASSYRIAN TEXTS FROM NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S REIGN FOUND IN BABYLON**

Robert Koldewey conducted his famous excavations in Babylon during 1899–1917. Already in 1903, during the work in the area of the South Palace

built by Nebuchadnezzar II, the archaeologists discovered the only main administrative archive in Babylon. Only a handful of the hundreds of tablets found in palace archives N1, N2, and N3 have so far been published (Weidner 1939, Pedersén 2005a: 110–132).

### 2.1. The Excavations

The South Palace, immediately southwest of the Ištar Gate in Babylon was the most completely excavated large building in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar expanded eastwards an earlier construction by his father Nabopolassar and the result was a large building with 600 rooms on the ground floor around a series of some 50 inner courtyards. The building was partially reconstructed in the 1980s. In the northeast section of the palace where the large, vaulted sub-terrain chambers were situated, the main part of the archive (N1) with 300 assigned excavation numbers was found. A smaller group of tablets (N2) related to the main group was found next to the Ištar gate and another small group of related tablets (N3) was recorded as found at the entrance area of the South Palace (Pedersén 2005a: 110–132).

### 2.2. The Archives

The more than 300 tablets are the remains of administrative archives (N1–N3) recording the entering and expenditure of large quantities of foodstuffs: barley, dates, and sesame oil. The incoming barley was stored in large silos at the palace and in other parts of Babylon. The sesame oil was distributed to important Babylonians and foreigners present in Babylon (Pedersén 2005b); among them were the exiled king Jehoiachin of Judah (2 Kings 24:8–17). The texts in the archives date from the years 3–34 during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II. In many texts both the name of the king and the regnal year are mentioned, but in several Neo-Babylonian texts only the regnal year and not the name Nebuchadnezzar is given. Internal relations among the texts confirm that, even when the royal name is not mentioned, the regnal years refer to Nebuchadnezzar II (Pedersén 2005a: 110–132). This is probably also the situation with the few texts written in Neo-Assyrian found together with Neo-Babylonian tablets in the entrance area of the palace built by Nebuchadnezzar (N3) to be discussed here. The Neo-Assyrian texts are dated to the years 3–9 (or years 3–6?) and deal with matters similar to the Neo-Babylonian tablets from the same findspot.

The texts in the archives are in the process of being published by O. Pedersén, responsible for transliterations, translations, commentaries, and studies, and J. Marzahn, responsible for the cuneiform copies. Below, one text written in Neo-Assyrian will be preliminarily discussed as an example. Although it has not been possible to rediscover many of the tablets from the German excavations in Babylon from museums or other collections, the photos made during the excavations are sometimes known. One such Neo-Assyrian tablet, Bab 27274, has already been published in photo (Pedersén 2005a: 130, Fig. 61). That tablet is of the same type as the one discussed here.

### 2.3. A Text as an Example

As an example of the Neo-Assyrian texts from Nebuchadnezzar's South Palace in Babylon, Bab 27275 (now VAT 17549 also to be seen on PhBab 1235 [1 2] and 1236 [1 2]) is here presented in photo (Fig. 1) and transliteration with translation.

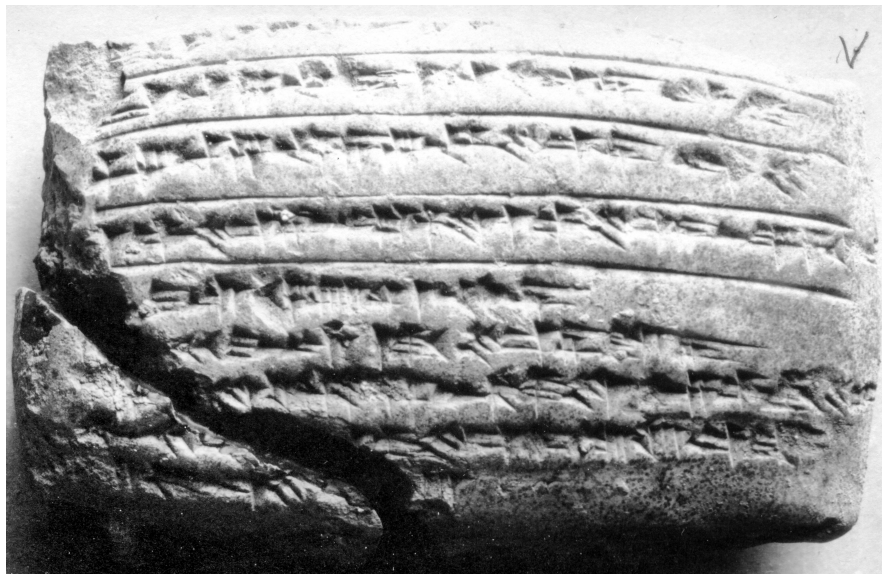


Fig. 1. Photo of the reverse of Bab 27275 taken during the excavation in Babylon (PhBab 1236). The transliteration given below is based on a reading of the original tablet in comparison with the excavation photos.

*Transliteration*

## Upper edge

- 1 [x x x x x x x x.x].x 6 ak ŠE.GIŠ.ì  
 2 [x x x x x x x x.x].4 3 qa 5 ak ì UD.1

## Obverse

1	1 GUR.2 PI [ì i]š-kar ša ITI.BARAG MU.3		
2	0.0.4 2 qa 2 <sup>2</sup> ak ì	5 ak ŠE.GIŠ.ì	UD.1 ša ITI.GUD
3	0.0.5 <sup>2</sup> 5 ak ì	5 ak ŠE.GIŠ.ì	ša ITI.SIG <sub>4</sub> UD.1
4	0.0.5 1 qa 6 ak ì	4 qa 5 ak ŠE.GIŠ.ì	KIMIN ITI.ŠU
5	0.0.5 3 qa 5 ak ì	5 ak ŠE.GIŠ.ì	ITI.NE
6	0.0.4 1 ak ì	5 ak (ŠE.GIŠ).ì	ša ITI.KIN
7	0.0.5 4 qa 7 ak ì	5 ak ŠE.GIŠ.ì	ITI.DU <sub>6</sub>
8	0.0.5 2 qa 5 ak ì	5 ak ŠE.GIŠ.ì	ITI.APIN

## Lower edge

1	0.1.1 2 qa 3 ak ì	0.0.1 3 qa 5 ak ŠE.GIŠ.ì	ITI.GAN
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## Reverse

1	0.0.5 4 qa 8 ak ì	0.0.3 1 qa ŠE.GIŠ.ì	ITI.AB
2	0.0.2 1 qa 6 ak ì	1 qa ŠE.GIŠ.ì	ITI.ZÍZ
3	0.0.1 4 qa 5 ak ì	5 ak ŠE.GIŠ.ì	ITI.ŠE
4	1 PI ŠE.GIŠ.ì ina ka-bar-te 1 PI ŠE.GIŠ.ì ina BUR šá 12 ITI.ME <sup>2</sup>		
5	[PAB] 3 GUR 14 sa 2 qa 1 ak ì		
6	a-[na] 24 GUR.1.4 ŠE.GIŠ.ì šá ì		
7	18 s[a]-te 2 qa ŠE.GIŠ.ì ḫal-šu-te PAB 4 PI.4 ŠE.GIŠ.ì		
8	PAB 25 [GUR].1.2 ŠE.GIŠ.ì TA ŠÀ ITI.BARAG		
9	a-di ITI.ŠE MU <sup>2</sup> .3 <sup>2</sup>		

## Translation

## Upper edge

- 1 [..... x+].6 litres sesame  
 2 [..... x+]27.5 litres oil, day 1.

## Obverse

1	252 litres oil, <i>iškāru</i> assignment of the month Nisan (I), year 3;		
2	26.2 litres oil	0.5 litre sesame	day 1 of month Iyyar (II);
3	30.5 litres oil	0.5 litre sesame	of month Sivan (III), day 1;
4	31.6 litres oil	4.5 litres sesame	day 1, month Tammuz (IV);
5	33.5 litres oil	0.5 litre sesame	month Ab (V);
6	24.1 litres oil	0.5 litre sesame	of month Elul (VI);
7	34.7 litres oil	0.5 litre sesame	month Tishri (VII);
8	32.5 litres oil	0.5 litre sesame	month Marchesvan (VIII);

## Lower edge

1	44.3 litres oil	9.5 litres sesame	month Kislev (IX);
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## Reverse

1	34.8 litres oil	19 litres sesame	month Tebet (X);
2	13.6 litres oil	1 litre sesame	month Shebat (XI);
3	10.5 litres oil	0.5 litre sesame	month Adar (XII);
4	36 litres sesame in <i>kabartu</i> , 36 litres sesame in <i>pūru</i> for 12 months.		
5–6	[Total:] 626.1 litres oil for 4,380 litres sesame <i>of</i> oil;		
7	110 litres pressed-out sesame, total: 168 litres sesame;		
8–9	Total: 4,548 litres sesame from the month Nisan (I) until the month Adar (XII), year 3.		

## 2.4. Commentary

Not only the Neo-Assyrian script, but also several other aspects of the text, either Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian, are noteworthy. Due to the fragmentary state of the tablet and because there are only a few fragmentary additional tablets of similar type in the archives, there are still a number of problems with the interpretation. Some of these matters will be preliminarily discussed here. The upper edge is here taken as the beginning of the document because of the other texts of similar type.

### 2.4.1. Writings

The frequent syllabic short writings of capacity units are interesting: *sa* (or *sa-te*), *qa*, and *ak*. The smallest unit is *ak* as an abbreviation for *akal* or *akalu* (NINDA), in the Babylonian system a tenth of the next larger unit, i.e. ca 0.1 litre. The middle unit, *qa* or SILA, in full form *qû*, is of course the well-known approximate correspondence to 1 litre. The larger unit *sa* or *sa-te* is the short form of *sût* or *sûtu* (often written BÂN or 0.0.1), in plural *sât* or *sâtu* or *sûtâtu*, first equivalent to 10 litres, later 6 litres in Babylonia. The largest units are PI or 0.1.0 and GUR (*kur* or *kurru*) or 1.0.0, which looks like a normal Neo-Babylonian *kur*-system also used in Neo-Assyrian documents. The subtotal in r.7 has in other texts a correct sum. Here one of the two added components has not been written.

### 2.4.2. Units and Calculations

The units and calculations are not fully clear in all details due to the fragmentary state of the tablets of this subgroup, but some preliminary points can be made. It is possible to calculate the amounts with contemporary Neo-Babylonian values of the units as has been done here in the translation. In that case only the 18 *sa-te* are apparent, instead of the normal 3 PI, and the 14 *sa* instead of the expected 2 PI 2 *sa*.

At the end of the tablet, the total of sesame (r.8) is the sum of the amounts of sesame given in two earlier lines (r.6 and r.7); so also in other tablets of the subgroup. The amount of sesame (r.6) is almost exactly seven times the amount of oil in the previous line (r.5), not the six times used in most other tablets of the archive.

## 3. CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES

A small group of administrative documents written in Neo-Assyrian was found together with Neo-Babylonian tablets from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II in the South Palace built by Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. If the dating to the reign of

Nebuchadnezzar will not be challenged, the Neo-Assyrian tablets from Babylon may together with the approximately contemporary tablets from Dur-Katlimmu be so far the latest available Neo-Assyrian texts. Some of the readings of the capacity units are exceptional: *sa* and *ak* together with the common *qa*. The full understanding of the details of the texts awaits future studies.

The texts from the archives in the South Palace in Babylon, both the many Neo-Babylonian and the small group of Neo-Assyrian, are in the process of publication and edition. The Vorderasiatisches Museum (Berlin) and especially its curator of cuneiform texts, Dr. J. Marzahn, are thanked for the opportunity to make a preliminary discussion of a small section of the material here. Several of the texts only exist as photos taken during the excavations in Babylon (some can be seen in the figures in Pedersén 2005a), and the rediscovery of more tablets from the German excavations in different collections would greatly improve the study of this interesting city.

