

31) Babylonian Miscellanea 1. The date of construction of the Euphrates Canal (*Nār-Puratti*)— The only royal inscription dated to the time of Nabopolassar which concerns civil work in the vicinity of Sippar is Langdon, Nbp, no. 2, now RINBE 1, Nabopolassar 14 (<http://oracc.org/ribo/Q005372/.Q005373/>).¹⁾ This short inscription of only 31 lines written in two columns deserves special attention because, on the one hand, it is an example of royal propaganda at the highest level, and, moreover, it may be the earliest example of royal economic activity in the Neo-Babylonian period.

The inscription, written on a clay cylinder, begins with the presentation of the king as a pious ruler, praying to Marduk and Nabû, who ordered him to look after the cities and sanctuaries located in them. This terse introduction is followed by an explanation of the reason for the commencement of construction work.

ì-nu-mi-šu-um zimbir.ki ma-ḥa-zi ší-i-ri na-ra-am ^dutu u ^da-a id.buranun is-si-šu-ma a-na qú-ud-duš be-lu-ti-šu-nu me-e i-re-e-qu a-na sa-a-bu (col. I, 12-16)

At that time, Sippar, lofty city, beloved by Šamaš and Aya, because the Euphrates had shifted some distance from it (Sippar), and the water was too far to draw to maintain the purity of their majesty”.

The royal decision is not motivated by the desire to satisfy the vital and economic needs of the city dwellers, but by cultic needs of the city gods. The brief description of the construction of the canal in col. II again precedes a picture of the ruler’s devotion to the gods (*ašri šaḥti pāliḥ ilī*).

ia-a-ti id.buranun a-na zimbir.ki lu ú-ša-aḥ-ra-am-ma me-e nu-úḥ-ši el-lu-tim a-na ^dutu en-ia lu ú-ki-in ki-bi-ir id šu-a-ti i-na esir.ud.du.a u a-gur-ri lu ú-ša-ar-ši-id-ma a-na ^dutu en-ia kar šu-ul-mi-im lu ú-um-mi-id (col. II, 3-14)

I had the Euphrates dug out as far as to Sippar and I established abundant pure water for Šamaš, my lord; I strengthened the bank of that canal with kiln-fired bricks laid in bitumen and I provided for Šamaš, my lord with a safe embankment”.

The canal was constructed according to the best standards: its banks were strengthened with kiln-fired bricks (*agurru*) laid in bitumen and an embankment (*kāru*), probably within the city of Sippar, was built.

The new canal was named the “Euphrates canal” (*Nār-Puratti*) while later, already in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, another name, *Nār-Šamāš*, was in use (Jursa 2010, 324). Until now, the earliest recognised attestation of the canal comes from the early years of Nebuchadnezzar (Jursa, *ibid.*); therefore, the text published below is extremely important, because it allows us to determine more precisely the date of the canal’s construction and the time of creation of the inscription commemorating this fact. The copy of ten out of fourteen lines of an administrative document BM 49293 was published already in 1910 by Pinches,²⁾ a fact not noted by modern scholars. The subject of the text is divided into two parts, the first, published by Pinches, concerns the delivery of building materials, the second (ll. 11-14), of which the first line is extremely badly preserved, presumably concerns payment for a cow; both took place in the same day, month, and year, i.e. on the twenty-first of Ulūlu, in the sixteenth year of Nabopolassar.

The first entry which is the subject of our interest concerns delivery in two instalments of wooden material called *šadipu*, (presumably twigs) which seldom appears in texts.³⁾ According to lines 7-8, a huge number of 7,300 *šadipus* was stored “in the storehouse, which is on the Euphrates Canal” (*bīt makkūri ša Nār-Puratti*). This is highly important information, as it means that in the middle of sixteenth year of Nabopolassar the canal had been functioning for some time, as a storehouse had already been built on its bank.

Since, in the light of BM 49239, “the Euphrates canal” existed already in 610 BC, the inscription commemorating its construction must be dated close to this time, as such a brief inscription written on commonly accessible materials as clay must have been composed shortly after completion of the canal, or maybe already after the completion of its main part. The purpose of wooden material in BM 49293 is not known, but it cannot be excluded that it might be destined for the construction of an earthen wall called a *mušanītu* for which “Faschine” (as described by Jursa 1995, 188) were used.

BM 49293 sheds new light on the early years of the Neo-Babylonian empire, as it shows that Nabopolassar, the new ruler of the rebuilt state, based his authority on three different elements. First and most obvious was the presentation of the ruler as a pious, humble worshiper of the gods, striving for the satisfaction of all their needs, especially caring for temples as places of cultic ceremonies. Although Nabopolassar did not avoid mentioning his military achievements, which he shared with the Medes, in his inscriptions, they are not the central part of his royal inscriptions, as such mentions are short and discreet, and did not present the king as, for example, the commander-in-chief of the victorious army. Although the discussed royal inscription

explains the decision to build the Euphrates Canal only as caring for the gods, it is beyond doubt that it was beneficial for members of the local communities and the economy. There is no doubt that such an achievement strengthened the king's authority among the local society.

The material resources needed to conduct the task came presumably from the spoils of the looted cities of Assyria (especially Nineveh and Kalhu). The date of BM 49239 suggests that the main part of the Euphrates canal was completed before the final destruction of the Assyrian Empire in 609 BC.

BM 49239 (82-3-23, 230)

5.3 x 3.55 cm

21.6.16Nbp

Obv.	1.	3 lim 3 me 40	Rev.	7.	<i>ina é níg.ga</i>
	2.	^{gis} ša-di-pi maḥ-ru-[t]u		8.	ša ina ¹ ugu ¹ id ud.kib.nun ^{ki}
	3.	3 lim 9 me 60		9.	iti.kin u.21.kam
	4.	^{gis} ša-di-pi ár-ku-tú		10.	mu.16.kam ^{md} ag ¹ -a-ùru
	5.	pap 7 lim 3 me ^{gis} ša-di-[pi]		11.	^{6?} gín ¹ kù ¹ .babbar ¹ x x x x x ¹
L.e.	6.	ár- ¹ ku ¹ -[tú] u maḥ-ru-tu	L.h.e.	12.	1 gu.4.ab ^m uš-ša-a-a ina igi
				13.	^m du-muq iti.kin u.21.kam
				14.	mu.16.kam ^{md} ag-a-ùru

Translation

1-10. 3340 twigs of earlier delivery, 3960 of later delivery, total 7300 of earlier and later deliveries of twigs (stored) in the storehouse on the Euphrates canal; month Ulūlu, twenty-first day, sixteenth year of Nabopolassar.

11-14. ^{6?} shekels of silver, ...one cow which Uššaya (gave to) Dummuqu; month Ulūlu, twenty-first day, sixteenth year of Nabopolassar.

Notes

1. Translations are based on this edition.
2. Pinches 1910, 62, no. 3. The tablet includes two entries, however, Pinches copied only the first one. Line 11, the first line of the second entry, is so badly preserved that I have abandoned the attempt to present its transliteration; as Pinches suggested, the second entry concerns a cow and is dated on the same day, month, and year as the first entry.
3. An additional unpublished text in which a quantity of šadipu is related to two different building materials will be published elsewhere.

Bibliography

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