

NABU 1991-79 Paul-Alain Beaulieu

Egg Offerings for the Gods of Babylon – In three of his inscriptions Nebuchadnezzar II boasts of having established regular offerings of eggs, birds and fish, collectively designated as « the pride of the marsh » (*simat appāri*), for the gods of Babylon and Borsippa. The references are as follows :

I R 65 (= VAB IV Nbk.9 = Berger, AOAT 4/I pp. 287-88, Nbk. Zylinder III, 4)

Offerings to Marduk, Zarpanītu, and the gods of Babylon

Col.I 18.	<i>qá-du-um šá dingir.dingir é.sag.íl ù din gir.dingir ba-bi-lam^{ki}</i>
19.	<i>nu-ú-nù iṣ-ṣu-ru ú-šu-um-mu pe-la-a si-ma-at ap-pa-ri-im</i>
20-25	(various delicacies such as honey, milk, oil, wine, beer etc ...)
26.	<i>ki-ma me-e na-a-ri la ni-bi-im</i>
27.	<i>i-na ^{giš}banšur ^damar.ud ù ^dzar-pa-ni-tu₄</i>
28.	<i>en.meš-e-a lu ú-da-aš-ša-am</i>

« Together with the gods of Esagil and the gods of Babylon, fish, birds, voles (and) eggs, the pride of the marsh (...), did I provide abundantly, like the countless waters of a river, for the table of Marduk and Zarpanītu my lords. »

Offerings to Nabû and Nanaya at Borsippa

Col.II 30.	<i>pé-la-a si-ma-at ap-pa-ri-im¹</i>
31-33	(oil, beer, wine, butter and milk)
34.	<i>giš^šbanšur ^dna-bi-um ù ^dna-na-a</i> <i>en.meš-e-a</i>
35.	<i>e-li ša pa-nim ú-ṭa-ah-hi-id</i>

« Eggs, the pride of the marsh (...), did I provide in greatly increased quantities for the table of Nabû and Nanaya my lords. »

Similar statements are repeated in Col. III 13-17 (eggs, birds and fish for Marduk and Nabû in the Esagil and the Ezida) and also occur in the Wadi-Brissa and Nahr el-Kelb inscriptions of the same ruler (Weissbach WVDOG 5 = VAB IV Nbk.19 = Berger, AOAT 4/I pp.314-18, Wadi-Brissa + Nahr el-Kelb Inschrift) : B Col.VII 19-21, also mentions « eggs, the pride of the marsh » (*nunuz-a si-ma-l at¹ ap-pa-ri*), whereas A Col.VII 7-10 is more specific, listing « duck eggs » among the delicacies offered to Nabû and Nanaya at Borsippa (see also the inscription BM 45619 now fully published by A.R. George in RA 82, 1988, 146) :

A Col.VII 7.	[o o] <i>qá-du šá dingir.meš b[ar-síp^{ki}]</i>
8.	[o] <i>uz.tur^{mušen} 3 tu.kur₄ 20 š[eš^{mušen}]</i>
9.	[o] <i>nunuz uz.tur^{mušen} 2 ú-šum-[mu-ú]</i>
10.	<i>i-si-ih nu-l nu¹ zu.ab si-mat a[p-pa-ri]</i>

« Together with the gods of B[orsippa ...] ducks, 3 turtledoves, 20 *mar[ratu]* birds ...] duck eggs, 2 vo[les], a string of fish from the Apsû, the pride of the marsh ... »

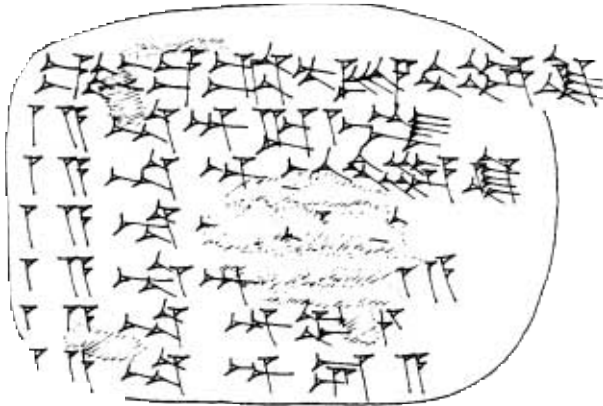
The existence of egg offerings in the Esagil and the Ezida is known only from the aforementioned inscriptions. The tablet published here therefore provides the first archival confirmation of Nebuchadnezzar's claim to have instituted, and in some cases reinstated or increased, such offerings. The tablet bears the museum number YBC 5159 and was recently identified in the course of cataloguing the holdings of the Yale Babylonian Collection¹. Measurements of the tablet are 31x40x16 mm. :

YBC 5159

obv. 1.	<i>nunuz nap-ta-nu^{mes} šá tin.tir^{ki}</i>
2.	<i>1 a-na^d taš-me-tu₄</i>
3.	<i>1 a-na^d r gašan¹ tin.tir^{ki}</i>
4.	<i>1 a-na^r d o o]</i>
5.	<i>1 a-na^r d o o]-a</i>
6.	<i>1 a-na^d r di.kud¹</i>
7.	<i>1 a-na^d é-a</i>

rev. uninscribed

1. Egg(s for the sacred) meals of Babylon.
2. One for Tašmêtu
3. One for the Lady-of-Babylon
4. One for 'o o'
5. One for 'o o'
6. One for Madanu
7. One for Ea



The deity mentioned in line 3 is probably Zarpanîtu, the consort of Marduk. One is tempted to read ^dna-na¹-a on line 5 but not enough traces remain to put this reading beyond question. Although the tablet doesn't bear a date formula its paleography is so unmistakably characteristic of the sixth century that one can safely assume the text to have been drafted during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II himself or one of his successors. The transaction recorded here parallels the inscriptions of the king, I R 65 Col.11 10-18 in particular, which reminds us that egg offerings were instituted not only for Marduk and Zarpanîtu, but also for « the gods of the Esagil and the gods of Babylon. » Tašmêtu (the consort of Nabû), Madanu and Ea are indeed deities likely to have been worshipped in the Esagil and other temples of the capital. This data provides further confirmation that the

statements found in building inscriptions, far from being mere vaunting, often faithfully reflect ancient cultic practices and can be used as reliable historical sources. The origin of the tablet is unknown. One may presume, however, that it originally belonged to the archive of the Esagil or another temple of the capital. Administrative texts from the Esagil are extremely rare for that period, insofar as published material is concerned.

Egg offerings seem to have been an exclusive privilege of the gods of Babylon and Borsippa. To be sure, eggs are never mentioned in the thousands of Neo-Babylonian texts from Sippar and Uruk dealing with the maintenance of the cult. Nevertheless, duck and ostrich eggs are mentioned in Seleucid rituals from Uruk for the second meal of the morning (*naptanu tardennu ša šēri*) presented to Anu, Antu and the gods of Bīt Rēš and Irigal (AO 6451, F. Thureau-Dangin, *Rituels Accadiens*, Paris, 1921, pp. 64, 78 and 84) :

rev. 17.

30 šeš^{mušen} 20 tu.kur₄^{mušen} 3 nunuz

ga.nu₁₁^{mušen} 3 nunuz uz.tur^{mušen}

« 30 *marratu* birds, 20 turtledoves, 3

ostrich eggs and 3 duck eggs. »

While ostrich eggs must have been a luxury item in all periods of Mesopotamian history (see references in A. Salonen, *Vögel und Vogelfang im alten Mesopotamien*, AASF b 180, 1973, 166), ducks eggs were presumably a more easily available item. Yet, references to duck eggs outside lexical texts are extremely rare. A few years ago D.I. Owen published an interesting text from the Ur III dynasty listing 391 duck eggs (391 nunuz uz.tur) among large numbers of birds of various kinds, turtle eggs and turtles (D.I. Owen, « Of Birds, Eggs and Turtles, » *ZA* 71, 1981, 29-47 ; see also the appendix by W.W. Hallo, pp. 48-50, with publication of YBC 16648, also from the Ur III period, listing 25 duck eggs among sundry items). Owen speculated that these deliveries were intended either for the royal table or for the temples of Ur and Nippur. If the latter hypothesis eventually proves right, then we will have some evidence for the great antiquity of the practice of egg offerings mentioned in the inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar II and now confirmed by YBC 5159.

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