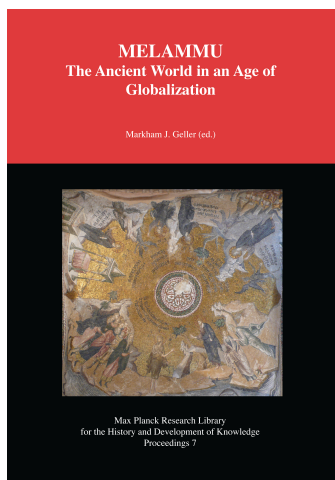


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The Religious Reform of Nabonidus: A Sceptical View



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## Chapter 8

### The Religious Reform of Nabonidus: A Sceptical View

*Kabalan Moukarzel*

#### 8.1 Introduction

Modern scholars often ascribe to Nabonidus an attempt to introduce some sort of “religious reform.” Three documents were particularly important in the creation of modern views on the reign of the last ruler of independent Babylonia—“The Verse Account of Nabonidus” (hereafter quoted as the *Verse Account*), “The Cyrus Cylinder” and “The Chronicle of Nabonidus.” The hypothesis that Nabonidus was a “religious reformer” was based mainly on information from the Verse Account and the Cyrus Cylinder and was born with the first translations of these documents in the nineteenth century; subsequently, in the early twentieth century, it permeated the general notions on the reign of Nabonidus. Throughout the twentieth century this theory has remained indisputable for the majority of Assyriologists; however it was modified in some important details.

The two main sources which gave birth to the hypothesis about the “religious reform”—and especially the Verse Account—raise many questions in connection with the nature of the texts, with their historical value and with the methods used in their analysis. The present article attempts a re-examination of these documents and some of the associated modern views, trying to examine the predefined models in some studies. It considers three different sets of problems. In the first place, the Verse Account is analyzed as a literary text with its own purpose and meaning, and as main instrument in the creation of the standard image of Nabonidus in modern studies. The first modern investigations on the reign of the last Babylonian king are examined in the second place, and especially the role of Sidney Smith’s study in shaping the image of Nabonidus as “the religious reformer.” The study of Smith in the early twentieth century not only incorporated the first detailed presentation of the “religious reform” theory, but also had a significant impact on all further work on the subject. The subsequent evolution of this theory in the twentieth century is reviewed in the third place together with the additional arguments raised by some scholars and claiming to support it in one way or another. Some methods of textual and historical analysis are also discussed in connection

with the arguments promoted in these later publications. Examination of all studies about the issue is not among the purposes of the present paper.

## 8.2 The Verse Account of Nabonidus

The text of the Verse Account is preserved on a tablet in the British Museum, BM 38299. Despite the impairments on the tablet, the narrative is comparatively well preserved, particularly in columns II and V, and somewhat worse in columns III and IV. The document has been investigated, translated and commented by many authors.<sup>1</sup> The most authoritative analysis was made by S. Smith. With his translation and theoretical approach, Smith was the first to define many of the arguments common in the later treatment of the subject.

The most important question posed by this document is whether we can accept its historical value as a source of reliable information, comparable for example with the Chronicle of Nabonidus. The answer demands an examination of the literary style of the text, of its inherent sense and the objectives of its message. The Verse Account was composed in Babylonia in the late sixth century BCE The beginning of the Cyrus' rule being the usual *terminus post quem* accepted for its composition (Smith 1924, 27; Kuhrt 1990, 142; Schaudig 2001, 47–48). The date has a crucial importance for the definition of the purposes of the text.

The style of the document can be described as negatively polemic, it has a belletristic form. In this respect the Verse Account differs considerably from the Chronicle of Nabonidus, its statements being evidently open to partiality. The structure of the text is marked by the use of many literary devices. The sentences in column I for example are openly hostile to Nabonidus, and most of them take the shape of accusations against various injustices committed by the former king.

I.2. [...] <sup>[bu]</sup>*šaḥ-ḥu-u i-na-a-ri ina (giš)kakki*  
 [...] the weak he killed with the sword.

I.3. [...] (lú)*tam-kar ip-ta-ra-as a-lak-tam*  
 [...] for the merchant, he blocked the road.<sup>2</sup>

Lines 22–30 of column I describe the rebuilding of the temple in Harran by the king and are an exception to this predominant scheme. Column II uses in lines 2–11 another literary skill—direct speech. The main purpose of this device is to

<sup>1</sup>For the text of the Verse Account, see (Smith 1924, 27–97, plates V–X). More recent translations were made by (Oppenheim 1969, 312–315) and (Schaudig 2001, 565–572, Propagandetexte, P. 1. Stropchengedicht). Schaudig (2001, 563) also provides a full bibliography about the source.

<sup>2</sup>See (Smith 1924, 83, 87 and plate V). For recent transliteration and translation see (Schaudig 2001, 565, 572).

convince the reader (or listener) in the veracity of the “words” said by the king. The verbal forms used here are mostly in the first person.

II.4. *lu-ub-ni bīt-su lu-ub-šim-ma šu-bat-su*  
I shall build his house, I shall construct his dwelling.<sup>3</sup>

Between lines 12 and 32 however the description of the king’s deeds is carried on with verbs in the third person singular.

II.18. *ka-ra-aš ip-te-qid ana riš-tu-u bu-kur-šu*  
A camp he put into the charge of his eldest child.<sup>4</sup>

Column V is particularly interesting. It starts with new “denunciations” against Nabonidus, again given in direct speech.

V:10 *mi-ḫi-iš qān tuṭ-pi ūl i-di a-ta-mar.*  
I see one who knoweth not the imprint of the stylus.

The direct speech of the king occupies lines 7–12; lines 19–20 and 27 further down present again direct speech, but this time of two high officials. The narrative in column VI describes events related to Cyrus. The style here is openly eulogistic, depicting Cyrus as a “creator of justice.”

VI.6. [...] *ilāni(meš) i-la-ab-bi-in ap-pa.*  
[...] (before) the gods, he touched the nose.<sup>5</sup>

The literary accomplishments used in the realization of the narrative are undoubtedly intended to produce an expected effect. The style of the Verse Account and the poetic tone of the text suppose its public reading. The polemic purpose of the narrative is achieved by literary skills which have an old tradition in Mesopotamian literature but are used here in a very original manner. The specific literary form is only a device for the conveyance of the meaning of the document and the realization of its objectives. If we want to establish the historical value of the Verse Account, its text should evidently be compared with other contemporary documents. The most relevant comparison would be that with the text of the Chronicle of Nabonidus, a tablet belonging to the series of the “Babylonian Chronicles” (Wiseman 1956, 1–3; Grayson 1975a, 104–111, Chronicle No.

<sup>3</sup>See (Smith 1924, 84, 88 and plate V). I think that a better normalization would be “*lubni bīssu lubšim-ma šubassu.*” Cf. (Caplice and Snell 1988, 89–91). For recent transliteration and translation see (Schaudig 2001, 567, 574).

<sup>4</sup>See (Smith 1924, 84, 88). For recent transliteration and translation see (Schaudig 2001, 568, 574).

<sup>5</sup>See (Smith 1924, 86, 90, plate X). For recent transliteration and translation see (Schaudig 2001, 569, 571, 576–577).

7; Smith 1924, 98–99). The juxtaposition of the facts mentioned in the Chronicle of Nabonidus and in the Verse Account can be summed up in the following table:

BM 38 299: The Verse Account	Column, lines	BM 35382: The Chronicle of Nabonidus	Column, lines
1. Unjust rule	I. 1–16	Not mentioned	
2. Creation of a false god called by the king “Sîn”	I. 18–23	Not mentioned	
3. Creation of an image and a crown for this god	I. 24–30	Not mentioned	
4. The king declared his plan to build a temple in Harran	II. 4–10	Not mentioned	
5. Suspension of the Akītu festival until the end of the building works in Harran.	II. 11	The festival was temporarily suspended because the king was in Taima.	II. 6–7, 11–12, 20–21, 24–25
6. The building of the temple in Harran.	II. 12–17	Not mentioned	
7. The king entrusted the royal power to his son.	II. 18–20	Mentioned	II. 5, 10, 19, 23
8. Campaign across the country Amurru against Taima.	II. 21–24	Mentioned	I. 15–22
9. The capture of Taima.	II. 25–26	Mentioned	II. 5, 10, 19, 23
10. The royal building works in Taima.	II. 27–29	Not mentioned	
11. Robbery and plundering committed there by the king.	III. 3–8	Not mentioned	

BM 38 299: The Verse Account	Column, lines	BM 35 382: The Chronicle of Nabonidus	Column, lines
12. The vainglory of Nabonidus.	V. 2–13	Not mentioned	
13. Confusion of rituals by Nabonidus.	V. 14	Not mentioned	
14. Nabonidus pronounced blasphemy against Esagila.	V. 15–20	Not mentioned	
15. The king changed the emblem of Esagila.	V. 21–22	Not mentioned	
16. Two high administrators supported the king.	V. 23–28	Not mentioned	
17. Cyrus proclaimed peace in Babylon.	VI. 2–3	Mentioned	III. 19
18. Cyrus returned images of gods to their shrines.	VI. 12–16	Mentioned	III. 21–22
19. Cyrus destroyed the symbols of the rule of Nabonidus.	VI. 17–24	Not mentioned	

Table 8.1

The main differences in the information come from the peculiar literary styles of the texts and their specific objectives. We can assess these differences by separating the events described only in the Verse Account from those mentioned in both documents.

Group 1 demonstrates the propensities of the information in the Verse Account and Group 2 expresses the attitude of its text towards some well-known facts from the reign of Nabonidus. Group 2 is important for the understanding of the objectives of the text. We can discern the manipulative purposes of the document in the presentation of these well-known events. They are mentioned in an interpretative manner; each event is presented as a logical part of the narrative and is deliberately discredited as a result. We can find a good example of

Group 1. Information only mentioned in the Verse Account of Nabonidus	Group 2. Information mentioned in both the Verse Account and the Chronicle of Nabonidus
1. Unjust rule	The king entrusted the royal power to his son Bēl-šaru-ušur
2. The king was abandoned by his <i>šēdu</i>	The king's campaign in the country Amurru against Taima
3. Creation of a false god called by Nabonidus "Sîn"	Cyrus entered the city and proclaimed peace in Babylon
4. The rebuilding of the temple in Harran by the king	Cyrus returned to their different shrines the images of gods collected by Nabonidus in Babylon
5. Suspension of the Akītu festival in Babylon until the end of the building works in Harran	
6. The vainglory of the king and his blasphemy against Esagila	
7. The king performed cruelties in Taima	
8. Two high administrators supported the king	
9. A confusion of rituals made by the king	
10. The king undertook building works in Taima similar in their magnitude to those in Babylon	
11. Cyrus destroyed the symbols of the rule of Nabonidus	

Table 8.2

this calculated procedure in the presentation of the fact that the king gave some of his authorities to his son before his departure to Taima. The Verse Account implies that the king was reluctant to fulfill his royal duties. The key phrase here is "*iptaqissu šarrūtam*"—"he entrusted the kingship to him" (Smith 1924, 84, 88, plate VII, Col. II: 20). No contemporary Babylonian source confirms however that Bēl-šaru-ušur assumed the functions of king. Many texts attest that he executed some of the prerogatives of the kingship, but evidently he was not in-

vested with full royal authority and he was never referred to with the royal title in cuneiform texts (Beaulieu 1989, 186–197).

The text of the Verse Account explains this transfer of royal prerogatives as some kind of “royal madness” and an “evil deed.” In the logic of the narrative this is closely connected with the expedition of Nabonidus to Taima and his activities there. The text emphasizes that the king committed cruelties in Taima.<sup>6</sup> The text contains a moral denunciation of the deeds of a Babylonian king unique in that age, even if we take into account that it was pronounced *post eventum* with the evident purpose of idealizing by contrast the new king—Cyrus. The glorification of Cyrus with which the text ends seems thus a logical conclusion in the development of the narrative.<sup>7</sup>

The manner of presentation of the events of Group 2 in the Verse Account (Group 1) attests most clearly the manipulative character of the whole document. Instead of directly falsifying, denying or hiding publicly known facts, the text displays them in a premeditated misinterpretation. This artifice is used throughout the text of the Verse Account. Based on well known facts, these manipulative interpretations gain more weight, and their tendency is clear.

The same artifice is used in the presentation of well-known events in Group 1, and here the level of manipulation is even higher and more straightforward. We can clearly observe this at several places in the text. A notable example is offered by the account of the events connected with the restoration of the temple of the god Sîn in Harran–Eḥulḥul.<sup>8</sup> The rebuilding of this temple and maybe of the whole city which had suffered destruction around 610–609 BCE was among the most important projects of Nabonidus and is mentioned as such in his earliest royal stela (Langdon 1912, 282–285, Nabonid Nr. 8, col. X: 1–31). The inscription is dated at the beginning of the reign of Nabonidus, see (Beaulieu 1989, 21–22). The family of the king had its origins in the city of Harran, but his decision to restore the Eḥulḥul temple must have been motivated by a number of economical and political factors, not only by cultic considerations. In column II of the Verse Account this undertaking is qualified as an “abomination, the work of no-sanctuary.”<sup>9</sup> There could hardly be a more severe incrimination against a Mesopotamian king than the one of sacrilege and blasphemy. This libel in column II stands as a logical continuation of the more expanded and consequential accusations already mentioned in column I—that Nabonidus created something “no-sanctuary.” something that “no one in the land ever saw” and “he called its name Sîn.”<sup>10</sup> The implications and purposes of this plot are self evident. We can

<sup>6</sup>The Verse Account, col. II: 25–26, col. III: 3–5.

<sup>7</sup>The Verse Account, col. VI: 2–28.

<sup>8</sup>The Verse Account, col. II: 4–17.

<sup>9</sup>The Verse Account, col. II: 17.

<sup>10</sup>The Verse Account, col. I: 19, 21, 23.



observe how the text of the document manipulates a real fact, and here the level of misinterpretation is quite immoderate, presenting the renovation of a famous ancient temple as an act of sacrilege.

Another example is offered by the account of the interruption of the New Year festival—Akītu. The Verse Account places this event in direct relation with the king's project for the rebuilding of the temple of Harran.<sup>11</sup> The Chronicle of Nabonidus however offers a more detailed account,<sup>12</sup> describing in its formulaic style the performance of some incomplete version of the usual rituals of the Akītu festival in the absence of the king from the capital. The text mentions explicitly: “*niqé ina é.sag.gil u é.zi.da ilāni šūt Bābili(ki) u Barsip(ki) kī šalmu nadnū urigallu išruq-ma bītā iblil*”—“Offerings were made to the gods of Babylon and Borsippa in Esaila and Ezida as is correct. The Urigallu priest made a libation and besprinkled the temple.”<sup>13</sup>

It is possible that after the year of a king's accession his presence at the Akītu festival was not obligatory, as was observed by (Kuhrt 1990, 140). The importance of Akītu for Babylonian society, for its cults and for the calendar excludes the possibility of completely omitting the celebration. This is the reason why there seems to have existed some kind of more compact ceremony approved by tradition and appropriate in the cases when the king was absent from the capital. The tablet BM 86379 offers a fair proof, mentioning the celebration of Akītu in the accession year of Šamaš-šuma-ukīn and then its “omission” in a time of active warfare between Babylonia and Assyria (Smith 1924, 22–26, plate IV, and especially BM 86379, obv. 5–8, 18, rev. 1–3, 7). The absence of Nabonidus from Babylon was evidently due to his prolonged sojourn in Taima. But the Verse Account suggests that the king was absent because he had vowed not to celebrate Akītu until he had finished the building of the “no-sanctuary” temple in Harran. It should be noted that this explanation of the interruption of the Akītu festival and of the absence of the king from Babylon has been transferred directly from the Verse Account into modern historiography. The Verse Account underrates intentionally the great distance from Babylon to Taima as well as the inherent difficulties of the imposition of Babylonian power in the oases of north-western Arabia, in order to impose its explanation of the king's absence with his blasphemous activities in Harran. Thus, the Verse Account creates in its treatment of the events in Group 1 a logical system of allegations based on the misinterpretation and distortion of well-known facts. This system can be presented in part like this:

<sup>11</sup>The Verse Account, col. II: 11.

<sup>12</sup>The Chronicle of Nabonidus, col. II: 6–8, 10–12, 19–21, 23–25.

<sup>13</sup>See (Smith 1924, 111, 115) and the Chronicle of Nabonidus II: 7–8, 11–12, 20–21, 24–25.

1. The Events	2. The Interpretations in the Verse Account
1. Nabonidus rebuilt the Eḫulḫul temple in Harran as the cult centre of Sîn	1. Nabonidus was abandoned by his <i>Shedu</i> and in a state of madness built “an abomination, something no-sanctuary”
2. The king was absent from the Akītu festival in Babylon, because he was in Taima	2. The king vowed not to celebrate Akītu until “the work” (the rebuilding of the temple in Harran) was finished
3. The king undertook a campaign against Taima and remained there for several years	3. The king set out on a far journey with his army to rob and plunder and to build a palace similar to the one in Babylon

Table 8.3

It is evident that the text of the Verse Account contains a premeditated and detailed system of manipulative misinterpretations of the facts suitable to its main objective: to discredit king Nabonidus. At the core of the whole scheme stands a statement, the importance of which was remarked by Amélie Kuhrt (1990, 141). In the text of column I: 18 among other direct accusations against Nabonidus we find the sentence “[...] -*šū it-te-kir-šū še-e-du*.”<sup>14</sup> Kuhrt pointed out that this statement was meant to lay the foundation of the document’s logic: “The text states that Nabonidus was abandoned by his *Shedu*, his protective deity, thus causing his own downfall through a series of blasphemous acts and bringing the country to ruination” (Kuhrt 1990, 141–142). More arguments could be brought forward in favour of this suggestion. Starting from the assumption that the term “*šēdu*” designated an evil power and not a protective spirit, Smith translated the sentence as: “[...] an evil demon altered him” (Smith 1924, 87, and his argument on p. 93, note 17). This view however contradicts the more usual positive meaning ascribed to *šēdu* as a protecting deity and a part of the human soul “embodying the vital forces of the individual.” according to Oppenheim (1980, 205). It can be proposed as other version for the translation of this sentence either “[...] he was in enmity with his *šēdu*” or “[...] he was estranged from his *šēdu*.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>See (Smith 1924, 83). For recent transliteration and translation see (Schaudig 2001, 566, 573).

<sup>15</sup>In the sentence we have this construction: *itekīr*–3 p. sing. masc. Perfect (or Preterite in Gt Stem), from *nakāru* in the sense of “be in enmity” “be estranged from” see (Caplice and Snell 1988, 71, 51–52), *šū*—pronominal suffix 3 p. sing. masc. acc.; *šēdu*—the noun. Smith’s translation of the verb in the sense of “altered” is disputable.

The passages presented in the Verse Account as direct speech deserve special attention. These are to be found in col. II: 2–11 and col. V: 6–13, 19–22, 27.<sup>16</sup> The text in column II refers to the rebuilding of the temple in Harran, and lines 5–13 in column V contain threats, probably aimed at Cyrus; in both cases it is implied that these are the words of Nabonidus himself. In lines 19–22 of column V Nabonidus states his intention to change the symbol of Esagila.<sup>17</sup> The text of V: 27 presents an explanation offered by two high temple administrators, Rimut and Zeriya. These passages in direct speech are undoubtedly the most difficult part of the text; their analysis leads to the formulation of three distinct questions: are the words ascribed to the king authentic and to what degree; what meaning would they have conveyed to a Mesopotamian audience; and what purpose their inclusion in the narrative served in the context of its main objectives.

The first question cannot be answered directly, and has three hypothetical solutions. The possibility that these words were really said by Nabonidus and the Verse Account just quotes them seems small given the evident prejudice of the source and its use of literary skills. The suggestion that the Verse Account quotes real statements out of context, modifying them according to its purposes in the form of well-arranged quotations, seems more probable, but could be true for only some of the passages in question, for example the declaration of the king's plans for the rebuilding of the temple in Harran. But it seems inconceivable that, for example, the statement voicing the king's resolve to interrupt the celebration of Akītu could be a true quotation; in this and other cases the text evidently manipulates with facts. Thus it is the third variant which seemingly has the highest degree of probability—notably that the quotations imputed to Nabonidus are completely false and invented with the intention of manipulating the reader or listener, or at least modified from actual statements of the king, “corrected” so as to suit the purposes of the text. In his stela from Babylon Nabonidus describes his plans about the rebuilding of Eḫulḫul, but the expressions used in this actual document have nothing in common with the phraseology of the Verse Account.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately we do not possess other similar documents which could permit us to establish the degree of veracity (or rather, of falsification) of the statements attributed to the king in the other instances under consideration; it should be stressed however

<sup>16</sup>See the passages in transliteration and translation in (Schaudig 2001, 567, 569–570, 574, 576–577).

<sup>17</sup>This passage is of crucial importance about the theory for “religious reform” of the king, the Verse Account (V: 18–22) “u<sub>4</sub>.sakar é.sag.il iṭ-ḫul-ma i-šal-lal šu.min-šú, ú-paḫ-ḫi-ir mārē(meš) [um]-man-nu i-ta-mi it-ti-šú-un, bīta e-pu-uš a-na man-nu an-nu-ú ši-mi-is-su, lu-ú ša (d.)Bēl šu-ú mar-ri še-mi-it-ma, (d.)30 u<sub>4</sub>.sakar-šú il-te-mi-it bīr-su”—“At the crescent of Esagila he looked and with his two hands he carried it off, he assembled the sons of the scholars, he argued with them: The temple was built by that whose sign is this. If it belong to god Bel, then the spade is his sign. God Sīn has his crescent marked (on) his temple” (Schaudig 2001, 570, 577).

<sup>18</sup>See (Langdon 1912, 282–285, Nabonid Nr. 8, col. X: 1–31) and the Verse Account col. II: 2–11.

that no other extant text contains even a hint of threats addressed by Nabonidus at Cyrus, or of any intention to change the symbol of Esagila.

The second main question is related to the understanding of the phrases in direct speech and the appraisal of their eventual meaning to the Mesopotamian audience for which they were intended, notwithstanding whether authentic or falsified. We must recognize that we cannot understand fully and adequately their real meaning and possible connotations. Being able to conventionally translate them or analyze their grammar does not mean that we can really understand them in the way the ancient Mesopotamians did.<sup>19</sup> The problem concerns the interpretation of any ancient texts, but is particularly evasive and delicate in the case of this short utterances in direct speech, with all the possible duplicity and hypocrisy involved in their use in the document as implied by its foregoing analysis.

When appraising the degree of reliability of the statements attributed to Nabonidus in the Verse Account, the main consideration should be the purpose of the text. This was evidently of a propagandistic character, aiming to discredit the former king and to glorify his successor, the invader Cyrus. The text of the Verse Account as a whole and the phrases in question in particular were not written in the sixth century BCE with the intention of documenting one or another event for posterity, but in order to achieve some specific and politically motivated contemporary aims which justified the premeditated falsification of historical events. Another argument against the easy attribution of earnest historical value to these passages is that they do not find any corroboration in the other literary monuments of this age. We will adduce a comparison between the information offered by the Verse Account and that in another contemporary document frequently cited in its support—the Cyrus Cylinder.<sup>20</sup>

Some modern works have noted both the propagandistic purposes of the text of the Cyrus Cylinder and its relation to Mesopotamian literary traditions.<sup>21</sup> Despite the differences in the literary form of the Cyrus Cylinder and the Verse Account there is also an obvious coincidence of political intention behind them. But if we restrict ourselves to the comparison of the relevant information found in the two texts, we shall easily conclude (as Table 4 demonstrates) that the most seri-

<sup>19</sup>For instance the passage in direct speech in the Verse Account col. V: 18–22, where is stated that Nabonidus changes some emblem on Esagila, which is named “crescent”—u<sub>4</sub>.sakar (*uškāru*). He did this because according to the source, the king accepted the crescent as symbol of god Šin. See the passage in (Schäudig 2001, 579, 577). It is known that the crescent was symbol of Šin, but it remains obscure regarding his symbolic and functional role over the temple of Marduk. If the temple had a crescent over it, then what was the difference between this crescent and the crescent of the god Šin?

<sup>20</sup>See the text of the source in transliteration and translation in (Schäudig 2001, 550–556, K2.1. Kynos-Zylinder), also the translation in (Oppenheim 1969, 315–316). For the main elements regarding the text’s narrative, see (Kuhrt 1983, 85–87).

<sup>21</sup>See (Harmatta 1971, 217–231; Kuhrt 1983, 88–93; and d’Agostino 1995, 172–175), who notes the relation of the text with the propagandistic tradition of the Nabonidus’ inscriptions.

The Verse Account	Column, Lines	The Cyrus Cylinder	Lines
1. Nabonidus rebuilt the temple in Harran as part of his adoration of a fake god, called by him “Sin”	I. 18–30, II. 4–10	No information about the king’s religious activities in Harran or the rebuilding of the local temple	
2. The king was abandoned by his <i>Shedu</i>	I. 17	No information on the subject	
3. The king cancelled the festival of Akītu in Babylon	II. 11	No information about the cancellation of the festival	
4. Description of the campaign against Taima	II. 25–29	No information about the campaign	
5. Statements of Nabonidus in direct speech	II. 2–11, V. 5–7, 9–13, 16, 20	No information about any statements of the king	
6. Nabonidus entrusted the kingship to his eldest son.	II. 18–20	No information about a transfer of the kingship	
7. Nabonidus committed blasphemous acts against Esagila	V. 16–22	Nabonidus committed blasphemies against Marduk	7–9, 15, 33–34
8. No information about tributes received by Cyrus.		Cyrus received tribute from different kings	29–31
9. Cyrus returned to their various shrines the statues of different gods which Nabonidus had collected in Babylon.	VI. 13–16	Nabonidus collected in Babylon statues of gods as a blasphemous act, Cyrus returned them to their various shrines.	9–10, 33–34

Table 8.4

ous accusations against Nabonidus found in the Verse Account are not mentioned in the text of the Cyrus Cylinder, despite its partiality against the king.<sup>22</sup> The

<sup>22</sup>The differences in literary form are result of the different purposes of the two texts. Documents like the Cyrus Cylinder were intended to present a king’s deeds before the gods and future kings, usually

implications about the untrustworthiness of the Verse Account and its arbitrary manipulation with facts are obvious; but the comparison of the two documents also brings forth new questions. Why does the Cyrus Cylinder, although accusing Nabonidus of blasphemy against Marduk, fail to mention anything about the temple in Harran or the cult of Sîn there? Why does it pass in silence over even such an important fact as the expedition of Nabonidus in Arabia? If the Cyrus Cylinder and the Verse Account had the same propagandistic intentions, then why does the former refrain from using the same artifices as the latter, and even omits to mention some of the real facts and arguments relevant to its case?

All that has been said so far can be summed up in several conclusions about the Verse Account and its value as a historical source. It is a well-composed text, with consistent logic and intent in the pursuit of its concrete purposes. It differs from the Chronicle of Nabonidus in not being a mere collection of facts, and from the Cyrus Cylinder in lacking detailed eulogy of the subsequent ruler and the commendation of his devotion and building doings to the gods. The Verse Account expresses a definite point of view and promotes its political cause through the adept use of literary skill. As S. Smith has phrased it, “The document is indeed a polemic piece of political propaganda aimed at securing an appreciation of the new foreign ruler for his piety” (Smith 1924, 231). The propaganda character of the text is also acknowledged by other authors—von Soden (1983, 66–68), Beaulieu (1989, 4, 206–207), Kuhrt (1990, 141), Schaudig (2001, 2). It is therefore clear that the Verse Account should not be given credit as a source of important historical information on the rule of Nabonidus, except possibly as a piece of evidence on the use of political propaganda in late sixth-century Achaemenid Babylonia. The text is known from a single copy found in Babylon, and does not seem to have been widely disseminated; therefore it was not a part of the established literary tradition (Smith 1924, 31–32). It does not belong to any of the traditional types of literary composition known from Mesopotamia, although its style has something in common with so the Babylonian Historical Epic (Grayson 1975b, 43).

But although the historical value of the Verse Account seems thus to be insignificant or controversial, it has exerted an extremely strong influence on the shaping of the vision of the age of Nabonidus in modern historiography, and notably in the emergence of the theory about his “religious reforms” of which it is the cornerstone.

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placed at the base of some temple. The Verse Account with its emotional style and poetic language must have had another intended purpose, notably to explain the king’s deeds before the people.

### 8.3 Early Theories about the “Religious Reforms” of Nabonidus

The theory about the “religious reforms” of Nabonidus appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and had a great influence on all later perception of the events of the period between 556 and 539 BCE. Morris Jastrow, although he did not dedicate a specialized study to the subject, tackled it in his general work on the religion of Assyria and Babylonia. For example, in connection with the rebuilding of the temple Ebabbar, Jastrow mentions: “[...] Nabonnedos feeling the end of his power to be near, undertakes, as one of the last resorts, the restoration of this edifice, in the hope that by thus turning once more to the powerful Shamash, he might secure his protection, in addition to that of Marduk [...]” (Jastrow 1898, 70). The statement of Jastrow, probably based on the then recent discovery of a cylinder of Nabonidus in Sippar,<sup>23</sup> contains the interesting assertion that the rebuilding of the temple was occasioned by the king’s presentiments of the impending end of his power. It is difficult to agree with this view; Jastrow seems to ignore the old Mesopotamian tradition which made the rebuilding of temples one of the duties of the king. Until the battle near Upi (Opis) in October 539 BCE, the actions of Nabonidus do not show any signs that he might be expecting an imminent end to his reign. On the contrary, his actions were energetic and well-premeditated, and he must have had hopes for victory, when he decided to offer the battle. The whole conception that Nabonidus would have raised the cult of Šamaš to be equal with that of Marduk, hoping through his protection to escape his doom, seems a clear example of over-interpretation of the data in the relevant sources. By undertaking the building works at the sanctuary in Sippar, Nabonidus was doing no more than his royal duty; and we know today that the works in Sippar must have started early in his reign and not at its very end.<sup>24</sup>

Further in his exposition, Jastrow brings his considerations to a logical end with the suggestion that “in the closing days of the Babylonian monarchy a more serious attempt, it would appear, was made to displace Marduk. Nabonnedos formed the design of replacing both Marduk and Nabu by the cult of Shamash. He incurred the ill-will of the priests by paying much more attention to the restoration of the various Shamash temples in Babylonia than would appear to be consistent with devotion to Marduk” (Jastrow 1898, 240–241). Thus from the mere fact of the rebuilding of a temple, Jastrow has evidently come too far, suggesting a deliberate attempt at the “replacement” of the cult to Marduk in what could be seen

<sup>23</sup>The author does not mention which of the cylinders from Sippar he has in mind. It would be the cylinder published as Nabonid Nr. 1 by (Langdon 1912, 218–229). See a translation of the text in (Sayce 1892, 168–176). More about the nomenclature of inscriptions from Sippar, see (Beaulieu 1989, 20–42).

<sup>24</sup>For more detailed account about the date of the rebuilding of the temple in Sippar by Nabonidus see (Beaulieu 1989, 132–137).

as no less than a “religious reform.” His speculation finds no confirmation in the sources however, for we have no single Babylonian text criticizing the rebuilding works made by Nabonidus in Sippar.<sup>25</sup> The assertion that the rebuilding of Šamaš temple led to discontent among the priests also finds no direct backing in contemporary sources, and Jastrow does not quote any ancient text in support of it, although he mentions it once more further in his work (Jastrow 1898, 647). He seems to accept unconditionally the singular assertion of the Cyrus Cylinder that Nabonidus did not worship Marduk, disregarding the political bias of the source, and looks for evidence in support of it in the records of the building works of the king. The main elements in Jastrow’s reconstruction of events could be summed up as follows:

1. The king replaced the cult to Marduk with that to Šamaš;
2. This led to discontent among the priests of Marduk;
3. The king lost his throne because of this opposition and the lost battle at Upi against Cyrus.

The views of Morris Jastrow represent a stage in the development of Assyriology, and from this early stage some problems connected with the methods of research are clearly outlined. The first and foremost among these is the over-interpretation of the ancient sources. The earlier discovery of the Cyrus Cylinder, in which the image of Nabonidus as a “blasphemous king” is a key element, has evidently made an overwhelming impact on the interpretation of subsequent finds, in this case the Sippar Cylinder of Nabonidus. Jastrow undervalued the propagandistic character (and therefore the restricted historical value) of the Cyrus Cylinder, and gave it credence as a reliable main source of information. At the same time he typically over-interpreted the Sippar Cylinder, a traditional votive list of a king’s deeds, in order to turn it into a piece of supporting evidence for his hypothesis. At the end of the nineteenth century, enough was known about the building activities of Mesopotamian kings to make the whole operation of presenting the Sippar inscription as proof of the “heresy” of Nabonidus inadmissible. The alleged “discontent of the priests” offers a different case, as there is practically no evidence to this effect in the sources, and even the text of the biased Cyrus Cylinder does not imply that the priests of Marduk were in any way opposed to Nabonidus (in fact, they are not mentioned there at all).<sup>26</sup> The whole idea that the cult of Marduk was in any way “replaced” by the cult of Šamaš (or that a deliberate attempt to this effect was made by Nabonidus) is not supported

<sup>25</sup>Compare for example the two texts most adverse to Nabonidus—the *Verse Account* and the *Cyrus Cylinder*.

<sup>26</sup>See the translation of the text in (Oppenheim 1969, 315–316).



by other texts and seems thus founded only on a vague and biased assertion in a hostile source like the Cyrus Cylinder.

The development of Assyriology in the early twentieth century was stimulated by the publication and analysis of a number of new source documents. Among these there were some of specific interest for the study of the reign of Nabonidus, including an important inscription from Harran.<sup>27</sup> This new stage in the investigation of Nabonidus and his age is best presented in the works of (Smith 1924; Smith 1940). We will examine his conclusions and arguments mainly as expressed in his book (Smith 1924, 27–124). This was the first publication to offer good reproductions, transliterations and translations of the main sources for the problems under discussion, namely the Verse Account and the Chronicle of Nabonidus (Smith 1924, 27–98, for the Verse Account, and 98–124, for the Chronicle of Nabonidus). Smith was the first modern author to present a coherent general overview of the reign of Nabonidus based on all sources known at the time. He put forward a consistent theory of the “religious reform” of Nabonidus based mainly on his analysis of the Verse Account, the propagandistic character of which he was fully aware of, noting the desire of its author to present the king in the most unfavourable light (Smith 1924, 31).

One of the assertions of Smith is that Nabonidus was unpopular among the Babylonian priesthood; his argument is based on the very existence of the Verse Account, which he qualifies as a “posthumous revenge of the priesthood” (Smith 1924, 32). The relevant sources from the period 556–539 BCE however offer no indication of any religious “deviation” on the part of Nabonidus, neither of any cultic opposition against him by either the priesthood of Marduk or that of any other Mesopotamian deity.<sup>28</sup> The idea of hostility or resistance on the part of the priests seems therefore to derive not from contemporary sources but exclusively from texts created after 539 BCE and connected by political and propagandistic aims which S. Smith obviously underestimated.

Commenting on the one of the Sippar Cylinders of Nabonidus, Smith states: “This position of Sîn as the supreme deity for whom Marduk acts as an intermediary, is not the ordinary Babylonian belief [...]” (Smith 1924, 45). This conclusion springs from his analysis of the reverential epithets used for Sîn in the text. Smith however overlooks the very similar epithets used in the same document for Marduk, and pays no attention to the structure of the text in which the exaggerated praise of Sîn is only met in a section devoted to the rebuilding of his temple in Harran, while the other passages in which he is mentioned contain only the usual

<sup>27</sup>For more on the inscriptions from Harran and their nomenclature, see (Gadd 1958, 35–92).

<sup>28</sup>The term *šangê* used in the Harran inscription of Nabonidus (H2 A, B), col. I: 14–17 in the description of some kind of internal problems, has rather the sense of “administrators” than “priests.” Cf. the discussion in (Kuhrt 1990, 137–138, 146–154).

epithets appropriate to Šin's position as the "father" of Šamaš in Mesopotamian mythology.<sup>29</sup> Smith restricts his analysis to the epithets of Šin in the document, but those used for Marduk, Šamaš or Anunit are no less elevated.<sup>30</sup> If we consider the structure of the text, we shall easily establish the fact that the use of this type of elevated epithets is restricted to the description of the rebuilding of the temples of these gods in Sippar and Harran. The one notable exception is the similar glorification of Marduk, which is not connected with the description of any building activities related to his cult. The text thus places Marduk in a particularly reverential position, not Šin.

The position taken by S. Smith is evidently dominated by his trust in the information of his preferred sources—the Verse Account and the Cyrus Cylinder, at the expense of the more trustworthy data of the Chronicle of Nabonidus which he underestimates. This is seen in his treatment of the passages mentioning two high administrators of Esagila, Rimut and Zeriya, supporters of Nabonidus according to the Verse Account.<sup>31</sup> His assertion is against what we have come to know from various Babylonian sources about Rimut and Zeriya who were both Babylonians by birth and occupied high temple offices not only before, but also after the Persian conquest.<sup>32</sup>

The question of the New Year festival—Akītu also takes an important place in the theory of Smith. In accordance with the information of the Verse Account that Nabonidus failed to participate in the festival and accepting its explanation of the king's reasons, Smith concludes that "Nabonidus did not regard the festival with the same favour as every other Babylonian monarch did" (Smith 1924, 48). The conclusion could seem acceptable only as far as we remain restricted to the information of this questionable text, but becomes very doubtful once we set it against the other available information. The beginning of the Chronicle of Nabonidus is not well preserved, but the Babylonian stela of Nabonidus contains the assertion that he participated in the Akītu celebrations after the year of his accession (Langdon 1912, 282–283, Nabonid Nr. 8, IX: 3–7). We would underline in this statement the explicit mention of the year—the first year of the reign of Nabonidus. We could assume that in the Neo-Babylonian period (626–539 BCE) the king's presence at the Akītu festival was not obligatory after his "accession

<sup>29</sup>For the "genealogy" of the god Shamash, see (Saggs 1998, 246–247).

<sup>30</sup>See the text of the inscription in (Sayce 1892, 168–176), (Langdon 1912, 218–229, Nabonid Nr. 1) and for recent transliteration and translation see (Schaudig 2001, 409–440, 2.12. Eḫulḫul-Zylinder). It must be noted that the inscription has many exemplars from different sites, see (Schaudig 2001, 409–414).

<sup>31</sup>The Verse Account, col. V: 23–27. Commenting on the Cyrus Cylinder, Smith qualifies them as "foreign officials appointed by the king" and adds that they were "very cordially hated in Babylon" (Smith 1924, 47).

<sup>32</sup>See the information about both officials in (Beaulieu 1989, 216–217), with interesting remarks about their careers both before and after 539 BCE.

year” (*rēš šarrūti*), an opinion also shared by other scholars.<sup>33</sup> A tablet in the series of the “Babylonian Chronicles” for example mentions the participation of Nebuchadnezzar in the festival in the year of his accession (Wiseman 1956, 69, BM 21946, obv. 14), and despite his long reign there is no other explicit mention of his personal participation in Akītu, till 594–593 BCE, when the information on the tablet ends, because of destructions.

We will point out two details. The first is the exact manner in which the main historical source—the Chronicle of Nabonidus—mentions several times the king’s absence from the celebration of Akītu in Babylon.<sup>34</sup> Besides noting the king’s absence, the text mentions explicitly that “offerings were made as is correct” in the temples of Marduk and Nabu. This could mean only one thing—that despite the king’s absence the festival was celebrated, if in some kind of shortened ritual form. Such a shortened form of the New Year ceremony must have been usual at times when the king was absent from Babylon, and part of an ancient tradition, known to the Chronicle of Nabonidus. A complete omission of the Akītu festival could have happened only at times of real distress—in the case of war or other disasters.<sup>35</sup> The form of the statement in the Chronicle of Nabonidus has direct parallels in the document BM 86379 and was evidently an established literary formula before Nabonidus accession.<sup>36</sup>

It is another problem why the Chronicle of Nabonidus is so insistent on remarking scrupulously every absence of the king from the Akītu festival, but it is doubtful that the answer would come from the Verse Account. The reason for the absence of Nabonidus from Babylon is adequately explained in the Chronicle of Nabonidus with his stay in Taima, but Smith ignores this fact in order to offer as his alternative explanation: the king’s cult for Sīn and the rebuilding of Eḫulḫul in Harran. His opinion is based again on the evidence of the Verse Account that after the beginning of the building works in Harran Nabonidus suspended all public festivals, including the New Year festival, until the restoration of the temple of Sīn would have been finished; this imposed by the king “public mourning” was presumably accepted with bad feeling by the Babylonians (Smith 1924, 48–49). Thus Smith is again giving priority to the dubious suggestions of the Verse Account, at the expense of alternative evidence from a source with bigger historical value.

<sup>33</sup>See (Kuhrt 1990, 40) and the remarks about the public character of the festival in (Thureau-Dangin 1921, 127–150).

<sup>34</sup>The Chronicle of Nabonidus II: 5–8; 10–12; 19–21; 23–25.

<sup>35</sup>See (Smith 1924, 22–27), where the document BM 86379 describes such a situation and the failure to celebrate the festival.

<sup>36</sup>See (Smith 1924, 22–27). See also the Chronicle of Nabonidus II: 5–8, 10–12, 19–21, 23–25 and compare with BM 86379 obv. 4, 18, rev. 1–3, 7.

Two other texts mention a public mourning during the reign of Nabonidus. One of the Harran inscriptions (Gadd 1958, 52–53, H1, B, III: 5–43) suggests this was on the occasion of the death of the king’s mother Adda-Guppi and the period of mourning was seven days and seven nights. The other text is the Chronicle of Nabonidus,<sup>37</sup> which gives the same reason—the death of Adda-Guppi, but sets the period of mourning at only three days. The two texts differ also in other details of the description of the ceremonies accompanying the burial of Adda-Guppi. The funeral and mourning are dated in the 9<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Nabonidus, that is, 548–547 BCE, when the king was in Arabia. Smith ignores this information, although the Chronicle is by far the most authoritative historical source for the period.<sup>38</sup> He also evades the reason for the public mourning in Babylon suggested by these two texts—the death of the king’s mother, as well as their alternative indications of its length. Instead of trying to compare and verify all extant pieces of information about a public mourning in the time of Nabonidus, he readily accepts the doubtful construction of the Verse Account and disregards any alternative evidence from other sources. It could be added that the Verse Account does not mention the death of the king’s mother at all.

A similar procedure is used by S. Smith in his treatment of the question of the “confused rituals.” This is another hostile allegation of the Verse Account, namely that Nabonidus “confused the rituals and upset their ordinances.”<sup>39</sup> This assertion is accepted literally by the author, who adduces in support the statement of the Cyrus Cylinder that Nabonidus suspended all regular offerings.<sup>40</sup> He also tries to find additional arguments in a number of passages in the inscriptions of Nabonidus mentioning the restoration of ancient ritual activities in rebuilt or repaired sanctuaries (Smith 1924, 55–59). Smith interprets the “restored rituals” as imposed religious reforms, accepted unfavorably by the Babylonian priesthood, following in this surmise the hostile attitude of the Verse Account. But in this case both the Verse Account and the Cyrus Cylinder are very unspecific in their general incriminations, and the quoted passages from the inscriptions of Nabonidus are examined by Smith out of context. In fact the formulaic phrase about “restored rituals” belongs to a long cuneiform literary tradition of dedicatory inscriptions offered on the occasion of the restoration of sanctuaries and mentioning the resumption of ritual activities. There is practically nothing in the inscriptions of Nabonidus that contradicts in any way what we know about Mesopotamian re-

<sup>37</sup>The Chronicle of Nabonidus II: 13–15.

<sup>38</sup>The Harran inscriptions are written in the literary style typical of Mesopotamian royal inscriptions, which was intended to serve definite religious and political purposes. As a source of historical information, they are inferior to a source of the rank of the Chronicle of Nabonidus.

<sup>39</sup>The Verse Account V: 14.

<sup>40</sup>See (Smith 1924, 54–58) as also the Verse Account V: 14, and the Cyrus Cylinder line 7.

building tradition, which was an important part of the royal duties and which dates back to Sumer (Saggs 1998, 270–275).

The accusations in the Verse Account and the Cyrus Cylinder that Nabonidus confused or suspended the sacred rituals contradict a group of important contemporary sources—the administrative texts from the temple archives of Ebabbar in Sippar and of Eanna in Uruk and Larsa. The importance of these texts is emphasized by their strictly administrative character; Smith however has failed to make use of them in his work. A tablet from the Uruk archives found in Larsa–YOS VI, 10—contains the text of a disposition of Nabonidus regarding the ritual offerings in the temple of Eanna (Beaulieu 1989, 118–119, YOS VI., 10, obv. 9–12, 17). The document contains information on different details of the ritual practices, three points being particularly worth notice. First, the temple personnel is advised to observe the regular ritual offerings. Second, the ritual offerings are supposed to follow the order established during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. And third, it is prescribed that the Eanna offerings should follow in quantity the rations usual in Esagila and Ezida. It should be noted likewise that other texts in the Eanna archives also contain instructions by king Nabonidus on religious matters and they are all consistent with the Babylonian traditions.<sup>41</sup> So if we return to the text of the YOS VI, 10 tablet and keep in mind the fact that it was a document of the temple administration and not of the king’s propaganda, we shall have to conclude that both the Verse Account and the Cyrus Cylinder offer false *post eventum* evidence about the “rituals” for Nabonidus neither suspended their implementation (despite the accusations of the Cyrus Cylinder), nor “confused” them (as professed in the Verse Account). The text of the Eanna tablet presents Nabonidus rather as a follower of tradition in the matters of cult.

The methodological fault of Smith’s attitude is demonstrated in his treatment of one other problem. This is the information that before the attack of Cyrus, Nabonidus collected in Babylonia the images of many gods taken from their shrines in different cult centers across Babylonia. Three main sources contain information about this development—the Chronicle of Nabonidus, the Verse Account and the Cyrus Cylinder.<sup>42</sup> The Chronicle remarks that the divine images of three cities—Cutha, Sippar, and Borsippa—were not brought to Babylon; the same line contains the announcement of the battle of Upi. According to S. Smith this was a certain indication that “the priests and the population” of the three cities refused to send their divine images as an expression of their discontent with the king (Smith 1924, 61). But the text of the Chronicle of Nabonidus does not imply

<sup>41</sup>For more information about these temple archives see (Beaulieu 1989, 118–125 (for documents from Eanna) and 132–137 (for documents from Ebabbar).

<sup>42</sup>The Chronicle of Nabonidus III: 9–12, the Cyrus Cylinder lines 10, 32–35, the Verse Account VI: 12–13.

directly anything of the kind; the following mention of the battle of Upi makes it much more reasonable to suggest that what was meant was simply that the three cities did not have enough time to send their divine images to Babylon. All three were situated near the capital, and the preceding enumeration suggests that the evacuation of the images had started from the distant cities.<sup>43</sup>

We should be fully aware that the action of Nabonidus in collecting the cult statues from the temples was in line with the traditional duties of a Mesopotamian king in times of enemy invasion. The evident purpose was to save the divine images from being captured by the enemy.<sup>44</sup> The Chronicle of Nabonidus only mentions the event, while the Cyrus Cylinder lists it with its accusations against Nabonidus as one of his “blasphemous acts.”<sup>45</sup> Smith eventually uses the assertion of the Cyrus Cylinder as his main starting point, neglecting well-known facts about Mesopotamian traditions of long standing. It is interesting to note that even the Verse Account does not use this fact as an incrimination against Nabonidus, mentioning it only as a part of the glorification of Cyrus. To draw from this event conclusions about some kind of political opposition of the “priests and people” against king Nabonidus, seems an over-interpretation of the sources.

The predisposition of S. Smith to the Verse Account and its prejudiced account is exemplified most clearly if compared to his treatment of the Chronicle of Nabonidus (Smith 1924, 98–124). In his analysis of the Chronicle he practically tries to adapt its information to that of the Verse Account. This could be demonstrated clearly with his treatment of the statement in the Chronicle I: 7 that Nabonidus crushed a revolt in his first regnal year, for which Smith finds no better use than as a confirmation of the accusations of the Verse Account against the king’s injustice (Smith 1924, 100). Comparing the information from the two texts, Smith consistently and gives priority to the Verse Account. It remains a mystery why he should have preferred an evidently biased text to a factually precise and trustworthy document like the Chronicle. The results of his choice are however consequential, especially in the establishment of the standard conception of Nabonidus as a “religious reformer.”

It would be interesting lastly to analyze the use S. Smith has made of Biblical and Greek sources in support of his hypothesis. The existing evidence on the age of Nabonidus in the works of ancient Greek authors is scarce; it is also late in date and written from the standpoint of a different cultural tradition. Although he has diligently collected the relevant passages of Herodotus, Xenophon, Josephus Flavius and the quotations from Berossus in the work of the latter,<sup>46</sup> Smith fails to

<sup>43</sup>The Chronicle of Nabonidus III: 9–11.

<sup>44</sup>See (Beaulieu 1989, 222–225) with further literature on this problem.

<sup>45</sup>The Cyrus Cylinder, line 10.

<sup>46</sup>The relevant passages are Hdt. I.71, 75–77, 79–91, 124–130, 178, 188–191; Xen. Cyr. I.5, 2–3, IV.6, V.2–3, VII.1–30; as also Joseph. C. Ap. I.21 with the quotations from Berossus.

note that none of these sources contains any information about the “blasphemous acts” of Nabonidus against Marduk. It should be said to his credit that, unlike many of his predecessors, he has at least not tried to adapt the information from the Babylonian sources to these Greek texts.

The attitude of S. Smith to the Biblical texts is however somewhat different.<sup>47</sup> In his examination of the Verse Account he puts forward the hypothesis that in the Book of Daniel the image of Nebuchadnezzar comprises characteristic features which could be attributed to Nabonidus (Smith 1924, 36–37). Starting from the image of Nabonidus in the Verse Account, Smith looks for analogies in the hostile characterization of Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel. He suggests for example that the reincarnation of Nebuchadnezzar in animal shape alleged by Daniel could be a Biblical reflection of the assertion in the Verse Account that Nabonidus was seized by a Demon (Smith 1924, 46). He takes up literally the accusation of the Cyrus Cylinder that Nabonidus appointed “unknown people” to high administrative positions, and associates it with the information of Daniel about the appointments of Jews by Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>48</sup> Smith makes also other parallels between the image of Nabonidus described in the Verse Account and the Cyrus Cylinder and the image of Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel. He suggests for example that the dream of Nebuchadnezzar described by Daniel was a reminiscence of a dream of Nabonidus mentioned in some of his inscriptions; and that the story about Nebuchadnezzar creating an idol and making everybody kneel before it was a definite reflection from the image of Nabonidus and his “religious reform.”<sup>49</sup>

The hypothesis of Smith is objectionable in several ways. He starts his comparisons from that image of Nabonidus which he has taken uncritically from the Verse Account and the Cyrus Cylinder, and which is artificial, literary, and prejudiced. Then he proceeds to look conscientiously for analogies in the Book of Daniel that could sustain his premeditated idea, disregarding everything else that does not serve his purpose and not bothering to consider the general character and specific attitudes of the compared texts. The establishment of a number of situational parallels in the compared texts is therefore of little value. There is not a single mention of the name of Nabonidus in the Old Testament, and this makes the attempt to substantiate the presence of his “image” there ambiguous. The most important critical argument is however related to the image of Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel. Although bearing the name of the real Babylonian king, the Nebuchadnezzar of Daniel is not based on the logic of historical fact, but on that of the message of the Biblical tradition. This image has little in common with the

<sup>47</sup>Daniel II: 48–49, III: 1, V: 1–4, 31, Jeremiah LI. 39: 57.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. Daniel II: 48–49 with the Cyrus Cylinder lines 3–4.

<sup>49</sup>Daniel III:1 and (Smith 1924, 107–108).

great king we know from cuneiform historical sources. Daniel's Nebuchadnezzar needs no historical authenticity and is not a historical personage in the strict sense of the word; he is rather an allegoric literary figure created according to a definite purpose and intended to embody the spiritual might of the message of God. It is therefore no wonder that the Daniel's image of Nebuchadnezzar undergoes a subjective development leading, through a number of ordeals, to his acceptance of the One God. There is little evidence of the historical king of Babylon in the biblical figure of Nebuchadnezzar except the name, and of course the well known facts of the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Jews to Babylonia.

In his final remarks on the "religion of Nabonidus" S. Smith formulates four main conclusions (Smith 1924, 62–63):

1. Nabonidus imposed a new cult based in Harran;
2. the king introduced changes in the religious practices of sanctuaries across Babylonia;
3. these changes were reformist in character and were dissembled under the euphemism of "ritual restoration"; and
4. these changes were rejected by various priests—"the guardians of Babylonian tradition."

The last three of these conclusions are particularly questionable. The restoration of the temple and of the ritual activities in the cult centre of Sîn in Harran is attested independently in the inscriptions of Nabonidus and therefore seems a credible fact; but that is not what we learn from the Verse Account. The question here is whether, when we choose a source and give it credence and priority over other sources, should we not rather believe it to the end, and not selectively? Smith seems to be neglecting the initial text on the "new" cult in Harran in the first column of the Verse Account, which reads:

[...] *ina māti lā īmuruš manmān* [...] *kigalla ušarmē ilu Sîn ittabi zikir-šu.*

[...] which nobody had ever seen in the land [...] he placed it on a pedestal, he called its name Sin.<sup>50</sup>

These phrases describing the activities of Nabonidus in Harran do not accuse him of *restoring* the cult of Sîn or *imposing* it over other cults; they accuse him of creating something new, something "unheard of" and "an abomination." which had nothing to do with the traditional cult of Sîn except that Nabonidus called it by that name. The Verse Account therefore does not describe Nabonidus as

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<sup>50</sup>*The Verse Account* 1.21–23.



a religious reformer imposing the cult of Šin, but rather as a madman imposing non-existing deity.

In his concluding remarks about the Verse Account, Smith states that it is one of the main historical sources for the age (Smith 1924, 82–83). He has no hesitations about the great historical value of the text. After all that has been said above, we feel justified to reiterate the scepticism of A. Kuhrt: “There can be no doubting the propagandistic nature of the text, nor the fact that it was composed and circulated after Cyrus’ victory in 539 BCE, as Smith was careful to emphasize. But does it have the historical value that Smith imputed to it?” (Kuhrt 1990, 142).

The main problem is one of method, not of detail. The analyses of Sidney Smith are usually restricted to passages of source text taken by themselves and not checked systematically against all other existing evidence; other texts are introduced very selectively only when they can offer the desired support to the elaborated speculation. The method is potentially unsafe because it can easily lead to haphazard and over-interpretative results.

Sidney Smith was the first modern investigator to elaborate theoretically the hypothesis of the “religious reform” of Nabonidus and to work systematically both into its details and components and into the methods of its verification. The importance of his work, besides the translations, is in the influence it has exerted on several generations of scholars. Most subsequent investigations on this period have been influenced in some degree by the ideas of Smith, and most later scholars have more or less sincerely accepted his basic theory of the “religious reform.”<sup>51</sup>

#### **8.4 Some Later Theories about the “Religious Reforms” of Nabonidus**

Among the authors who have worked on the reign of Nabonidus after Smith, C. J. Gadd should be mentioned for his important study on the royal stelas found in Harran (Gadd 1958, 35–92). On the basis of the text of the double inscription H2 A and B, Gadd advanced a new hypothesis explaining the reason for the long stay of Nabonidus in Arabia. In his words, “To this, the new inscription H2 gives, upon the face of it, a clear answer: the king withdrew before a mutiny of his subjects dwelling in the great cities of Babylonia, led by their priests” (Gadd 1958, 88). The arguments of Gadd for this conclusion are serious: the text of the inscription mentions civil disorders in a number of Babylonian cities, defined in the source

<sup>51</sup>For example, (Olmstead 1925, 47–55; Gadd 1958, 88; Dandamayev 1974, 24–25; Beaulieu 1989, 43–65, 184–185; Saggs 1998, 121–126).

as “an uprising against the divinity of Sîn” (Gadd 1958, H2 A and B, I: 14–22, 56–59).<sup>52</sup>

This piece of evidence is important. But Gadd underestimated two important factors—the characteristic features of the royal inscriptions as a literary type, and the need to compare the information drawn from this text with the data from other accessible cuneiform sources from the same period. The reliability of the specific information in such documents as royal inscriptions is usually difficult to assess, and without careful comparison with data from other sources there is always a risk of over-interpretation. In the present case, if we give credit to the evidence of the text, we will have to accept the conclusion that the country went through a phase of large-scale internal turmoil before the king’s march into Arabia. But this assumption finds no support in any of the Babylonian cuneiform sources from the period prior to 539 BCE. Neither the Chronicle of Nabonidus, nor any of the royal inscriptions and cylinders or any other administrative texts mention any civil unrest or social opposition against the rule of Nabonidus.<sup>53</sup> The text from Harran stands therefore very much alone in its affirmation.

If we concentrate our attention on the analysis of the text in which the inscription describe the event, we will easily conclude that it creates the definite impression of substantial organized resistance in most of the bigger cities of Babylonia. Due to its large scale, however, such a political crisis would not have remained unnoticed by all the remaining historical sources for the period. It should be underlined that even the Verse Account and the Cyrus Cylinder fail to accuse Nabonidus of suppressing an important rebellion in a number of major cities (six are mentioned by name in the text).<sup>54</sup> It could also be expected that an event of such a scale would have made a considerable impact on the political life of the country and would therefore have left some traces in the administrative texts from the temple archives in Uruk and Sippar. As far as we know however there are no documents containing any information about civil unrest or an economic crisis caused by political disturbances in this period. The paragraph discussed by Gadd raises several important questions about the reasons which sent Nabonidus for a long time in Arabia. The most adequate question in this situation would be: why would Nabonidus have described in his Harran inscriptions (H2 A and B)

<sup>52</sup>For recent transliteration and translation of the Harran stela of Nabonidus see (Schaudig 2001, 486–499, 3.1. *Harrān-Stele*).

<sup>53</sup>Cf. the texts of the Chronicle of Nabonidus, the Babylonian stela of Nabonidus in (Langdon 1912, 270–288, Nabonid Nr. 8), and the so called “Royal Chronicle from Ur” in (Lambert 1968, 1–8). For administrative texts, cf. (Beaulieu 1989, 116–127, 163–166), and for an example of a cylinder text see (Schaudig 2001, 397–409, 2.11 *Larsa-Zylinder*).

<sup>54</sup>The cities mentioned are Babylon, Borsippa, Nippur, Ur, Uruk and Larsa, cf. H2 A and B, I: 14–15. See also (Schaudig 2001, 488–489, 496–497).

something which is not mentioned in other sources, not even in his other royal stelae?

At first glance the complaints of Nabonidus in the text of H2 A and B that “the priests and people of the cult-centers of Akkad” had forgotten their duty and had offended Sîn, may seem a fair proof of the accusations in the Verse Account. The words used in the passage are “*šangē*(meš)” and “*mārē*(meš),” the first of which Gadd translates as “priests.” Amélie Kuhrt however has later examined in detail the use and meaning of the term “*šangē*,” concluding that it stands rather for “administrators.” not “priests.”<sup>55</sup> The content of the passage fits well in the main composition framework of the twin stela H2 B intended to glorify Sîn and his temple. The text of the other couple of stelae from Harran–H1, dedicated in the name of the king’s mother Adda-Guppi, shows that the king was personally devoted to the Moon god, maybe in accordance with the Mesopotamian tradition of personal devotion.<sup>56</sup> The introduction of some kind of serious problems which the king has successfully overcome is a technique typical for this genre of literary composition; that in this case the problems should have been presented as affecting Sîn is in perfect compliance with the singular occasion for the dedication of the Harran stela. This seems the probable answer to the question formulated above, offering a plausible explanation for the motives of Nabonidus to present in the H2 A and B stelae an exaggerated picture of large scale turmoil in the country, something not mentioned at all by any other sources.

As this paragraph precedes in the text of the inscriptions the information about the expedition of Nabonidus in Arabia, Gadd easily decided that this was the real reason for his long stay there; the inference was in line with the “religious reforms” theory which he accepted.

Another relevant question raised by this singular passage of the Harran inscriptions is about the eventual participants in the supposed “mutiny” against the king. If there were really some mass disturbances during the reign of Nabonidus, these would not have been caused by the personal devotion of the king for Sîn, but rather by interests beyond the theology of Mesopotamian cults, political and economic interests practically affecting numbers of people of different social and political status mainly belonging to the élite. In this respect it would be interesting to cite the opinion of A. Kuhrt that the opposition against Nabonidus would have been caused by his usurpation of the throne rather than his religious policy (Kuhrt 1990, 138). That Nabonidus was an usurper of the royal power is a fact, and although the assumption of Kuhrt finds as little support in other sources as

<sup>55</sup> See (Kuhrt 1990, 137–138). For the translation of the term as “administrators.” cf. (Oppenheim 1969, 562).

<sup>56</sup> See H1 A and B, II: 35–37 in (Gadd 1958, 50–51). For the tradition of personal devotion, cf. (Jacobsen 1995, 182).

that of Gadd, it adds an optional solution to the problem, which evades the tenets of the “religious reforms” theory.

Some authors have advanced the idea that the “religious reforms” of Nabonidus were intended to consolidate the West-Semitic Aramean tribes in Mesopotamia and the whole of the Near East under Neo-Babylonian dominance. In sixth century BCE the Arameans would have constituted significant ethnical element in Mesopotamia, and Harran was situated in an area where their presence was particularly felt.<sup>57</sup> The family of Nabonidus was a part of the local élite in Harran which incorporated Aramean origin and Assyro-Babylonian cultural affinities. H. Saggs and M. Dandamaev have suggested that through his “religious reform” which elevate the cult of Šîn, Nabonidus tried to impose an acceptable religion for all the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, both those with local and those with Aramean origin. Saggs and Dandamaev have both adopted the “religious reform” hypothesis, but have preferred to study its regional dimensions in the context of the Aramean-Mesopotamian environment.<sup>58</sup>

The Aramaic cultural and linguistic environment in Harran in the age of Nabonidus is a historical fact, and the family of the king was certainly part of that environment (Beaulieu 1989, 67–96). Following their migration between the 11th and ninth centuries BCE, the Aramean tribes gradually became the largest population group in Mesopotamia. The process was of course a long and complex one and went through different stages, with often various results even inside one and the same small geographical area. The ruling elites of Assyria and Babylonia did not have a standard approach to the Arameans, sometimes fighting against their tribal or state confederations, sometimes seeking their partnership; trying either to drive them away completely or to subordinate them by force in the regions where they had settled or to integrate them peacefully. The relationship between the local elites and the Arameans were thus complicated and often controversial.<sup>59</sup> In many areas of the Near East, the Aramean presence resulted gradually in cultural and political integration. S. Moscati has pointed out that Aramean culture was largely acquired and imitative in its character, depending on the regions where the different Aramean tribes had settled down (Moscati 1960, 171–181; Pitard 1998, 224–225); their language and script was among their few original innovations.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup>On the West-Semitic origin of the Aramean tribes and their migration in the Ancient Near East, started in the end of twelfth century BCE, see (Pitard 1998, 207–210).

<sup>58</sup>(Saggs 1998, 121–127, 247; Dandamayevev 1997, 246–261; Oppenheim 1980, 155, 380).

<sup>59</sup>On the history of the Aramean states in Syria, and Aramean tribes in Mesopotamia as also their relations with Neo-assyrian and Babylonian empires during eleventh–sixth century BCE see (Pitard 1998, 210–224).

<sup>60</sup>But with important cultural consequences for the entire Ancient Near East, see (Pitard 1998, 226–228).

The hypothesis asserted by Saggs and Dandamaev seems however to ignore these processes of cultural and religious (cultic) integration among the local traditions. After the Aramean migration, the traditional cults of the previous population in the areas where Arameans settled were adopted, together with their own nomadic and West-Semitic cults. Aramaic inscriptions state, that the preeminent deity among the Arameans, mainly in Syria, was Hadad. Among other main deities of Arameans there, were also El, Sîn from Harran, Rakib-el, Shamash and Reshep (Pitard 1998, 225–226). This information confirms the observation that the cult of Sîn in Harran was locally important, but had no central role in the Aramean pantheon. The cult could not be an important factor in the process of consolidation of the Neo-Babylonian empire's power over the the region of Fertile Crescent and its dominated by Arameans western parts, for the sake of its local character. The idea that through his “religious reform” the king tried to impose an acceptable religion for the inhabitants of Mesopotamia with Aramean and non-Aramean origin seems doubtful, because it underestimates the polytheistic traditions of the Aramean tribes, and it overrates the importance of the cult of Sîn from Harran within the borders of the Neo-Babylonian empire.

Other recent studies bearing on the “religious reform” theory have focussed on the analysis of the divine epithets used for Sîn in the inscriptions of Nabonidus. This trend is represented in the works of H. Tadmor and P.-A. Beaulieu (1965, 351–364; 1989, 43–67). Focussing their attention on the information from the royal inscriptions, they have both taken a critical attitude towards the Verse Account and have admitted its propagandistic character. One of their important arguments is the assertion that Nabonidus started the implementation of his “religious reform” gradual and late in his reign, which they suggest can be deduced from the text of some of the royal inscriptions (Beaulieu 1989, 62–65). The relevant inscriptions are (according Beaulieu's publication) No. 13, No. 14, and particularly No. 17, all dated in the late years of Nabonidus.<sup>61</sup> These three are the inscriptions in which the most exalting epithets of Sîn are used, and No. 17 glorifies only Sîn (Beaulieu 1989, 44–45, Table 3 with the used epithets). It is suggested that all three inscriptions were composed after the king's return from Arabia, an event which Tadmor and Beaulieu date to the 13<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Nabonidus (Tadmor 1965, 358–361; Beaulieu 1989, 203, 164–166).

It is true that these texts use extremely reverential epithets of Sîn. The authors however analyze their specific content without reference to the Mesopotamian literary environment in this age, and their approach warrants several objections both of general and specific character. This theory underes-

<sup>61</sup>Tadmor (1965, loc. cit.) gives a different numeration of the inscriptions, No. 25, No. 16, and No. 5; cf. (Beaulieu 1989, 32–34, 35–37), where the respective numbers of the inscriptions are No. 13, No. 14, and No. 17.

timates the power of the local Mesopotamian cult tradition and its reflection in written texts. Inscription No. 13 is the one on the Harran stela H2 A and B, which were intended for the temple of Sîn in Harran. Why should we expect that anyone would not use the most exalting epithets of Sîn in a dedication made in his very temple? The situation with inscription N<sup>o</sup> 17 is similar. This is a building cylinder inscription which was laid in another temple of Sîn, that in Ur. (Kuhrt 1990, 139). In the polytheistic religious environment of Mesopotamia, each local deity was regarded as the main god of the pantheon. The imposition of centralized political authority did not lead to the imposition of a centralized cult system over the local cults. On the contrary, Mesopotamian kings usually demonstrated their respect to the local main deities which they worshiped according to the local cult traditions during their visits in different cities. In the light of the ancient local cult traditions, we can not expect to find in an inscription placed in the temple of Sîn a specific gradation of epithets giving priority to Marduk.

None of the epithets of Sîn used in the three inscriptions discussed was specially invented by Nabonidus; they were all part of the habitual cult usage. Epithets of Sîn like “*nūr tēnīšei*”—“Light of the mankind” or “*bēl bēlē*”—“Lord of the lords” were traditional in their use and are mentioned in texts from the cult centers of Sîn and even out of them in some literary compositions.<sup>62</sup>

Among the specific objections to the arguments of Tadmor and Beaulieu one concerns the date of the mentioned cylinder from Ur, inscription No. 17. Tadmor has suggested (and Beaulieu has accepted) a date after the return of Nabonidus from Arabia (Tadmor 1965, 361; Beaulieu 1989, 35–36), but Kuhrt pointed out, that this contradicts the traditional attribution of this cylinder to the beginning of his reign.<sup>63</sup> Of course, the date of the inscription is not a crucial problem, but even if we should accept the dating of Tadmor and Beaulieu, we cannot agree with the logic of their reasoning that the text on a cylinder placed in a temple of Sîn and glorifying this god could contain more exalted epithets of Marduk than the ones associated with Sîn. The Nabonidus Cylinder describes the rebuilding of the ziggurat Elulgagasisa, a part of the temple complex Egišnugal in Ur which was devoted to the cult of Sîn.<sup>64</sup>

Objections can be raised also to the treatment by Beaulieu of inscription No. 14 (Beaulieu 1989, 32–34). Almost the entire text of the inscription is lost

<sup>62</sup>Examples can be seen in sources connected with god Sîn in (Jastrow 1898, 75–79, 212–220 and the text on 303–304). Cf. (Jacobsen 1995, 142–150).

<sup>63</sup>See (Kuhrt 1990, 138–139). The cylinder is dated in the beginning of the Nabonidus’ reign by Berger, see (Berger 1973, 355–359, Nbn. Zyl. II: 2). Almost all Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions do not contain internal evidence for dating and are undated.

<sup>64</sup>See the text of the cylinder inscription in transliteration and translation in (Schaudig 2001, 350–353, 2.2. Elulgalmagasisa-Zylinder).

with the exception of one small portion, in which Šin is mentioned as “the One who governs the growth of prosperity in Akkad.” The inscription is a fragment of a stela and only its sculptured top is well preserved.<sup>65</sup> The similarity between this paragraph and a similar paragraph in the inscriptions H2 A and B was the main argument of Tadmor and Beaulieu to date it after the 13<sup>th</sup> year of Nabonidus (Tadmor 1965, 356, 360–361; Beaulieu 1989, 33). The main problem here is that we do not know where exactly the inscription was found in Babylon or out of the city; it appeared in the early nineteenth century in the British Museum.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, of the three inscriptions presented in support of the hypothesis for a “gradual religious reform” of Nabonidus, two were found in temples of Šin and one is of unknown finding place. The epithets used in the inscriptions dedicated by Nabonidus in the temples of Šin have a traditional character and offer no proof, by their meaning or their form, for any “religious reform.”

The hypothesis of Tadmor and Beaulieu is influenced by the ideas of Sidney Smith. While Smith was mainly dependent on the propagandistic information of the Verse Account, Tadmor and Beaulieu have used more precise and reliable methods of research involving the constructive and critical analyses of a number of sources, the detailed study of many aspects of sixth century Babylonian society, and a singular emphasis on the importance of the documents from the Mesopotamian temple archives. But this hypothesis overestimates the value of the divine epithets used in the royal inscriptions dedicated to the sanctuaries of Šin. It must be noted that the biggest part of the king’s inscriptions are traditional in their content and form, like the other standard Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions.<sup>67</sup> This hypothesis underestimates also the archaeological context of the inscriptions stated as proof for Nabonidus’ “religious reform.”

## 8.5 Conclusions

The first summary hypothesis about the “religious reforms” of Nabonidus—that of M. Jastrow—was presumably affected by the lack, in the late nineteenth century, of sufficient and reliable historical sources for the period between 556 and 539 BCE. For a long time the Verse Account was seen as the main source of infor-

<sup>65</sup> See the text of the source in transliteration and translation in (Schaudig 2001, 531–532, 3.4. Tarif-Stele). The sculptured top of this royal stela is well preserved and depicts the king standing with scepter, tiara and three astral symbols of Šin, Šamaš and Ištar, see monument BM (WA) 90837.

<sup>66</sup> See the information about the finding-spot of the inscription in (Berger 1973, 382, Nbn. Stelen-Fragment I), and (Schaudig 2001, 530).

<sup>67</sup> The peculiarities of style of the king’s inscriptions are observed mainly in his stelae, and in passages in some of his cylinder inscriptions. For the style of the inscriptions see (Schaudig 2001, 49–65, 75–80). Example for standard Neo-Babylonian inscription of Nabonidus from Babylon can be seen in (Schaudig 2001, 345–350, 2.1. Imgur-Ellil-Zylinder).

mation for this period and its historical value was overestimated. The comparison between the ideas of Jastrow and Sidney Smith reveals not only the predominant influence of the same sources, but also some common methodological weak sides. Texts like the Verse Account were used uncritically from historical point of view, without sufficient historical analysis. The latter evidently cannot be substituted adequately by the translations of the texts and the philological commentaries on them, even when these were executed most professionally. As a result these documents were overvalued and over-interpreted. This attitude is best exemplified by the attitude of S. Smith to the Verse Account. He failed to analyze critically the evidence and character of this document and ignored its inherent contradictions with the major part of the remaining historical sources for the period as well as the fact that this text was composed *post eventum* and with evident propagandistic purposes. Smith practically “translated” in modern language the accusations of the Verse Account and built around them his reconstruction of the reign of Nabonidus.

Another common problem is the regular use of selective positive parallels and analogies for the “verification” of one or another proposition, creating an easy appearance of certainty through the accumulation of “matching” instances, to the expense of the often much more important information to be gained from the negative comparisons with other texts where the relevant facts are either missing or denied. One of the obvious results has been the persistence of the “religious reform” theory, which such one-sided analyses could not bring under consistent critic.

Other flaws of method and approach have often been added to these. Having both accepted a priori the “religious reforms” theory, Saggs and Dandamaev for example have tried to adapt the explanation of its causes to their general views and conceptions on the expansion of the Arameans; they have however undervalued the local religious and political traditions and the inherent political and religious divisions between the Aramean tribes. Tadmor and Beaulieu on their part have put forward very definite and straightforward textual studies, but have disregarded the local usage in the composition of inscriptions and the inherent habitual employment of specific divine epithets.

Today the historical sources available for research on the Neo-Babylonian period are much more adequate than they were in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, and their investigation has advanced considerably. As a result we are much better placed now to judge not only the historical processes in sixth century Mesopotamia, but also the source texts themselves with their inherent problems as well as the points of view and hypotheses of our predecessors in their investigation. The hypothesis that Nabonidus, the last Neo-Babylonian ruler, was a “religious reformer” is just one of these. Like all hypotheses, it should have



been put continuously to the test of critical analysis and scrutiny in the light of all available knowledge in order to test its integrity and veracity. As we have tried to show, this has not always been the case, and with very few exceptions (like the work of A. Kuhrt) the “religious reform” theory has rather become a universally accepted paradigm, shaping the views on the reign of Nabonidus for a considerable length of time. On careful examination however a lot of arguments of this hypothesis seem unreliable, or problematical. The question whether or not Nabonidus was a “religious reformer” therefore remains pending and undecided and should be open for future investigation and deliberation, eventually in the light of new source texts and more comprehensive text-critical analyses.

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