

The First Dynasty of Babylon

In the second millennium B.C., the Semitic language became the current and official language of Babylonia and Assyria, while Sumerian was preserved in schools and temples, and even sometimes used in an official inscription as Latin is today. The black stela of Hammurabi at Ur was inscribed both in Semitic and Sumerian. After the final destruction of Ur in the eleventh year of Samsuiluna, his successor, the Sumerian south falls into oblivion. Only letters, business documents and contracts of that period are preserved in the Babylonian Section of the University Museum.

The Cassite Dynasty

From the east and the west new people were soon to invade Mesopotamia. From the Taurus range the Hittites descended on Babylon, and brought to an end the brilliant dynasty of Hammurabi. In upper Mesopotamia, between the Chabur and the Tigris, and even eastward beyond it, Hurri invaders founded a new kingdom. The Mitanni for a while rivalled the growing power of Assyria, and its kings corresponded with the Pharaohs of Egypt. From the distant hills of Persia a new people, the Cassites, extended their foreign rule over Babylonia, a rule which was to last for over five hundred years. Their official letters to the Egyptian court have been recovered—written in cuneiform—at El-Amarna on the bank of the Nile. In Babylonia, temples were still repaired by their order, as is shown by numerous bricks stamped with the name of Kurigalzu (1345 B.C.). But the poverty of the material is an index of the low degree of prosperity of the land. Large estates were granted to foreign governors and local tax collectors. The deeds recorded on black diorite boulders—called *kudurrus*—are one of the most characteristic monuments of the Cassite period and were even preserved under the kings of the following native dynasty of Babylon. The fine example from Nippur (cf. *Figure 8*) in the Babylonian Section of the University Museum is dated at Nebuchadnezzar I (1000 B.C.) and was published by William J. Hinke (*A New Boundary Stone of Nebuchadnezzar I from Nippur*, 1907). At the top of the stone are engraved the figures of the enthroned gods and of their symbols, stars, weapons and animal emblems. They represent the deities invoked in the deed as protectors of the rightful owner,

and ready to put their ban and curse on any intruder. A large collection of administrative documents of the Cassite period has been found at Nippur.

The Assyrian Period

The names of the kings of Assyria who reigned in the great city of Nineveh in the eighth and seventh centuries until its total destruction in 606 B.C. have been made familiar to us through Biblical traditions concerning the wars of Israel and Juda, the siege of Samaria and Jerusalem, and even the prophet Jonah. From the palaces at Calah, Nineveh, Khorsabad, have come monumental sculptures and bas-reliefs, historical records on alabaster slabs and on clay prisms, and the many clay tablets from the royal libraries. Sargon, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal—the Sardanapalus of the Greeks—carried their wars to Babylonia, to Elam, to the old Sumerian south on the shores of the Persian Gulf. Babylon became a province of the Assyrian Empire under the king's direct control, or entrusted to the hand of a royal brother or even to a native governor. The temples were restored by their order. Bricks stamped with the names of the foreign rulers have been found at Nippur, Kish, Ur and other Babylonian cities, and may be seen in the Babylonian Section of the University Museum. Sin-balatsu-iqbi was governor of Ur and a devoted servant of Ashurbanipal. The temple of Nannar was a total ruin. He repaired the tower, the enclosing wall, the great gate, the hall of justice, where his inscribed door-socket, in the shape of a green snake, was still in position. Within the wall, on the platform, he rebuilt the shrine of Ningal, and the well attached to it. His foundation cones and inscribed bricks are now in the University Museum.

The Neo-Babylonian Period

Foreign rule was deeply resented by the Babylonians. The fall of Nineveh which filled the Orient with stupor found them on the side of Elam and the Medes, ready to share the spoils of the empire. The Chaldean princes, Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus, equalled the Assyrians as conquerors, and surpassed them as builders. Babylon with its enormous walls and moats, the Ishtar gate decorated with glazed