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## A TRADITION CURRENT IN THE THIRD CENTURY B. C.

CRANSTON EARL GODDARD

SHEFFIELD, ILLINOIS

**I**N the year 1923, Mr. C. J. Gadd, assistant in the department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities at the British Museum, discovered a portion of the Babylonian Chronicle between the tenth and the seventeenth years of Nabopolassar (616—609 B. C.). Mr. Gadd has translated the tablet (no. 21, 901) and with transliteration and notes has given us the results of his find in a book entitled "*The Fall of Nineveh.*" It is fairly certain from this Chronicle, in spite of its mutilated character, that Nineveh fell not in 607 B. C., as hitherto held, but in 612. From the evidence of this new find Pharaoh-necoh of Egypt is seen to be in league *with* Assyria. Those who wrote on the subject in 1924<sup>1</sup> were led to believe that the Chronicle was a direct contradiction of II Kings 23 29, which in the Revised Version reads: "In his (Josiah's) days Pharaoh-necoh king of Egypt went up *against* the king of Assyria." But the preposition 𐤎 has several meanings, one of which is "on behalf of." In fact, Brown, Driver and Briggs cite "against" as their *last* meaning for the word. Therefore, II Kings 23 29 could very well read: "In his days Pharaoh-necoh king of Egypt went up on behalf of the king of Assyria."

We have here another discovery that throws new light upon the international relations of the period, not before

<sup>1</sup> Welch, *Ex. Times*, Jan. 1924, p. 170 ff.; Allis, *Princeton Review*, July 1924, p. 464 f.

understood nor suspected. One is only sorry that the Chronicle stopped a half-dozen years short of a very interesting situation. What happened between 609 B. C. (which is the end of the tablet) and 605 B. C. (the defeat of Necho at Carchemish) we do not know, but there is evidence that something did occur. It is our opinion that there is yet more light to break upon these dark years and we venture the suggestion that we possess even now the substructure of our future knowledge in what we may be pleased to call tradition. For instance, there was unquestionably a tradition current in the third century before our era that Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon had come to Judea some time before history concedes that he did come. So stated the author of the Book of Daniel sometime in the second or third century (Dn. 1 1). A seeming echo of the same tradition is II Chronicles 36 6-7, although the Chronicler gives no date. Berossus (a Chaldee historian and priest at Babylon c. 260 B. C.) also gives us an account of an expedition by Nebuchadrezzar made just prior to his father's death. He writes as follows:

"When his father Nebuchodonosor (Nabopolassar) heard that the governor whom he had set over Egypt and the places about Coele Syria and Phoenicia had revolted from him, while he was not himself able any longer to undergo the hardships (of war), he committed to his son Nebuchadrezzar, who was still but a youth, some parts of his army, and sent them against them. So when Nebuchadrezzar had given battle and fought with the rebel, he beat him, and reduced the country from under his subjection, and made it a branch of his own kingdom; but about that time it happened that his father Nebuchodonosor (Nabopolassar) fell ill, and ended his life in the city of Babylon, when he had reigned twenty-one years; and when he was made sensible, as he was in a little while, that his father Nebuchodonosor (Nabopolassar) was dead, and having settled the affairs of Egypt and the other countries, as also those that concerned the "captive jews" and Phoenicians and Syrians and those of the Egyptian nations, and having committed the conveyance of them to Babylon to certain of his friends, together with the provisions, he went himself hastily, accompanied with a few others, over the desert, and came to Babylon. So he took upon him the management of public affairs and of the kingdom, which had been kept for him by one that was the principal of the Chaldeans, and he received the entire dominions of his father, and appointed that WHEN THE CAPTIVES CAME they should be placed as colonies . . ."

It is true that Berossus does not definitely mention a siege of Jerusalem or that the Babylonian Crown Prince had even gone to Judah, but the implications are significant. *Jewish* captives had somewhere been taken. Nebuchadrezzar himself hastens *across* the desert to his dead father. He was, quite probably, far south of Carchemish and much to the west of the river banks. It is not our purpose, however, to press any of Berossus' details, but it is our opinion that he has given us a reference to the same tradition mentioned by the Chronicler and the author of Daniel.

We believe also that it is possible to demonstrate that Berossus refers to the same year that the author of Daniel makes so bold to mention, i. e., the third year of Jehoiakim. If Jeremiah<sup>2</sup> is correct in equating the fourth year of Jehoiakim with the first year of Nebuchadrezzar, then Nabopolassar died before the fourth year of Jehoiakim, probably the latter part of the third, or possibly in the very first part of the fourth. It must be remembered that according to the Babylonian custom of computation, the king's reign did not officially commence until the New Year following his accession. For instance, the first contract tablet of Nebuchadrezzar's reign known to us at present is dated the 14th of Tammuz (July) in his accession year.<sup>3</sup> His first year is not mentioned until the following Nisan (April), which is the Babylonian New Year. Thus their calendar dates from spring to spring. The Jewish calendar, on the other hand, dates probably from autumn to autumn, starting with the month Tishri. If Tammuz 14 is the correct accession date of Nebuchadrezzar, then there were eight months and a half before his real first year would commence. But in the meantime, some six months before, in the month of Tishri, the Jewish year had commenced; therefore, although the first year of Nebuchadrezzar overlaps six months of the fourth year of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadrezzar really took the throne two months and a half before the fourth year of Jehoiakim had begun. Therefore, it was in the third year of

<sup>2</sup> Jer. 25 1.

<sup>3</sup> See *KB*. iv. p. 181.

Jehoiakim that Nabopolassar died, thus calling Nebuchadrezzar home to assume the throne. Daniel merely states that in "the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, came Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem, and besieged it."

It is not impossible, therefore, to demonstrate that Berossus refers to an event that took place in the third year of Jehoiakim. This event is not to be confused with that recorded by Josephus himself. The latter happened *after* the death of Nabopolassar, and therefore in the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim. Of the battle of Carchemish Josephus wrote:

"Now in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, one whose name was Nebuchadnezzar took the government over the Babylonians, who at the same time went up with a great army to the city Carchemish, which was on the Euphrates, upon a resolution he had taken to fight with Neco, king of Egypt, under whom all Syria then was." After he had defeated Neco, "he passed over the Euphrates, and took all Syria, as far as Palestine, excepting Judea."<sup>4</sup>

Jeremiah also agrees with Josephus as to the date of this battle. In chapter 46 he begins: "The word of Jehovah which came to Jeremiah the Prophet concerning the nations. Of Egypt: concerning the army of Pharaoh-neco, king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates in Carchemish, which Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, smote in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah." It is our contention that the battle of Carchemish took place after the death of Nabopolassar, either in the latter part of Nebuchadnezzar's "accession year" or in the first official year itself, and that the campaign Berossus mentions is one that took place even before his accession year.

The present writer is not of course ignorant of previous arguments of scholars, e. g., those of Professor Driver, who has said: "The terms in which Jeremiah speaks not only in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (25 ff.), but also in his fifth year (36 29), seem to imply that a Chaldaean invasion of Judah was still in the future and that Jehoiakim had not

<sup>4</sup> *Antiquities*, X. vi. 1; cf. Jer. 25 9-11; 18-20; 46 25 f.; 2 K. 24 7.

already, in his third year, fallen into Nebuchadnezzar's hands."<sup>6</sup> But this does not necessarily follow. One thing is certain—Jeremiah did not prophesy without reason. There is, in fact, very little prophecy in the old Testament in the sense of forecasting out and out. There is usually some reasonable background for a prophecy, and in this case, the movements of Nebuchadnezzar were in themselves suggestive enough. In his first year (604 B. C.), it is true, he defeated Necho at Carchemish. The conqueror loomed upon the horizon. But is there anything in any of the utterances of the Prophet that would contradict the assumption that Nebuchadnezzar had previously been to Jerusalem? On the other hand, he speaks quite naturally of an event that might occur again. As a matter of fact, it did not occur until 596 B. C., and through the intervening years Jeremiah thundered forth his warnings. Can it be that there is more history back of those warnings than we have hitherto known?

This much may be said in conclusion. A forecast is no more history than a tradition, but either one *may* become history over night. And if it is true, as it is, that Jeremiah's forecast came true, it is also true that this third century tradition, put forth by probably three contemporaries, may some day be established as true, not in the details of these three utterances necessarily, but in the essence and spirit of the tradition itself.

<sup>6</sup> *Cambridge Bible*, p. 2. \*