

The Babylonian Struggle for Independence 630-626 B.C.

SAMI AHMED

BECAUSE of the scarcity of sources the situation which existed toward the end of Ashurbanipal's reign and at the beginning of his successor's reign is, unfortunately, shrouded in mystery. The Annals, which have been our main source for the reign itself, do not go beyond the year 636 B.C. It is true that during the last years there were no warlike activities to record, but this does not seem sufficient cause for the little information that has come to us. The reason may, perhaps, be found in matters directly involving the monarch (such as illness), of which, however, there so far exists no knowledge.

Ashurbanipal probably died sometime after Simanu 631 B.C., for the last known document dates to his thirty-eighth year.¹ The phrase used by Ashur-etil-ilani regarding his father's death is: *il-li-ku nam mu-shi-shu*, previously the phrase has been restated: *il-li-ku NAM mu-shi-shu* (which simply would mean "his nocturnal death"). It has been noted that this term was usually used to denote an enemy.² Business documents from the north have been preserved in considerable number, but since they date by the eponymate it is impossible to gain any information concerning the date of his death, since we do not know the eponym in whose term Ashurbanipal died. A single tablet which seems to bring a glimmer of light to these dark

years is a charter of a land grant from Ashur-etil-ilani to Sin-shum-lishir. The inscription appears to suggest that Ashurbanipal died a natural death, and mentions one Nabu-rihtu-usur (probably the same person who was recorded earlier as selling his daughter by proxy for sixteen shekels of silver). The latter presumably acquired the assistance of Sin-shar-ibni, a high Assyrian official, and then attempted to gain the throne. But Sin-shum-lishir, the *rab shaqi*, or the general who had perhaps been attached to Ashur-etil-ilani since the prince's boyhood, may have assisted Ashurbanipal's natural heir in putting down the efforts of the two plotters.³

Recent excavations at Nimrud reveal that the level apparently dated to the end of Ashurbanipal's reign was damaged by conflagration and destruction;⁴ quite possibly, therefore, the revolt resulted in violence done to the city. In any event, however, we may hazard the opinion that Sin-shum-lishir was successful in his endeavor, for Ashur-etil-ilani became the king of Assyria.

An unusual document from Nippur dated to the accession year of Sin-shum-lishir, records the loan of thirty talents of silver from the temple of Shamash to six individuals whose positions are not clearly indicated, but who were probably influential within the city. This extraordinary amount of money may very well have been a

¹ D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings*, 626-566 (London, 1956), p. 92 mentions a tablet which is dated the 20th of Simanu, 631 B.C.

² R. Borger "Mesopotamien in den Jahren 629-621 V. Chr." *WZKM*, SS (1959), pp. 69 ff.

SAMI AHMED is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Denver.

³ C. H. W. Johns, *Assyrian Deeds and Documents*, I-V, (1898-1923), vol. IV, 807, partially reconstructed by Borger, *op. cit.*, No. 36. Johns, *op. cit.*, III, 307, A. T. Olmstead, *History of Assyria* (Chicago, 1923), p. 627.

⁴ M. Mallowan, "The Excavations at Nimrud," *Iraq*, XIV (1956), pp. 60 ff. (Level III).

forced loan negotiated at the time Sin-shum-lishir began his efforts to frustrate the attempted usurpation. The six men referred to were probably able to obtain the specified sum under the pretext of promising to secure the city for Sin-shum-lishir in case of resistance.⁵

As mentioned previously, it is known that in 672 B.C. Ashurbanipal's wife was pregnant. Early in his reign he reportedly was the father of more than one son, probably two;⁶ these were, possibly, Ashur-etil-ilani and Sin-shar-ishkun. It has been assumed that Ashur-etil-ilani was probably quite young at the time he ascended the throne, and the assumption has been based solely on the phrase, "(my) father did not rear me" which occurs in one of his inscriptions.⁷ The phrase, however, seems to have been a stereotype.⁸ Also it is attested that Ashur-etil-ilani had male children at the time of his ascen-

dency.⁹ Early in Ashurbanipal's reign he had at least two sons, of whom Ashur-etil-ilani was probably the eldest.¹⁰

Ashur-etil-ilani had evidently been appointed crown prince sometime prior to 660 B.C., for documents which date to that and the following years mention people who bear titles *mukin-apati* and *shalshu* of the crown prince.¹¹

The date of Sin-shar-ishkun's succession is not known, and has been the subject of much discussion.¹² Documents dated to his reign have been discovered at various Babylonian sites.

Ashurbanipal had apparently chosen his successor sometime prior to 660 B.C. As was mentioned, it was probably understood that if Shamash-shum-ukin died leaving no male heir, one of Ashurbanipal's sons would be the candidate for the Babylonian throne. Thus Ashurbanipal's other son (Sin-shar-ishkun) was perhaps destined to succeed his uncle as king of Babylonia, if the latter died leaving no male heir, and presumably, if Ashurbanipal was not alive. A prayer of Shamash-shum-ukin, cited earlier, "to him who is not worthy you gave a male heir" may support this view. Since Ashurbanipal was still living when Shamash-shum-ukin died without a male heir, the Assyrian king was free to appoint whomever he wanted to the position. Hence it seems probable that when Shamash-shum-ukin died, Kandalanu was placed on the Babylonian throne to rule until his own death and then to be succeeded by one of Ashurbanipal's sons.

Prior to his death in 631 B.C., Ashurbanipal had perhaps settled the matter of succession in the same manner his father had done: Ashur-etil-ilani, the

⁵ A. Clay, *Babylonian Expedition*, BE, VIII, Part 1, No. 141. Dubberstein (JNES, III, P. 41, N.) suggested that the name be read Sin-shar-ishkun. A. Leo Oppenheim read the tablet however (see the same n.), and the name is quite certain. Sayce, in his comment, on this document in the editorial notes to Maspero's *Passing of the Empires*, p. 481, suggested that Sin-shum-lishir was the predecessor of Sin-shar-ishkun. Olmstead *op. cit.*, p. 627, assumed that Sin-shum-lishir was dissatisfied with the land grant he had received as a gift from Ashur-etil-ilani, revolted, and for a short time was acknowledged as king in Sipper.

⁶ D. J. Wiseman, "The Vassal treaties of Esarhaddon," IRAQ, XX (1957), Part 1, ls. 249-50; R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collection of the British Museum*, I-XIV (Chicago, 1892-1914), No. 9, rev. ls. 6-7.

⁷ Johns, *op. cit.*, IV, 807 Borger, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁸ In one of Ashurbanipal's prayers (Sidersky, "A Hymn of Ashurbanipal to the Queen of Nineveh and Arbela," JRAS (1929), pp. 772-79, obv. 1. 13), it is said: "Although I knew not father and mother, in the palace unto my . . . I grew up, even I." In Harper, *op. cit.*, 926 a letter from Ashurbanipal to the Babylonians obv. 1. 13. occurs the phrase: "father and mother did not rear me."

⁹ E. Ebeling, "Eine Weihinschrift für Mar-duk," Ass. or., 12, pp. 71-73 l. 13. (a prayer for Ashur-etil-ilani; male children).

¹⁰ Harper, *op. cit.*, No. 9.

¹¹ John, *op. cit.*, III, 440, 444, 445.

¹² For references see W. Dubberstein, JNES (1944), p. 41. The author concluded that the reign of Sin-shar-ishkun began in 629 B.C.

crown prince, was to succeed him on the throne of Assyria; Sin-shar-ishkun, upon the death of Kandalanu, was to be king in Babylon. Thus the will of Esarhaddon would have been adopted by Ashurbanipal: one son of the reigning Assyrian king would, as king of Assyria, be the real master, but a second son would continue to be king of Babylon. In the present instance, however, as during the troubled times of Shamash-shum-ukin's revolt, Babylonia was no real unity; Babylon and its environs formed one portion, but Nippur, the Sea Land, and other areas were more strongly attached to Assyria than to Babylon proper. Ashurbanipal may, therefore, have willed the latter region to that princely son who would, upon Kandalanu's death, become king of Babylon. This theory is here tentatively adopted, therefore: that Ashur-etil-ilani ascended his throne sometime after June, 631, and in Ayyaru, 630 began his first regnal year;¹³ at about the same time Sin-shar-ishkun was probably sent south to rule in the area which was strongly held by Assyria, making his capital at Nippur.

Business documents dated to the reigns of Ashur-etil-ilani and Sin-shar-ishkun have been found in most Babylonian cities, but the majority of those not from Babylon itself derive from cities which were not under Kandalanu's jurisdiction. Seemingly, the situation was similar to that which existed during Ashurbanipal's and Shamash-shum-ukin's joint kingship prior to the latter's rebellion. However, it now seems clear that Kandalanu, Ashur-etil-ilani and Sin-shar-ishkun began struggling and claiming each other's territory. It is quite likely that as soon as Sin-shar-ishkun reached the South, he declared his independence and

claimed authority over the entire state of Assyria since he boasted the title "king of Assyria."

Some scholars have assumed that Sin-shar-ishkun had been called by the name Ashur-etil-ilani. It is true that documents are dated to the reigns of both Sin-shar-ishkun and Ashur-etil-ilani simultaneously, but our hypothesis disposes of the contrary assumption that the two names are necessarily to be taken as referring to the same person. It has been suggested that Ashur-etil-ilani and Sin-shar-ishkun are not brothers but are named for the same person.¹⁴ The principle support for this view was apparently the inscription of Nabonidus' mother, in which she mentioned only Ashur-etil-ilani.¹⁵ If, however, the latter has been called by the name Sin-shar-ishkun, Nabonidus' mother would surely have used this rather than the name Ashur-etil-ilani. Furthermore, the documents on which Ashur-etil-ilani's name appear do not go beyond the fourth year, eighth month of his reign, but the name Sin-shar-ishkun continued until 612 B.C.¹⁶

¹⁴ Borger, *op. cit.*, p. 68 fb.

¹⁵ C. J. Gadd, "The Harran inscription of Nabonidus," *Anatolian Studies*, VIII, (1958), p. 35 fb.

¹⁶ Borger has also assumed that one of Ashur-etil-ilani's inscriptions from Calah, which reports that the king had restored the temple of Nabu (*Iraq*, XII, p. 197, (ND 284); *Iraq*, XIV, p. 67 (ND 1130) is similar to the introduction of Sin-shar-ishkun's building inscriptions found at Nineveh. He also argues that Sin-shar-ishkun restored the Nabu temples at Ashur and Nineveh, and that since a land endowment document substantiates Sin-shar-ishkun's care of the temple of Nabu at Nimrud, therefore in the course of the temple restorations, Ashur-etil-ilani had changed his name to Sin-shar-ishkun (Borger, *op. cit.*, p. 70). Every king endeavored to restore the temples of the gods, including that of Nabu. Ashur-etil-ilani may have begun the restoration, but his reign; we would suppose, came to an end before the work was finished. Borger also mentions that none of the Assyrian king lists carried Sin-shar-ishkun's name; this, of course, may simply mean that the lists are not complete. Other inscriptions, however, do mention both Ashur-etil-ilani and Sin-shar-ishkun, respectively.

¹³ The text from Babylon (see previous n.) is dated to the accession year of Sin-shar-ishkun. It is probable that the people of Babylon thought that Sin-shar-ishkun was destined to rule all of Babylonia; thus we find only one tablet dated after him. (Goetze, *JNES*, III (1944), p. 44.

Perhaps in an effort to placate the Babylonian citizens who were under the rule of Sin-shar-ishkun, Ashur-etil-ilani sent the coffin of Shamash-ibni from Assyria to the deceased's tribal area, Dakkuri, for burial. This may have been the coffin and bones of that Shamash-ibni whom Esarhaddon carried to Assyria and killed in the latter's third year.¹⁷

Our assumption, then, is that Sin-shar-ishkun made his capital at Nippur, since Babylon was controlled by Kandalanu. Nippur, as we have seen, had been a strong military base upon which Assyria depended to maintain dominance over other parts of Babylonia. In addition, it was advantageously located, both militarily and commercially, in the center of the land, and not too far from the recently overpowered Elam.

As indicated above, Bel-ibni continued as governor of the Sea Land through Ashurbanipal's reign and during the early part of Ashur-etil-ilani's rule, but his fate is not known and he may have died or been deposed. Berossos reports that Nabopolassar was appointed governor of the Sea Land by Sin-shar-ishkun.¹⁸ Since southern Mesopotamia was under the jurisdiction of Sin-shar-ishkun, according to the hypothesis here advanced, it is reasonable to assume that he would issue the appointment of a governor for the Sea Land. It is suggested that Bel-ibni, as well as Nabopolassar,

called himself "son of nobody."¹⁹ Hence it is indeed possible that Nabopolassar was Bel-ibni's natural heir,²⁰ and that when the father died a natural death he was succeeded by a son.

A text from the Seleucid era which is doubtless a copy of an earlier tablet, states that Nabopolassar, who is called "king of the Sea Land," returned to Elam a number of ritual tablets which had been kept at Uruk.²¹ The use of this title may indicate that Nabopolassar declared his independence in the Sea Land prior to his assumption of the Babylonian throne in the Fall of 626 B.C. If so, he probably took advantage of the divisive influences within the land and declared himself king of the area over which he served as governor. If this conclusion is correct there were now four kings in the Assyro-Babylonian land: Ashur-etil-ilani in the north who, at least theoretically, had broad authority over the south; Sin-shar-ishkun in Nippur; Kandalanu in Babylon; Nabopolassar in the Sea Land. The text states that Nabopolassar had plundered Uruk, which at this time was properly an Assyrian territory though under Sin-shar-ishkun's jurisdiction. This, again, may indicate that soon after Nabopolassar had assumed the title "king" he began attacking areas held by his nominal master. Such activities were possibly those reported in some confusion, by Abydenus, quoted by Eusebius:

¹⁹ Nabopolassar asserts: "In my childhood I was the son of nobody." (F. Weissbach, *Babylonische Miscellen*, (1903), pl. 8, (1903), pl. 8, WVDGG, IV), Bel-ibni, in a letter to Ashurbanipal, stated: "I am . . . the son of nobody" (Harper, *op. cit.* 521). Olmstead *op. cit.*, p. 633) and Gadd (*History . . .* p. 226) have assumed that Nabopolassar was Bel-ibni's son.

²⁰ There is evidence that Bel-ibni had male heirs (ABL, 793, rev. ls. 16 ff. ". . . and I, my brothers, my sons, and my friends will come and kiss the feet of the king our lord."

²¹ Thureau-Dangin. *Rituel Accadiens* (Paris 1921), pp. 65, 80, 86, AO 6451, rev. ls. 46 ff. which reads: "According to the tablet which Nabopolassar plundered from Uruk."

¹⁷ Pritchard J. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 303, No. 2; Yale Oriental Series, 1 (New Haven) No. 43, M. 60-62; D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* (Chicago 1926), 11, 1133-1135.

¹⁸ P. Schnabel, *Berossos und die Babylonische Hellenistische Literatur* (Leipzig, 1923), p. 271.

When Sarocus (Sin-shar-ishkun) heard that a very great multitude of Barbarians had come up from the Sea, he sent Busalossorus (Nabopolassar) against them.²²

The incident may have been the first of Nabopolassar's warlike activities against Assyria, and Sin-shar-ishkun may have sent Nabopolassar hither before he knew that the attack was actually directed by his governor of the Sea Land.

Ashur-etil-ilani, king of Assyria proper, left too few inscriptions and documents for us to gain insight into his individual character. The remains of his palace at Nimrud suggest that he was less ostentatious than his father and grandfather had been, for, although the palace was built on a higher level than the previous palaces, it contained no reliefs such as those his ancestors had used to depict their strength and valor. This was natural since he seems to have made no conquests and most likely participated in no hunting campaigns worthy of commemoration, a fact which may imply that he was not powerful, and therefore was incapable of maintaining the empire in the way his father had done. The palace, covering a small area, was erected with characteristically small bricks, and had extremely small rooms; the interior bears no decorations, the ceilings are low, and the wainscoting, instead of being richly carved alabaster, consisted of roughly cut limestone slabs. If Ashur-etil-ilani's remains reveal anything, it is the king's apparent ascetic inclination, to which may have been added a necessary economy in personal expenses and state financing.²³

It is interesting that Ashur-etil-ilani should select for his restorations, a temple of Urash at Dilbat, which seems to have been neglected by all other late Assyrian, and all subsequent Baby-

lonian, kings. He rebuilt it "with burnt brick which is the hand work of the plain, . . . The 'body' of that floor he made bright as the Tigris and the River" (i.e., the Euphrates).²⁴ The discovery of this text at Dilbat, which was well within Kandalanu's area, makes it probable that the forces of Ashur-etil-ilani had attacked Dilbat and for a time held that city.²⁵

Throughout his reign, it is probable that some vassals, who had hitherto feared Assyria, seized the opportunity while Assyria had a weak monarch, to begin attacking Assyrian territories.²⁷ Thus, Josiah, king of Judah, feeling that Ashur-etil-ilani was too weak to oppose his activities, in about 628 B.C. seems to have moved towards the coast to extend his domination over the Assyrian territory of Ashdod and settle some Judaeans there.²⁸

In the third year of Sin-shar-ishkun, 627 B.C., the city of Nippur was besieged, probably by Nabopolassar. The attack, which continued through the months of Simanu, Tammazu, Abu, Ululu, and Tishritu, must have been quite acute since people, presumably of the poor classes, sold their children. The price of barley is recorded in one of the documents as being one shekel of silver for one qa, or three times higher than the price of grain during

²⁴ S. Langdon, *OECT I* (Oxford, 1923), p. 38.

²⁵ Contrast Wiseman, *Chronicles*, p. 5. Texts dated to Kandalanu from Dilbat have been preserved. Langdon, *JRAS* (1928), p. 321, dated to his seventeenth and eighteenth years.

²⁶ E. Ebeling, *Eine Weihinschrift* . . ., *op. cit.*

²⁷ F. Cross and D. Freedman, "Josiah's Revolt Against Assyria," *JNES*, XII (1955), pp. 56 ff.

²⁸ J. Naveh, "A Hebrew Letter From the 7th Century B.C.," *IEJ*, X, No. 3 (1960), No. 2, P. 61, No. 53, who dates the letter to the reign of Ashurbanipal.

²² I. P. Cory, *Ancient Fragments* (London, 1832), p. 64.

²³ A. Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains* (London, 1850), II, pp. 39 ff.; *Nineveh and Babylon* (London, 1867), p. 558.

the siege of Babylon in 648.²⁹ This would indicate that the city of Nippur was very hard pressed, even though the siege lasted only six months. Babylon's siege lasted for two years and involved the Babylonian and allied armies which were forced to retreat to the capital, as well as the citizens of the city.

The Babylonian Chronicle³⁰ reports the coming of Assyrian troops to the South, most probably dispatched by Ashur-etil-ilani to recover Nippur while it was under siege lest the city fall to Nabopolassar. On the 12th of Ululu, the Assyrian army was at the city of Shaznaku (probably to be located in the Diyala region), and set its temple of fire.³¹ It is here assumed that the Assyrians ravished Shaznaku and its surrounding area.³² These events apparently frightened the people of Kish, situated on the road to Nippur, since in the month of Tishriti the gods of Kish were taken to Babylon.³³ We may surmise that the inhabitants of the city

were evacuated at the same time. The Assyrian armies probably spent little time at Kish since Nippur was their real destination. As soon as the northern forces approached Nippur, Nabopolassar raised the siege and retreated to Uruk. The retreating army, apparently pursued by the Assyrians, fought a battle in the vicinity of Uruk, Nabopolassar's presumed base of operations and whose citizens assisted him, after which the Assyrians again withdrew to Nippur in the Fall of 627 B.C.³⁴ The withdrawal of the Assyrian army may indicate that Sin-shar-ishkun had refused to submit his city to the forces sent by his brother.

Early in 626 B.C. (Ayyaru) Assyrian reinforcements again marched into Babylonia.³⁵ By this time, it appears, Kandalanu was dead, and the Assyrian purpose was probably to take over Babylon and re-establish Assyrian authority there.³⁶ Not improbably, the Assyrians had heard of an encroachment by Nabopolassar, which would account for the sending of troops so early in the year.

A business document from Sippar dated to Ululu of Nabopolassar's accession year may indicate that this city had aligned itself with Nabopolassar by that time.³⁷ The alignment of Sippar with Nabopolassar angered the Assyrians, and their forces advanced towards Babylon, probably planning to take that city and then move north to Sip-

²⁹ The siege documents reviewed by A. Leo Oppenheim, "Siege Documents from Nippur," Iraq, XVII (1955), pp. 69 ff., mention that a famine (*danatum*) prevailed. Two contain the phrase "During (the time when) the gate of Nippur was closed, 'indicating that the city was under siege. Contrast the normal interpretation of locking up the city. The children sold were mostly girls; their prices ranged from 6 to 22 shekels. Two of the documents deal with the sale of sons (2 NT 301, 2NT 302). These siege documents deal merely with Ninurta-uballit and his two business associates, Arad-Gula and Danni-Nergal, who may have been only three of many who were thus engaged.

³⁰ Wiseman, *Op. cit.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, obv. ls. 4-5 (BM 25127).

³² This is deduced from the fact that the Assyrian army, advancing slowly and apparently without opposition (there is no reference to such in the Chronicle) entered Shaznaku on the 12th of Ululu and yet by early Tishriti had not reached Kish. The distance between the assumed location of Shaznaku and Kish could have been covered in three days march at an average speed of two and one-half miles per hour, eight hours per day; during the intervening period, the surrounding area could be thoroughly ravished.

³³ Wiseman, *Chronicles*, *op. cit.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, obv. ls. 8-9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, obv. 1. 10.

³⁶ As indicated above, Kandalanu must have died in the Fall of 627 B.C. A number of documents are dated "X year after Kandalanu," and the Babylonian Chronicles (*ibid.*, obv. 1. 14) states that for a year there was no king in the land—meaning, presumably, the year prior to Nabopolassar's ascendancy to the throne, which occurred in Marcheswan, 626 B.C. but after the year of Kandalanu's death.

³⁷ The text from Sippar is dated the 22nd of Ululu (BM 496, Wiseman's *Chronicles*, *op. cit.*, Pl. XXI, pp. 93-94). Wiseman thinks that this date may be a scribal error; if not, it means that Nabopolassar was acknowledged in Sippar two months earlier than in Babylon.

par. On the 12th of Tishriti 626, they approached Babylon, but the Babylonians repulsed their assault, inflicted a great loss upon the army, and confiscated much spoil.

This victory paved the way for Nabopolassar to ascend the throne of Babylon in Marcheswan, 626 B.C., and thus began his accession year and the era of the Chaldaean dynasty.³⁸ At the New Year festival of 625/624 B.C. Nabopolassar held the hands of Marduk and thus began his first year of reign.³⁹

In Adaru, 626, Nabopolassar returned to Susa the gods which Ashurbanipal had probably carried off after the destruction of that city in 646 B.C. and which had since been deposited at Uruk,⁴⁰ an action which was probably a gesture of gratitude to the Elamites.

Warlike activities are reported for Nabopolassar's first year. On the 17th of Nisannu there was panic in Babylon, and the image of the god Shamash along with other statues of the deities of the city of Shapazu (probably located north of Sippar), were brought to Babylon. The following day the Assyrians entered Sallat, also presumably north of Sippar. The Assyrian army halted at Sallat, probably to await additional troops and information concerning Nabopolassar's preparations to meet their advance. Since the troops did not move for about two and one-half months, this apparently encouraged Nabopolassar to lead his forces in an attack upon the city.

³⁸ Parker and Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.*, p. 9. BHT, *The Chronicles of Years*, p. 25, rev. ls. 4 ff. gives the date of Nabopolassar as the 26th day of Marcheswan. Only twenty days after the writing of the tablet from Sippar, dated the 22nd of Ululu, the accession year of Nabopolassar, the Assyrian army was on its way to Babylon.

³⁹ Parker and Dubberstein, *op. cit.*, p. 9; BR, 14, from Uruk is dated the 23rd of Ayyáru of Nabopolassar's first year. A text from Babylon is dated Ayyaru 14, of his second year (VAS, VI, 3).

⁴⁰ Wiseman, *Chronicles*, *op. cit.*

However, upon word that Assyrian reinforcements were on the way southward, he withdrew.⁴¹

Business documents alone provide the criteria for dating the extent of the reign of Ashur-etil-ilani. The last tablet is dated in the eighth month of his fourth year.⁴² Therefore, his reign may have ended shortly after Marcheswan, 625 B.C.

The period between Abu, 625 and Ululu 624 seems to have been one of relative peace.⁴³ Nabopolassar was probably not yet in a position to advance upon the Assyrians who still held many Babylonian cities, whereas Assyria was now confronted with internal difficulties. Babylonian business documents at this time began to be dated solely to the reign of Sin-shar-ishkun, which probably indicates that he had become king of Assyria. There is no evidence from these years, but since Sin-shar-ishkun had clearly challenged his brother's authority in the South and bore the title "king of Assyria," it is probable that he did usurp the Assyrian throne. Additional evidence for his usurpation may indeed be found. It is known that Ashur-etil-ilani had male children; if the order of succession, as established by Esarhad-don, had been followed, one of them would have been his successor. None of them were. It appears, therefore, that Sin-shar-ishkun was in reality an usurper. The city of Ur must have acknowledged Nabopolassar's authority in his second year, 624 B.C., for documents from Ur dated to his reign begin to appear at this time, suggesting that the people of this city had expelled the Assyrian representative and had aligned themselves with Nabopolassar.⁴⁴ There is, however, no evidence to suggest that he coerced the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, lz. 18-24, p. 52.

⁴² *Babylonian Expedition op. cit.*, VIII, No. 5.

⁴³ Wiseman, *Chronicles*, *op. cit.* ls. 22-25, p. 52.

⁴⁴ H. H. Figulla, *Ur Excavation Texts*. (London, 1949), IV, No. 56.

city or rendered any assistance to the citizens of Ur to rid themselves of Assyrian domination. In 624 B.C. an Assyrian army advanced into Babylonia and encamped by the Baniti canal. Since it apparently found itself in no position to defeat Nabopolassar, it retired to Assyria to prepare for another endeavor the following year.⁴⁵

In 623 the city of Der revolted from Assyria, which thus lost an important outpost on its border as well as a significant route into the mountains of Elam. Uruk must have been strongly held by Nabopolassar until at least his third year (623 B.C.). It is possible, however, that for a short time the city may have been lost to Assyria, for a text from Uruk is dated to the seventh year of Sin-shar-ishkun and this was the third year of Nabopolassar.⁴⁶ This episode may have resulted from the activities of the Assyrian army which came South in Nabopolassar's third year, for in Tishriti of the same year, the Assyrian monarch led an army directly to Nippur, and, in all probability, attempted to gain Uruk. After the attempt failed, part of the Assyrians probably remained to strengthen the garrison at Nippur, lest it too fall to the enemy, and the king returned North with rest of his troops.

⁴⁵ Wiseman, *Chronicles*, *op. cit.*, rev. ls. 25-28, p. 52. See comment, pp. 9ff.

⁴⁶ L. W. King, *ZA*, IX, pp. 398-99; *JRAS* (1921), p. 383; *BR*, No. 71.

The fragmentary nature of our sources makes it impossible to determine successive events; we know only that some person (perhaps someone who had attempted to replace Nabopolassar and failed), was killed after ruling 100 days.⁴⁷ Nor is it known when Nippur was won by the Babylonians, but it was probably besieged when Sin-shar-ishkun withdrew to Assyria after his unsuccessful attempt against Uruk. It may be assumed that, after a fierce battle, the city fell at the end of 623 or early 622. Nabopolassar thus gained Assyria's last stronghold in southern Mesopotamia and with it Assyrian domination in the South came to an end. By 622, therefore, Nabopolassar controlled all Babylonia. Until this date his policy had been to gain the whole of southern Mesopotamia and to defend it against Assyria. The subsequent years, until the fall of Nineveh in 612, witnessed a change in his policy from the defensive to the aggressive. During these years he sought allies, assaulted Assyrian territories, and finally participated in the destruction of Nineveh.

⁴⁷ Wiseman also assumed that it was probably an attempt to replace Nabopolassar (*Chronicles*, *op. cit.*, p. 10). Another possible explanation may be that it was an attempt to replace Sin-shar-ishkun while absent with his forces; his failure in Babylon and the gradual loss of Babylonian cities may have encouraged someone to try to usurp the throne (*ibid.*, ls. 39-41, pp. 52-55).



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