CHAPTER TWO
KIN GROUPS IN NORTHERN BABYLONIA:
BABYLON, BORSIPPA, AND DILBAT

2.1. INTRODUCTION

First mentioned in the inscriptions of the Akkadian king Šar-kali-šarri, Babylon remained a minor city until the dynasty founded by Šumu-abum emerged in the first half of the second millennium. In the wake of the political and military struggles that followed the collapse of the Ur III Empire, Babylon became the dominant city in southern Mesopotamia due to the imperial ambitions of Hammurabi. However, unlike other seats of dynastic rule that preceded Babylon as the primary center of power in Mesopotamia, the city retained its preeminent position under the Kassite rulers, who eventually replaced Hammurabi’s dynasty. Consequently an enduring ideology of Babylon’s primacy was fostered that established the city over all others as both the seat of political and religious power. This ideology was not always mirrored by the historical realities of the post-Kassite period: political power was exercised from other cities, claimants to the throne were not always able to control Babylon, and there were city governors whose autonomy and power rivaled that of the king at Babylon to the point that they were able to carry out military campaigns independently. Nevertheless, the monarchy was

---

1 RA 4 (1898) Pl. 5, No. 13 = RIME 2, 183 (k).
3 Brinkman, PKB, 293–294.
4 Steven W. Cole argues that the governor at Nippur, the šandabakku, had been a powerful and independent figure in the eighth century (Cole, SAAS 4, 50–52) who was able to lead a campaign south to the Gulf (Cole, Nippur, No. 114:24–29 [IM 77112]). Nabû-šuma-imbi, Borsippa’s governor during the reign of the mid-eighth-century king Nabû-šuma-iškun, acted independently of the king at Babylon and even found himself in open conflict with the people of Babylon (see below, section 2.3.2.1.1).
typically centered at Babylon under the Kassites and their successors. The Assyrians recognized the political significance of Babylon in their efforts to control their southern neighbor in the first half of the first millennium; the emperor installed puppets, members of the royal family, or took the throne himself, but did not foster a vassal king at another Babylonian city to rival the importance of Babylon.

Of course, Babylon could only maintain its exalted position so long as it remained a viable and habitable city. Beginning with the reign of Samsuiluna, southern Babylonia entered a period of decline and partial abandonment that may have been spurred by shifts in the channel of the Euphrates and its many branches; however, there is no evidence that Babylon and the neighboring cities of Borsippa and Dilbat were adversely affected by any such meanders that occurred between the collapse of the first dynasty of Babylon and the early first millennium. Foreign invasions proved more devastating to the city. Babylon survived the depredations of the Elamite raids that ended the Kassite dynasty and, more significantly, the wrath of Sennacherib’s destruction of the city. Esarhaddon’s subsequent resettlement and rebuilding of Babylon played an important role in re-establishing the boundaries and layout of the city in the mid-first millennium, laying the foundations for the architectural height that the city attained under Nebuchadnezzar II.

---

5 Bêl-ibni (702–700) and Kandalânû (647–627).
7 Tîglâth-pîleser III (728–727), Sargôn II (709–705), and Esarhaddon (680–669) all incorporated Babylonian royal titles in their titulary (Brinkman, Prelude, 55, n. 255). Shalmanesser V was recognized as king of Babylon in Babylonian King List A, the Ptolemaic Canon, and a Babylonian chronicle (Grayson, Chronicles, 73.30 and RIA 6.93 iv 9 and p. 101). He was also called king (LUGAL E) in a tablet dated during his reign at Babylon in 724 (BM 38259 r. 9”). Sennacherib’s reign over Babylonia (704–703) was not acknowledged in the Babylonian Chronicle or the Ptolemaic Canon (Brinkman, Prelude, 69), and texts dated during his reign in Babylonia only used the title King of Assyria (IM 57905:19–20; UM 29.13.568 r. 15’–16’; and VAS 5 1:21 [VAT 4919]).
8 Sîn-balâsu-iqbi, the governor of Ur, used the slightly more elevated title of šakkana-akku and dedicated some of his building projects to Ashurbanipal while omitting any reference to his allegiance to Šamaš-šuma-ukîn (Frame, Babylonia, 125–126). His autonomous behavior and pro-Assyrian stance may have made him a foil to Šamaš-šuma-ukîn, a situation beneficial to Ashurbanipal.
9 See below, section 5.1.
10 Steven W. Cole and Hermann Gasche, “Second- and First-Millennium BC Rivers in Northern Babylonia,” in Changing Watercourses in Babylonia, MHEMV V/1, 30–54. The evidence for the Kassite and post-Kassite periods is sparse. While Babylon, Borsippa, and Dilbat remained fed by water from the Euphrates, other cities in northern Babylonia such as Sippar (ibid., 32–33) and Kish (ibid., 35) had to be supplied by canals that were opened up in the first millennium.