

RBL 12/2002

**Vanderhooft, David S.**

***The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets***

Harvard Semitic Museum Monographs 59

Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999. Pp. xii + 246, Cloth, \$29.95, ISBN 0788505793.

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This revised and updated Harvard dissertation (Peter Machinist, director) attempts to clarify the character and functions of the Neo-Babylonian empire in relation to subjugated populations, especially the people of Judah. Two basic questions address this larger concern: 1) "How did the Babylonians conceive and implement their role as imperial rulers?" and 2) "Can the responses of subject populations to these implementations furnish independent evidence about the empire?" (p. 2). Vanderhooft's attempt follows upon his mentor's study, "Assyria and its Image in the First Isaiah," *JAOS* 103 (1983) 719-37, which studied Isaian texts in an effort to discern how ancient Judeans were influenced by and viewed the Assyrian empire. Whereas a great deal of work has focused on the Assyrian empire, relatively little has been done on the Neo-Babylonian empire, especially since scholars often assume that the Babylonians continued the administrative policies of the Assyrians. Vanderhooft's analysis focuses upon the notions of imperial rule articulated in the Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions, Babylonian imperial administration in the Levant, and the portrayal of Babylon in selected prophetic texts.

Vanderhooft's analysis of the Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions begins by noting the characteristics that distinguish them from their Assyrian counterparts. The Babylonian inscriptions tend to be apolitical in that they emphasize commodities and building materials that flow into Babylonia rather than the king's political relationships, military encounters, and heroic deeds. Indeed, the Neo-Babylonian inscriptions tend to return to the themes that were dominant in the royal inscriptions of the Old Babylonian period. Their apolitical character and their placement in locations that were not accessible to human viewers suggests that the intended audience was the gods or future rulers who might uncover them. Indeed, the titulary employed in the inscriptions emphasizes the king's role as ruler of Babylon and servant of the patron deities and their temples. By contrast, Neo-Assyrian titulary forms emphasize the king's role as ruler of the world. Nabopolassar's inscriptions tend to focus more on his efforts to free Babylon from Assyrian control, but Nebuchadnezzar's inscriptions begin to shift toward a larger world view in which he portrays himself as protector of humanity. The flow of goods

into Babylon facilitates Nebuchadnezzar's portrayal of Babylon as the center of creation. The inscriptions assert that all humanity recognizes the preeminence of Babylon and its king, although Marduk does not command the king to seek out and conquer rebels in the manner of the Assyrian inscriptions. It is noteworthy that Vanderhooft's portrayal of Babylonian ideology in the royal inscriptions is quite similar to that of the *Enuma Elish*, which portrays Marduk as the defender of the gods and his temple as the center of creation. Nabonidus, on the other hand, sought to relegate Marduk to a lesser position in the pantheon while promoting the moon god Sin to the premier rank in the divine hierarchy. In addition, Nabonidus sought to establish continuity between his reign and those of the Neo-Assyrian Sargonid kings. His efforts appear to be motivated by an interest in portraying himself and Babylon rather than the Medes as the heirs to the legacy of Assyrian imperial rule.

Vanderhooft then turns to a study of Babylonian imperial administration in the Levant in an effort to determine how the model developed above finds expression in the mechanics of Babylon's imperial administration. Again, a fundamental question is whether or not there was significant continuity between the Assyrian and Babylonian military and administrative systems. He begins with a discussion of the contraction of Assyrian power in the southern Levant during the course of Assurbanipal's reign, particularly after 640 B.C.E., and the concomitant rise of Egyptian power in the region during the reign of the Saite dynasty beginning with Psammetichus I (640-610 B.C.E.). In Vanderhooft's view, the presence of the Egyptians in this region better explains the logic, methods, and consequences of Babylonian rule under Nebuchadnezzar. Whereas the Assyrians were committed to developing the economy of the Philistine coastal plain and surrounding regions--indeed, the Assyrians were reluctant to punish this region quite so thoroughly in times of revolt in order to protect their economic interests--Nebuchadnezzar could pursue a "scorched earth" policy in order to drive out the Egyptians and render the region useless to them. The Babylonians did not create a provincial system to administer the region--as the Assyrians had done before them. Deportation of the population only removed people from the land; they were not replaced by deportees from other conquered lands as in the Assyrian system. There seems to have been little developed trade between Babylon and these outlying regions. The Babylonians focused instead on insuring that tribute and goods were delivered to Babylon, but there was no corresponding shipment of Babylonian goods to subject areas.

Vanderhooft examines the prophetic literature in an effort to reconstruct perceptions and influence of the Babylonian world view on the part of a subject people. He is particularly interested in how the biblical writers resisted or acquiesced in the ideas and practices of the Babylonian empire. Texts studied include several that explicitly name Babylon, the Babylonian king, and royal representatives, i.e., Mic 4:10; Isa 13:1-22; 14:1-23; 21:10; texts from Jeremiah; Habakkuk 1-2; Ezekiel 17; 21; Isaiah 40:18-20; 46; 47; Jeremiah 50-51. The Micah reference is a late insertion that presupposes Assyria as a paradigm for Babylon. The Isaian texts are generally late and look forward to Babylon's demise, but they do not refer to imperial ideas and practices. Perhaps Vanderhooft should also have considered Isaiah 2 and its relationship to Isaiah 13, insofar

as this chapter presupposes Jerusalem's role at the center of the nations. The Jeremian texts point only to Babylonian military commanders charged with the conquest of Judah; administrative officials are lacking. Habakkuk attempts to undermine notions of Babylonian rule by portraying the Babylonian king as a blasphemous, corrupt looter who will ultimately suffer punishment. His exclusion of Habakkuk 3 from discussion is regrettable, particularly since the depiction of YHWH in a solar chariot who tramples the sea with his horses takes up an image that may well relate to Assyrian images of Assur and Marduk's defeat of Tiamat. Ezekiel focuses on Babylon's acquisition of cedar from Lebanon and the portrayal of divination as an act that achieves YHWH's purpose. But does Ezekiel's vision of a restored Temple in Jerusalem at the center of creation owe anything to the Babylonian conceptualization of Marduk's ziggurat in Babylon? Second Isaiah employed images of Babylon as a foil to articulate notions of the monotheistic idea in the international sphere. Vanderhooft concentrates especially on the depiction of the Babylonian *akitu* (New Year) festival in Isaiah 46, but he does not pursue the question as to how Babylonian ideas and practice may have informed the prophet's conceptualization of YHWH as protector of creation, the one who authorizes kingship, and who carries the exiles back to the center of creation at Jerusalem. Jeremiah 50-51 depicts the fall of a city that is no longer an international force.

Altogether, Vanderhooft's portrayal of a unique Babylonian self-conceptualization that sees itself at the center of the world is useful to biblical scholars. He might take the investigation a step further to ask if such a conceptualization influenced Judean depictions of Jerusalem and YHWH in the prophetic literature (see, e.g., the example of Isaiah noted above) or even in the narrative literature, such as Genesis. Indeed, Nabonidus' emphasis on Sin in place of Marduk may have some bearing on interpreting the depictions of Abram's origins in Ur of the Chaldeans and Haran, both of which were known in the ancient world for the worship of Sin. In sum, this is a useful study that can serve as a platform for much more creative research.