

TITLE: *Babylonian World Map*

DATE: 600-500 B.C.

AUTHOR: *unknown*

DESCRIPTION: In 1881 the Iraqi-born archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam discovered what became known as the *Babylonian World Map* while excavating a site near the ancient Babylonian city of Sippar. Rassam was looking for evidence of the biblical Flood, and because he could not read cuneiform text, he dismissed the tablet as of little importance. In fact, he did not even realize it was a map. It was only in the late 20th century that cuneiform scholars at the British Museum deciphered the tablet's text and discovered its significance.

This later Babylonian clay tablet, dating from the Persian Period (seventh or sixth century B.C.), shows an *asysocentric* view of a flat, round world with Babylonia in the center. Its identity as a map attempting to depict the entire world is substantiated by the adjacent text, which mentions "*seven outer nagûs [regions] beyond the encircling ocean*". This is a slightly different concept from that of the early Greeks, for whom the encircling ocean was outside of all known lands.

During the fifth century Babylon was still a flourishing city, regarded as the center - the "hub" - of the universe. Yet only with the rise to supremacy of the Babylonian kings, with Hammurabi toward 2000 B.C., had its claim to this position become possible. Previously the position was occupied by one of the former capitals of the earlier kingdoms. Probably the Sumerians made the city of *Nippur*, honored by them as a central shrine, a "Sumerian Rome", the center of the universe from about 2300 B.C., for at that time supremacy was regarded as conditional upon the possession of *Nippur*.

Shown here is an unbaked clay tablet now in the British Museum (Gallery 55, Case 15 BM 92.687) that contains a text accompanied by a map. Although believed to have been found in Sippar or Borsippa, Iraq, the tablet is likely to have been made in Babylon in the seventh or sixth century B.C. A note inscribed on the tablet, however, indicates that it was copied from an older tablet made (it would seem from internal evidence) in the ninth century B.C. The tablet, somewhat damaged around the edges, measures 12.2 x 8.2 cm (5 x 3 inches). About a third of one side and all the reverse is filled with text and the map occupies the remaining two-thirds.

This Babylonian tablet contains a written description and a diagrammatic image of the world as conceived sometime after 900 B.C. Its provenance is uncertain, but its British Museum catalog number and the onomastics of the scribe who copied the tablet point to the city of Borsippa. The description written to accompany the map has an integral, but complicated, relation to the image. This world map is best matched with the category of medieval maps termed *mappaemundi*. It depicts a geographic totality that includes the local environment but is not limited to it. Circles represent cities and parallel lines rivers as in the *Nuzi* map (#101). The largest demarcated area, shown as a rectangle on the upper central portion, is *Babylon*, the point of view from which the map was presumably made. Also on the map are the states of *Urartu* and *Assyria*, the latter written with the determinative *KUR*, "land." The cities of *Der* and *Susa* and the territory of *Bit Yakin* are included. The regions, cities, and other geographic features such as the swamp and the water channel are all arranged inside a circle bounded by the waters of the ocean, designated as the *Bitter River* around the entire encircling band. Medieval *mappaemundi* typically show the world encircled by the "ocean sea" [*Mare Oceanum*] within a spherical world picture; equally, the "ocean river" [*Alveus Oceanus*] is sometimes shown as dividing the land zones. For want of intermediary evidence, one

can only note the cosmographical elements of the Babylonian world map without drawing conclusions about possible continuities.

Beyond the salt waters surrounding the known cities and lands are large triangular areas (*nagûs*, only five survive of the original eight) representing lesser-known faraway places. They could be reached were one prepared to travel *seven beru*, but here the ordinary features of the known world are exaggerated or disturbed. One of these distant regions is described as a place where “a winged bird cannot safely complete its journey”. Another is home to horned cattle. A reference to the “Four Corners” of the world (*kibrat erbetti*) in the last section of the text is followed by the phrase “whose interior no one knows.” The inscribed portions of the map are lamentably damaged and incomplete. Even so, because they have a decidedly mythological literary character, with references to heroes and kings such as Sargon, Nur-Dagan of Purushhanda, and Utnapishtim – the only man to survive the great Flood and attain immortality, well known from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* – we are for certain in an imagined cosmical landscape.

The question of the map’s orientation has been discussed by Eckhald Unger. As already noted, the third-millennium *Nuzi* map is clearly oriented to the east (*IM.ICUR*, “mountain wind”). On this Babylonian *mappamundi* a mountain is drawn at the top of the circle of the world. From the vantage point of Babylon, the mountain could represent the east. If so, however, then other places are not arranged accordingly, Assyria, for example, is placed below and to the right of Babylon (in fact, it lies to the north), while Susa, shown at the bottom, should not be in the west (in fact, its location is southeast of Babylon). Altogether, places do not appear to be situated exactly in accordance with any given orientation of the map.

The tablet was made at a time when the Babylonian and Assyrian empires had reached their maximum extent and the map highlights the relationship of the most distant regions of the earth to the Babylonian heartland. Its features are clearly delineated and most are actually labeled. Orientated with north at the top, the map shows the world “as a disk surrounded by (or maybe floating in) a ring of water called the *marratu* [*Bitter River*], marked on the map simply as *ocean*. The outer *nagu* (regions or districts; possibly originally eight in number) are shown as triangles reaching out beyond the encircling salty sea. The distance of each from the other is given. Within the circle, the Babylonian world is clearly delineated. *Babylon* is singled out by a rectangular place sign. Other cities are shown, some so labeled in the center of the circular sign, some with just a central dot. Regions are identified, such as *Assyria*, *Der*, *Bit-Yakin* (territory of an Aramaean tribal group around the southern Euphrates); the name *Khabban* [*Habban*] to the upper left appears to denote an area of Elam southeast of the Zagros part of Kassite territory around Kermanshah, geographically out of place (it might also be another town of the same name otherwise unknown); and *Urartu* (eastern Turkey and Armenia, an independent kingdom in the Iranian-Turkish-Russian borderland). Mention of these last three helps date the original composition of the map to the ninth century B.C. at the earliest. The unnamed river, marked by parallel lines, appears to represent the Euphrates. It flows into a swamp (marked by a rectangle at the mouth of the river and labeled as such) before reaching the sea in two outflows (one so labeled). A canal or waterway (*bitqu*, possibly an antecedent of the modern Shatt-al-Arab) is shown. In the northeast, a mountain is also labeled. Other features belong to local history or cosmological belief, such as the *Fort of the god*, a city near the trumpet-shaped sea which may be *Der* [Badrah] at the foot of the Zagros Mountains. The

reinstated text in *Nagû* 2 reads, rather unexpectedly, *Great Wall*. This, Dr. Finkel explains, is likely to refer to the “great wall” thought to be the birthplace of a demonic figure according to some Sumerian texts, and certainly not to the one in China. The literary figures and exotic animals mentioned in the texts, together with the description of conditions in far- away regions, suggest the ancient author was reflecting the general interest with distant areas characteristic of the first half of the last millennium B.C., when the Assyrian and Babylonian empires reached their maximum extents. The ancient author concluded by commenting that his sketch showed, as we would put it today, “the four corners of the world”.

The identified remote lands are said to be inhabited by legendary beasts. In one, it is noted that *the sun is not seen*. These various legendary beasts are named which were reputed to live in regions beyond the ocean that encircled the Babylonian world. A few ancient heroes reached those places, and the badly damaged text appears to describe conditions in them. The map is really a diagram to show the relation of these places to the world of the Babylonians.

This Babylonian plan of the world illustrates the idea concerning the world that was current in the late Babylonian period. It represents the region of Babylonia, Assyria, and the neighboring districts as a circular plain surrounded by the Persian Gulf (*Ma-ra-tum*). The city Babylon (*Babylu*) is indicated near the center, and next to it the land of Assyria (*Ashshur*). The position of certain other cities is indicated. The district toward the south, bordering the Persian Gulf, is represented as being full of canals and marshes. Toward the north is marked a district that is referred to as mountainous. Beyond the circle is represented the Persian Gulf, and a number of triangles pointing outward from the circular zone, each being labeled “region,” indicating a vague conception concerning the same.

In addition to the entire kingdom of Babylonia, which is schematically portrayed on this clay tablet, seven unnamed circles are depicted and an accompanying cuneiform text is found on both sides of the tablet. The front-side text contains names of countries and cities but, on the reverse side, the text is chiefly concerned with a description of the *Seven Islands* or *Nagûs* [regions] which are depicted in the form of equal triangles (only one of which is entirely intact on the tablet) rising beyond the circle of the *Earthly Ocean* [*marratu*]. Some scholars believe that there may have been eight *Nagûs* originally. The tablet further states that these “islands” are at equal distances of seven miles (from either each other or from the Babylonian world), around the outer periphery of the *Earthly Ocean* [*marratu*]. But the distance between them varies, being sometimes six, sometimes nine miles. The description of two of these islands, however, has not survived.

The Babylonians knew little about the nature of these seven *nagûs*. We hear chiefly only of their various degrees of brightness. From the text on the tablet and the inscriptions on the chart itself we learn that the first *nagû* lay in the southeast, the second in the southwest, and so on, in a clockwise sequence.

The descriptions of the first and second *nagûs* are not preserved. The third *nagû* is where *the winged bird ends not his flight*, i.e., cannot reach. On the fourth *nagû* *the light is brighter than that of sunset or stars*: it lay in the northwest, and after sunset in summer was practically in semi-obscurity. The fifth *nagû*, due north, lay in complete darkness - a land *where one sees nothing*, and *the sun is not visible*. The Sumerians and Babylonians probably had some knowledge, possibly acquired from other people, of the northern high latitudes and of the polar nights. Highly remarkable is the sixth *nagû*, *where a horned bull dwells and attacks the newcomer*. An exactly similar presentation, true to tradition, occurs

in the same position in an astrolabe of the 17th century A.D. and has been used in the reconstruction of the tablet. The seventh *nagû* lay in the east and is thus described: *where the morning dawns*; meaning that it faces the sunrise.

According to Babylonian ideas, the *nagûs* said to lie between the *Earthly* and the *Heavenly Oceans* connected the heavens and the earth. These *nagûs* form bridges to the *Heavenly Ocean*, wherein are the various animal constellations, 18 of which are mentioned by name.

Thus round the heavens flowed the *Heavenly Ocean*, corresponding to the *Earthly Ocean* on the earth. And in the *Heavenly Ocean* were animal constellations, the "vanished" gods. These probably recur in the expression *belt of heaven*, Sumerian for which may be literally translated, *divine animals*. As the animal constellations also sank below the horizon, so the *Heavenly Ocean* extended beneath the earth, so that plenty of room existed below the Underworld for the passage of the sun, moon, and planets. After the overthrow of the old world order of *Apsu* and *Tiamat* or *Chaos*, the former gods, according to the Babylonian *Epic of Creation*, were deposed and banned as animals to the *Heavenly Ocean*, by command of the creator of the new world.

In the beginning everything was ocean - the *Apsu* - *Chaos*, whence arose a number of divinities, including *Tiamat* (the sea) and the gods *Anu*, *Enlil* and *Enki* (*Ea*), the later representatives of the tripartite world. Now *Apsu* desired to destroy his offspring, but was killed by *Enki*, who looked upon the *Apsu* as his home. Then *Tiamat*, who went forth to revenge *Apsu*, was vanquished in conflict with Sumer, Babylon and Assur, respectively. Now before the struggle, *Tiamat* had created, in place of *Apsu*, huge monsters in animal form. The late Sumerian ruler, Gudea of Lagash (2600 B.C.), records in his inscriptions seven such monsters; in Hammurabi's time (about 2000 B.C.) the number was eleven. The text of the Babylonian cosmos, however, enumerates eighteen animals, but the names of two of them are not known. Each of the last two texts named begin with the same three animals: *Basmu*, *Mushus* and (*Laha*) *mu*. It appears from these texts that in the course of time new kinds of animals were added.

All of these animal constellations, though not to be confused with our zodiac, knowledge that, in this form, has not been traced beyond about 420 B.C., may nevertheless be approximately equated with our zodiacal signs; among other things and changes, however the names have naturally altered in the course of time. The chief animals are also shown on some post-Babylonian tablets of an astronomical nature. Karl Maasz has therefore made use of these drawings in his reconstruction, in which pictures of the so-called boundary stones have served as guides. According to the drawings of the clay tablet in question, the order of the animal constellations run from right to left - from north to west, then around to the east. The text contains the following full list of "animals" in the *Heavenly Ocean*: (1) the adder (*Basmu*); (2) the red serpent (*Mushus*)- a typical name for the dragon of Babylon which the god *Marduk* borrowed from the god *Enlil* of Nippur; this dragon appears as a decoration on the Ishtar Gate of Babylon. He is of special interest because the four animal elements which compose him are borrowed from the neighboring animal constellations: the front legs from the lion standing before him; the back legs from the raven or eagle standing behind him; the scorpion's sting on his tail from the scorpion next to him here. The dragon himself represents in principle a serpent - the *hydra*; (3) the *Lahamu*, a serpent with the front feet of a lion, also reminiscent in this respect here of its neighbor, the lion (the *hydra*); (4) the gazelle; (5) the bull (in the late Sumerian period, a wild bull); (6) the panther; (7) the ram; (8) unknown; (9) the

lion (the constellation Leo); (10) the jackal (the constellation Cassiopeia); (11) the stag (the constellation Andromeda); (12) the fowl (? the falcon); (13) unknown; (14) the monkey; (15) the he-goat, also known as the goat-fish; (16) the ostrich (probably the crane); (17) the cat; (18) an insect, possibly the grasshopper. The numbers 1-18 correspond to the numbers on the illustration, except that numbers 8 and 13 are not preserved in the text of the clay tablet.

These divine animal constellations which dwell in the *Heavenly Ocean* are there named the departed gods (in another cuneiform document they are referred to as the gods of the night and the goddesses of the night) because they were derived from the earlier “vanished” gods of the Sumerians, which, as the result of a reform in prehistoric times, were deposed and replaced by human gods. The *Epic of Creation* is the acknowledgment of this reform.

All of this - the *Seven Nagûs [Islands]*, the animal constellations and the *Heavenly Ocean* - encircle the primary focus of the tablet, the “world map”. The earth proper, again, is displayed as a circular disc. Enclosed by the circle of the *Earthly Ocean* lies an oblong marked *Babylon* with two parallel lines running to it from mountains at the edge of the enclosure, and running on to a marsh which is identified by two parallel lines near the bottom of the circle. The marsh can be identified as the swamp of lower present-day Iraq, its identity secured by the name *Bit Yakin* at its left end, the so called “*Sea Country*” and known to be a tribal territory covering marshland.

At the top, in the north, are the mountains, whence the Euphrates descends, in a southeasterly direction. In the center lies Babylon - the “hub of the universe”. Encircling the earth is the *Earthly Ocean*, entitled the *Bitter River*, creating a gulf (the Persian Gulf of today), it flows across the earth as far as the Euphrates. For the rest, the map gives various nameless places indicated only by blank ovals. It is oriented towards the northwest. From other Babylonian sources it can be learned that for the Babylonians, the *Bitter River* or *Earthly Ocean* was enclosed by a double range of mountains, those to the east and west - the *sunrise* and *sunset* range, respectively being specially mentioned.

Obviously this is not so much a topographical map as it is an attempt to illustrate ideas expressed in the accompanying text, greatest attention being paid to the remote regions. The Babylonians evidently viewed the earth as flat, in common with other ancient peoples. Their references to the “four corners” relate to the directions of the winds and should not be taken as implying that they thought it was square.

In summary, the Babylonian cosmos comprises a world map executed in cartographic manner, a contour sketch of the *Seven Islands* complete with descriptive text, and finally, a descriptive text (only) of the *Heavenly Ocean* and its animal constellations. Although the map is unique, its cartographic conventions point to established conceptual and mapping traditions. Moreover, the historian of cartography is spared doubt as to the interpretation of the schematic representation by the labeling of the various lines and circles.

Although cuneiform maps may not be forerunners from which later Western maps originate, they share characteristics with other cartographic traditions in their graphic imaging of territorial, social, and cosmological space. Cuneiform texts provide several varieties of evidence for the ancient Mesopotamian efforts to express order by describing, delimiting, and measuring the heaven and earth of their experience, producing house, temple, plot, and field plans, city maps, and, with respect to the celestial landscape, diagrammatic depictions of stars. Various orders of power are implicit in the expression of these aspects of order in the environment. Administrative

and economic powers support, or even require, the making of maps, as well as determining overtly the topographies that maps depict.

Where once such maps would not have been admitted within a general history of cartography, a new view of the meaning of the map can embrace them. The historiography of maps and cartography has emerged from criticisms similar in nature to those made against the modernist or presentist historiography of science, namely, that in reifying science or sciences such as cartography, false evolutionary histories are liable to be constructed. Some originating point is identified, such as the origins of science in Greece, or of mapmaking in Babylonia, from which a continuous history may be written from a presentist perspective, a tale of a discipline's inexorable progress from its originating moment to the present. Critical cartographic history, however, has laid aside such ideas, and we no longer look to (in the words of Denis Wood), "a hero saga involving such men as Eratosthenes, Ptolemy, Mercator, and the Cassinis, that tracked cartographic progress from humble origins in Mesopotamia to the putative accomplishments of the Greeks and Romans".

By no means do all ancient Near Eastern maps display metrological finesse or even the use of measurement, though some characteristically do, such as the agrarian field and urban plot cadastral surveys. Concern for orientation is attested in a number of maps, but not always in the same way, although with a tendency toward an oblique orientation northwest to southeast. Ancient Near Eastern maps may not have invariably been meant as exact or direct replications of territory, but there can be little doubt that they distinctively reflect the conceptual terrain of their social community and culture at large. The maps of buildings and fields focus on the urban and agricultural environment, matters of critical importance to whatever political and economic powers prevailed.

The maps of cities with their waterways and surrounding physical landscape combine cartography of sacred space, seen in the temple plans, with that of economic space, seen in the field surveys. The cities of Nippur and Babylon had a religious and cosmological function as well as a political and economic one. In the periods of their supremacy each was viewed as the center of the universe, as the meeting ground between heaven and the netherworld. The map of the principal temple in Babylon, *E-sagil*, which was the earthly abode of the national deity *Marduk*, represents the terrestrial counterpart to the celestial residence of the great god *Enlil*, designed, figuratively speaking, on the blueprint of the cosmic subterranean sweet watery region of the *Apsu*.

The Babylonian world map is an attempt to encompass the totality of the earth's surface iconographically: land, ocean, mountain, swamp, and distant uncharted "regions" This said, it represents more of an understanding of what the world is from the viewpoint of historical imagination than an image of its topography against a measured framework. It offers a selective account of the relationship of Babylon to other places, including those that were at the furthest reach of knowledge.

The diversity of cultures that have sought to preserve their maps, putting them on clay, papyrus, parchment, and other writing media, points to a near universality of making maps in human culture. Cognitive psychologists claim that we come into our physical world mentally equipped to perceive and describe space and spatial relationships. The linguistic act of spatial description is perhaps a proto-mapmaking function of our very desire and attempt to place ourselves in relation to the physical world. By extension, we should not doubt that mapmaking too, in all its historical subjectivity, is a universal feature of human culture. The interest of the cuneiform maps

It must be said that damage or loss of this kind to our cuneiform tablets happens exceedingly rarely, and it is doubly unfortunate that it should have happened to a Map-of-the-World 'triangle'. Dr. Finkel and his assistant found the missing fragment. The triangular *nagû* belonged right next to the long-known cuneiform label on the tablet that read: 'Six Leagues in between where the sun is not seen.' The new *nagû* was itself inscribed 'Great Wall'. It could not be the Great Wall of China, of course, but an earlier big wall that was already known from cuneiform stories.

The cuneiform handwriting dates the map to, most probably, the sixth century BC. The map's content undoubtedly reflects Babylon as the center of the world; the dot that can be seen in the middle of the oblong that is the capital city probably represents Nebuchadnezzar's *ziggurat*. The tablet contains three distinct sections: a twelve-line description concerning creation of the world by *Marduk*, god of Babylon; the map drawing itself; and twenty-six lines of description that elucidate certain geographic features shown on the map.

These first twelve lines differ from the text on the reverse in spelling many words with Sumerian ideograms, and we can deduce that the scribe himself viewed this section as distinct from the map and its description from the double ruling across the width of the tablet that follows line 12. This ideographic style of spelling is fully in keeping with the first millennium BC date of the tablet itself, which is established by topographical terms in the map, in addition to the word *marratu*, as already mentioned. There were certainly eight *nagûs* originally. All are of the same size and shape, and where the tablet is still preserved we can see that the distance between them, travelling round parallel to the circular rim, varies between six and eight *beru* or double hours, a measurement conventionally translated as 'Leagues'. The whole of the reverse is given over to a description of these eight *nagûs*, stating that in each case it is the same seven-League distance across the water to reach them, and describing what is to be found on arrival.

While it has been argued that the map in its present form cannot be older than the ninth century BC - for this is the time when the word *marratu* is first used for sea, for example - in Finkel's opinion the conceptions behind the map and the description of the eight *nagûs* are much older, originating in the second millennium BC; in fact dating back to the Old Babylonian period in which the *Ark Tablet* was written. This can be concluded from the description's very spellings, for the words are written in plain syllables in a style abhorred in first-millennium literary manuscripts, where ideograms, as found in the first twelve lines of this same tablet, are usually favoured. With this in mind we find ourselves with a cosmological system and tradition that is much older than the document on which it is written. The nature of the *Map of the World* tablet falls thereby into sharper focus: it represents an old tradition partly overlaid with later data or speculative ideas. The scribe at any rate tells us that his production is a copy from an older manuscript.

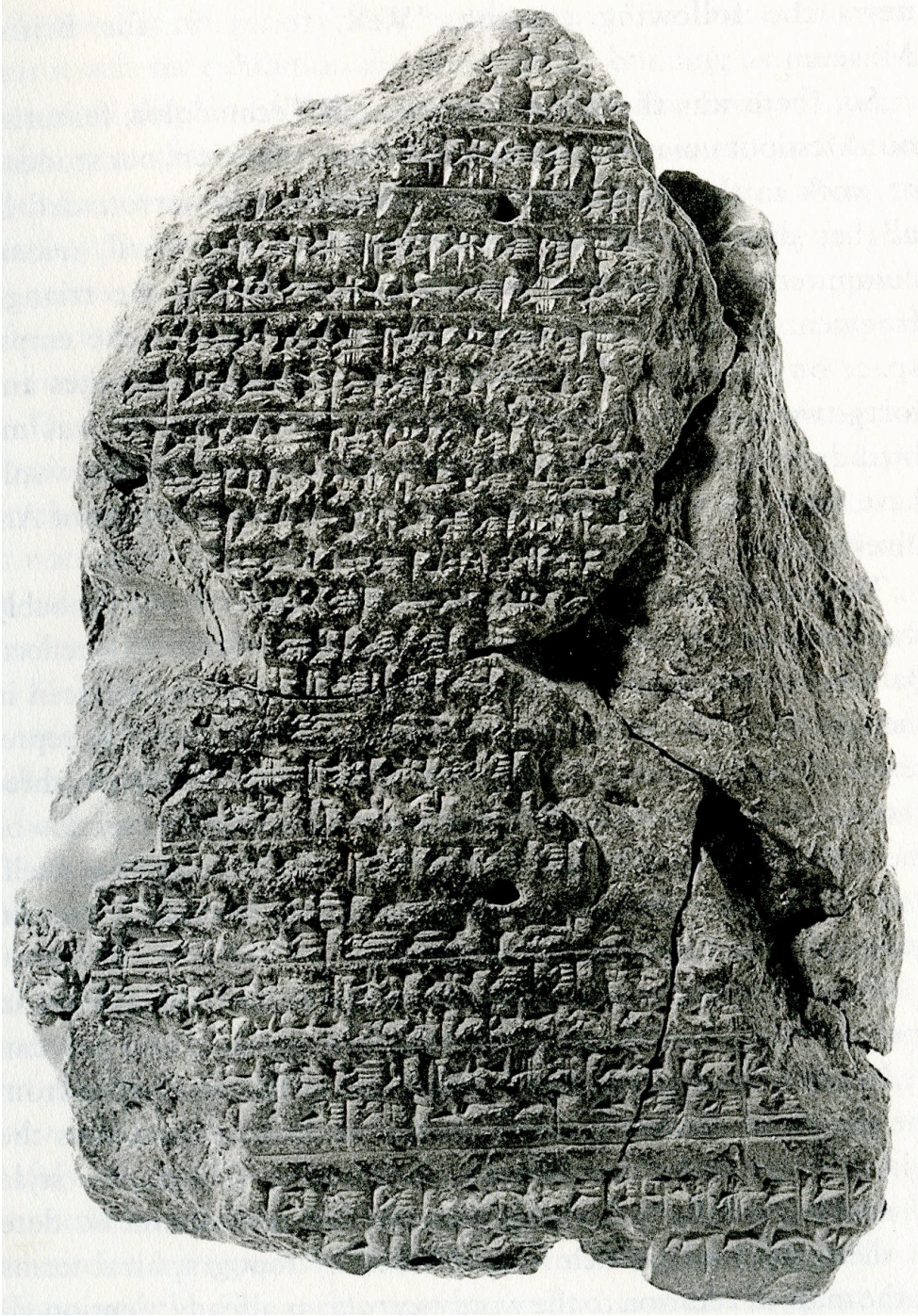
The world in the map is portrayed as a disc, and we can therefore assume that the world itself was generally visualised in the same way at the time when the map originated. The circular waterway *marratu*, which is written with the determinative for river, derives from the verb *mardru*, 'to be bitter'. Since this word, although marked with the river sign, certainly means sea in other texts, we translate it here as 'Ocean', although 'Bitter Sea' or 'Bitter River' are equally possible: In eight directions, beyond that water, lie the *nagûs*. In the first millennium BC this word has a very practical meaning, used of regions or districts that are politically or geographically definable and literally within normal reach. In the *mappamundi*, however, the meaning is quite different. These eight

nagûs are giant mountains beyond the rim of the world which are unimaginably remote. Although necessarily depicted as triangles they must be understood as mountains whose tips would gradually appear above the horizon as they were approached across the Great Ocean.

In placing the mountainous *nagûs* in this position the cosmologists were answering with simplicity an unanswerable question: what lies beyond the horizon? It is rational to assume that there would eventually always be water, for all land known to man is ringed with water, but once across the *marratu*, what then? According to this system the world is hedged around by eight immense and unreachable mountains, which enclose the world like a fortress. Beyond that was the sky, or nothing, however you liked to look at it.

This geographical actuality is explicit in the tag at the end of the document, which refers to the *Four Quarters of the World* as the stage on which the eight-fold triangle descriptions play out. This grand expression, in Sumerian or Babylonian, had been favored by the kings of Mesopotamia to express the breathtaking reach of their kingdoms since time immemorial. The understanding of the map in its original incarnation therefore is that all outlying geography is situated on the flat; travel outwards across the ocean ring and there the traveller will find these remote mountain land masses waiting with their curious occupants or larger-than-life features. On the other hand the triangles that ring the circular world could also be conceived to point up into the heavens, so that the map, drawn on the flat, represents a world like an eight-pointed crown.

In as much as they are decipherable the eight descriptions that accompany the *nagûs* read as if presented by a very bold traveller returned, passing on his discoveries and explaining as best he could what marvels could be expected by anyone who followed in his footsteps. The tone feels like a digest of heroic journeys and exotic traditions, reduced to a formula. Who might such a traveller be? Some Babylonian proto-Argonaut, sailing fearlessly across horizons in search of adventure and the unknown? A highly intrepid merchant, returning home full of wonderful tales and dining off them ever since? Or, might it not rather be some observer who could fly over the world beyond the ends of the earth? After all, the whole map is a bird's-eye view, and the original compiler of this account, whoever he was, did have a dad called *Bird*, as we can see from the last line of the tablet.



The back view of the Babylonian world map

The whole of the reverse is given over to a description of these eight *nagûs*, stating that in each case it is the same seven-League distance across the water to reach them, and describing what is to be found on arrival.

This Babylonian map of the world, by the way, is full of other secrets and to wander after them now would take us far beyond this book into cuneiform byways of astrology, astronomy, mythology, and cosmology (at least), brave journeys themselves that cannot be undertaken here. The map story is far from concluded. The map's

uniqueness from our point of view, however, does not mean for a minute that it was such a rarity in its own day. On the contrary, it is probable that many such maps existed, both on clay and on bronze, fulfilling different functions and even expressing different theories. One reason for this conclusion is that the Babylonian tradition exemplified by the map of the world found its counterpart in the maps known to historical geographers as T-O maps (*see* #205), which survived from the Early Middle Ages until perhaps the 15th century AD. The origin of this name lies in the fact that these European maps show the world as a disc surrounded by the mare oceanum, with a T fixed in the middle that represents the three major waterworks that divide the three parts of the earth. These maps bear an uncanny - and usually unexplained - resemblance to the Babylonian map of the world, with its N---S River Euphrates transversed by the waterway to the south. The resemblance is such that the European maps seem literally to be a reinterpretation of a Babylonian model.

That the Babylonian design survived and could exert its influence so long after the event is surely a further demonstration of what followed when Greek mathematicians and astronomers came to investigate Babylonian cuneiform records. Surely they copied whatever they found interesting onto papyrus for consideration and development once they got home, and that would have included any maps and diagrams that they came across in the libraries.

LOCATION: British Library, London

SIZE: 4.75 x 3.25 inches (12 cm x 8 cm)

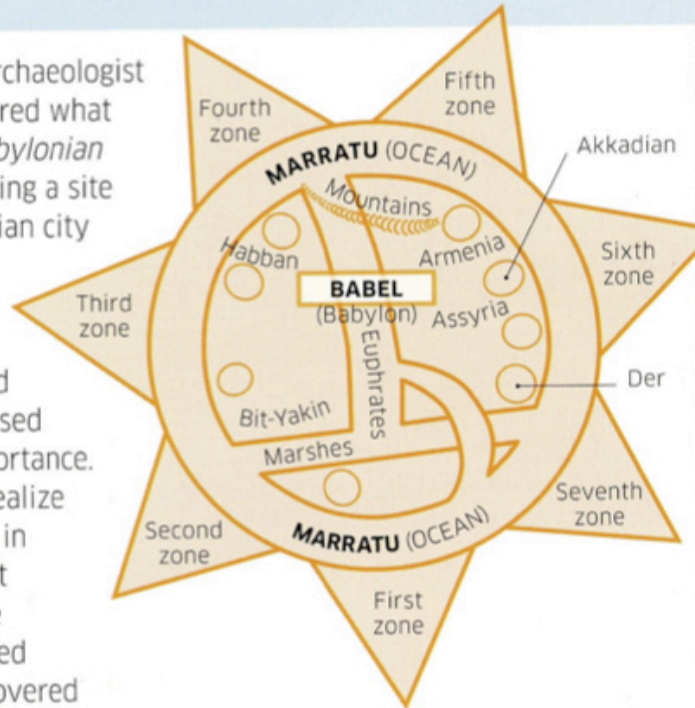
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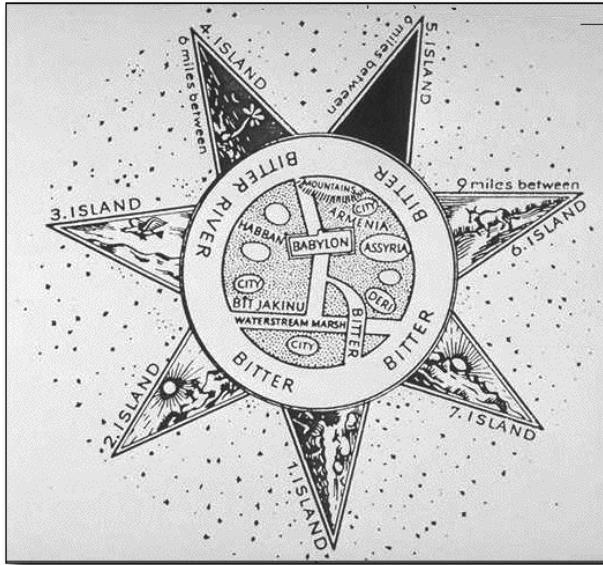


IN CONTEXT

In 1881, the Iraqi-born archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam discovered what became known as the *Babylonian World Map* while excavating a site near the ancient Babylonian city of Sippar. Rassam was looking for evidence of the biblical Flood, and because he could not read cuneiform text, he dismissed the tablet as of little importance. In fact, he did not even realize it was a map. It was only in the late 20th century that cuneiform scholars at the British Museum deciphered the tablet's text and discovered its significance.

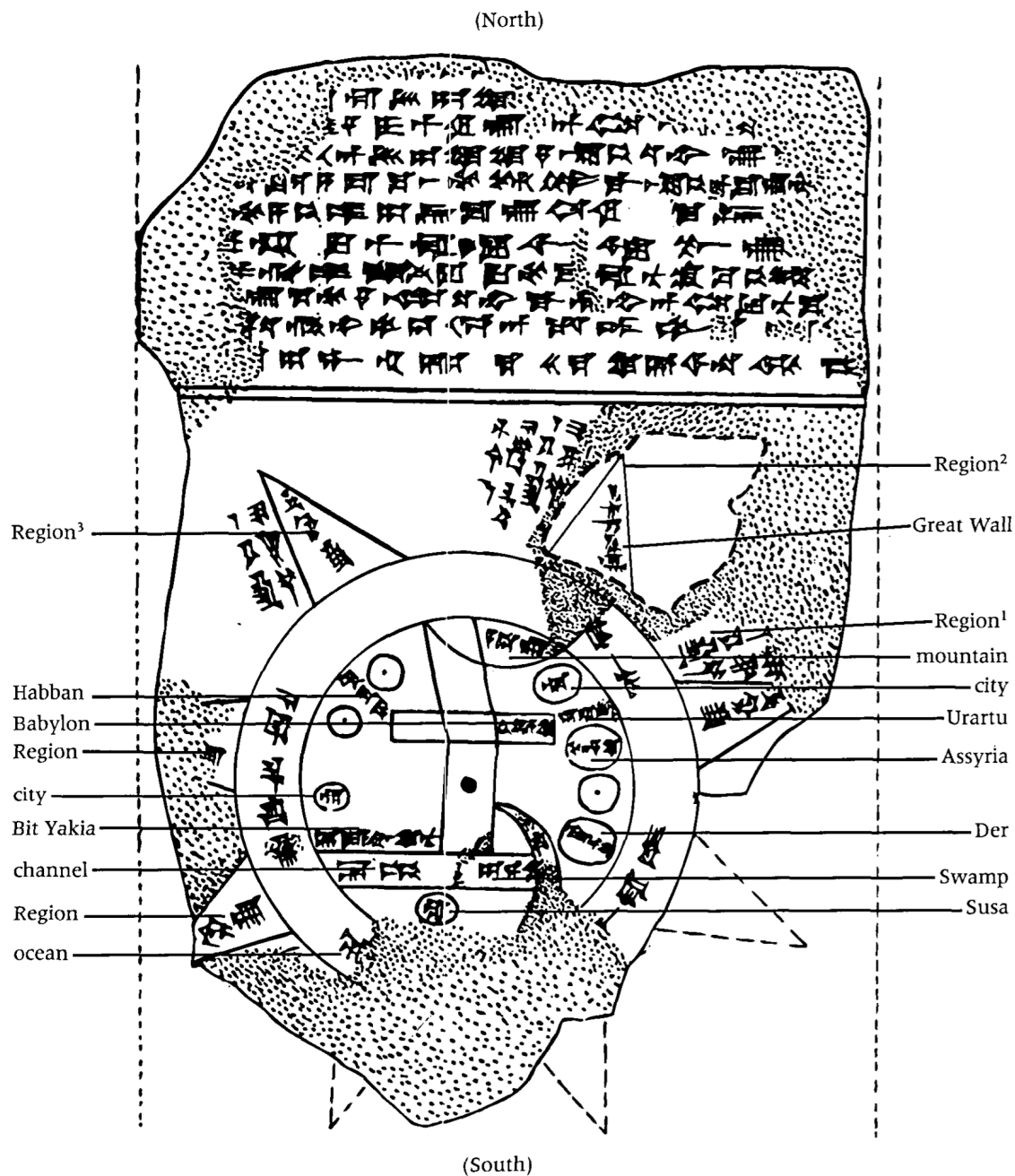


▲ This diagram shows the mix of Babylonian mythology and geography depicted on the map.





*Map of the world on an unbaked clay tablet from Babylonia, with the newly-restored piece (center-right).
(Courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum. No. 92687.)*



Region¹ Region/8 leagues/in between
 Region² Region/3 leagues/in between/where the sun/is not seen
 Region³ Region/6 leagues/in between

Identification, in English, of the major features of the Babylonian map of the world as drawn by R. Campbell Thompson and amended by C. B. F. Walker. The pecked line indicates the piece reinstated in 1995 by I. Finkel. Except for the label within Region 2 (Great Wall), translations are from W. Horowitz.

