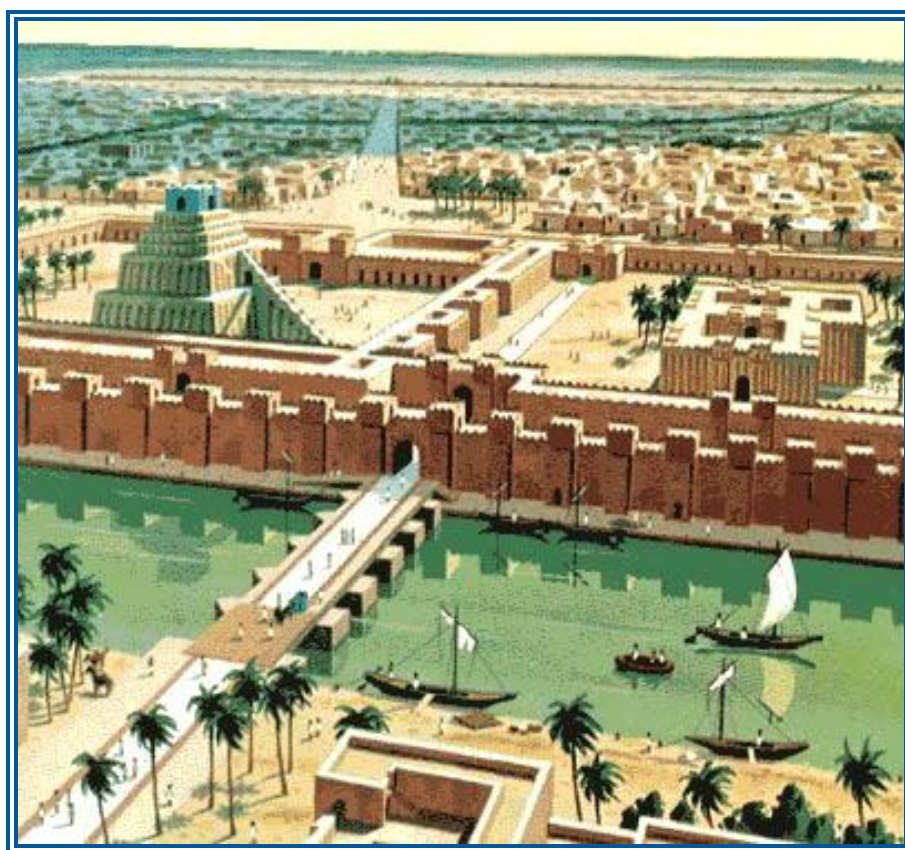


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Bernd Rohrmann
Essay about Babylon
History ~~ Demise ~~ Sway



March 2017



~ Babylon ~ βαβυλων ~ Babel ~ βαβελ ~

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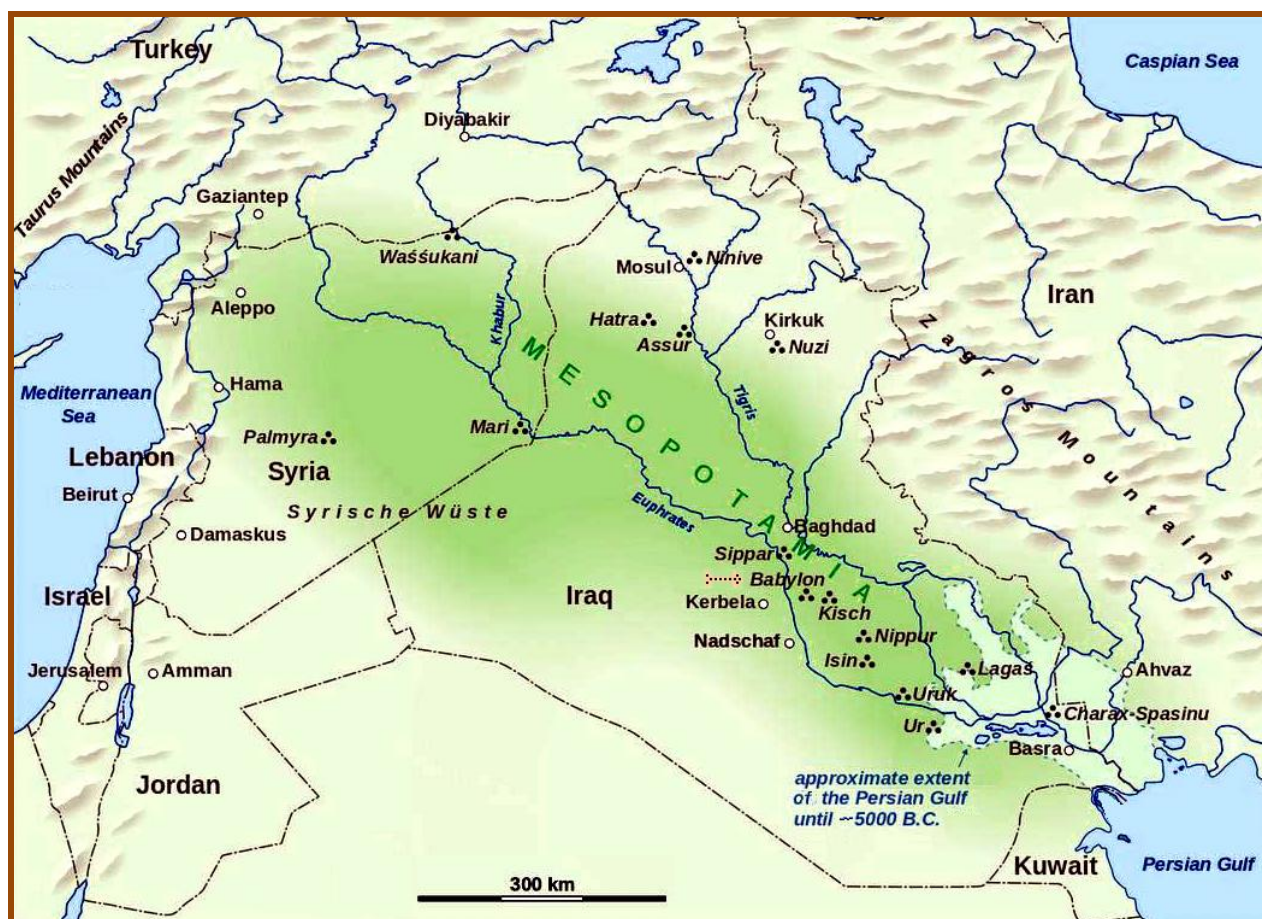


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❖ The meaning of "Babylon"

Babylon is located in the centre of Mesopotamia (as marked below), a large area defined by the two rivers Euphrates and Tigris, both running south-east into the Persian gulf. From about 3000 B.C. {B.C.E} onwards, Mesopotamia was the 'birthplace' of the earliest "high cultures".



So, why is "Babylon" still a momentous name, even though this once famous city does not exist anymore? There are several reasons ... Firstly, some thousands of years ago Babylon was a mighty place, and ruled for some time a significant area then called Babylonia. Secondly, in its prime time, it contained stunning architecture. Thirdly, the Babylonian Tower, often called Babel Tower, was right there.

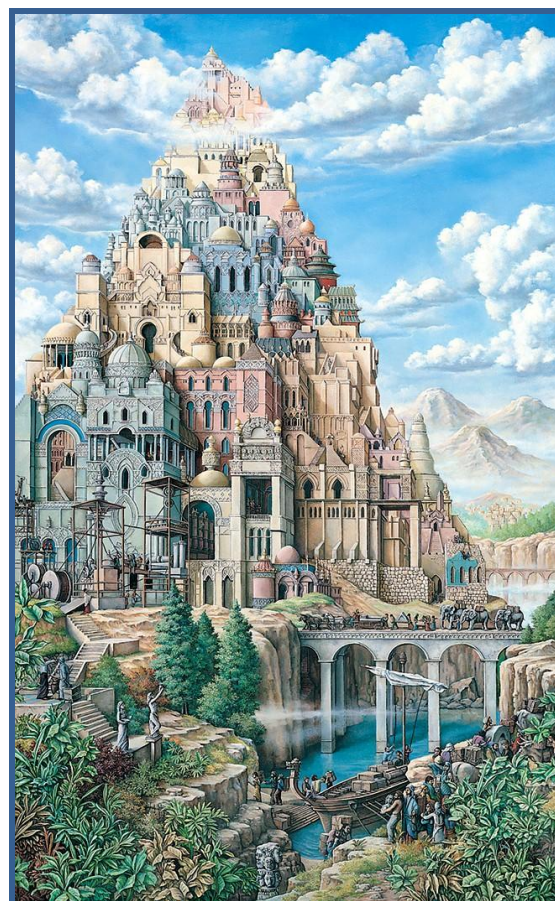
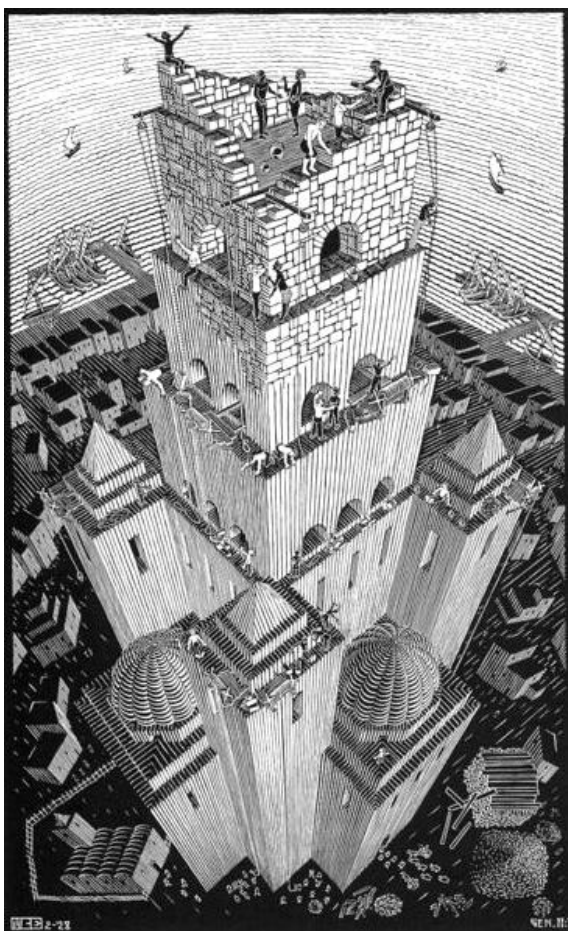
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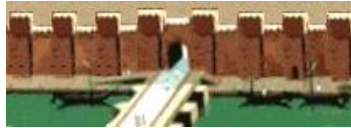
The blue glazed bricks may have given this very large façade (14 m high) a jewel-like shine.



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Yes, Babylon has died. Nevertheless, it's not forgotten, it lives on – in museums and in minds.

❖ Babylon today

It is still just a very large district of ruins. The British Empire, to which Mesopotamia after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire belonged, supported archaeological efforts there, but had no interest in rebuilding anything. And they did not block sufficiently all the looting in this area. Furthermore, the harsh weather increased the 'ruin of the ruins'...



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Ironically it was Saddam Hussein, the president & dictator of modern Iraq who decided in 1983 to get essential parts of historic Babylon rebuilt on top of the old ruins. Then both restorations and new constructions were conducted.

Beside Babylon, the same occurred in Assur and Niniveh, "to demonstrate the magnificence of Arab achievements".

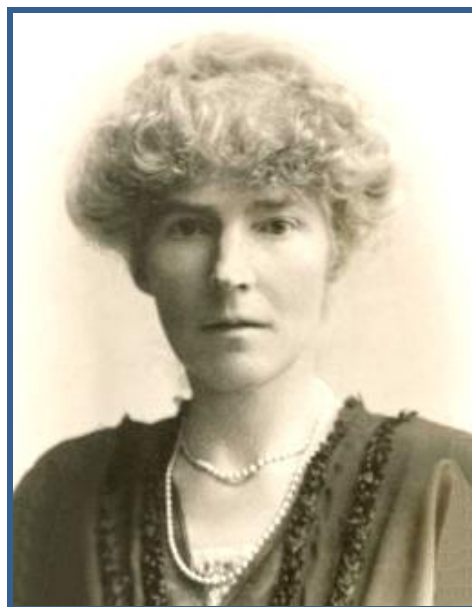
Unfortunately all this work was done adhoc-ish, without involvement of any professional archeology.

Yet the US-American and international gulf war in 2003 ended Hussein's Babylonian agenda completely, and in 2006 he was sentenced to death because of his many social crimes.

By the way, during this war, the USA army damaged some historic sections rather badly.

Since 2009, the province of Babil, the capital town of which is Hillah, is responsible for the Babylonian ruin district. Not much work is happening, given the very unstable status of Iraq, but at least the access for visitors is now organized.

The prime time of archeology in Babylon was actually been between 1850 and World War I, predominantly by researchers from England, France and Germany. In my personal (of course biased) view, two people were outstanding, Mr Koldewey and Mrs Bell.



The German archaeologist Robert Koldewey (1855 – 1925) led a team from the "German Oriental Society" and conducted the most thorough scientific excavations of Babylon, from 1899 to 1917.

His outstanding results included to identify the fundament of the Marduk temple ~ Babel tower, and to fully dig out the Ishtar Gate.

This was later reconstructed in Berlin (as outlined in a chapter above).

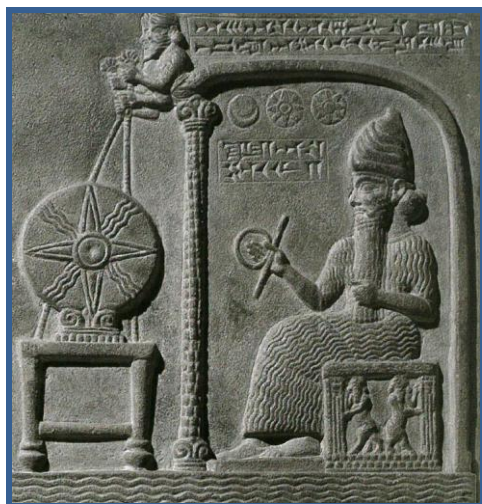
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In both Assyria and Mesopotamia, polytheistic societies, a lot of gods were honoured, and for the essential ones temples were erected. The main one of Babylon was Marduk



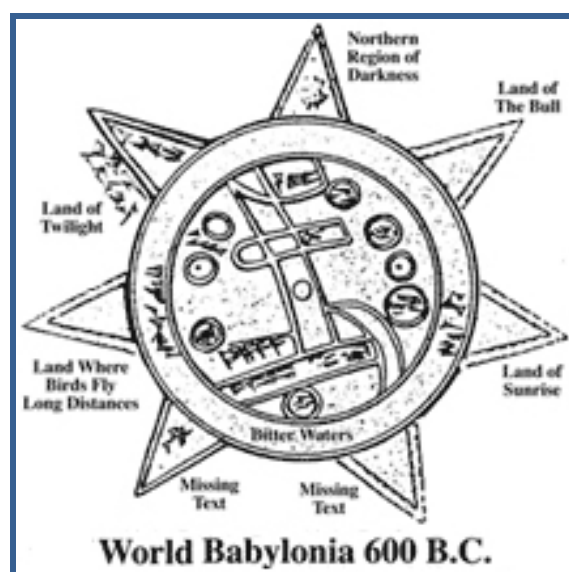
Further gods were linked to the sun or the moon, or to 'life' issues – fertility or agriculture.



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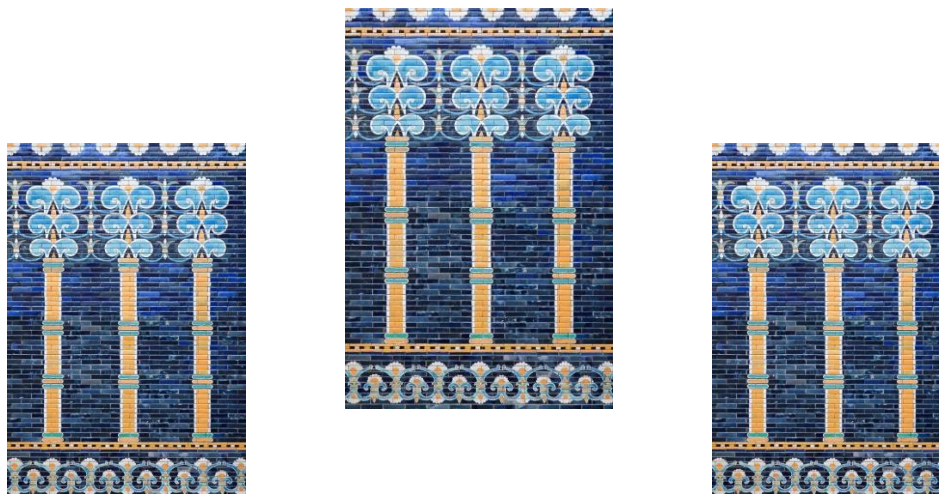


The most unusual and most impressive archaeological find in Babylon was what is rated as the first-ever world map, from ~600 B.C., later named "imago mundi".



It presents Babylon at the river Euphrates, surrounded by a number of external countries, for which archaeologists came up with interpretations.

And this ends the - admittedly, somewhat compressed - 'art review' of grand Babylonia.



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❖ Finis & farewell

During the last decade, serious efforts to mend the archaeological ruins of Babylon have taken place guided by the Worlds Monument Fund (WMF}, "to help the Iraqi authorities making the site ready for visitors to once again enjoy the wonders of this place in the cradle of civilization".

This enterprize is very demanding indeed – yet certainly most valuable.

And this is the end of my *Essay about Babylon* – I hope it gave you a chance to "travel" there, and to bring this so damned dead city for a while back to life – just in your mind!



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