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# Reexamining Nebuchadnezzar II's 'Thirteen-Year' Siege of Tyre in Phoenician Historiography

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**Abstract:** This study reexamines a lynchpin of Neo-Babylonian Levantine Phoenician historiography: Nebuchadnezzar II's purported thirteen-year siege of Tyre in the early sixth century BCE. This detail about the length of the siege can be found only in Josephus' (first century CE) writings, but this study's new assessment of the (sixth-fifteenth century CE) manuscript evidence shows that the more commonly transmitted length of the siege was "three years and ten months." Other manuscript variations further illustrate that there was little continuous cultural memory of the length of the event. When coupled with (a) other chronological problems in Josephus' works, (b) a review of the complex Biblical, Mesopotamian, and Classical relevant literary sources, and (c) the lack of current evidence for any destruction levels or siegeworks at the site of Tyre, the case for insisting other sources be synchronized with this thirteen-year framework weakens. Shorter sieges or raids, blockades of the island or inland ports, and periodic Babylonian military presence to extract personnel and resources are all likely scenarios for Tyre and other Levantine sites during Nebuchadnezzar's 43-year reign. Discarding a single "thirteen-year siege" as a reliable historical detail allows scholars of the Neo-Babylonian period in the central coastal Levant to shift their attention to more interesting questions, including exploring the causes and impacts of the evident changes in Tyre's seaward and inland trading patterns in the sixth-fifth centuries.

**Keywords:** Phoenicia, Tyre, Nebuchadnezzar II, Levant, Neo-Babylonian Period

In most synthetic histories of 'Phoenicia,'<sup>1</sup> the story of the Neo-Babylonian period (ca. 605–539 BCE) is a short one, with the majority focusing on Nebuchadnezzar II's military targeting of the city of Tyre (modern Şur, Lebanon) as the climax of

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<sup>1</sup> This Greek term has long been anachronistically applied by scholars to the many competing city-states of the central coastal Levant (modern coastal Syria, Lebanon and Israel/Palestine) in the first millennium, which share significant features of their material culture and religious worldview. See

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the narrative. Historians understandably emphasize the purported thirteen-year length of the siege, tying this to the decline of Tyre's importance in the wider Mediterranean trading sphere while noting that the city seems nevertheless not to have been destroyed or even significantly damaged. The most recent synthetic histories of the region take for granted the length of the military siege: Sader describes the siege of Tyre as "the major event" of the period and adds that "the historicity of the siege of Tyre was confirmed" by a Babylonian text describing provisions for the army "who went against the land of Tyre," which will be discussed further below.<sup>2</sup>

This study offers reorientation towards the sources for this dominant historical narrative, including a new presentation of the manuscript evidence for the accounts of Josephus on which the thirteen-year historical detail relies. While much of this evidence will not be new to those working to understand the Neo-Babylonian presence in the Levant, my goal is to suggest that we weigh this evident somewhat differently. Reviewing all the sources together illustrates the complex nature of the sources from multiple languages and subfields, as well as the circular nature of some scholarly arguments for the non-specialist. Ultimately, there does seem to be strong evidence indicating that Nebuchadnezzar II was strategically interested in Tyre and actively attempted to control its resources, and even that Tyre's influence waned significantly in the second half of the first millennium. This study calls into question whether a single siege of thirteen years is the "fact" or piece of data around which the rest of our textual, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence should be shaped. Upon review of the evidence, the so-called 'thirteen-year' siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar seems to be an anomalistic characterization of what was more likely several smaller-scale interventions in the region, or a more passive blockade between port and land-side city (in line with the conclusions drawn by several Assyriologists or others working on this material). As will become clear, removing this lynchpin piece of the chronology of Neo-Babylonian period Levantine historiography changes little of our understanding of Babylonian interest in Levantine coastal cities, military organization, or deportation policy. However, setting aside the 'thirteen-year' siege as historically unlikely as such, does resolve some of the problems which characterize our reconstruction of the sixth-century Iron Age II-III transition. Letting go of this number as historical fact allows scholars of Phoenician history to reorient their work, opening new research avenues into Neo-Babylonian political and economic pol-

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Quinn (2018) for a full discussion of Phoenician identity, and a defense of the continued usefulness of the term with explicit caveats in Sader (2019).

<sup>2</sup> Sader (2019), 134 referring to the Neo-Babylonian text presented in Unger (1926), 316. See also Elayi (2018), 196–208 for another recent account.

icy concerning the island of Tyre,<sup>3</sup> its mainland neighboring community, and the rest of the Levantine Phoenician coast.

## I. Sources for the 'thirteen-year' siege

Despite the certainty with which this siege is treated today, its length is mentioned only by Josephus (ca. 37-100 CE) among ancient historians. Josephus gives the thirteen-year figure in two places, once in his *Antiquitates Judaicae* (*AJ*; completed ca. 94), and once in his slightly later work *Contra Apionem* (*Ap.*; completed ca. 97). The latter offers the fuller discussion (emphasis added):<sup>4</sup>

**Ap. 1: 154** These words contain the truth in agreement with our books; for it is written there that Naboukodrosoros devastated our sanctuary in the eighteenth year of his reign [...]. **155** I shall add the Phoenician records as well—for one must not pass over the abundance of proofs. The calculation of dates goes like this: **156** In the reign of king Ithobalos, Naboukodrosoros besieged Tyre for 13 years. After him Baal reigned for 10 years. **157** Thereafter judges were appointed: Ednibalos, son of Baslechos, was judge for 2 months, Chelbes, son of Abdaeos, for 10 months, Abbalos, the high-priest, for 3 months; Myttynos and Gerastartos, son of Abdelimos, were judges for 6 years, after whom Balatoros was king for 1 year. **158** When he died they sent for Merbalos and summoned him from Babylon and he reigned for 4 years; when he died they summoned his brother Eiromos, who reigned for 20 years. It was during his reign that Cyrus became ruler of the Persians.

**159** So the whole period is 54 years, with 3 months in addition; for it was in the seventh year of the reign of Naboukodrosoros that he began to besiege Tyre, and in the fourteenth year of the reign of Eiromos that Cyrus the Persian seized power. **160** The Chaldean and Tyrian materials are in agreement with our writings on the subject of the sanctuary [...].

While Josephus' purpose in all of this is to offer cross-cultural support for the dating of the destruction and rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, along the way he reports both the date of the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre and its duration. Not so in Josephus' earlier mention of the siege, where he gives only the thirteen-year figure (emphasis added):<sup>5</sup>

**3** In the period in question, scholarly interpretations reconstruct a distance of between 750 m and 2 km between island and shore and estimates for its area range from 16 ha to 57.6 ha. See Sader (2019), 115–116 for a helpful summary and bibliography. The island was of course connected to the mainland as a result of a later legendary siege—that of Alexander the Great in 332 BCE. It is interesting for our purposes to note that Joseph. reports, citing a certain 'Dios', that Tyre was built on two islands, purportedly joined together by Eiromos / Hiram I of Tyre (*Ap.* 1.113), whom Joseph. describes, citing Menander this time, as reigning for 34 years; this has been collated by later historiographers with something like 970–937 BCE; *Ap.* 1.118; Barclay (2007), 70–73.

**4** This and all following translations of *Ap.* are from Barclay (2007).

**5** This and all following translations of *AJ* are from Begg and Spilsbury (2005).

**AJ 10: 219** After being king for 43 years, King Nabouchodonosor completed his life, an audacious man and more fortunate than the kings before him. Berosus has also mentioned his deeds in the third book of his *Chaldean History*, writing as follows: [...]

**227** And also Megasthenes mentions these things in the fourth book of the *Indica*, in which he tries to show that this king surpassed Heracles in courage and in greatness of deeds; for, he said, he subdued much of Libya and Ibera. **228** And Diocles in the second book of the *Persica* mentions this king, and Philostratus in the *Indian* and *Phoenician Histories* states that this king besieged Tyre for 13 years at the time Ithobal was ruling Tyre. Such were the things recorded by all the historians concerning this king.

In the *AJ* passage, Josephus' aim is to compile evidence on Nebuchadnezzar himself, demonstrating his larger-than-life persona and legendary deeds. The reference to the siege given here seems repeated and elaborated in *Ap.*, though the sources given for the information in each work differ in Josephus' characterization.

These two attestations in Josephus are the only extant ancient references to a thirteen-year siege at Tyre, and are recorded nearly 700 years after the date of the purported event. However, Josephus' account has long been seen as indirectly confirmed by passages in the biblical book of Ezekiel. Ezek. 26:1–21 (a prophecy dated “the eleventh [month of the twelfth] year,” or 586 BCE) and 29:17–20 (in the “twenty-seventh year, in the first month,” or 571) speak to the destruction of Tyre at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, reportedly as divine punishment because Tyre celebrated the fall of Jerusalem (Ezek. 26:2).

**Ezek. 26: 7** [...] the Sovereign LORD says: From the north I am going to bring against Tyre Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses and chariots, with horsemen and a great army. **8** He will ravage your settlements on the mainland with the sword; he will set up siege works against you, build a ramp up to your walls and raise his shields against you. **9** He will direct the blows of his battering rams against your walls and demolish your towers with his weapons. **10** His horses will be so many that they will cover you with dust. Your walls will tremble at the noise of the warhorses, wagons and chariots when he enters your gates as men enter a city whose walls have been broken through. **11** The hooves of his horses will trample all your streets; he will kill your people with the sword, and your strong pillars will fall to the ground. **12** They will plunder your wealth and loot your merchandise; they will break down your walls and demolish your fine houses and throw your stones, timber and rubble into the sea. [...] **14** I will make you a bare rock [*sur*], and you will become a place to spread fishnets. You will never be rebuilt, for I the LORD have spoken [...].<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This and all following biblical quotations are from the NIV Translation.

The earlier-dated prophecy thus anticipates total destruction of the city, playing on the name of the city (v. 14) to emphasize the desolation to come. The second prophecy, dated fifteen years later, paints a significantly different picture:

**Ezek. 29: 18** Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon drove his army in a hard campaign against Tyre; every head was rubbed bare and every shoulder made raw. Yet he and his army got no reward from the campaign he led against Tyre. **19** Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to give Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will carry off its wealth. He will loot and plunder the land as pay for his army. **20** I have given him Egypt as a reward for his efforts because he and his army did it for me, declares the Sovereign LORD.

While this passage seems to indicate that Nebuchadnezzar was not successful in capturing or inflicting serious damage on Tyre, the implication that the siege was long (“every head was rubbed bare,” an idiomatic expression probably intended to describe the Babylonian besiegers rather than Tyrian inhabitants) and the timing of this second prophecy fifteen years after the first have been roughly synchronized in modern histories with the thirteen-year figure from Josephus. Taken together, these four short passages<sup>7</sup> represent the core of the argument for a more than decade-long Babylonian military presence at Tyre in the early to mid-sixth century. The work of reconciling them to create a coherent historical narrative has been ongoing since Jerome’s commentary on Ezekiel (d. 420 CE).<sup>8</sup>

## II. Problems with these sources

Aside from the perhaps surprising paucity of references to such a notably long siege, the sources we do have present several complicated problems. Four types of difficulties are worthy of discussion here (in decreasing argumentative weight): 1. a lack of internal consistency regarding the details of the siege; 2. the opacity of Josephus’ own sources for his characterization of the siege; 3. the complications arising from the textual transmission and extant manuscripts of *AJ* and *Ap.*; and

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<sup>7</sup> Some might add Jer. 27:3–8, which prophesies Nebuchadnezzar’s control over Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon. No details of any method of conquest are provided and Neo-Babylonian power in these regions is not contested by modern historians.

<sup>8</sup> See the excellent summary of Jerome’s project, which derives details about the siege from comparison with Alexander the Great’s siege, more than 200 years later, in Garstad (2016). The most recent significant reengagement of the chronological reconciliation project known to me is Zawadzki (2015).

(4.) the omission of any mention of a protracted siege of Tyre in other ancient historians' works (where we might reasonably expect to find it).

**Internal consistency.** There are several ways the sources presented above resist an internally consistent narrative, which I will review briefly here. Within Josephus' accounting, some emendation of the text is required to make sense of it and produce a workable picture of the historical dates of Nebuchadnezzar's presence at Tyre. First—and most often noted—the fuller passage from *Ap.* gives a tally of the years of all the Neo-Babylonian and Persian period rulers of Tyre, culminating in the totaling provided in 1.159, namely, 54 years and three months. Checking Josephus' list of regnal periods against his final tally results in a discrepancy of one year; the total should be 55 years and three months. Attempts to resolve this are varied, including: one or more of the numbers were corrupted over the course of the passage's transmission, the phrase “whole period” (σύνπας χρόνος) has some referent other than the obvious one, or Josephus has simply done his math incorrectly.<sup>9</sup> There are other problems with the numbers in this passage (for example, that Nebuchadnezzar would have destroyed the Jerusalem temple in the nineteenth—rather than the eighteenth—year of his reign), but the specificity of these calculations have made them seem particularly alluring for historians.

Perhaps more troublingly, Josephus reports that the siege began in “year seven,” seemingly referring to the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. Cuneiform and other sources agree that Nebuchadnezzar II ascended the throne upon the death of his father, in 605, and that he ruled for 43 years. This puts “year seven” at 598/7, a full decade before the conquest of Jerusalem and the first prophecy against Tyre in the extant text of Ezekiel. If this timeline were correct, the siege of Tyre would have been undertaken both before and simultaneous with the initial attack on Jerusalem in 597 and the later conquest of Jerusalem in 587 (the latter following its own siege of at least eighteen months). Finally, Neo-Babylonian Chronicles—which exist through year eleven of Nebuchadnezzar's reign—do not mention a siege at Tyre at all, while they do mention shorter sieges at nearby cities (see below).

Thus, some alteration of Josephus' text is required for any cogent account of Nebuchadnezzar's conflicts with Jerusalem and Tyre which assumes a thirteen-year presence at the latter. While consensus opinion among recent Phoenician histories places the thirteen-year siege soon after the (587) conquest of Jerusalem, from 585–573,<sup>10</sup> many other proposals regarding the dates of the siege of Tyre

<sup>9</sup> See Barclay (2007), n. 519 for a recent discussion.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Elayi (2018), 201.

have been proffered. These are summarized in Table 1, outlining the required concessions (including several proposed emendations of Josephus' text) to support each hypothesis (consensus opinion is bolded).

**Table 1:** Survey of published proposals for dating the 'thirteen-year' siege of Tyre (see also Zawadski 2015 for a deeper engagement with several of these theories; consensus dating in bold).

Proposed Years of the Siege	Scholars	Required Concessions
603-590	Wiseman (1991 [1985]),	Positing an earlier king Ithobaal of Tyre. 28
(a) 597-585 (b) 575-574	Schaudig (2008)	Siege begins in "year 7" of Nebuchadnezzar; ascension of Cyrus dated to 538 (i.e., conquest of Babylon, rather than rise in Persia); period of judges in Tyre overlaps with royal rule (accounting for the calculation error).
(a) 598-586 (b) 573/2-570/69	Vogelstein (1950–51), 198-220	Siege begins in "year 7" of Nebuchadnezzar; second siege proposed on the basis of other attestations of Egyptian involvement in the Levant (e.g., Herodotus' account).
588/7-575/4	Van der Brugge and Kleber (2016), 155-184	Read "year 17" for "year 7" of Nebuchadnezzar; adjusted for Josephus' calculation error.
587/6-574/3	Dougherty (1929), 36 n. 132-133	Read "year 17" for "year 7" of Nebuchadnezzar.
<b>585-573/2</b>	<b>Unger (1926), 314–317; Katzenstein (1973 [1997]); Zawadski (2003, 2008, 2015)</b>	<b>Read "year 7" of Ithobaal, not Nebuchadnezzar.</b>
(a) 585–572 (b) July 564- September 563	Elayi (2013), 213-214	Read "year 7" of Ithobaal; second siege posited to resolve data from Neo-Babylonian administrative texts.
584/3-572/1	Niese (1887), vol. 1: <i>AJ.</i> I-V and (1890), vol. 4: <i>AJ.</i> XVI-XX and <i>Vit.</i> ; Siegert (2008) <sup>11</sup>	Read "year 7" of Ithobaal; adjusted for Josephus' calculation error.
577-564	Wiseman (1991 [1985])	Josephus' date for the Tyrian "judges" marks the end of the siege.

<sup>11</sup> Siegert (2008) discusses the stemma of Greek Josephan manuscripts used in his translation at 66–68, and the Latin manuscripts and their importance at 71–74.

Those who follow the consensus dating also rarely engage the other dated events provided by Josephus; for example, that Nebuchadnezzar occupied Coele-Syria (probably referring to inland Syria, Jordan, and possibly Arabia<sup>12</sup>), and subjugated the Ammonites and the Moabites in year 23 of his reign (noting that this corresponds to the fifth year after the conquest of Jerusalem; *AJ* 10.181–182),<sup>13</sup> presumably while the siege at Tyre was ongoing. Finally, little attention has been paid to the age of Nebuchadnezzar (consensus opinion has him concluding the siege at age 61/62), and what this might mean for his role in the conflict, especially for the later proposals. In a few histories, the assumption that he probably was not present the entire length of the siege is made explicit; others avoid the question altogether.

As is evident from even this cursory outline, any historical reconstruction of a thirteen-year siege must determine how heavily to weigh the implied dates in the Ezekiel material and then reconcile Josephus' various dates and calculations by suggesting some textual error. However, the *nature* of the siege also requires examination to make sense of these texts as a coherent narrative. Many historians have argued that for the engagement to have lasted thirteen years (without capitulation), it must have been a kind of partial blockade<sup>14</sup>—perhaps the Babylonian installations limited contact between the island of Tyre and its mainland town and dependent villages, while being unable to halt resupply of the island by sea. The Babylonian army would then have had a kind of semi-permanent encampment<sup>15</sup> (with full-time craftsmen and a reliable source of sheep; see below), presumably at the mainland town of Tyre or just outside it. Together, these concessions do make the hypothetical duration of Babylonian presence at Tyre more plausible. But of course, this economic-blockade model of the siege throws the Ezekiel account into sharp relief. The aggressive military language of siege works, battering rams, and ravaging of the population would seem dramatically overplayed if the siege involved establishing a presence in the mainland city and attempting to prevent supplies from reaching the island (while boats came and went freely from other ports) for thirteen years. Perhaps Ezekiel describes only an

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<sup>12</sup> See discussion in Tyson (2013), 8 n. 21.

<sup>13</sup> Tyson (2013) convincingly argued that this account is based primarily—if not entirely—on Jer., but the internal consistency of Josephus' narrative is still at stake.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Markoe (2000), 47: "This long operation—in reality, a land blockade of the island city—should be understood as a stratagem of containment rather than as a continuous, concerted attack."

<sup>15</sup> Peckham (2014), 370 writes: "... the landward embargo, manned by small contingents from Uruk and Sippar, interfered with its business and its reputation but did not threaten its physical survival."



initial conquest of the mainland town, and aggressive military actions were limited afterward. Examination of Josephus' own sources, however, hardly helps to resolve the situation, as will be evident below.

**Josephus' own sources.** The Φοινίκων ἀναγραφάς ('Phoenician records' or 'archives of the Phoenicians') are mentioned in *Ap.* 1.155, a bit misleadingly as Josephus does not repeat his clarification that he knows of these sources only through Greek translations, attributed by him to Dios and Menander of Ephesus. Elsewhere Josephus speaks more specifically of Tyrian archives or records, even challenging his contemporary readers to consult the officials at Tyre in charge of these records (*AJ* 8.55). According to Josephus, Menander is the purported source of a chronology of kings of Tyre, although Garbini has convincingly argued that Josephus probably mischaracterized Menander's work (which may instead have been a compilation of stories about ancient kings).<sup>16</sup> Many scholars have voiced their suspicions that Josephus is accessing Menander directly, or for that matter Dios—an otherwise unattested Greek source.<sup>17</sup> Alexander Polyhistor (first century BCE) was initially suggested as a plausible intermediary, but Nicolaus of Damascus (born ca. 64 BCE; mentioned by Josephus in *AJ* 1.94) has also been posited.<sup>18</sup> Any Greek intermediary might well have altered, summarized, or otherwise adapted an original text by Menander or Dios, whose contact with purported Phoenician-language archives is now untraceable.

A final source, likewise unattested in the extant corpus of ancient historians, is one Philostrates or Philostratus, cited where Josephus mentions in passing that "Philostratus ... agrees on these matters when he mentions in his history the siege of Tyre" (*Ap.* 1.144), and again by name only in *AJ* 10.228. Figure 1 represents the probable chain of transmission for the sources cited by Josephus in association with his account of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre.

Of course, the fact that Josephus used the biblical texts known to him at the end of the first century CE should not be overlooked; as in many other places where biblical books go uncited or are more freely adapted,<sup>19</sup> Josephus was probably working with a version of Ezekiel's prophecies in Greek as he constructed his narrative. He certainly knew some version of the prophecies of Ezekiel, as else-

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<sup>16</sup> For Josephus's descriptions of Menander, see *Ap.* 1.106–126; *AJ* 8.141. Garbini (1980), 117 writes: "[...] fu un compilatore di storie di re, tratte da cronache locali redatte già in lingua greca, e che la sua attività di traduttore degli 'Annali di Tiro' costituisce soltanto un'invenzione di Flavio Giuseppe."

<sup>17</sup> Barclay (2007), 71, n. 382: "Josephus probably guesses that Dios wrote a history of the Phoenicians—its focus may have been narrower (on Tyre) or wider; he can cite no book number."

<sup>18</sup> See Begg (2000), 375 n. 48 for a good summary of the bibliography.

<sup>19</sup> Again, see Tyson (2013) for a particularly compelling case.

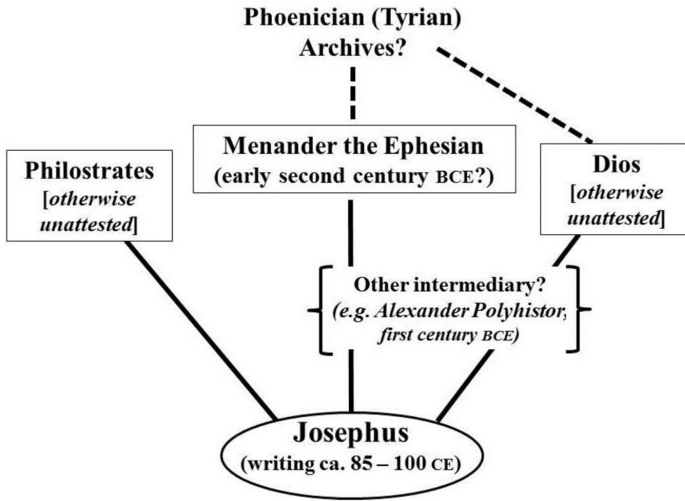


Figure 1: Josephus' sources on Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre

where he writes that the prophet left behind “two books” (probably chapters 1–39 and 40–48; *AJ* 10.79). Josephus' interest was in finding support for Jewish history and texts in the writings of other Mediterranean peoples; while he may have had mediated access to actual Phoenician records, these would be useful only insofar as they harmonized with biblical texts and extra-biblical Jewish traditions. Perhaps in length or in verbal action (*ἐπολιόρκησε*), the extant Josephan record of the siege owes more to Ezekiel than any ancient archive at Tyre.

**Textual transmission: Latin manuscripts of Josephus.** The problem of Josephus' ancient sources is compounded by the textual transmission history of Josephus' manuscripts. Josephus wrote in first century CE Greek, but the earliest manuscripts of *AJ* are in Latin, from the sixth through ninth centuries. The extant Latin translations of both *AJ* and *Ap.* seem to be owed to the patronage of Cassiodorus (completed in the mid-sixth century).<sup>20</sup> Variation among the Latin manuscripts is not easily accessed; most scholars still work primarily from Niese's 1885–1895 edition, which created a synthetic Greek text from available Greek and Latin manuscripts, noting what Niese deemed significant variants in the text (though distinguishing Latin variants only by the notation “Lat.,” which obscures a pastiche of Latin manuscripts<sup>21</sup>). Boysen's 1898 edition of the Latin translation actually harmonized the consulted Latin texts with Niese's Greek. In recent years,

<sup>20</sup> Mentioned in Cassiod. *Inst.* 1.17. 1. See Lembi (2005).

<sup>21</sup> Niese (1885–1895 [1955 reprint]), vol. 2, iii-iv.

the Brill Josephus Project likewise based its work on Niese's text, supplementing it with variants from other sources.<sup>22</sup> The latest attempt to produce a usable Latin edition is "The Latin Josephus Project," which completed their online searchable Latin text of *AJ* in May 2019, based on a single fourteenth-century manuscript; there are no plans to undertake *Ap*.<sup>23</sup>

As has become clear, Niese's edition is insufficient for modern scholarship in several ways. First, many more manuscripts of Josephus' works have come to light in the 120 years since it was completed,<sup>24</sup> and the growing interest in digitization projects hosted by libraries, monasteries, universities, and other online repositories (like Artstor), has increased the corpus of accessible Josephus manuscripts drastically. Secondly, Niese made decisions about the relative value of the manuscripts known to him in a somewhat simplistic (and occasionally arbitrary seeming) manner. He separated the extant manuscripts into two classes, the primary class consisting of two manuscripts<sup>25</sup> thought to descend from the same source (based on the spellings of proper names<sup>26</sup>), and the secondary class made up of all other versions. Niese relied heavily on these two manuscripts, overvaluing them even in cases where they are incomprehensible and cogent readings are attested in other manuscripts.<sup>27</sup> It is unclear when he consulted a manuscript directly or through an editor's work. Multiple sigla are used for individual manuscripts, and not infrequently Niese uses only particular books or sections from a manuscript, not mentioning it at all for other portions of the work. Nodet completely reworked the manuscript families for his 1992–2010 edition of the Greek *AJ*, ultimately devaluing Niese's favored codices significantly. Third, in the extant editions, questions raised by the Latin variants are in nearly all cases subsumed to the preserved Greek. While understandable given the focus on reconstructing an authoritative Greek manuscript, this is particularly strange for sections in

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**22** Namely Thackeray's Loeb edition, the Siegert-directed Münster project (for *Ap*.) and the Nodet-directed French project (for *AJ*).

**23** The Project's base text for *AJ* is the fourteenth-century Bamberg Msc. Class. 78 (Pollard and Timmermann, [accessed Feb. 16, 2022]). Note that their manuscript also gives *annis tribus et decem mensibus*, or three years and ten months, for the relevant passage in *AJ* 10.

**24** Blatt's (1958) mid-century attempt to produce a Latin edition of Josephus' works lists 171 known manuscripts of *AJ* (unfortunately, he only edited books I–V, and his edition has its own oft-cited problems). For criticisms, see Feldman (1989), 335. By the year 1999, more than 130 Greek and about 230 Latin manuscripts with Josephus content were known to Sievers (1999).

**25** The fourteenth-century Regius Parisinus gr. 1421 and the fifteenth-century Oxoniensis (Bodleianus), misc. graec. 186.

**26** Now known to vary significantly independent of parent text; Leoni (2015), 313.

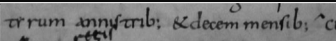
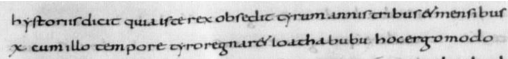
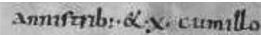
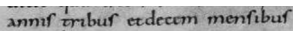
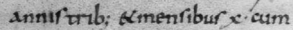
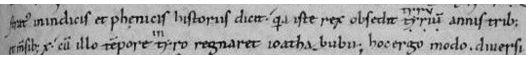
**27** Schreckenberg (1972), 29.

which surviving Latin texts predate Niese's preferred Greek manuscripts by 600 years.

Given the many proposals regarding possible textual problems in Josephus' discussion of the siege at Tyre, the variation among the manuscripts of *Ap.* and *AJ* is of great interest. Unfortunately, little can be said about the textual transmission of the former text, as it was distinctly less popular than *AJ* in medieval libraries. It has long been noted that all extant *Ap.* manuscripts in Greek appear to be direct or indirect copies of the same eleventh-century codex, Laurentianus 69.22, with a gap in Book 2 (52–113), characterized by additions and modifications by a Christian editor. The Latin copies, too, show little variation. But more can be said of the textual history of Josephus' *AJ*. Regarding the passage in question, Niese makes mention of no Latin manuscripts in his apparatus to the temporal clause rendered ἔτεσι τρισὶ καὶ δέκα, though at least one (unspecified) is cited nearby. Only two Greek variants are given: the compressed ἔτεσι τρισκαίδεκα in Laurentianus plut. 69.20, and the abbreviated ἔτεσι γ' in Vaticanus gr. 147. Nodet's edition renders the Greek clause in the same manner as Niese but offers no notes regarding variants of any origin.

For the historical problem at hand, a close examination of available manuscripts is required. Table 2 presents a sample of eighth-seventeenth-century Latin manuscripts containing *AJ* 10.228 (including most of the earliest extant texts), offering image and transcription of the phrase denoting the length of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre. Of the nineteen manuscripts I was able to collate, ten show a clear reading of *mensibus* in the line, rendering in nine cases the phrase 'three years and ten months' (and in one case, 'three years and three months'). Three more contain the first number *tribus*, with the Roman numeral 'x' in place of *decem*, perhaps the result of a similar interpretation distinguishing differing units for each. This preference for a three-year siege is underscored by the 1524 Frobenius text, the *editio princeps* of the printed Latin of *AJ*—and the last version not harmonized with a Greek base-text—which reads *annis tribus et decem mensibus*.

**Table 2:** Sample of Latin manuscripts containing Josephus' *Antiquitates* 10.228

Manuscript Name	Date (CE)	Length of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre
GKS 157 (Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen) <sup>28</sup>	700-899	 annis trib; & decem mensib;
Lat. 5052 (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris) <sup>29</sup>	800-899	 annis tribus & mensibus / x
Wissenburgensis (Ms. Guelf 22 (Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel) <sup>30</sup>	800-899	 annis trib;. & x.
Staatsbibliothek Bamberg Msc. Class. 78 <sup>31</sup>	800-899	 annis tribus et decem mensibus
Palatinus Lat. 814 (Biblioteca Vaticana) <sup>32</sup>	800-899	annis / tribus & msib; x.
Mp. Theol. Fol. 5 (Würzburg) <sup>33</sup>	800-899	 annis trib; & mensibus x.
Ms. lat. Fol. 263 (Staatsbibliothek, Berlin) <sup>34</sup>	1000-1099	 annis trib; / et msib; x.

**28** Image and permission to publish granted by Erik Petersen, Senior Researcher at the Center for Manuscript and Rare Books, Kongelige Bibliotek.

**29** Available publicly, courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9067689z>, 147, first two lines at top left).

**30** Available publicly, courtesy of the Herzog August Library Wolfenbüttel Manuscript Database (<http://diglib.hab.de/mss/22-weiss/start.htm>, 210v, second column, line 9).

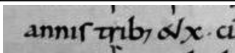
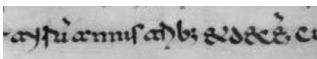
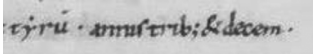
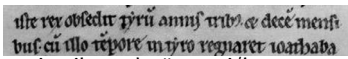
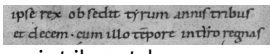
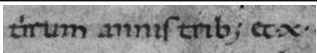
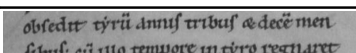
**31** Image reproduction permission granted by Gerald Raab, Digitale Reproduktion und Bestands-sicherung, Staatsbibliothek Bamberg. Available through the Staatsbibliothek Bamberg – Kaiser-Heinrich-Bibliothek, with digitization through the Munich Digitization Center (<https://zendsbb.digitale-sammlungen.de/db/0000/sbb00000114/images/>, 122r, second column, second paragraph).

**32** Manuscript images available through Bibliotheca Laureshamensis digital (this author was unable to obtain permission to reproduce the image); rights held by Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana ([https://bibliotheca-laureshamensis-digital.de/bav/bav\\_pal\\_lat\\_814](https://bibliotheca-laureshamensis-digital.de/bav/bav_pal_lat_814), 122r, lines 12–13).

**33** Available through Creative Commons license, courtesy of Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg (<http://vb.uni-wuerzburg.de/ub/pageflip2.html?book=41667146&page=2>, 104v, bottom of page).

**34** Available publicly, courtesy of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – PK (<https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht/?PPN=PPN819595527>, 174r).

Table 2: (continued)

Manuscript Name	Date (CE)	Length of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre
Plut.19 sin.1 (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence) <sup>35</sup>	1000-1099	 annis trib, & x.
Plut. 66.01 (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence) <sup>36</sup>	1000-1099	 annis trib; & decē,
Plut. 66.02 (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence) <sup>37</sup>	1000-1099	 annis trib; & decem.
Plut. 66.05 (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence) <sup>38</sup>	1000-1099	 annis trib,. & decē mensi/bus.
Lat. 5045 (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) <sup>39</sup>	1100-1125	 annis tribus et decem
S. Marco 385 (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence) <sup>40</sup>	1100-1199	 annis trib; et .x.
Codex 162 (Cologne Cathedral Library) <sup>41</sup>	1150-1175	 annis tribus & decē men/sibus.

<sup>35</sup> Available through the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Digital Repository (<http://mss.bmlon line.it/catalogo.aspx>; Plut.19 sin.1, 97v). Permission to reproduce this and other images from the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana collections (below) granted by the MiC; any further reproduction is prohibited.

<sup>36</sup> Available through the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Digital Repository (<http://mss.bmlon line.it/catalogo.aspx>; Plut.66.1, 167v).

<sup>37</sup> Available through the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Digital Repository (<http://mss.bmlon line.it/catalogo.aspx>; Plut.66.2, 138v).

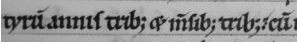
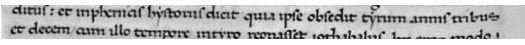
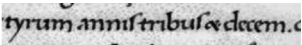
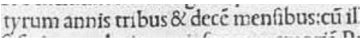
<sup>38</sup> Available through the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Digital Repository (<http://mss.bmlon line.it/catalogo.aspx>; Plut.66.5, 101r).

<sup>39</sup> Available through Creative Commons license, courtesy of European Regia and the Bibliothèque nationale de France (<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8454696n,144r>).

<sup>40</sup> Available through the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Digital Repository (<http://mss.bmlon line.it/catalogo.aspx>; S.Marco 385, 129v).

<sup>41</sup> Available through Creative Commons license, courtesy of Archbishop's Diocesan and Cathedral Library in Cologne; edited by Patrick Sahle (<https://digital.dombibliothek-koeln.de/hs/content/titleinfo/177841,74v,firstcolumn>).

Table 2: (continued)

Manuscript Name	Date (CE)	Length of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre
Plimpton MS 043 (Columbia University Libraries) <sup>42</sup>	1150-1199	 annis trib; & msib; trib;:
Plut. 66.03 (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence) <sup>43</sup>	1400-1499	 annis tribus / et decem I
Plut. 18 sin. 10 (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence) <sup>44</sup>	1400-1499	 annis tribus &. decem.
A.212.4 Hist. 2 <sup>o</sup> , incunabulum (Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel) <sup>45</sup>	1486	 annis tribus & decé mensibus:

Josephus' *AJ* was among the most popular of non-biblical medieval manuscripts. Given this popularity, the variation in siege-lengths represented by the extant Latin manuscript corpus indicates that Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre was probably not famously a thirteen-year ordeal. Whatever Josephus originally recorded, there is extensive evidence for textual corruption in this passage of the *AJ*. Perhaps it is possible to go further and suggest that the passages from Ezekiel (which would have been well known to any library with access to the *AJ*) were not read as conflicting with a siege just 29% as long as the now-canonical thirteen years. Indeed, a three-year-ten-month siege would perhaps still have been notably long for the period in question.

**Other ancient historians.** Tallying the lack of reports of the thirteen-year siege of Tyre is of course a kind of *argumentum ex silentio*. But several sources do

<sup>42</sup> Image provided by C. W. Dutschke, Curator of the Medieval and Renaissance Collections, Columbia University. Image reproduction courtesy of E. Runde, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries.

<sup>43</sup> Available through the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Digital Repository (<http://mss.bmlonline.it/catalogo.aspx>; Plut.66.3, 152v).

<sup>44</sup> Available through the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Digital Repository (<http://mss.bmlonline.it/catalogo.aspx>; Plut.18 sin.10, 178r).

<sup>45</sup> Available through Creative Commons license, courtesy of the Herzog August Library (HAB) Wolfenbüttel (<http://diglib.hab.de/inkunabeln/212-4-hist-2f/start.htm>, 184).

discuss Phoenicia in the Neo-Babylonian period, even Tyre in particular, without making mention of Nebuchadnezzar's particular attentions on that city. First, there is no mention of the siege in Nebuchadnezzar's own inscriptional record, where a thirteen-year military event (whatever its nature) might be expected to have inspired some textual and/or iconographic representation. While the state of preservation of royal documentation from the Neo-Babylonian Empire is, of course, imperfect (see below), the paucity of data for a siege lasting 30% of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar may be noteworthy.

Secondly, the main historical (as opposed to prophetic) narratives in the Hebrew biblical corpus do not seem to mention an extended siege at Tyre. Nebuchadnezzar's attacks on Jerusalem are discussed in 2 Kings 24–25 and in 2 Chron. 36; the fate of Tyre is not mentioned, perhaps surprising given the Chronicles' penchant for noting when prophecies have been fulfilled. Jer. 27:3–8 predicts that the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon will be given to Nebuchadnezzar in a prophecy dated early in the reign of Jehoiakim (r. 608–598), and Jer. 28:1 describes envoys from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon in Jerusalem in the fourth year of Zedekiah (594). While most historians conclude that Jeremiah lived at least a few years past the fall of Jerusalem in 587 (perhaps as late as 573) and would accept that the biblical book was edited with the benefit of hindsight, the text does not discuss Nebuchadnezzar's military actions at Tyre.

In the Greek-speaking world, Herodotus (writing ca. 430 BCE) writes closest in time to the conflict in question. He mentions contemporary conflicts between Egypt and both Sidon and Tyre: "Apries<sup>46</sup> ... reigned 25 years, during which he led an army against Sidon and fought a sea-fight with the king of Tyre" (2.161). This detail is notable not just for the absence of information about a prolonged land siege at Tyre, but also for the possibly conflicting evidence that at some point during a period which encompassed the entire length of the consensus dating for the thirteen-year siege (extending only four years before, and then three years after those dates<sup>47</sup>), Tyre was engaged in a sea-battle with the pharaoh of Egypt. While certainly not precluding the historicity of Nebuchadnezzar's long siege, it does make it more difficult to understand, regardless of how one imagines the date or outcome of this sea-battle. Would a Tyre which had so recently faced off with Egypt—the Neo-Babylonian Empire's major opponent on

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<sup>46</sup> I.e., the 26th dynasty pharaoh Wahibre Haaibre, whom Egyptologists calculate reigned 589–570 BCE, dying in 567.

<sup>47</sup> Although Hdt. gives 25 years as the length of Apries' reign, which is now known to have lasted 19 years.



the Mediterranean world stage—really have earned Nebuchadnezzar's ire and protracted attack?<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, would Tyre's ships have been independent enough to conduct a sea-battle while a siege of the island (or inland) city was ongoing? Or have been likely to recover enough after a major siege to engage such an imposing enemy at sea?

Similarly, Diodorus Siculus (writing 60–30 BCE) used Herodotus alongside other sources for his own historical compendium. He shows a special interest in Phoenician/Punic culture, but also addresses only Egypt's military effect on the Levantine Phoenician cities in the Neo-Babylonian period:

Apries was king for 22 years. He made a campaign with strong land and sea forces against Cyprus and Phoenicia, took Sidon by storm, and so terrified the other cities of Phoenicia that he secured their submission; he also defeated the Phoenicians and Cyprians in a great sea-battle and returned to Egypt with much booty. (1.68.1)

Diodorus' account differs from Herodotus' in interesting ways (recording a shorter regnal period for Apries; adding that Cyprus and Phoenicia were both targets for the pharaoh's attacks; specifying that the Egyptian military attacked by both land and sea, etc.). While Tyre is not mentioned by name in this later rendition, the outcome—that a significant sea-battle ended in defeat for the Phoenicians—is offered where only implied by the earlier accounting. It is difficult to know whether these additional details result from Diodorus' supplementary sources, differing version of Herodotus' work, or creative efforts, but it may be significant that the story given here focuses on the western—not eastern/Mesopotamian—empire as the major player in this chapter of Levantine history.

While less significant for the present study, it is interesting to note that the Persian Muslim historian al-Ṭabarī (839–923 CE), who expends great efforts to collect legends and stories surrounding Nebuchadnezzar (sometimes called by his “Persian name,” Bukhtrashah) in his *Ta'rikh al-Rusūl wa al-Mulūk* (or *Ta'rikh al-Ṭabarī*), does not mention a protracted land siege in the central coastal Levant during his reign. There the siege of Jerusalem is retold in detail, alongside a foray into Egypt and other military and strategic exploits, and even exaggerated stories are repeated (e.g., Nebuchadnezzar “lived a long life of over three hundred years”<sup>49</sup>), making the absence of a thirteen-year battle at Tyre all the more remarkable. Al-Ṭabarī is known to have traveled throughout what is today Syria, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, and Egypt, even living in Beirut for a time.

<sup>48</sup> This is the scenario adopted by van der Brugge and Kleber (2016), 162–163.

<sup>49</sup> Perlmann (1987), 47, section 649.

While of course none of this ninth century CE circumstantial evidence may directly undermine the likelihood of a sixth-century BCE siege, in al-Ṭabarī we do find a witness contemporary to our extant manuscript tradition who was actively seeking stories about Nebuchadnezzar. It remains intriguing in terms of reception history that a historian of al-Ṭabarī's voracious appetite would not have taken note, implying the 'thirteen-year' story simply was not in circulation.

All of these concerns serve to question the well-accepted position that through our extant Greek manuscripts of Josephus, a singular testament to an extremely long military campaign has been accurately preserved (while several other details in the same passages have been inaccurately transmitted). I argue that a textual problem somewhere along its transmission is much more likely, and that the length of the siege is the most likely candidate for some textual error, since there is no doubt that Nebuchadnezzar spent time in Lebanon, including at Tyre on several occasions (as will be explored below).

So what if Nebuchadnezzar did not maintain a siege of Tyre for thirteen years? If we may be (a) skeptical that Josephus had accurate (mediated) access to Phoenician histories, (b) certain that there are problems with the numbers in his account of Neo-Babylonian Tyre, and (c) concerned by the lack of historiographical corroboration (to the point that much of the Latin medieval Josephan tradition preserved a 'three year, ten month' siege length for several centuries), then what happens to the picture of Neo-Babylonian Levantine Phoenicia if we discard this chronological detail?

### III. Other indirect evidence used to support the thirteen-year siege

To test the plausibility of the hypothesis that Nebuchadnezzar's army did not spend thirteen years at Tyre, other Levantine and Mesopotamian evidence which has been harmonized with the story of the long siege in contemporary histories will now be briefly reexamined. These sources can be divided into four categories: 1. Neo-Babylonian period archaeological remains from Tyre and its region, 2. Babylonian Chronicles and royal inscriptions from Mesopotamia, 3. Nebuchadnezzar's monumental inscriptions in Lebanon, and 4. Neo-Babylonian administrative texts, including the *madāktu* ('siege camp') texts, texts mentioning *Šurru* / Tyre, and relevant royal ration lists from Babylon. As will become clear, none of these sources offer clear support for a thirteen-year siege of Tyre, while all are consistent with an interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's involvement in the Levant that sees multiple short interventions (with individual cities targeted no longer than

perhaps one to three years,<sup>50</sup> and often for only a few months) as the norm throughout his forty-three-year reign. Notably, I am not the first to make this assertion – this conclusion has been independently reached by several scholars working on the Mesopotamian material.

**Archaeology of Tyre and its region.** The difficulties of identifying Neo-Babylonian period archaeological remains are not unique to the Phoenician coast. Throughout the Levant, the relatively short period during which the Babylonians were in power in the first millennium necessarily limits their archaeological impact.<sup>51</sup> Almost no distinctive administrative accoutrements (like seals or other markers of Babylonian-deputized power) seem to have been introduced. Perhaps worse, just as Faust pointed out for Judah, along the Phoenician coast “... we cannot at the present state of knowledge, identify the pottery of the sixth century BCE.”<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, several new vessel and object types, as well as certain architectural features, can be dated to the subsequent Persian period based on similarities with objects from the Persian heartland, or comparisons with the archaeological repertoires at other Levantine sites. Still, in some cases it is difficult to determine how circular these lines of argumentation have become; since the majority of historians of Phoenicia believe major socio-political changes mark Achaemenid rule in the Levant, newly observed changes in the material record of the mid-first millennium may be ascribed to the Persian period without independent verification.

Further challenges are posed by the vastly changed topography of Tyre itself. Before the military-engineering feat of Alexander the Great in 332, Tyre was an island, connected through social, political, and economic ties to a coastal town (called Ušu/Uzu or Palaetyrus). Several biographers of Alexander mention that (at least in the late fourth century) the island was fortified on the landward side. Unfortunately, our earliest detailed description of the geography of Tyre comes after this extreme alteration of the landscape—from Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE): “Tyre,

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**50** Note that the five-year siege purportedly undertaken at the mainland city of Palaetyrus by Shamašer V (727–722 BCE) is also mentioned only by Joseph. *AJ* 9.283 and is discounted or omitted by all recent Phoenician histories.

**51** E.g. for the southern Phoenician coast (stretching from Ashkelon north in what is today coastal Israel/Palestine), Shalev and Martin (2012), 94–95 describe the sixth century as a period of “settlement crises” and summarize the situation thus: “A few sites may show limited evidence of active settlement. Some (Akko, Yoqneam, Jaffa and Yavne-Yam) produced architectural remains that may belong to the Babylonian period. Others show a degree of continuity with Iron Age features (the fortifications at Dor, some tombs at Achziv). In both cases, the poor quality remains are indicative of irregular occupation or of a severely reduced settlement. More typically architectural remains cannot be dated to the Babylonian period.”

**52** Faust (2012), 15.

once an island separated from the mainland by a deep sea-channel 700 paces wide, is now attached [...]. Its circumference, including Palaetyrus, is 19 [Roman] miles, the island *oppidum* itself extending 22 stadia” (*HN* 5.17.76). Converting these units indicates that according to Pliny’s account, the circumference of the Roman city (including the former island, mole, and coastal town) was 33.23 km, with the circumference of the ancient island measuring only 4.07 km and located 1.03 km from the coast. The location and extent of the coastal city was also long-debated,<sup>53</sup> and several archaeological missions—including aerial and underwater surveys of the ports—have attempted to recover the ancient shorelines of both island and mainland town.<sup>54</sup> While much headway has been made in establishing the ancient topography, the areas of most value in determining the historicity of a protracted siege of Tyre under Nebuchadnezzar are precisely those most changed by Alexander’s mole.

Instead of clear indications of late Iron Age island fortifications, or evidence for numerous soldiers stationed in Palaetyrus, we might instead search for indirect evidence of military, political, or social disruption in the sixth century. To reiterate, the evidence for Neo-Babylonian period Tyre is sparse, but what evidence we do have seems to indicate continuity in the material record during the seventh through fifth centuries, with no visible destruction levels, nor evidence of bulwarks or other siege construction.<sup>55</sup> More tentative evidence may be sought in burial sites on the mainland side. Where preserved, multi-period cemeteries or tomb groups in the region of Tyre seem to show continuity through the Iron Age II-III periods. These sites include Burğ aš-Šamāli (3 km east of Tyre), Rashidieh (4 km south of Tyre), and possibly the tombs at Šiddiqin (15 km southeast of Tyre), and Khirbet Silm (20 km east of Tyre), though none of these were excavated systematically.<sup>56</sup> One exception is the cremation cemetery at Tyre al-Bass, which was

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53 Cf. Doumet-Serhal (2004), 60–69.

54 Beginning with the excavations of Renan 1860–64, and including archaeological and survey projects directed by Le Lasseur 1921–22, Poidebard 1934–36, Chéhab 1947–70s, Frost 1960s, and the underwater surveys of Nouredine, el-Hélou, and Mior 2001–13.

55 Beginning with Bikai (1976). One recent island-side investigation may be found in the American University of Beirut’s recent excavations of a late Iron Age or Hellenistic temple at Tyre, which was located in the southeastern portion of the island. Already excavated by Chéhab in the 1970s (whose notes were lost and never published), the new 2012–15 work directed by Badre uncovered ceramics from the Iron Age II – III period in the area to the southeast of the “tower” structure, perhaps in an open-air courtyard. Although the stratigraphy at the site was minimal and the substrate very disrupted, she proposed dating the temple structure to the Persian Period, with no obvious sign of a Neo-Babylonian period destruction/disruption in that area, though the scope of the excavations was limited; Badre (2015).

56 See discussion of these sites with bibliography in Dixon (2013), 483–489.

abandoned in the seventh century,<sup>57</sup> probably during the period of Neo-Assyrian control. Tyre itself stands in sharp contrast with other sites where destruction levels attributed to Nebuchadnezzar have been excavated. The sites of Tel Kabri (10 km south of Tyre; probably a dependent of Tyre in the Neo-Babylonian period) and of Tell Keisan (ca. 14 km northeast of Haifa), as well as the Philistine cities of Ashkelon and Ekron, were devastated in Nebuchadnezzar's early campaigns.<sup>58</sup>

#### **Neo-Babylonian Chronicles and royal inscriptions from Mesopotamia.**

Unfortunately, the events of only 11 of Nebuchadnezzar's (or Nabû-kudurri-ušur in these sources) 43 years are detailed in preserved chronicles. The relevant text is Neo-Babylonian Chronicle 5 (BM 21946), which includes entries for 12 years, from the 21st and final year of Nabopolassar (605 BCE) to the 11th year of Nebuchadnezzar (594).<sup>59</sup> Each year's events are briefly and formulaically stated, with only military highlights featuring in the resulting narrative. Most prominent are campaigns to "Ḫattu" (<sup>KUR</sup>Ḫat-tû), a region which includes the Levantine coastal territories, but was probably used loosely for all territory west of Mesopotamia, probably stretching from southwestern Turkey into the Sinai. Only four cities are named, two where battles are fought (Carchemish and Hamath), and two singled out for punishment (Ashkelon[?] and "the city of Judah"). These and episodes of military involvement in Ḫattu are outlined in Table 3.

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57 Aubet (2010), 144–155.

58 A final site whose archaeological remains might, in future, contribute to the question at hand is that of Riblah, a tell not far from the modern town of Rablah, Syria, near Lebanon's northeastern border. Riblah was a stop on both the north–south and east–west trade routes, locally well-placed on the road between Homs and Baalbek, and perhaps a two-week journey from Babylon. The biblical books of 2 Kings and Jer. mention this site as the location of the military camp of Pharaoh Necho II (ruling ca. 610 – ca. 595) while in the Levant (2 Kings 23:29–34), and then again as the headquarters of Nebuchadnezzar during the 588–86 siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:6–7, 18–21; Jer. 39:5–7, 52:9–11, 26–27). Though relatively far from the towns of Megiddo and Jerusalem which were reportedly besieged from this location, Riblah would have been strategically situated near fresh water and a defensible mountain pass. The text of 2 Kings is clear that Nebuchadnezzar was actually stationed at Riblah while his forces attacked Jerusalem, thus the captive king Zedekiah was brought to Riblah for punishment.

59 For more on the corpus as a whole, see Waerzeggers (2012), 285–298. The formative editions also include Grayson (2000 [1975]) and Glassner (2004).

**Table 3:** Campaigns to Ḫattu represented in Neo-Babylonian Chronicle 5<sup>60</sup>

Regnal Year (Date BCE)	Military Campaigns to Ḫattu (and elsewhere)
0 (605/4)	Nebuchadnezzar (crown prince) marches to Carchemish and Hamath, battling with Egypt. After accession, returns to Ḫattu and “marched about victoriously,” bringing the “vast booty of Hattu to Babylon.”
1 (604/3)	Nebuchadnezzar “marched about victoriously in Hattu.” “All the kings of Hattu” come before him and present tribute. Capture of Ashkelon(?)
2 (603/2)	Campaign to Ḫattu (?) <sup>61</sup> [broken]. Mention of siege towers [rabâti <sup>meš</sup> ] in unknown context
3 (602/1)	Campaign to Ḫattu [broken]
4 (601/0)	Campaign to Ḫattu. (Invasion of Egypt – ends in a draw)
5 (600/599)	(Nebuchadnezzar stays home with his army)
6 (599/8)	Campaign to Ḫattu. (Campaign against the Arab tribes)
7 (598/7)	Campaign to Ḫattu. Capture of “the city of Judah”
8 (597/6)	Campaign to Ḫattu as far as Carchemish
9 (596/5)	(Fighting in Mesopotamia)
10 (595/4)	(Rebellion “in Akkad”) Campaign to Ḫattu [broken]
11 (594/3)	Campaign to Ḫattu [catchline for the next tablet – broken]

Because of the frequency with which Ḫattu appears in Chronicle 5’s record of Nebuchadnezzar’s campaigns, several scholars have argued along the lines that “it is doubtful that the area was ever effectively controlled and annexed to the empire; otherwise it would not appear so frequently in the chronicles. Probably we should think in terms of periodic military incursions of a punitive nature in order to obtain tribute and booty.”<sup>62</sup> In other words, Nebuchadnezzar’s army seems to have had free reign (“marching about victoriously”) in the Levant, and expectations that tribute from all heads of state would be received. Certainly the Neo-Babylonian state dealt in most cases with independent rulers—not locally-installed governors as did Neo-Assyrian rulers.<sup>63</sup> Though it is not made explicit in the Chronicle, failure to bring tribute seems to be the cause of targeted attacks (note the close juxtaposition of the assertion that tribute was received from “all

<sup>60</sup> Translations from Grayson (2000 [1975]).

<sup>61</sup> Or Kimuhu (modern Samsat), in Anatolia; Na’aman (1992), 41–44.

<sup>62</sup> Da Riva (2015), 614.

<sup>63</sup> See the thorough treatment of Neo-Babylonian governance in Vanderhooff (2003), 235–262.

the kings of Ḫattu” and the description of the plunder, sacking, and defeat of Ashkelon in year one). As has already been mentioned, the lack of explicit mention of Tyre seems at least to provide confirmation that Josephus’ “year seven” designation for the start of a thirteen-year siege is unlikely to refer to Nebuchadnezzar’s year seven.

In fact, we have an overlapping Neo-Babylonian inscription<sup>64</sup> for regnal year seven (598/7) in the Hofkalender Prism (EŞ 7834, Istanbul Archaeology Museum). As part of a text detailing the enlargement of a palace in Babylon, a list of unnamed vassal kings of Levantine cities is included: Tyre (Ṣūru), Gaza (Ḫazzati), Sidon (Ṣidūnu), Arwad (Armada), and Ashdod (Aṣdūdu). Because this list does not order the cities from north-to-south as one would expect if describing them in the order they might be reached by a Neo-Babylonian army on campaign, it has been generally accepted that they are listed in order of regional importance, with Tyre first in the list. Da Riva has argued convincingly that this list (along with those of various types of Babylonian governors and officials which accompany it) should be read with other Neo-Babylonian inscribed lists as records of labor levies, noting regions which were expected to contribute to various building projects.<sup>65</sup> Mention of Tyre and other Phoenician cities in this account of royal engineering projects might be underscored by the discussion of the retrieval of cedars *ina la-ab-na-nim* (‘in the Lebanon’), restored in column ii,<sup>66</sup> and mentioned throughout the descriptions of various palace improvements in the Hofkalender Prism.

A final royal monument has been brought into the discussion, though it dates from the reign of Nabonidus (r. 556–539) and does not mention Tyre explicitly. This object is the Istanbul (or Babylon) Stele of Nabonidus (EŞ 1327, Istanbul Archaeology Museum), whose pedestal peg features a small incised sign of Tanit.<sup>67</sup> Schaudig has argued that the stele was made from a stone “marked as property of Tanit and stored in some Phoenician temple’s magazine,” taken in spoil to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar “during his wars against Tyre—either from Tyre itself or from another Phoenician city,” and eventually reused by Nabonidus.<sup>68</sup> The suggestion that reuse accounts for the presence of a Tanit-sign on a Neo-Babylonian stele from Babylon is a good one (though certainly not the only possible explanation); still, if accepted, several other features of the stone would have to be ex-

<sup>64</sup> For more on this corpus, see Da Riva (2008).

<sup>65</sup> Da Riva (2013).

<sup>66</sup> Restored on the basis of another Neo-Babylonian cylinder (C34); Da Riva (2013), 217.

<sup>67</sup> First noted in Schaudig (2001), 514; formal discussion in Schaudig (2008), 533–545.

<sup>68</sup> Schaudig (2008), 534.

plained.<sup>69</sup> Even if this stele represents a spoil of war from Phoenicia, it does not necessitate a thirteen-year siege at Tyre as its source.

While our preserved Babylonian royal texts offer only glimpses of Nebuchadnezzar's involvement in the Levant and the value of Tyre among western cities, the view from these sources is tantalizing. Campaigns westward to Ḫattu seem to have been frequent occurrences, which continued beyond what might be imagined as a reasonable period of adjustment while Nebuchadnezzar consolidated his power back home and reputation abroad. Tyre would likely have been visited several times given its importance in the region, and as early as 598/7, Tyre was probably sending laborers or craftsmen—and possibly helping to facilitate the transportation of cedars—to Babylon for Nebuchadnezzar's building projects. This data from early in Nebuchadnezzar's reign does not preclude a turn of events that could lead to a thirteen-year military campaign against Tyre, but the examples of Ashkelon and Jerusalem seem to indicate that short (i.e. mentioned for only a single year) concentrations of military might were the norm when cities balked at payment or other contributions for Babylon. A more detailed picture of Nebuchadnezzar's involvement in Phoenicia is available through examination of Neo-Babylonian monumental inscriptions in Lebanon itself.

**Neo-Babylonian monumental inscriptions in Lebanon.** Four sites bearing monumental inscriptions attributed to Nebuchadnezzar have been identified in Lebanon (Table 4).<sup>70</sup> Three of the sites are in northern inland Lebanon; one is among the dozens of reliefs carved into the promontory and riverbanks of the Nahr el-Kalb just north of Beirut. At the time of Nebuchadnezzar's inscription at this latter site, three Egyptian reliefs (each bearing the cartouche of Ramesses II) and five Neo-Assyrian reliefs (one attributed to Esarhaddon, four unattributed due to wear) were already present; no other stone-cut monuments left by ancient rulers have been identified in northern Lebanon.

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<sup>69</sup> Schaudig (2008), 533–535 argues that the Tanit-sign should be dated to the first half of the sixth century, though this is based only on his assumption that it comes from one of Nebuchadnezzar's sieges (dating the long siege at Tyre to 598–585, and a second siege in 575–574). While Schaudig offers a brief summary of the chronology of extant Tanit-signs, arguing that this would be the “oldest extant specimen of its kind,” in fact we know of no other object on which the Tanit-sign is used in this manner: on the lower face of a large block of granite, small in scale relative to the width of the stone (preserved at 48 cm wide; the sign appears to be ca. 5 cm wide x 7 cm tall). This would seem more like a mason's mark, though an unprecedented choice of symbol.

<sup>70</sup> For more on these inscriptions, see Da Riva (2012).



**Table 4:** Neo-Babylonian monumental inscriptions in Lebanon<sup>71</sup>

Monument Location	Inscription	Iconography	Orientation
Nahr el-Kalb	(a) Old Babylonian text; (b) Neo-Babylonian text. [incompletely preserved]	n/a	Located on the northern bank of the river (Egyptian and Assyrian reliefs carved on the southern bank).
Wadi esh-Sharbin / Wadi Charbine / Wadi Brissa	(a) Old Babylonian text; (b) Neo-Babylonian text.	(a) King fighting a lion; (b) king before a tree.	King facing eastward (towards Syria) in both images.
Wadi as-Saba'	n/a	(a) King fighting a lion; (b) king standing, right hand raised to the mouth, below symbols depicting a moon, sun, and star.	King facing northward (towards Syria) in both images.
Shir as-Sanam	[five columns of text, badly worn]	King standing below symbols depicting a moon, sun, and star.	King facing eastward (towards Syria).

As far as can be reconstructed, the Nahr el-Kalb inscription seems to preserve much of the same text (with some minor variants) as that at Wadi esh-Sharbin; the same may be true of the inscription at Shir as-Sanam, though it is nearly illegible today. The legible portions of the inscriptions both reinforce the standard Neo-Babylonian concern with building projects and cultic rites and illustrate in greater detail Nebuchadnezzar's interest in the central coastal Levant. This local concern is expressed in propagandistic and protective terms in the Wadi esh-Sharbin text:

(I did) what no former king had done: I cut off the high mountains, I split the stones of the mountains, and I opened passes (into the mountains), I established a road for the cedars whose beauty is prized, whose shapes are pleasing and outstanding, huge yield of Lebanon [...]. I let the inhabitants of Lebanon lie in safe pastures, I did not allow anyone to frighten them. So that nobody should oppress [them], I have [put] an eternal image of my royal person, [...] I wrote an inscription with my image in a mountain pass, (and) I established (it) for ever after.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Described in Da Riva (2009).

<sup>72</sup> Da Riva (2009), 271.

In the most basic sense, these monuments represent an intentional presentation of Neo-Babylonian royal ideology. But Da Riva sees the northern Lebanese inscriptions as serving multiple purposes, celebrating the power of the king,<sup>73</sup> perhaps commemorating agreements made with the inland tribes, and marking the main thoroughfares through the forests.<sup>74</sup> In these ways the iconography of the king figure—fighting lions, and standing before images of divine power or fertility—may be even more functionally important than the inscriptions themselves. As a corpus, Nebuchadnezzar’s Lebanese monumental inscriptions illustrate an interest in ongoing trade relations with the people of both inland mountains and the coastal thoroughfares (if the Nahr el-Kalb inscription is not intended solely to engage the Assyrian and Egyptian monuments on the opposite bank).

**Neo-Babylonian administrative texts.** Three types of administrative texts have been used to locate indirect support for the thirteen-year siege of Tyre: 1. *Madāktu* / “campaign” texts, 2. texts mentioning a place called *Šurru* / “Tyre”, and 3. ration lists from the Babylonian royal court. As will be evident, each of these corpora can be understood as consistent with a series of shorter campaigns at Tyre and other Levantine sites; none necessitate a single thirteen-year siege at Tyre.

The *Madāktu* texts form a corpus because of their provenance (in the Ebabbar archive at Sippar), and the mention of *madāktu*, a military campaign or campaign camp, during several consecutive years of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign (Table 5). None of the texts mention the location or direction of the campaign, nor whether it took place at a single location. Zawadzki’s statement that “it seems probable that the texts presented here deliver the first Neo-Babylonian data supporting the classical story about the 13-years siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar”<sup>75</sup> was based on (a) the assumption that the campaign mentioned in these texts represented a single campaign at a single location lasting from at least Nebuchadnezzar’s 28th–30th year (577–575 BCE)<sup>76</sup>; (b) the Josephan testimony to a long siege at Tyre; and (c) Katzenstein’s chronology of that siege (585–572), thus placing the *madāktu* in the final

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73 Da Riva (2015), 609–610: “[...] the fact that the monument (inscription and image) was in many cases not accessible, as in Shir as-Sanam, perhaps not even visible, as in Sela’, was of no importance [...]. Their creation should be seen within the general context of the political power dynamics of imperial control, alongside a range of other strategies used to overcome distance and centrifugal tendencies and to subdue rebels and rivals—military campaigns, the building of roads and fortresses, the administrative organization of the territory and the appointment of governors.”

74 Da Riva (2009), 273.

75 Zawadzki (2008), 336.

76 The suggestion that texts referring to the 26th year (BM 77291; Nbk 165; 1884,0211.20) and 27th (BM 74723; Nbk 173; 1883,0118. AH.42) should also be connected with this campaign has to do with additional appearances of Ki-Šamaš (see BM 79664 in Table 5), where he receives sandals and bags “which belong to the equipment of the soldiers going on campaign;” Zawadzki (2008), 336. The

years of that conflict. The single-campaign theory arose from (i) the recurrence of the same individuals in a handful of the texts, often completing the same tasks or playing the same roles at the camp, and (ii) from the reference in BM 78828 to as much as ten months' worth of grain rations being sent for carpenters at the camp. But these same patterns are to be expected from any standing army on long-term campaign, whether that camp is stable (perhaps at a site like Riblah, not itself a military target) or being broken down and reestablished as the army moved.

**Table 5:** Administrative texts referring to *madāktu* that have been used to reconstruct the siege of Tyre<sup>77</sup>

Tablet No.	Regnal Year of Nebuch.	<i>Madāktu</i> Phrase(s)	Soldiers mentioned
BM 78828	28	Rations (incl. 10 <i>kur</i> of barley) and equipment [Four carpenters] for carpenters at a campaign camp ( <i>madāktu</i> )	
BM 56821 (CT <sup>78</sup> 55, 606)	29	10 sheep taken as offerings of the king “from the campaign camp” ( <i>ultu madāktu ibūkū</i> ).	Nūr-Šamaš + Šamaš-rē’ua
BM 79664	30	Silver and water bags “to bring to the campaign camp” ( <i>ana madāktu iššū</i> ) on behalf of two soldiers.	Kī-Šamaš + Šamaš-aḥ-iddin <sup>79</sup>
BM 57536 (CT 57, 377)	30	Sheep offerings taken from the campaign camp ( <i>ultu madāktu ibūkūnu</i> ).	[Bēl-at]ta-tale’i + Aḥūšunu
BM 63820	30	10 lamb offerings of the king taken from the campaign camp ( <i>ultu madāktu ibūkū</i> ); sheep offerings taken <i>ultu madāktu ibūkū</i> ; “to take the field” ( <i>ina madākti alāku</i> ).	Nūr-Šamaš + Aḥūšunu
BM 74919	31 [king not named]	Silver brought to the campaign camp ( <i>ana madāktu iššū</i> ) for the leatherworker and bronze-smith.	Šamaš-ana-bītišu

The *madāktu* texts outlined above are in fact not the only *madāktu* texts from Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. Two earlier texts may be enlightening: BM 49824 is dated to Nebuchadnezzar’s third year and discusses the delivery of supplies “for the

frequency of campaigning attested in the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle 5 precludes the assumption that these all reflect a single, immobile campaign in my view.

<sup>77</sup> This is a brief tabular summary of the texts compiled and discussed in Zawadzki (2008).

<sup>78</sup> Budge (1896).

<sup>79</sup> This individual is known from other three texts: an account dated to Nebuchadnezzar’s third year (BM 75606; Nbk 30; 1883. 0118,AH.955); and two receipts dated to Nebuchadnezzar’s 36th regnal year (BM 56770; CT 56, 29; 1882,0714.1178, and BM 75600; Nbk 304; 1883,0118. AH.949).

military camp at the disposal of the king” (*a-na ma-dak-ti a-na pa-ni* LUGAL). The same phrase appears in another supply text (BM 49439) dated to year eleven. Just as in the later corpus, these *madāktu* texts do not name the destination or location of the campaign/siege camp. Since both of these texts date to years covered by Chronicle 5, it is interesting to note that they do not seem to correspond to sieges at Levantine cities. The role played by Riblah, as portrayed in 2 Kings, seems to align with the *madāktu* texts’ depiction of a military camp where sheep were raised and sent to be sacrificed, carpenters and other craftsmen were employed, and the king was headquartered. Riblah, moreover, was located in a region in which the Babylonian army is known to have fought early in Nebuchadnezzar’s reign (i.e., that of Hamath, mentioned in Chronicle 5 as the site of a battle with Egypt in 605/4).

Another corpus of Babylonian cuneiform administrative texts from Nebuchadnezzar’s reign mentions a place called *Šurru* (Tyre). Joannès made a case for the identification of most occurrences not as the Phoenician city of Tyre, but a “New-Tyre”—named for the homeland of a group of Phoenicians deported to Babylon. Like many other towns named for cities in Ḫattu,<sup>80</sup> he suggested this *Šurru* was located somewhere between Uruk and Sippar (a distance of 250 km), in the Mesopotamian heartland:

Il apparaît donc que *Šurru* devait être au centre d’une zone agricole où certains sanctuaires tels l’Eanna d’Uruk, ou l’Ebabbar de Sippar possédaient des domaines, et il est probable qu’une partie du contingent des déportés tyriens a servi de main-d’oeuvre pour l’exploitation de ces propriétés ou pour la garde des troupeaux ...<sup>81</sup>

The *Šurru* corpus now includes texts from archives at Uruk (Eanna Temple), Sippar (Ebabbar), Nippur, and Marad (E-igi-kamma), dating from 574–563 (where preserved; they are summarized in Table 6).<sup>82</sup> However, Kleber restudied these texts (adding a few new ones to the corpus) and concluded the full group instead refers to the coastal Phoenician Tyre, a position which has drawn many Assyriologists to adopt it.<sup>83</sup>

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**80** The best known are those named for Judah (over 200 tablets from 572–484 BCE mention “Al-Yahudu”) and Neirab (of Syrian origin; Tolini 2015, 58–93), but communities from Quramat, Qadeš, Sidon, and Gaza (Cf. Tolini 2015, 65, and n. 31 for a summary of the debates surrounding these toponyms), as well as Arqa’ and Ashkelon (Zadok 2015, 108) are known during the sixth–fourth centuries.

**81** Joannès (1987), 150.

**82** See also the discussion in Vanderhoof (2003), 246.

**83** Kleber (2008), 141–154.

**Table 6:** Babylonian texts mentioning *Ṣurru*<sup>84</sup> (bolded texts incontrovertibly refer to Levantine Tyre)

Tablet Nomenclature	Provenance	Regnal Yr. of Nebuch. (date BCE)	Notes on <i>Ṣurru</i> reference
Ni 361	Nippur	31 (574)	Written at [New-?] Tyre ( <sup>URU</sup> <i>Ṣur-ri</i> )
PTS 2516	Uruk	31[+x] (>574)	Garment given to a man in New-Tyre ( <i>šā ina</i> <sup>URU</sup> <i>Ṣur-ru</i> ); written at [New-?] Tyre ( <sup>URU</sup> <i>Ṣur-ru</i> )
VS 20, 90	Uruk	34 (571)	Mentions some product (cedar? wool?) from [New-?] Tyre ( <i>šā</i> <sup>URU</sup> <i>Ṣur-ru</i> ).
BM 75155 (Nbk 287)	Sippar	35 (570)	Sale of sesame; mentions some product from [New-?] Tyre ( <i>šā</i> <sup>URU</sup> <i>Ṣu-ú-ru</i> )
AO 19926 (TEBR 44)	Uruk	38 (567)	Recruitment of ten archers; written at [New-?] Tyre ( <sup>URU</sup> <i>Ṣur-ru</i> )
PTS 3181	Uruk	39 (566)	Rations for oblates at the opening of a canal serving New-Tyre; written at [New-?] Tyre ( <i>in[a</i> <sup>URU</sup> <i>Ṣur-ru</i> )
BM 40546 (RP NS IV, 96)	Sippar	40 (565)	Contract for cows; written at [New-?] Tyre ( <sup>URU</sup> <i>Ṣur-ru</i> )
PTS 2992	Marad	40 (565)	Three sheep sold in [New-?] Tyre ( <i>šā ina</i> <sup>URU</sup> <i>Ṣur-ru</i> <sup>ki</sup> ); written at [New-?] Tyre ( <sup>URU</sup> <i>Ṣur-ru</i> )
BM 79658	Sippar	41 (564)	Supplies for 30 soldiers from [New-?] Tyre ( <i>šābē šā</i> <sup>URU</sup> <i>Ṣurru</i> ); mentions garments “for their tents” ( <i>ana maškanāti</i> ); Šamaš-šar-ušur delivers supplies
GC I 94	Uruk	41 (564)	Contract for shepherds' rations; written at [New-?] Tyre ( <sup>URU</sup> <i>Ṣur-ru</i> ); mentions the <i>šandabakku</i>
BM 58342 (CT 56, 47)	Sippar	[41? <sup>85</sup> ]	[Badly preserved] mentions soldiers and tents ( <i>maškanāti</i> )
<b>GC II 135</b>	Uruk	[42?]	<b>Supplies for four soldiers who “go against” the country of Tyre (<i>šā... ana</i> <sup>KUR</sup><i>Ṣur-ri illik</i>)</b>
GC I 169	Uruk	42 (563)	Date rations for 30 men of [New-?] Tyre ([ <i>šā</i> <sup>URU/</sup> <i>Ṣur-ru</i> ])
BM 70342	Sippar	42 (563)	Supplies [for soldiers of [New-?] Tyre] who went on a military expedition ( <i>(ana šābē šā</i> <sup>URU</sup> <i>Ṣurru) šā ana madākti illikki</i> ); Šamaš-šar-ušur delivers supplies

<sup>84</sup> Compiled in Unger (1926); Joannès (1982; 1987); Zawadzki (2003); Van der Brugge and Kleber (2016).

<sup>85</sup> The year is not mentioned, but the month (Ululu) was intercalated only in years 31, 32, and 41 of Nebuchadnezzar's reign.

Table 6: (continued)

Tablet Nomenclature	Provenance	Regnal Yr. of Nebuch. (date BCE)	Notes on <i>Šurru</i> reference
BM 56475 (CT 55, 228)	Sippar	[?]	Receipt for an iron object; written at [New-?] Tyre ( <sup>URU</sup> <i>Šur-ru</i> )
HE 163	Sippar	[?]	Letter concerning the arrival of shippers at Tyre ( <i>ana</i> <sup>URU</sup> <i>Šur-ru</i> ) along with a representative of the king ( <i>qīpu</i> )
GC I 151	Uruk	[?]	<b>Rations for the king and the soldiers who were sent as envoys “against the country of Tyre” (<i>ana</i> <sup>KUR</sup><i>Šur-ru</i>)</b>

Of interest for our current purposes, BM 79658, BM 70342, and GC I 169 might discuss the distribution of supplies for soldiers from Tyre or New-Tyre, in either case probably conscripted into the Babylonian army. GC II 135, and GC I 151 each contain the phrase *sābē ana Šurru*, designating supplies for soldiers sent “against Tyre,”<sup>86</sup> where Tyre is marked with the determinative for countries/regions (<sup>KUR</sup>), rather than that for cities (<sup>URU</sup>)—though this determinative is sometimes used in unexpected or inconsistent ways in Neo-Babylonian texts. Taken together, at a minimum these tablets indicate that a military campaign to Levantine Tyre occurred in 563/2. They might indicate the presence of a Tyrian community in the Mesopotamian heartland as early as 574, which might have contributed its own soldiers to the Babylonian army by 564. On the other hand, they might document a crew of Babylonian works at Phoenician Tyre as early as 591, who may have been placed there as part of a trading post or garrison.<sup>87</sup>

But evidence for Tyrians in Babylon may be pushed even earlier than 574/3 through examination of royal ration lists, the third type of relevant administrative texts for our purposes. Two texts found at the South Palace of Babylon, numbered Babylon 28178 and Babylon 28122,<sup>88</sup> are among those which discuss the payment of oil rations to artisans stationed at the royal court. The first mentions 190 sailors (*malāḥṭī*) from Tyre; the second includes another 126 unspecified Tyrians (<sup>LU</sup>*Šur-ra-a*) and is dated to Nebuchadnezzar’s thirteenth year (592 BCE). As with the

<sup>86</sup> Zawadzki (2003), 278 has argued they may discuss “(Babylonian) soldiers (on the expedition against) Tyre,” but this is based on his acceptance of Katzenstein’s chronology for the long siege of Tyre, and not the straightforward grammatical construction of the phrase.

<sup>87</sup> Kleber (2008), 144–145; van der Brugge and Kleber (2016), 161–162.

<sup>88</sup> Published in Weidner (1939).

earlier *Šurru* texts interpretation, these tablets may refer to people from Tyre who have been hired, deported, or otherwise transferred to Mesopotamia. The inclusion of the first group's profession, along with their collective presence at Nebuchadnezzar's royal court, indicates the high status of these (perhaps unwilling, but nevertheless valued) guests of the king. While the population(s) of Tyrians living in Neo-Babylonian Mesopotamia (along with, perhaps, certain Tyrian kings mentioned by Josephus) might have come in the wake of the long siege of Tyre, the redistribution of Levantine populations in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods provides plenty of historical opportunities for these communities to have been established.

Josephus himself writes that “prisoners of war” were taken to Babylon, some of Phoenician origin, as early as 605/4 when no specific punitive actions against these cities had yet been undertaken. In *AJ* 10, the discussion of Nebuchadnezzar's ascension to the throne of Babylon reads (emphasis added):

222 And having learned not a long time later of the death of his father, and having settled the affairs of Egypt and the rest of the region, Nabouchodonosor assigned to some of his friends the task of carrying up to Babylon the prisoners of war from the Judean, Phoenician, Syrian, and Egyptian peoples with the heaviest force and the rest of the plunder, while he himself hastened through the desert with a few men and arrived in Babylon.

223 And after taking over the affairs that had been managed by Chaldeans [...] and after becoming master of his father's whole empire, he arranged for settlements to be assigned to the prisoners of war, on their arrival, in the most suitable places in Babylon. Then he himself lavishly adorned both the temple of Bel and the rest of the temples out of the spoils of war [...].”

Thus, the community of Tyrians in the Mesopotamian heartland could have been established at the turn of the sixth century, with populations in enclaves between Uruk and Sippar (including in the capital of Babylon itself). Individuals there worked the arable land, served some kind of military service—for which they were supplied by the state—and perhaps the community grew and waned as relationships between Babylon and Levantine Tyre changed.

Certainly, Nebuchadnezzar frequently demanded tribute from Tyre and all other important Levantine cities; probably dozens of such demands were made throughout his forty-three-year reign. Undoubtedly labor and other supplies were sent from the leading Levantine cities to Babylon as contribution to specific building projects; these may have been yearly requirements, or ‘requested’ on an as-needed basis. As several biblical texts reiterate, the burden of allegiance to Babylon was real and Egypt may have periodically seemed like the lesser of two evils to these small Levantine states. The texts in Ezek. 26 and 29 may well reflect actual siege tactics used by Nebuchadnezzar (at Tyre or other cities); the Babylonian army probably visited Tyre and its dependents more than once, sending at least

one verifiable military expedition there in 563/2. But like other sieges of cities in the region, any military siege of Tyre was probably no more than one to three years in length, with Nebuchadnezzar overseeing it and other military operations from a more permanent base at Riblah (about 180 km from Tyre). There is even a possibility that a more passive blockade continued for a longer period of time, with Babylonian soldiers enforcing Tyre's inability to move goods from its island or land-side ports inland. None of these possibilities require scholars to characterize Nebuchadnezzar's investment in the region of Tyre in Josephan terms.

As Nebuchadnezzar's monumental inscriptions in Lebanon indicate, in addition to the obvious allure of Tyre's potential tribute, his interest in the central coastal Levant also included access to the inland cedar forests. The language of protection and construction in the legible monumental texts indicate that he may have worked with inland tribes to 'cut out the middleman' of the Phoenician coastal cities to establish a reliable route to the cedars and control over their products. Tyre's increasing burden of payment to Babylon (after centuries of supplying Assyria), coupled with the potential loss of control over cedar and other inland trade would have been more than enough to weaken its political influence over and trading connections to its western colonies, even while Tyre—by all accounts—seems to have retained its kingship and not to have been fully plundered by the Babylonians, whatever form their interest in the city took.

The Josephan reference to a 'thirteen-year' siege of Tyre seems to have preserved an accurate memory of the change in the city-state's status while embellishing with precision that may be unwarranted (but may have made for a better story to his first-century CE Roman Judean audience familiar with the drama of protracted displays of military strategy). Like the other uncorroborated siege of Tyre mentioned by Josephus—purportedly undertaken by the Neo-Assyrian ruler Shalmeneser V (727–722 BCE; *AJ* 9.283)<sup>89</sup>—the specific length of the Josephan account of the Neo-Babylonian siege should be relegated to a footnote in the story of first millennium Tyre. Removing this specific detail from its central place in discussions of the chronology of Neo-Babylonian period Levantine historiography frees Phoenician archaeologists and historians to explore in more novel ways the nature of Tyre's decline, including the role various forms of imperial pressure may have played in reshaping the relationships between Levantine coastal cities, inland communities, and western colonial settlements in the sixth century.

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<sup>89</sup> In several recent Phoenician histories, this account is either omitted, e.g. Peckham (2014); Mar-koe (2000), or heavily discounted e.g. Elayi (2018), 166.



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