Maciej Grabowski

Tombs on the Borders of the City : Funerary Use of Babylon's City Walls During the So-Called Late Periods

Światowit : rocznik poświęcony archeologii przeddziejowej i badaniom pierwotnej kultury polskiej i słowiańskiej 12 (53)/A, 25-38

2014

Maciej Grabowski

Tombs on the Borders of the City – Funerary Use of Babylon's City Walls During the So-Called Late Periods

Keywords: Babylon, burial customs, city walls, Achaemenid Period, Seleucid Period, Parthian Period

Religious, socio-cultural and possibly economic factors determining the location of tombs and cemeteries remain one of the less known aspects of Mesopotamian burial customs (Postgate 1990: 234). Taking into account the very basic opposition between intramural and extramural burial sites, it is clear that throughout the history of ancient Mesopotamia the former took preponderance with a diversified funerary use of urban space, including burials in living quarters and houses themselves. A particularly interesting choice of location eluding the abovementioned opposition, is represented by the burials discovered in the ruins of city walls, i.e., on the borders of the proper urban space. Late periods in Babylon provide some of the most explicit examples of this type of secondary use of city walls, and these will be investigated in the present paper.

One must remember that in the Mesopotamian literary tradition, city walls were perceived not only as a settlement's physical boundary and a measure of protection against external enemies. They were also a barrier in cosmological terms, separating the "city" (Akkadian *ālu*) from the "steppe" (Akk. *ṣēru*), the cultivated land from the wilderness, and order from chaos. For this reason, in the text of *tākultu* ritual, Babylon's city walls were designated with the Sumerian sign DINGIR (Akk. *ilu(m)*, "god, deity") and enlisted along with other divinities to which offerings were made by the king (Pongratz-Leisten 1994: 25).

The sacral significance of city walls could have been the reason why the custom of burying the dead in their brick massif was not a common one. Its most explicit evidence may be found in Ashur where numerous tombs were discovered along the city walls. The earliest examples are dated to the Middle-Assyrian Period, but the majority come from the Neo-Assyrian times when the city's inner wall fell into ruin. The practice continued into the Post-Assyrian and eventually Parthian Period (Haller 1954; Andrae, Lenzen 1933; Mofidi Nasrabadi 1999: 83–89). It was also inherited by the Muslims who preferred to bury their dead on dry raised grounds outside the settlements. Naturally, ancient tells and ruined mud brick fortifications were most suitable for that purpose, so much in fact that Walter Andrae observed that burials in the old walls of Baghdad were practiced even in his own times (Andrae, Lenzen 1933: 91).

Obviously, neither in Ashur nor in Babylon, the city walls were not the only structures serving as a place of burial. During the late periods in Babylon the dead were buried in the ruined houses, on the streets and squares, e.g., in the residential district of Merkes. Burials were even found in the ruins of Esagila, as well as in the *palaestra* and the stage building of the Hellenistic theatre. On Qasr, the Late Parthian cemetery was situated on the main courtyard of the Southern Palace. Mound Babil, where the Summer Palace of Nebuchadnezzar II was located, also served as a necropolis between Seleucid and Sasanian times. It is reasonable to assume that before burials were made in these structures, most of them had already lost their original function, however, the paucity of archaeological evidence provided by the early 20th c. publications of the *Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft* does not allow to resolve these issues in a definite manner, and the excavations conducted on the monumental city walls of Babylon are not exceptional in that matter.

These walls, which even today remain an outstanding feature of the local landscape, are primarily the work of King Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 BC). Since Herodotus their magnitude kindled the imagination of Greek and later Latin authors, who described them with various exaggerations (Boiy 2004: 73–76). Today we know that the inner city wall measured no less than 8.05 km in length, whereas the outer city was encompassed by the wall ca. 10.6 km long, called *Osthaken* by the German scholars. Supplemented by a series of river- and moat-walls, Babylon's city walls formed undoubtedly one of the most immense and complex fortification systems in the ancient Near East.

The excavations of the city walls of Babylon conducted by the DOG brought to light at least five burial sites: three at the inner city wall, one at the outer wall, and another one by the wall situated half-way between Qasr and Mound Babil (**Fig. 1**). Differences in scale suggest that some of them were only occasional places of burial, whereas others must have played a role of cemeteries used over a considerable time. Yet even a broad assessment of a total number of graves they consisted of is impossible, due to scarcity of the information provided in the main publications.

Osthaken

Unfortunately, the late history of the *Osthaken* is mostly unknown, as the wall does not appear in the available Late-Babylonian cuneiform tablets. The account of

Berossus, a native Babylonian historiographer quoted by Flavius Josephus (*Contra Apionem* I.152), about Cyrus' order to raze "the walls of the outer city," supports Robert Koldewey's assumption that by the Parthian Period, the *Osthaken* presented no real defensive qualities (Koldewey 1913: 4). However, in the light of the major building works ascribed to the Late Parthian or Sasanian Period, which transformed remains of the Summer Palace into a fortress, some late renovations of the outer wall's northernmost parts cannot be excluded (Heinsch, Kuntner 2011: 505–506).

The *Osthaken* was superficially investigated on a length of ca. 830 m during brief excavations conducted south-east of Mound Babil (Wetzel 1930: pls. 2, 3). It consisted of two lines of fortifications, with the outer one only fragmentarily excavated. The space between them was filled with rubble, and the main wall was furnished with so-called cavalier towers (Wetzel 1930: 70–74).

The excavation report offers only a short notice regarding late burials discovered along the outer city wall. According to Koldewey, when its condition deteriorated to a degree it could not afford any protection, it began to serve as a cemetery. Most of the graves had a form of cavity dug into the wall's massif, and many of them contained poorly preserved terracotta coffins dated supposedly to the Parthian Period, although simple pit graves were also encountered (Koldewey 1913: 4).

Almost nothing specific is known about the locations and quantities of these tombs. Published plans representing nearly the whole of the investigated part of the wall, include only two graves (**Fig. 2**). The sketch quite clearly represents a pair of the so-called *Pantoffelsarkophage* or "slipper coffins," a characteristic coffin type for the 1st–2nd c. AD in Babylonia, with oval opening and tubular, flat-bottomed and tapering body, often glazed and decorated. This elaborate type of body receptacle must have been utilised by at least moderately wealthy citizens, whose distinctive status finds further confirmation in the fact that many slipper coffins were unearthed in the main courtyard of the Southern Palace; several were also found in the theatre on Mound Homera and in the so-called "Parthian house" on 'Amran ibn 'Ali, however, not a single one comes from the living quarter at Merkes.

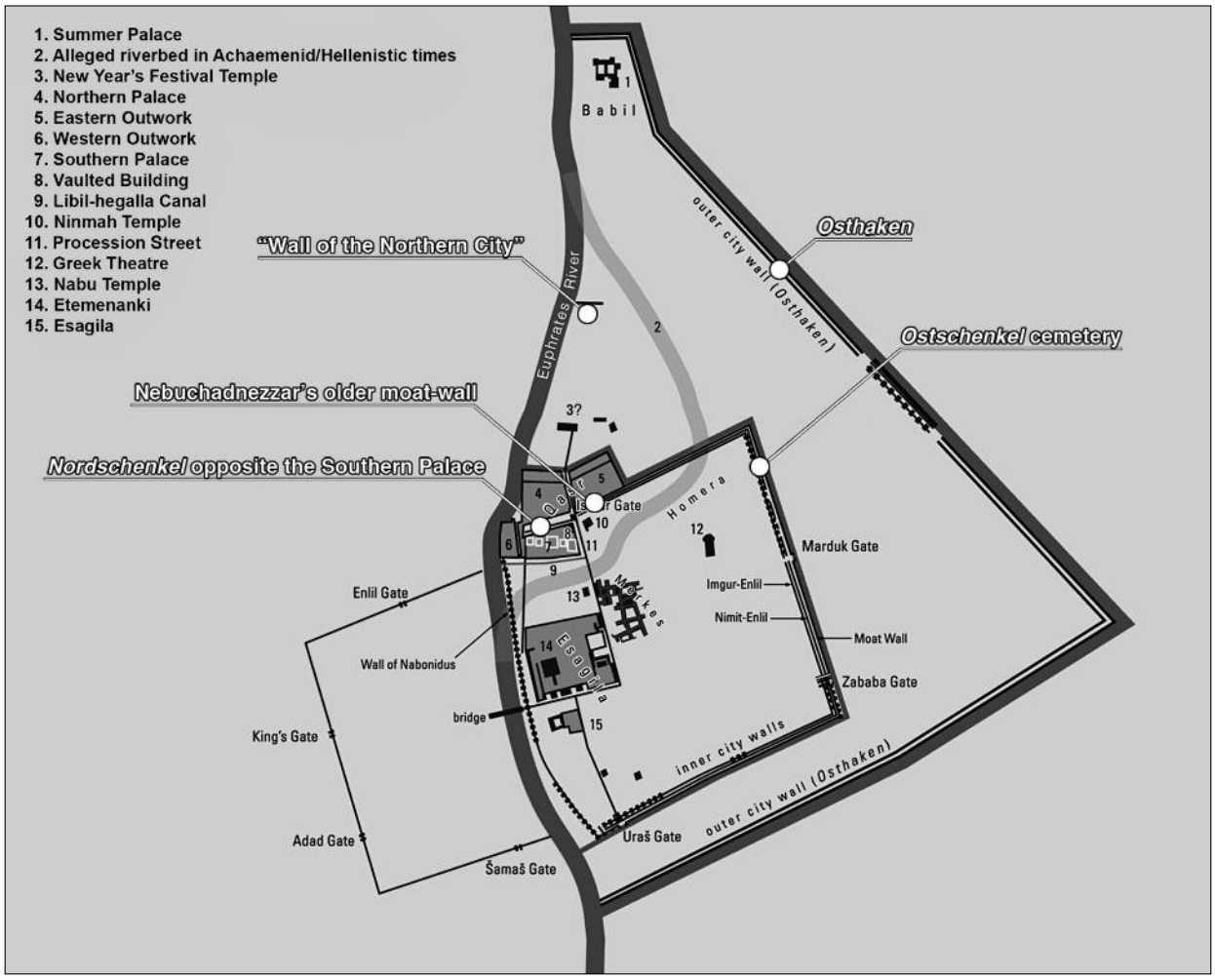

Fig. 1. Babylon and the burial sites in its city walls (Drawing M. Grabowski).

Ryc. 1. Plan Babilonu z cmentarzyskami na terenie murów miejskich.

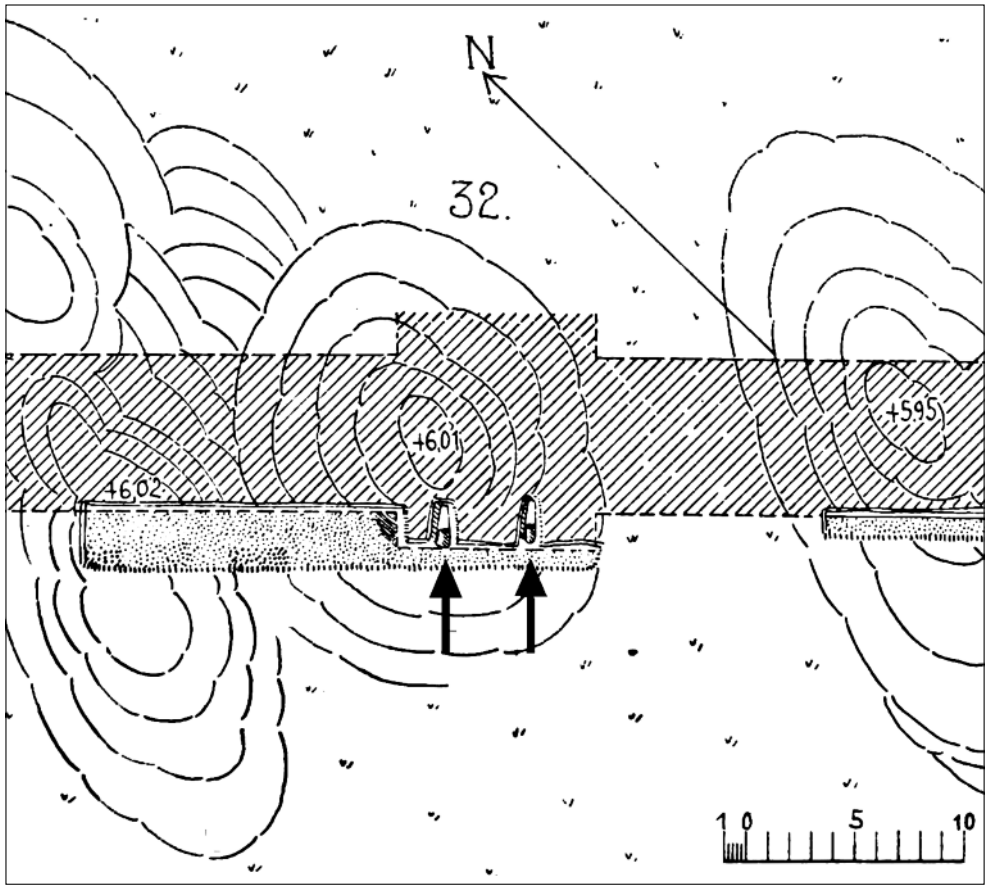

Fig. 2. Detail of the outer city wall (Wetzel 1930: pl. 59).

Ryc. 2. Fragment planu muru zewnętrznego.

Both slipper coffins in the area of the *Osthaken* were inserted into deep cavities or loculi carved in the western façade of Tower 32, ca. 1.22 km from Mound Babil (Wetzel 1930: 72, pl. 59:part III). The fact that they were wholly embedded into the tower's massif and not buried in its rubble, suggests that the wall was still at least partially standing at the time the burials were made. Furthermore, it is clear that this area was situated in a considerable distance from the diminished settlement of Parthian Babylon, and the burial site should be perceived as external in relation to the inhabited parts of the city.

The supposed wall of the Northern City

Late, presumably Parthian, graves were also reported from the vicinity of the wall situated to the north of the so-called *Nordstadt* (Northern City), also known as the Eastern Tell. This elevated plateau stretching to the north from Qasr, was extensively occupied in Seleucid and Parthian times (Hauser 1999: 211–214; Schmidt, Finster 2002). A clue regarding the wall's condition at that time is provided by an astronomical diary dated to 123 BC, which suggests that the wall included the city's "outer gate" mentioned as being situated "above the gate of Ištar" (Sachs, Hunger 1996: No. -122A obv. 5). If the gate's location is correct, the text confirms functioning of the wall at least at the beginning of the Parthian rule over Babylonia (Grabowski 2014: 155).

The chain of low hills concealing the wall extends on a length of 220 m, from the bank of the Euphrates eastwards. It was only fragmentarily excavated, and the gateway was not found. Although modern channels completely destroyed its eastern limits, Friedrich Wetzel suggested that the wall may have reached the northern stretch of the inner city fortifications (Wetzel 1930: 69, pls. 1, 4, 57), thus encircling the whole area of the Northern City. Furthermore, Giovanni Bergamini interpreted the wall as a part of dock connected to Nabonidus' river-wall (Bergamini 1977: 129). More recently it has been suggested that the wall was meant to shelter the city from sudden levies (Lippolis, Monopoli, Baggio 2011: 6).

Regardless of its function, at some point the area of the wall was used for burials, as two terracotta coffins were found near the south-western corner of Tower 2 (**Fig. 3**). They were lying next to each other, along the axis of the wall, certainly not embedded in the wall's massif. It is, however, impossible to tell whether they were buried in its debris, and thus after its collapse. According to Wetzel's brief description, one of the coffins was green-glazed with an unglazed cover, while the other one was unglazed. Both were compared with the coffins found in the Merkes quarter, and on this basis dated to the Parthian Period (Wetzel 1930: 69).

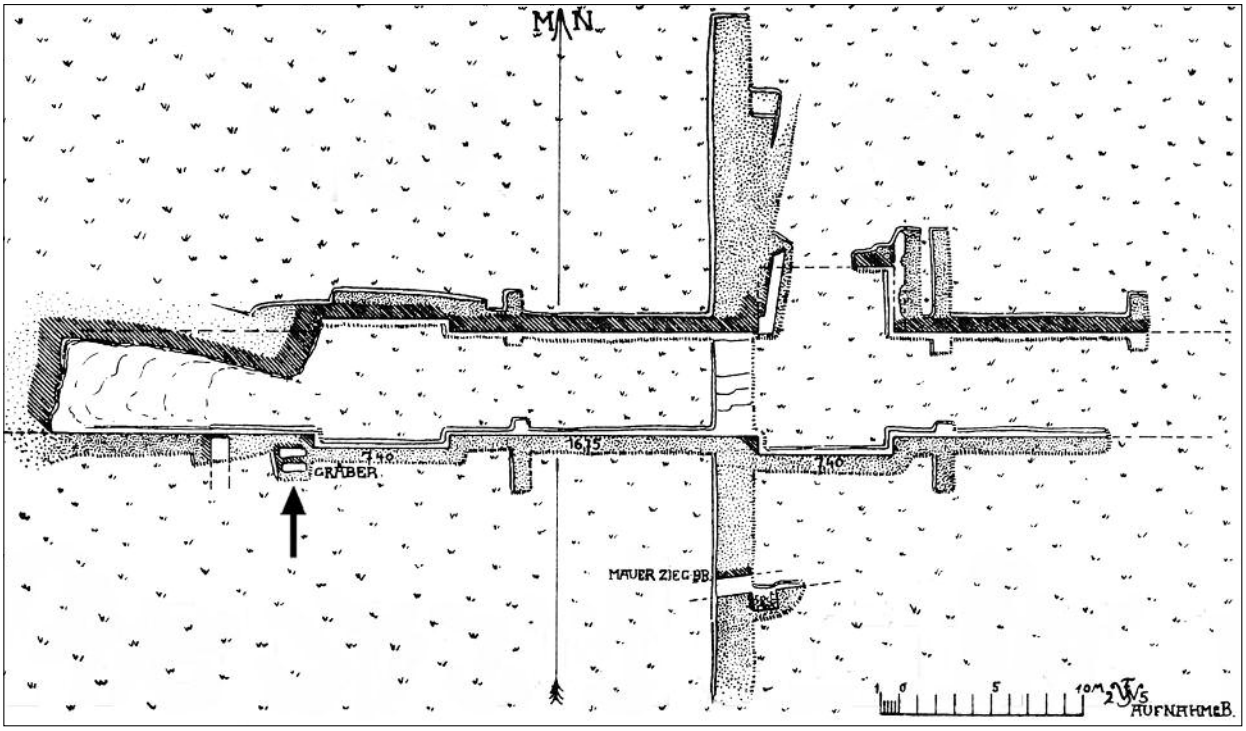

Fig. 3. The supposed wall of the Northern City (Wetzel 1930: pl. 57).
Ryc. 3. Domniemany mur Miasta Północnego.

Inner city walls

Monumental fortifications encompassing the rectangular inner city consisted of the main wall and the front wall, called Imgur-Enlil and Nīmit-Enlil respectively; the latter was furthermore faced by an embankment and a broad moat. Apart from the so-called Nabonidus' wall that protected the river bank, German excavators ascribed the construction of these fortifications to Nebuchadnezzar II (Wetzel 1930). More recently, however, Sandra Heinsch and Walter Kuntner argued that the architectural history of Babylon's city walls is considerably longer and much more complex than it was hitherto considered (Heinsch, Kuntner 2011).

The idea that inner fortifications of Babylon were not finished during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II and his immediate successors finds support in the cuneiform sources of Achaemenid date, including the famous *Cyrus Cylinder*, which explicitly states that Cyrus strengthened the fortifications of Imgur-Enlil and completed the baked brick embankment of the moat (*Cyrus Cylinder* 38–40). Even though no similar restoration or building works on the city walls are documented for the Seleucid times, one should not exclude regular reparations, as Seleucids, just like their predecessors, acted as legitimate rulers of Babylon. Their pious attitude towards the city and its walls is claimed in a text of one of the New Year's festival rituals that includes a declaration from the king that he did not destroy the city walls of Babylon (Rollinger 2013: 143–145).

No comparable testimonies are available for the subsequent Parthian times, but the inner city walls were mentioned in two fragments of astronomical diaries dated to 125 BC, both reporting of Arab attacks on Babylon (Sachs, Hunger 1996: 265, 269). One of them mentions a collapse of walls in an unclear context (ibid.: No. -124A obv. 8'), whereas the other one informs of a breach made in the wall by the attackers, somewhere in the vicinity of Zababa Gate (ibid.: No. -124A rev. 5'), thus undoubtedly in the wall's south-eastern section. Both accounts indicate that at least by the last quarter of the 2nd c. BC, the inner city walls remained the main line of defense against external threat.

As one may infer from a fragment of the *Epitome* of the *Philippic History* of Pompeius Trogus by Justin (XLII.4.2), the fortifications of Babylon were still in use even in the mid- 1st c. BC, when the city got involved in the Arsacid dynastic struggles. At that time a deposed Parthian King Mithridates (III) took shelter in Babylon, where he was subsequently besieged by his brother Orodes (II). According to Justin, the city was able to withstand the siege for some time and its eventual surrender was caused by famine. This implies that direct incursions on the city were ineffective and speaks for the efficiency of its defensive system even in this particularly late period.

In the light of all of the abovementioned textual evidence it is reasonable to assume that the walls of the inner city must have been to some extent continuously maintained and repaired not only by the Achaemenids, but also by the Seleucids and possibly the Arsacids as well.

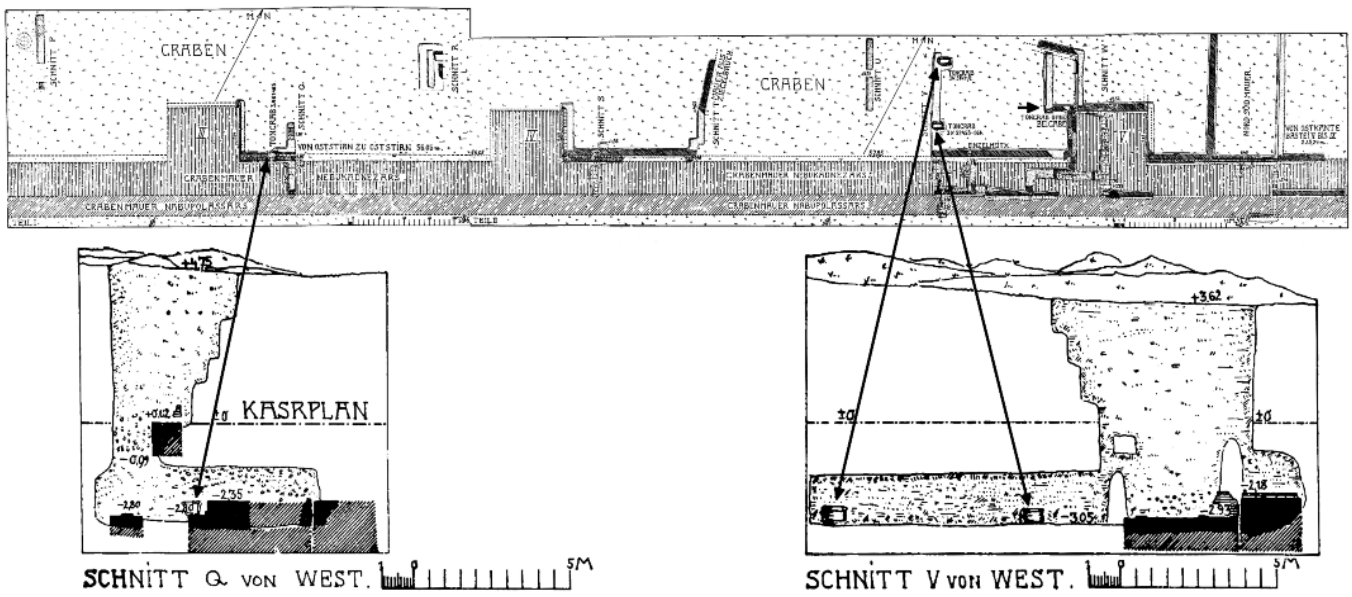

Fig. 4. Fragment of the older moat-wall of Nebuchadnezzar with Sections Q and V (Wetzel 1930: pl. 30).
Ryc. 4. Fragment starszego muru fosowego Nabuchodonozora z profilami Q i V.

Consequently, the presence of graves in these fortifications appears as a puzzling element in their complex history. Especially intriguing is the large cemetery on the northern part of the *Ostschenkel*, i.e., the eastern arm of the inner city walls. Several graves were also discovered along the so-called older moat-wall and the *Nordschenkel* (the northern arm of the inner city walls) opposite the Southern Palace.

The older moat-wall

Four graves were discovered in the excavation tunnels along the older moat-wall of Nebuchadnezzar (*ältere Grabenmauer Nebukadnezars*), in the southern part of the fortified area known as the Eastern Outwork (Wetzel 1930: 39–43). On the plan of the area, the graves were designated by the excavators as "*Tongräber*," due to the use of terracotta coffins as body receptacles (**Fig. 4**).

One of them was located east of Tower III directly by the wall and its foundations (level: -2.80 m); two other were encountered further east at a corresponding level (ca. -3.05 m). Just several meters eastwards, the excavators came across remains of a structure constructed of broken bricks abutting to the north-western corner of Tower V. As noted by Wetzel, another "*Tongrab*" containing no grave goods was discovered by the walls of the abovementioned structure (Wetzel 1930: 46). Whether it was a dwelling, and whether the burial was made during its occupation cannot be determined.

According to the sketches depicted on the plan, all of the coffins bear close resemblance to each other with one end rounded and the other one straight. In terms of size, however, they must have differed considerably, with the first one being perhaps a child's coffin (0.65 m long, 0.4 m wide and 0.2 m high), whereas one of the group from the vicinity of Tower V was somewhat larger (1.2 m long, 0.43–0.65 m wide and 0.5 m high) (Wetzel 1930: 41, 46). It seems clear that all of these coffins can be ascribed to the so-called bathtub type, also known as *Hockersarkophage*, due to the fact that they were primarily suited for body in flexed or semi-flexed position.

Eva Strommenger (1964: fig. 1) dated this particular coffin type to between the 8th and the mid- 4th c. BC, but one cannot exclude its survival even in later times. Over the centuries this particular coffin type underwent a steady development in which the receptacle was becoming gradually longer and lower (Baker 1995: 213, fig. 25:4). Thus with the approximate length of ca. 1.2 m, the coffins found near Tower V represent the later version of the bathtub type, whose examples discovered at Sippar and Ur were assigned to the Achaemenid Period based on the accompanying pottery (Baker 1995: 214–215, with notes 78–81).

Such a date is also very plausible for the graves unearthed by the older moat-wall. Wetzel pointed out that these burials were made after the destruction of the Eastern Outwork (Wetzel 1930: 41) by recurring levies resulting from the shift of the Euphrates riverbed that might have taken place early in Achaemenid times (Koldewey 1932: 36; Wetzel, Schmidt, Mallwitz 1957: 1). Of course, in this particular area, the wall itself ceased to perform its primary function and could have been partially dismantled already during the Neo-Babylonian Period due to the construction of the Eastern Outwork and the relocation of the moat to the latter's northern and eastern sides. Consequently, when the burials were made, the wall was most likely hardly recognisable on the surface.

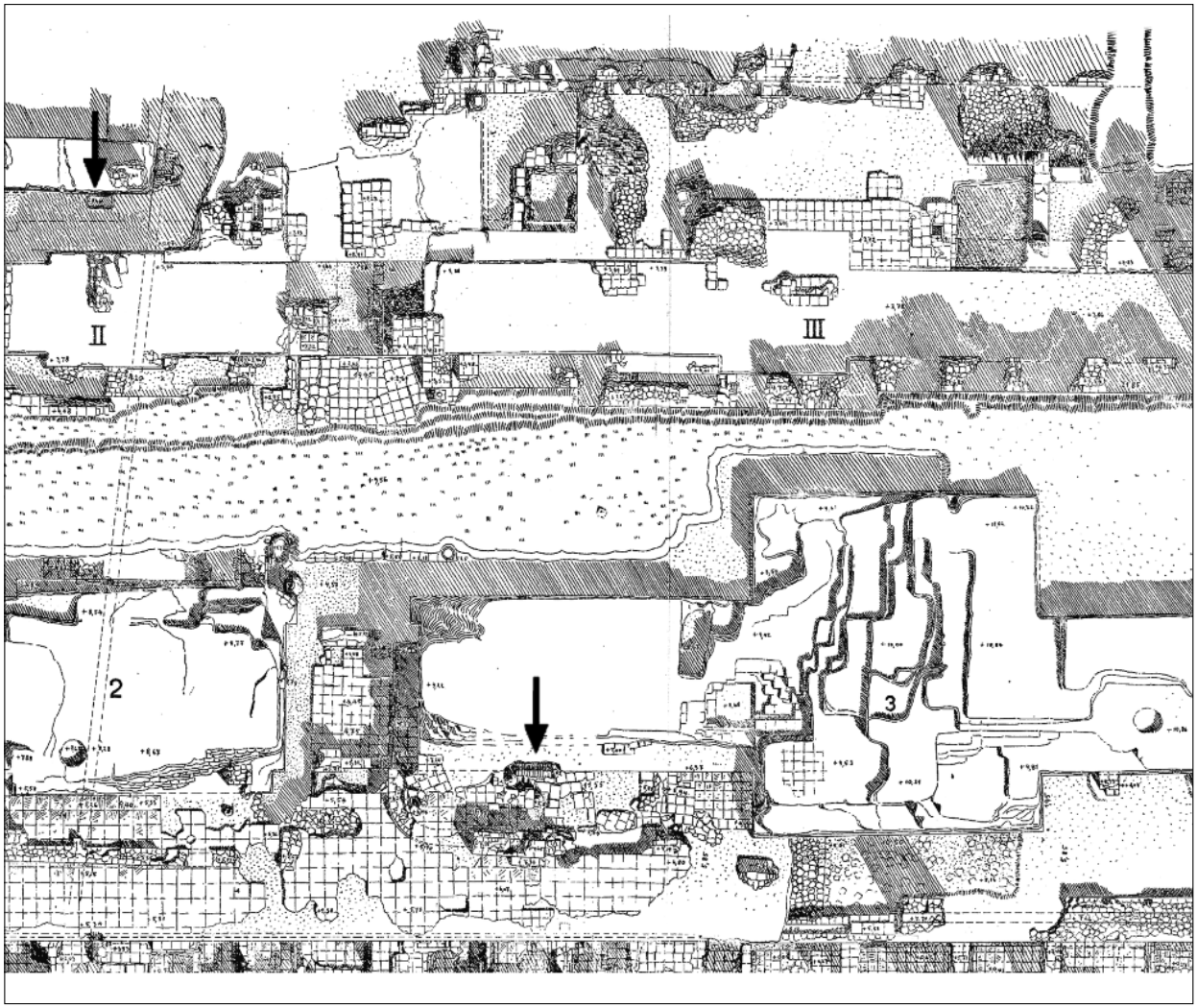

Fig. 5. Fragment of the *Nordschenkel* opposite the Southern Palace (Wetzel 1930: pl. 13).
Ryc. 5. Fragment planu północnego odcinka muru wewnętrznego (*Nordschenkel*) naprzeciwko Pałacu Południowego.

Nordschenkel opposite the Southern Palace

Possibly one of the earliest graves in the area of the *Nordschenkel* stretching along the Southern Palace was situated next to a partition wall opposite Tower II of Nīmit-Enlil (Wetzel 1930: pl. 13). Since the sketch on the plan clearly represents a short coffin, most likely of the bathtub type similar to those from the vicinity of the older moat-wall, we may suggest an Achaemenid date.

While the abovementioned coffin was totally omitted in Wetzel's description of the area, a brief notice was dedicated to the group of gable-roofed brick tombs discovered on the street running between Imgur-Enlil and the northern wall of the Southern Palace. These tombs were apparently buried amongst series of late walls of broken brick built upon the uppermost pavement of large (51×51 cm) clay tiles stamped with the inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II (Wetzel 1930: 16, pl. 17:level III). Yet only one of these tombs was depicted on the plan (**Fig. 5**). Furthermore, it was provided with a cross-section (**Fig. 6**) that reveals that the tomb was constructed in a specially prepared cavity (bottom level: +5.09 m) sunken under the uppermost pavement (ca. +5.95 m in the vicinity of the tomb) and cutting slightly into the brick massif of Imgur-Enlil (Wetzel 1930: pls. 13, 17, 19, 22, 23). The tomb was accompanied by two large jars, supposedly of a ritualistic purpose, which were also dug into the street's pavement.

The cross-section clearly shows that the level from which the cavity was dug, could not have been much higher than the uppermost pavement of the street. It seems, therefore, that at the time of the burial the street was still in use, and so was probably the wall that towered over it. Based on its type, which was commonly found also in other parts of the city, the grave itself comes either from Seleucid or Parthian times, roughly between 300 BC and AD 200, according to the chronology proposed by Joachim Oelsner (1986: 122, n. 481).

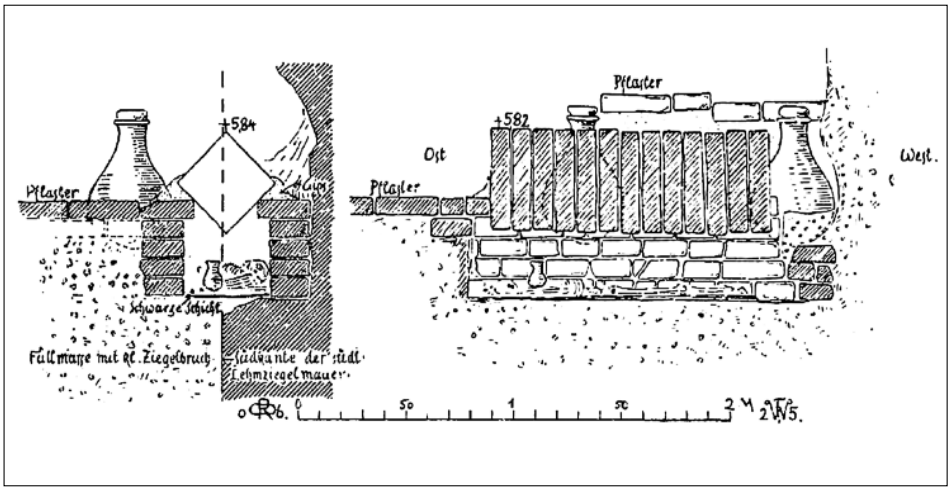

Fig. 6. Gable-roofed brick tomb from the street between the Southern Palace and the *Nordschenkel* (Wetzel 1930: pl. 22).

Ryc. 6. Grób ceglany z dachem dwuspadowym odkryty na ulicy między Pałacem Południowym a północnym odcinkiem muru wewnętrznego (*Nordschenkel*).

Ostschenkel cemetery

Wetzel's publication offers considerably more information about the cemetery located on the so-called *Ostschenkel*, despite the fact that most of the documentation, including detailed records of individual burials, stratigraphic data and inventory description, was lost during the evacuation of the German expedition in 1917 (Wetzel 1930: 25).

According to the plans of the north-eastern part of the inner city walls (**Fig. 7**), the burial site was situated on a ca. 100 m long stretch between Towers 7 and 11 of Imgur-Enlil, opposite the northern outskirts of Mound Homera. At first glance, the layout of the cemetery appears disorganised with terracotta coffins scattered along the fortifications. One should notice, however, two apparent concentrations of graves: one on the western and one on the eastern slope of the artificial elevation that concealed the ruined walls. Many of the coffins were also arranged either in parallel or perpendicular position in relation to the walls but no orientation pattern can be distinguished.

In terms of the archaeological context, Wetzel's notice that the graves were sunken in the debris, as well as in the brick massif of the walls, is of vital importance. On this basis Wetzel concluded that the burials were made after the walls had fallen in ruin rising not much higher than they were during the excavations (Wetzel 1930: 25). Unfortunately, none of these conclusions can be verified without the lost documentation, sections and level measurements, which is why further inquiry can be based only on grave typology and the scant available information about grave inventories.

The burial site comprised of nearly 170 graves of which 15 representative specimens were described and illustrated in Wetzel's publication. About 149 of these graves, therefore a vast majority consisted of burials in unglazed terracotta coffins of several types, while the rest represented the category of late brick tombs.

As far as the terracotta coffins are considered, at least five main types can be distinguished. These include bathtub coffins (**Fig. 8:a**) and a vastly more numerous group of the so-called inverted coffins, which were not only shallower and longer, but also placed in inverted position

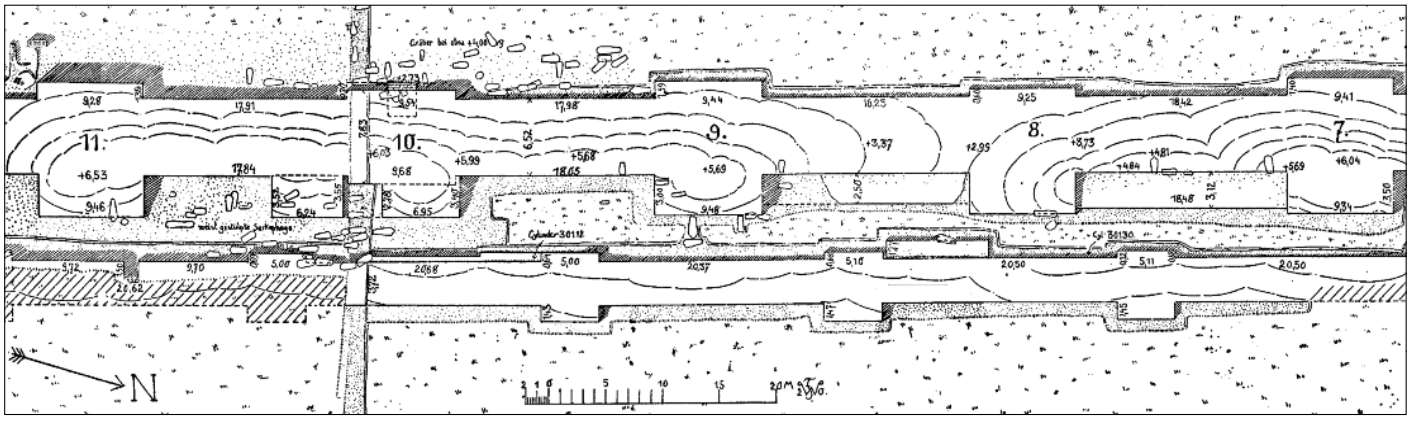

Fig. 7. The *Ostschenkel* cemetery (Wetzel 1930: pls. 32:part II, 33).

Ryc. 7. Cmentarzysko na wschodnim odcinku muru wewnętrznego (*Ostschenkel*).

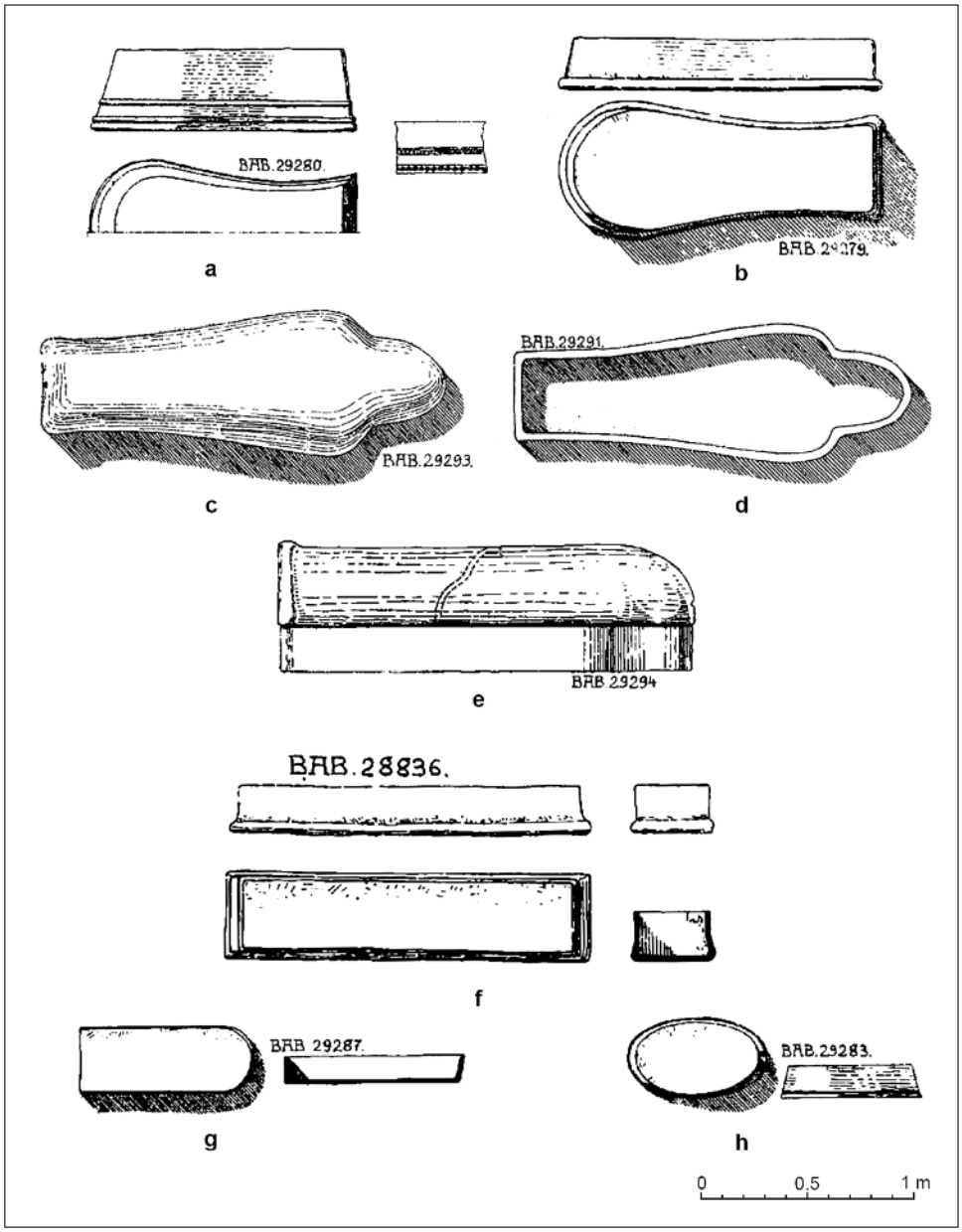

Fig. 8. Terracotta coffins from the *Ostschenkel* cemetery (Wetzel 1930: pl. 39: a–c,e–g,i,k).

Ryc. 8. Terakotowe sarkofagi z cmentarzyska na wschodnim odcinku muru wewnętrznego (*Ostschenkel*).

over the body (as the so-called "*Stülper*") (**Fig. 8:b**). Both coffin types were suited exclusively for burial in flexed or semi-flexed position. Another outstanding coffin type encountered at the *Ostschenkel* cemetery were anthropoid coffins (**Fig. 8:c–e**) most of which were also placed over the bodies, arranged presumably in extended position. Two remaining coffin types include a shallow, rectangular coffin (**Fig. 8:f**), as well as a considerable group of children coffins, predominantly oval in shape (**Fig. 8:g,h**).

Wetzel's description also includes several types of brick tombs differing in terms of construction technique. Following more recent typologies, in which the main criterion was the form of roof (e.g., Litvinsky 1983: 85–86, 107; Pestle 1999: 35–37; Messina 2006: 140–143), only four types can be distinguished at the *Ostschenkel* cemetery. Their roofs were constructed of bricks laid either flat (**Fig. 9:a**) or leaned against each other (**Fig. 9:b**) or set edgewise in a row (**Fig. 9:c**), in both latter cases forming the so-called gable roof. Some of the most spacious brick tombs were covered with a gable roof that combined these two techniques (**Fig. 9:d**). Other characteristic traits of these tombs include plaster coating and a shallow, elongated terracotta coffin placed inside (Wetzel 1930: 26).

One should also mention that the burial activities on the eastern arm of the inner city walls were not confined to the cemetery investigated by the DOG. In 1979 an unspecified number of graves was discovered by Iraqi archaeologists in the area closer to the north-eastern corner of the inner city walls. According to a brief report, the tombs were dated to the late periods on ceramic grounds, and most of them were located on the eastern side of the fortifications (Mohamed 1979–1981: 21). No information about

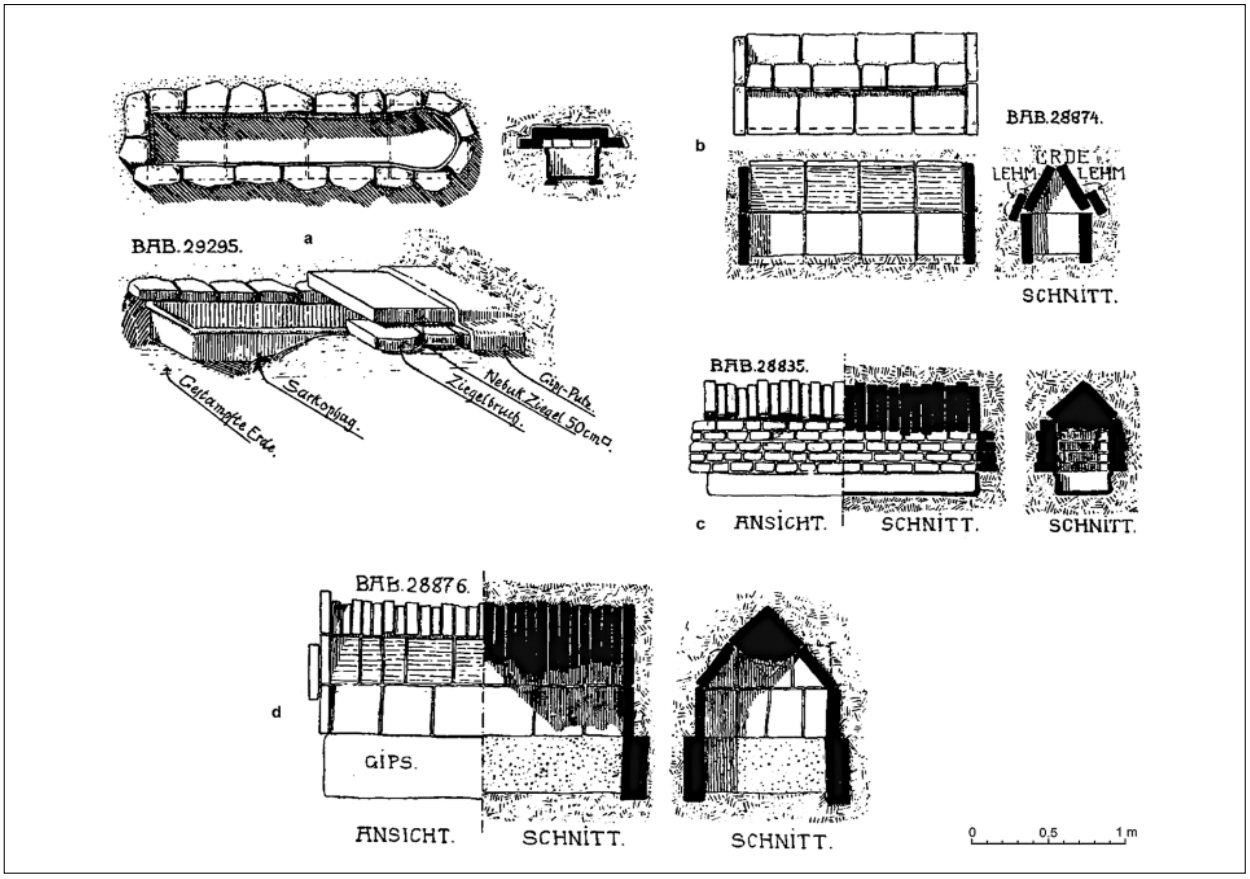

Fig. 9. Brick tombs from the *Ostschenkel* cemetery (Wetzel 1930: pl. 39:m–p).

Ryc. 9. Ceglane groby z cmentarzyska na wschodnim odcinku muru wewnętrznego *Ostschenkel*.

the form of these burials was provided, but one of the published photographs (**Fig. 10**) shows several terracotta coffins set upright, whose shape is, however, difficult to recognise.

As nothing specific can be said about the coffins discovered during the Iraqi excavations, the available typological information is chronologically indicative in general terms only. The bathtub coffins from the cemetery investigated

Fig. 10. Iraqi excavations at the north-eastern corner of the inner city walls (Mohamed 1979–1981, fig. 20 in Arabic section).

Ryc. 10. Irackie wykopaliska przy północno-wschodnim narożniku muru wewnętrznego.

by the DOG, which measure ca. 1.3 m in length and 0.4 m in height,[1] clearly fall into the late group of this type dating most probably to the Achaemenid times (Baker 1995: 214–215, fig. 25:4). A Late Achaemenid date is usually assigned to the inverted coffins, by far the most numerous coffin type at the cemetery, represented by 93 examples, although at Merkes these coffins were also encountered in the layers associated with the Seleucid and Parthian occupation.[2] Further implications come from the note included on the plan (*meist gestülpte Sarkophage*) indicating that inverted coffins were concentrated on the eastern side of Imgur-Enlil (**Fig. 7**). On the same side of the wall, the plan allows to recognise most of the anthropoid coffins dated, according to a recent study, to the Late Achaemenid and Seleucid times (Richter 2002: 296). Thus the area may have formed an earlier part of the cemetery established hypothetically during the Late Achaemenid Period.

The remaining group of flat-covered and gable-roofed brick tombs seems to be entirely missing from the plan. These types of brick tombs were, however, characteristic not only for the Seleucid but also for the subsequent Parthian times, and their sole presence implies that the burial site remained in use during the period of Graeco-Macedonian domination and probably even after the Parthian conquest in 141 BC.

Unfortunately, the available information about the grave inventory is too scarce to shed more light on the chronological issues. From Wetzel's general description we learn that it consisted in most cases of several jars and/or bowls, the former mostly unglazed, the latter mostly glazed, both probably typical for the Seleucid/Parthian tombs from Merkes.[3] Other objects included three pilgrim flasks with two handles, a couple of spouted vessels, a jar decorated with a figural motif in barbotine technique, and two scarab gems, all pointing, according to Wetzel, to the Seleucid/Parthian date of the cemetery (Wetzel 1930: 26). According to Christine Heike Richter, who studied the original excavation journals, the inventory recovered from these graves may have also included two *alabastra* comparable to the Early Hellenistic vessels of this type from Rhodes (Richter 2002: 279, n. 45). Two other were apparently similar to the *alabastron* discernible in the ceramic assemblage from the abovementioned Iraqi excavations (Mohamed 1979–1981: fig. 21 in Arabic section).

Overall, the possible time-span of the cemetery extends over several centuries between the Persian rule, the Hellenistic era and the eventual decline of Babylon in the first centuries AD. Since, however, the abovementioned textual sources provide evidence of the functioning of inner city walls until the last quarter of the 2nd c. BC, an Early Achaemenid date for the beginning of the cemetery seems difficult to reconcile with Wetzel's claim that the burials were made when the walls were already ruined. Two important aspects of the whole issue may provide more insight in this evident discrepancy.

First of all, one cannot entirely exclude a possibility that the bathtub coffin type, the earliest at the *Ostschenkel* cemetery, remained in use until the 1st c. BC, as several possible examples of this type were encountered in the poorly dated late contexts in the areas of the Northern City and the Eastern Outwork.[4] By the Parthian Period these coffins would certainly represent a fading burial practice, thus perhaps their small number at the *Ostschenkel* cemetery. If that was the case, the discussed burial site could have come into existence already during the Parthian Period, after a total dereliction of the inner city walls.

Furthermore, a very likely possibility is that the degradation process of the walls was much more irregular and complex than it was hitherto considered. Particular portions of the walls were likely to have declined separately and the *Ostschenkel* might have been one of the earliest parts of the fortifications to fall into ruin. A corresponding idea was put forward by Richter, who proposed that after the northern arm of the inner city walls had been partially destroyed by the waters of the Euphrates flowing in its shifted riverbed, the adjoining north-eastern corner of the fortifications began to languish and was eventually turned into a burial site (Richter 2002: 280).

This particular variant relies on the concept of relocation of the Euphrates riverbed, which is an issue in itself. Wetzel dated this occurrence to the Early Achaemenid Period (Wetzel, Schmidt, Mallwitz 1957: 1), more recently, however, it was proposed to have taken place in times of Seleukos I, who, according to a cuneiform chronicle known as the *Diadochi Chronicle*, conquered Babylon by diverting the course of the river into the city (Bergamini 2011: 27). On the other hand, such renowned scholars as Robert Rollinger neglect the idea entirely as having no

[1] Measurements based on Wetzel 1930: pl. 39:b, here **Fig. 7:a**.

[2] E.g., Nos. 166, 177, 185, 189 and two other known solely from the plan of the area (Reuther 1926: 239, 242, 244–245, pl. 3).

[3] E.g., Nos. 177, 204, 211, 212 (Reuther 1926: 242, 255–257).

[4] A round-ended coffin measuring ca. 40 cm in height appears in one of the pictures documenting the Iraqi excavations of the living quarter in the Northern City/Eastern Tell, dated supposedly to the Parthian times (Musah 1979–1981: fig. 5). Plans of the Eastern Outwork also reveal three short coffins with one end rounded and the other one straight. Their chronological context is, however, very unclear apart from the fact that they derive from the times following the destruction of the whole structure (Koldewey 1932: pls. 15 up, 16 the uppermost register).

confirmation in archaeological evidence (Rollinger 1993: 148–166), and this view received much approval over the last decades (Boiy 2004: 66, 78–79). As the issue cannot be resolved in the present paper, a cautious approach must be exercised towards the possible *terminus post quem* for the *Ostschenkel* cemetery, whose possible date spans therefore from Achaemenid until Parthian times.

Such a broad chronological horizon obscures the cemetery's socio-cultural dimensions and the cultural profile of the people who used to bury their dead in this particular place. One of the most distinctive features of the cemetery – the anthropoid coffins – represent without a doubt an Egyptian/Levantine influence of the Achaemenid and Seleucid times. Nonetheless, the majority of coffin and grave types encountered at the *Ostschenkel* cemetery were of indigenous design, not to mention the bathtub coffins whose origins reach back to the 8th c. BC. Clearly, the typology of graves hardly implies a possibility that the cemetery served a foreign community.

In this particular context the location of the cemetery may be of considerable importance. Situated on the border of the city, far from its official buildings, sanctuaries, commercial areas and living quarters, these graves certainly do not comply with the millennia-old Mesopotamian custom of intramural burial. Such a separation from the core of settlement might have been purely incidental, as it is likely that some families had no proper space to conduct an interment in their own dwelling or in its direct proximity. Others, however, who pursued burials in this isolated location could have been guided by religious concerns, particularly these against pollution caused by a dead body. Strict regulations of this kind functioned in mortuary traditions of the Iranians (Boyce 1993), the Greeks (Morris 1987: 192–194) and the Jews (Hachlili 2005: 10), whose presence in Babylon during Achaemenid, Seleucid and Parthian times is beyond any doubt. Whether any of these mortuary traditions indeed affected the existence of the *Ostschenkel* cemetery is impossible to tell. One may, however, see in this extraordinary cemetery a forerunner of the extramural burial grounds that emerged during the Sasanian Period.

Conclusions

Despite the fragmentary state of data at our disposal and the consequent chronological issues, one may come to certain conclusions regarding the ways in which Babylon's city walls and their remains were utilised for funerary purpose, throwing new light on the true nature and purpose of this particular burial custom.

In fact, each of the discussed burial sites was differently implemented in the area it was located in. The use of ruined or dismantled fortifications commenced most probably already during the Achaemenid Period, as one may infer from the bathtub coffins recovered from the older moat-wall in the area of the Eastern Outwork. During the Seleucid and/or Parthian Period, narrow streets in-between the walls, such as the one between the northern wall of the Southern Palace and the so-called *Nordschenkel*, were overbuilt with tenuous structures of broken brick and used as a burial site only after their abandonment; nota bene some of the tombs were cutting into the massif of the wall, which at that time must have been still standing. The so-called wall of the Northern City that survived supposedly at least until the last quarter of the 2nd c. BC, also sheltered graves including the long glazed coffins of Parthian date. In the 1st–2nd c. AD parts of the outer wall or the so-called *Osthaken* functioned as an extramural cemetery in relation to the diminished settlement of Parthian Babylon. Quite unique is also the use of façade of one of the wall's towers, which appears to be furnished with loculi containing slipper coffins, specific for this particular time period.

The most problematic is probably the case of the *Ostschenkel* cemetery in which one is impelled to recognise Wetzel's view that the burials were made once this section of the inner city walls had fallen in ruin. Yet even in such state they must have formed an outstanding feature of the local landscape, an elevated, dry piece of non-agricultural land that seems very convenient for disposal of the dead who for some reason would not be buried in the living quarters of Babylon.

Such characteristics points to the true purpose of burying the dead in the ruins of city walls, which can be basically defined as preservation of the grave and the human remains it contained. The walls functioned as a shelter from natural destructive factors such as, e.g., levies, whereas their location on the city's borders or peripheries was probably relatively secure from the dangers of the "steppe" and easily accessible to the family members of the deceased. The former may have regularly visited the tombs in order to perform offerings for the dead, possibly similar to *kispum* known from the earlier periods that played a crucial role in maintaining of a proper relation between the living and the dead (Bayliss 1973: 117–118). Such offerings and related commemorative rites were also inherent to the Greek mortuary tradition, in which they were undoubtedly performed by family members at the tomb of their deceased relative (Garland 1988: 104–120).

Although difficult to assess, other religious requirements may have also affected the custom of burying the dead in the ruins of city walls. Both the Greeks and the Iranians living in Babylon were likely to adhere to religious regulations against pollution. Natural reluctance of these groups towards the custom of in-house burial practiced by the Babylonians may have induced them to bury their dead in the ruined fortifications outside the proper settlement or at least on its outskirts. One of the accounts in astronomical diaries, dated to 162 BC, may provide evidence of such a conduct: *others went in (...) in order to bury their dead (...), went out from Babylon*. (Sachs, Hunger 1996: No. -161A1+A2 obv. 26'–27'). Unfortunately, whether the fragment refers to the Greek community (*politai*) undoubtedly

inhabiting Babylon, or some other group, is impossible to tell.

As for the walls themselves, the study reveals that their decline should be perceived as a long-term and irregular process that included a loss of defensive capabilities resulting from physical degradation, as well as a gradual decline of their sacral and cosmological significance. The process might have commenced already under the Achaemenids when the walls were most probably still largely intact, and progressed with their gradual deterioration during the Seleucid and Parthian Periods. Not without significance for this process was probably the departure of the royal authority from Babylon, formerly acting as its main guardian and the custodian of its fortifications.

Dr Maciej Grabowski
Institute of Archaeology
University of Warsaw
maciej.grabowski2@gmail.com

Bibliography

Andrae W., Lenzen H.
1933 *Die Partherstadt Assur*, Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 57, Leipzig.

Baker H.
1995 *Neo-Babylonian Burials Revisited*, (in:) S. Campbell, A. Green (eds.), *The Archaeology of Death in the Ancient Near East*, Oxbow Monograph 51, Oxford, 209–220.

Bayliss M.
1973 *The Cult of Dead Kin in Assyria and Babylonia*, "Iraq" 35/2, 115–125.

Bergamini G.
1977 *Levels of Babylon Reconsidered*, "Mesopotamia" XII, 111–152.
2011 *Babylon in the Achaemenid and Hellenistic Period*, "Mesopotamia" XLVI, 23–34.

Boiy T.
2004 *Late Achaemenid and Hellenistic Babylon*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 136, Louvain – Paris – Dudley.

Boyce M.
1993 *Corpse, Disposal of, in Zoroastrianism*, (in:) E. Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica VI*, London – Boston, 279–286.

Garland R.
1988 *The Greek Way of Death*, Ithaca.

Grabowski M.
2014 *Historical Topography of Parthian Babylon*, "Parthica" 16, 17–30.

Hachlili R.
2005 *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices, and Rites in the Second Temple Period*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 94, Leiden – Boston.

Haller A.
1954 *Die Gräber und Grüfte von Assur*, Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 65, Berlin.

Hauser S.R.
1999 *Babylon in arsakidischer Zeit*, (in:) J. Renger (ed.), *Babylon: Focus mesopotamischer Geschichte, Wiege früher Gelehrsamkeit, Mythos in der Moderne*, Colloquien der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 2, Saarbrücken, 207–240.

Heinsch S., Kuntner W.
2011 *Herodot und die Stadtmauern Babylons. Bemerkungen zur archäologischen Befundsituation der Landmauern*, (in:) R. Rollinger, B. Truschnegg, R. Bichler (eds.), *Herodot und das Persische Weltreich*, Classica et Orientalia 3, Wiesbaden, 499–529.

Koldewey R.
1913 *Das wieder erstehende Babylon*, Leipzig.
1932 *Die Königsburgen von Babylon II. Die Hauptburg und der Sommerpalast Nebukadnezars im Hügel Babil*, Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 55, Leipzig.

Lippolis C., Monopoli B., Baggio P.
2011 *Babylon's Urban Layout and Territory from above*, "Mesopotamia" XLVI, 1–8.

Litvinsky B.A.
1983 *Pogrebal'nye sooruženiâ i pogrebal'naâ praktika v Parfii (k voprosu o parfânobaktrijskih sootvetstviâh)*, (in:) B.A. Litvinsky (ed.), *Srednââ Aziâ, Kavkaz i zarubežnyj Vostok v drevnosti*, Moskva, 81–123.

Messina V.
2006 *Seleucia al Tigri. L'edificio degli archivi, lo scavo e le fasi architettoniche*, Monografie di Mesopotamia VIII, Firenze.

Mofidi Nasrabadi B.
1999 *Untersuchungen zu den Bestattungssitten in Mesopotamien in der ersten Hälfte des ersten Jahrtausends v. Chr.*, Baghdader Forschungen 23, Mainz am Rhein.

Mohamed A.K.
1979–1981 *Excavation at the North-Eastern Part of the Inner-Wall of Babylon*, "Sumer" 41, 21–22, and Arabic section: 36–42.

Morris I.
1987 *Burial and Ancient Society. The Rise of the Greek City-State*, Cambridge.

Musah M.U.
1979–1981 *Excavations at the Eastern Tell*, "Sumer" 41, 67–70, and Arabic section: 108–112.

Oelsner J.
1986 *Materialien zur Gesellschaft und Kultur in hellenistischer Zeit*, Assyriologia VII, Budapest.

Pestle W.
1999 *The Graves of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris* (unpublished Honour Thesis at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor).

Pongratz-Leisten B.
1994 *Ina Šulmi Irub. Die kulttopographische und ideologische Programmatik der* akītu-*Prozession in Babylonien und Assyrien im I. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, Baghdader Forschungen 16, Mainz am Rhein.

Postgate J.N.
1990 *Archaeology and the Texts – Bridging the Gap*, "Zeitschrift für Assyriologie" 80, 228–240.

Reuther O.
1926 *Die Innenstadt von Babylon (Merkes)*, Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 47, Leipzig.

Richter H.
2002 *Anthropoide Tonsarkophage aus Babylon – Bestattung à l'égyptienne?*, (in:) S. Frede et al. (eds.), *Die phönizischen anthropoiden Sarkophage II*, Mainz am Rhein, 273–301.

Rollinger R.
1993 *Herodots babylonischer Logos. Eine kritische Untersuchung der Glaubwürdigkeitsdiskussion an Hand ausgewählter Beispiele*, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft, Sonderheft 84, Innsbruck.
2013 *Berossos and the Monuments: City Walls, Sanctuaries, Palaces and the Hanging Garden*, (in:) J. Haubold, G.B. Lanfranchi, R. Rollinger, J.M. Steele, *The World of Berossos. Proceedings of the 4th International Colloquium on »The Ancient Near East between Classical and Ancient Oriental Traditions«, Hatfield College, Durham 7th–9th July 2010*, Classica et Orientalia 5, Wiesbaden, 137–162.

Sachs A.J., Hunger H.
1996 *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia III. Diaries from 164 B.C. to 61 B.C.*, Vienna.

Schmidt J., Finster B.
2002 *Das Bīt Akītu von Babylon*, "Baghdader Mitteilungen" 33, 281–330.

Strommenger E.
1964 *Grabformen in Babylon*, "Baghdader Mitteilungen" 3, 157–173.

Wetzel F.
1930 *Die Stadtmauern von Babylon*, Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 48, Berlin.

Wetzel F., Schmidt E., Mallwitz A.
1957 *Das Babylon der Spätzeit*, Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 62, Berlin.

Maciej Grabowski

Groby na granicach miasta – sepulkralne wykorzystanie murów miejskich Babilonu w tzw. okresach późnych

Praktyka chowania zmarłych w ruinach murów miejskich była wyraźnym odstępstwem od dominującej w starożytnej Mezopotamii tradycji pochówku *intra muros*. Mimo tego wyjątkowego charakteru, jej znaczenie i geneza nie były dotychczas przedmiotem dociekań naukowych. Podstawę do dyskusji na ten temat stanowią w niniejszym artykule groby odkryte przez archeologów niemieckich i irackich w ruinach monumentalnych murów obronnych Babilonu (**Ryc. 1**), datowane nieprecyzyjnie na tzw. okresy późne, obejmujące okres achemenidzki i epokę hellenistyczną.

Poważną przeszkodą w interpretacji tego materiału jest częsty brak podstawowych informacji zarówno na temat samych grobów, jak i ich kontekstu archeologicznego. Fizyczny stan murów miejskich w owym czasie jest również nie całkiem jasny. Wzmianki w tekstach klinowych na temat murów wewnętrznych jedynie sugerują, iż mogły one przetrwać przynajmniej do ostatniej ćwierci II wieku p.n.e. Nieco bardziej klarowny jest przekaz Berossosa (za pośrednictwem Józefa Flawiusza) na temat muru zewnętrznego (tzw. *Osthaken*), zgodnie z którym został on przynajmniej częściowo zburzony niedługo po zajęciu miasta przez Cyrusa Wielkiego w 539 roku p.n.e.

Mimo licznych trudności, studium umożliwia hipotetyczne rozpoznanie sposobów wykorzystania przestrzeni związanej z murami obronnymi do celów sepulkralnych. Mury zniszczone lub raczej rozebrane, takie jak tzw. starszy mur fosowy, służyły za okazjonalne miejsce pochówku już od okresu achemenidzkiego, o czym świadczy obecność „sarkofagów wannowych" (ang. *bathtub coffins,* niem. *Hockersarkophage*) (**Ryc. 4**). W czasach seleukidzkich i/lub partyjskich zmarłych chowano także na ulicy oddzielającej północny mur pałacu południowego od północnego odcinka wewnętrznego muru obronnego, który, jak dowodzi przeprowadzona analiza, nadal górował nad ulicą (**Ryc. 5, 6**). Pochówków dokonywano także w cieniu tzw. muru miasta północnego (**Ryc. 3**), który przetrwał najprawdopodobniej do ostatniej ćwierci II w. p.n.e. Natomiast cmentarzysko na murze zewnętrznym (**Ryc. 2**), datowane na I–II w. n.e. ze względu na obecność charakterystycznych „sarkofagów pantoflowych" (ang. *slipper coffins,* niem. *Pantoffelsarkophage*), pełniło niewątpliwie funkcję nekropoli *extra muros* względem zasiedlonej w tym czasie części miasta.

Najbardziej problematyczny przypadek stanowi cmentarzysko na wschodnim odcinku murów wewnętrznych, tzw. *Ostschenkel* (**Ryc. 7–10**). Brak informacji uniemożliwia weryfikację poglądu Friedricha Wetzela, zgodnie z którym liczne pochówki w tym miejscu pochodzą z czasów, gdy mury leżały już w ruinie. Jednakże nawet wtedy pozostałości murów musiały wyraźnie piętrzyć się nad otaczającym je terenem. Ponieważ pas ten nie mógł być przeznaczony pod uprawę, w naturalny sposób stał się on niezwykle dogodnym miejscem pochówku.

Powyższe obserwacje na temat cmentarzyska na *Ostschenkel* wskazywać mogą właściwy sens praktyki grzebania zmarłych w ruinach murów miejskich, który polegał na intencji zabezpieczenia grobu i szczątków ludzkich przed niszczycielskim działaniem zarówno czynników naturalnych, jak i ludzkich. Tak położone groby były również łatwo dostępne dla mieszkańców miasta, którzy być może odwiedzali je w celu odprawienia ofiar *kispum* i powiązanych z nimi rytuałów należących do podstawowego kanonu tzw. kultu zmarłych. Nie ma natomiast żadnej pewności, że pochówki w ruinach murów miejskich należy wiązać z zamieszkującymi Babilon Irańczykami czy Grekami, którzy ze względu na restrykcyjne nakazy religijne z całą pewnością chowali swoich zmarłych z dala od siedzib ludzkich.

Przeprowadzone w artykule rozważania dowodzą także, że upadek murów Babilonu powinien być postrzegany jako długotrwały i nieregularny proces, który w różnym czasie dotykał poszczególnych części fortyfikacji. Proces ten obejmował jednak nie tylko stopniowy zanik funkcji obronnych spowodowaną fizyczną degradacją, ale także utratę ich pierwotnego znaczenia symbolicznego i kosmologicznego.