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Berlin is not just any city. It has a troubled history, of which the world is well aware. It is a place burned into the consciousness of most people and will continue to be so. Any child with the opportunity of education will sooner or later learn about the city where in a bunker the tyrant Adolf Hitler met his ignominious end. He or she will learn of the place where the capitalist West and the communist Soviet Union perfected their 20th-century Cold War rhetoric, and where the most unexpected volte-face in modern history took place as thousands streamed to freedom under the helpless gaze of their captors.

Berlin is today a reunited city in almost frantic motion to regain its rank and reputation as a world capital. So much so that it is billions of deutschmarks in the red, technically bankrupt. The ambitious building schemes of the city's government may well have to be curtailed. At the same time, the federal government's massive construction projects continue, untouched by the present scandal.

Within this resurrected city the symbols of a much older power reside—a power with a resilience that goes mostly unrecognized. Berlin's Pergamon Museum houses the reconstructed Ishtar Gate, northern entry point to Nebuchadnezzar's city of Babylon. By all accounts it is as faithful a reconstruction as one could expect 2,500 years after the fall of an empire that flourished in Mesopotamia in the sixth and seventh centuries BCE.

When the German Empire was established in 1871, archaeology of the ancient Near East was a newly developing field. The German authorities were keen to match the established cultural reputations of the French and British Empires and invested in archaeological excavations carried out by their own nationals. France had its archaeological collection at the Louvre, Britain's was in the British Museum, and Berlin would soon have its equivalent. By the end of the 19th century and into the early 20th, shipments of artifacts began arriving from the eastern Mediterranean region and Mesopotamia. Most spectacular were the finds from Pergamos in western Turkey and from Babylon in Iraq.

It was possible to reconstruct ancient Babylon's Processional Way and the connected Ishtar Gate from the blue glazed tile walls and fragments found in the sands of Iraq. By agreement with government authorities, sufficient artifacts were allowed to leave the country for the massive reconstruction effort. The exhibit that

visitors marvel at today came into being in the 1930s, after years of painstaking work.

On the walls of the Ishtar Gate were serpentlike dragons representing Marduk, and wild bulls symbolizing Adad, the weather god. A cuneiform inscription from

Nebuchadnezzar, also found at the excavation site, reads in part:

“Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, the pious prince appointed by the will of Marduk, the highest priestly prince, beloved of Nabu, of prudent deliberation, who has learned to embrace wisdom, who fathomed Their [Marduk and Nabu’s] godly being and pays reverence to Their Majesty . . . the firstborn son of Nabopolassar, the King of Babylon, am I. . . .

The Pergamon Museum’s other celebrated exhibit, for which the museum is named, is the Hellenistic Great Altar from Pergamos (also called Pergamum or Pergamon) in western Turkey. When it was first put on display in Berlin it was welcomed with considerable pride and even now is viewed as a powerful symbol.

Quoting some of Pergamos’s admirers, Max Kunze writes in *The Pergamon Altar: Its Rediscovery, History and Reconstruction* that “Pergamon had been ‘an ambitious center of power and culture where one had had the means to attract the finest craftsmen.’ Its splendid altar was seen as the ‘proudest monument of monarchist self-confidence,’ a role which it was also to fill in Berlin. The fledgling German empire had adopted The Pergamon Altar and its symbolic meaning, which whether ancient or modern, was practically identical. The historical parallels were close at hand. Just as the Hellenistic Empire of Pergamon superseded the Classical city culture of Athens, so were the small states of Germany swallowed into the empire under Prussian leadership.”

What goes generally unnoticed, however, is the connection between Babylon’s walls and famous gate and the Hellenistic altar from second-century-BCE Pergamos. To understand, we need to trace the decline of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

Nebuchadnezzar’s successor, Awil-Marduk, set the stage for the submission of the empire to the Medo-Persians. Weakened over the next few decades by internal divisions, the strongly fortified Babylon fell without a fight in 539 BCE to Cyrus the Great’s forces. The Persians were generally tolerant toward the nations they defeated, allowing them to retain their culture and religion. An example of their

permissive attitude came soon after the fall of Babylon. Cyrus issued a proclamation returning the Jewish captives in Babylon to Jerusalem with instructions to rebuild the temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Though the Persians did not initially interfere in Babylon's religious practices, the political power of the Babylonian priesthood (who were Chaldean magi) eventually became a problem. The temple had always been central to Babylonian life, with an entire culture and economy surrounding the Ziggurat of Marduk. As a result, the Chaldean priests were a powerful elite. They were often more powerful than the Babylonian king himself: the monarch had to acknowledge the priests' intermediary role and "take the hands of Marduk" before assuming the throne. The king thus became the son of the god and was obliged to protect the religious hierarchy. The priests frustrated the Persians' tolerance when, in an attempt to retain their behind-the-scenes political power, they installed one of their own, a priest posing as the king's brother Smerdis, as ruler of Babylon. The imposter was discovered and killed by the Persians. Following a subsequent revolt when the priests again set up their own Babylonian ruler, the Persian king Xerxes came and destroyed Babylon in 487 BCE. In the process, he tore down the temples and removed the statue of Marduk.

At this point, around 480 BCE, the Babylonian priests are thought to have left the city and reestablished their base elsewhere. According to one source, "the defeated Chaldeans fled to Asia Minor, and fixed their central college at Pergamos, and took the palladium of Babylon, the cubic stone, with them. Here, independent of state control, they carried on the rites of their religion" (William B. Barker, *Lares and Penates: or, Cilicia and Its Governors*, Ingram, Cooke and Co., London, 1853, pp. 232–233).

Throughout the 350 or so years following the establishment of Pergamos, it seems that the descendants of the Babylonian priesthood maintained their role in the city's religious life. Certainly kings were still in the thrall of the priesthood. It was accepted that kings were de facto priests; such was the interrelationship of religion and government. The acropolis, with its Temple of Athena Parthenos, the virgin goddess of the city, was well known in the ancient world. It was also perhaps one of the most impressive fortresses in the region. At the height of Pergamene power around 165 BCE, the Great Altar was built. Around its base was a frieze over 360 feet long depicting the battle of the gods and the giants, thought to symbolize the Attalid king Eumenes II's victory over the Gauls and other kingdoms. Whether the altar was dedicated to Athena or Zeus or both is unclear from the fragmentary inscriptions

found. We do know that, like the Babylonians, the Pergamenes worshiped a plethora of gods, including also Aesculapius, the god of healing, and Dionysus, or Bacchus, the god of wine, associated with secret fertility cult rituals.

At the end of the first century, believers at Pergamos were warned about the dangers of their polytheistic surroundings. In a collection of letters to seven churches in Asia Minor, the apostle John was commanded to write to the Pergamos community, “I know that you live in the city where that great throne of Satan is located, and yet you have remained loyal to me” (Revelation 2:13, New Living Translation). Is this a reference to the Great Altar and the cult worship of Aesculapius, signified by a serpent—the symbol of Satan himself? Whatever the relation, the New Testament writer was also told that the church at Pergamos was compromised by false religion: “You tolerate some among you who are like Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. He taught them to worship idols by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin. In the same way, you have some Nicolaitans among you—people who follow the same teaching and commit the same sins” (verses 14–15).

Were they involved with some of the sexual rites practiced in the ancient mysteries? It seems quite possible. The danger of false religion is always present for followers of Christ. The Western world claims its Judeo-Christian heritage. Yet it is a heritage at odds with the Babylon that reaches out to us still in the economic, political, religious and cultural life of our times.

Two important symbols of that ancient Eastern world rest at the heart of a modern Western city. They invite us to recognize that there is yet another Babylon to come—a Babylon that will touch us all. No longer restricted to the ancient world, the globalizing Babylon of the future will bring about the final age of mankind.

<https://historum.com/t/simon-magus-trip-to-rome.140226/>

The kings of Pergamos, in whose dominions the Chaldean Magi found an asylum, were evidently by them, and by the general voice of Paganism that sympathised with them, put into the vacant place which Belshazzar and his predecessors had occupied. They were hailed as the representatives of the old Babylonian god. This is evident from the statements of Pausanias. First, he quotes the following words from the oracle of a prophetess called Phaennis, in reference to the Gauls: "But divinity will still more seriously afflict those that dwell near the sea. However, in a short time after, Jupiter will send them a defender, the beloved son of a Jove-nourished

bull, who will bring destruction on all the Gauls." Then on this he comments as follows: "Phaennis, in this oracle, means by the son of a bull, Attalus, king of Pergamos, whom the oracle of Apollo called Taurokeron," or bull-horned. This title given by the Delphian god, proves that Attalus, in whose dominions the Magi had their seat, had been set up and recognised in the very character of Bacchus, [Dionysos] the Head of the Magi. Thus the vacant seat of Belshazzar was filled, and the broken chain of the Chaldean succession renewed.

At first, the Roman Pontiff had no immediate connection with Pergamos and the hierarchy there; yet, in course of time, the Pontificate of Rome and the Pontificate of Pergamos came to be identified. Pergamos itself became part and parcel of the Roman empire, when Attalus III, the last of its kings, at his death, left by will all his dominions to the Roman people, BC 133. For some time after the kingdom of Pergamos was merged in the Roman dominions, there was no one who could set himself openly and advisedly to lay claim to all the dignity inherent in the old title of the kings of Pergamos. The original powers even of the Roman Pontiffs seem to have been by that time abridged, but when Julius Caesar, who had previously been elected Pontifex Maximus, became also, as Emperor, the supreme civil ruler of the Romans, then, as head of the Roman state, and head of the Roman religion, all the powers and functions of the true legitimate Babylonian Pontiff were supremely vested in him, and he found himself in a position to assert these powers. Then he seems to have laid claim to the divine dignity of Attalus, as well as the kingdom that Attalus had bequeathed to the Romans, as centering in himself; for his well-known watchword, "Venus Genetrix," which meant that Venus was the mother of the Julian race, appears to have been intended to make him "The Son" of the great goddess, even as the "Bull-horned" Attalus had been regarded. \*

The Great Altar of Pergamon is in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin. The base of this altar remains on the upper part of the Acropolis. It was perhaps this altar, believed to be dedicated to Zeus, that John of Patmos referred to as "Satan's Throne" in his Book of Revelation (Revelation 2:13).