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Światowit 8 (49)/Fasc.A, 133-137

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2009-2010

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ARKADIUSZ SOETYSIAK

## THE GATES OF DUR-ŠARRUKIN

### Abstract

Dur-Šarrukin, the capital of Assyria established by Sargon II, was built on the virgin soil in the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. The square-like city had been oriented according to the traditional Mesopotamian cardinal directions, i.e. with corners pointing north, south, west and east. According to Sargon's inscription, there were eight gates of Dur-Šarrukin, two in each cardinal direction, and each gate was attributed to one deity. The analysis of the list of these eight gods and goddesses proves that Sargon decided to use the esoteric Babylonian tradition in order to place his capital in the symbolic centre of the world.

### Introduction

Sargon II, the king of Assyria (721–705 BC), established a new capital of his state and named it Dur-Šarrukin (Akkad. "Sargon's stronghold"). It was intended to be a cosmological centre of the world (for discussion on

symbolic meanings of Dur-Šarrukin's topography cf. PONGRATZ-LEISTEN 1994: 30–31; BATTINI 1996; 1998; 2000). The city was built in a square shape with corners pointing to the contemporary cardinal directions (and walls oriented according to the traditional Mesopotamian cardinal directions, namely NE, NW, SE, and SW, see Fig. 1). In his inscription Sargon wrote that he had opened eight gates, two for each wall, according to the direction of the winds of heaven (foundation cylinder 66–70; FUCHS 1994: 295). Each gate was named after one deity from Assyrian pantheon (Table 1, see Fig. 1).

Table 1. The gates of Dur-Šarrukin.

Tabela 1. Bramy Dur-Šarrukin.

	NE	NW	SW	SE
first gate of the direction	Enlil	Anu	Ea	Šamaš
second gate of the direction	Mullissu	Ištar	Belet-ilani	Adad

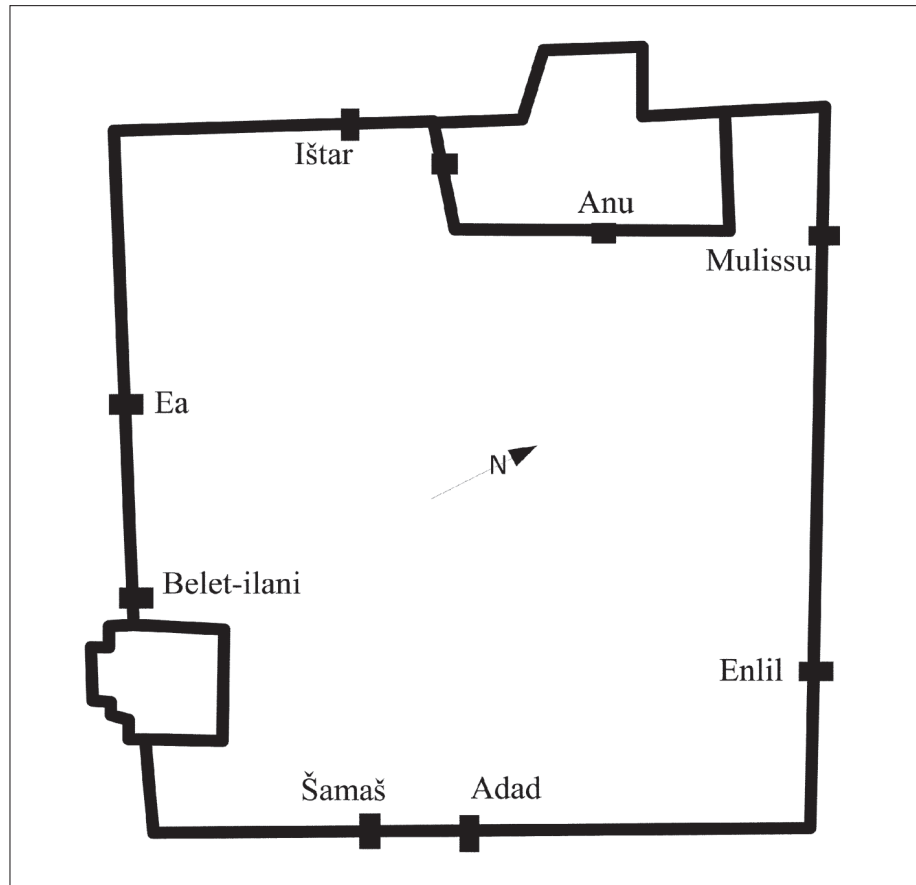


Fig. 1. Plan of Dur-Šarrukin (modern Khorsabad) with most likely identification of gates.

Ryc. 1. Plan Dur-Szarrukin (współczesny Chorsabad) z prawdopodobną identyfikacją bram.

Table 2. The catalogues of winds and world directions.  
Tabela 2. Katalogi wiatrów i części świata.

	N	E	S	W
MUL.APIN and astronomical texts	Enlil	Anu	Ea	Anu
<i>Les quatre vents</i> (NOUGAYROL 1966)	Adad+Ninurta	Enlil	Ea	Anu
K (Kuyunjik) 8397	Ninlil, the lady of winds	Enlil, lord of everything	Ea, father of gods	Anu, father of gods
K 9875	Sin	Anu	Ea	Ea + Anu

The names of gods are surely not accidental and especially Enlil, Anu, and Ea are known in other sources as the gods of three sectors of heaven. Also the idea of the winds of heaven and names of other gods and goddesses may be explained in terms of esoteric Babylonian sky-watching tradition. Thus, it may be hypothesized that Sargon decided to use this tradition in placing his capital in the symbolic centre of the world. After presenting the textual evidence I will try to explain the possible symbolic meaning of the city's orientation.

### Textual evidence

In Mesopotamian tradition, at least from c. 1400 BC onwards, the sky was divided into paths of three gods: Enlil, Anu, and Ea (HOROWITZ 1998: 158). The second path covers the belt of the celestial equator, while the first and the third cover the northern and visible part of the southern hemispheres respectively. If projected on the plane of the horizon, these three paths may be related to the cardinal directions: the path of Anu to east and west, the path of Enlil to north and the path of Ea to south. Such horizontal attribution was expressed in MUL.APIN and other astronomical texts, and in the course of evolution of Mesopotamian learned tradition it has been slightly modified in a speculative manner. Alasdair Livingstone published three various catalogues of winds containing names of gods related to the cardinal directions (1986: 76; see **Table 2**).

The oldest catalogue (*Les quatre vents*) is Middle Assyrian, while the remaining two belong to the New Assyrian corpus of documents. The second (K 8397) is

a fragment of the so-called *Nippur Compendium* (GEORGE 1992: 152), the last one is known from the series *Travel in the desert* (VANSTIPHOUT 1977: 25). The names of gods are not the only attributes of world directions. The learned tradition also produced the association of a world direction with proper names of winds (HOROWITZ 1998: 197) and constellations (MUL.APIN II i 68–71; HUNGER, PINGREE 1989: 87; HOROWITZ 1998: 199). Finally, the late round diagram W 26030/121 found in the Reš temple of Uruk shows the relation between winds and months in the year (HOROWITZ 1998: 194). In all these texts the four winds are identified with four directions. The winds of four directions are attested also in *Enuma eliš* IV 41–44 as Anu's gift for Marduk and a cause of Tiamat's wrath (HOROWITZ 1998: 111). The summary of these associations has been presented in **Table 3**.

The next document referring to the attribution of four cardinal directions is *Šumma Šin ina tamartišu* 4, 9'–20' (KOCH-WESTENHOLZ 1995: 108), being an explanation of eclipse properties if only one sector of Moon's disc vanishes. The four sectors are related to four world directions and then to their attribution (**Table 4**).

The names of city or temple gates with celestial meaning were not unattested in Assyria. The northern gate of Nineveh was called "May the reign of Sennacherib be as steady as the position of The Wagon, the gate of Mullissu" (KOCH-WESTENHOLZ 1995: 154), the northern gate of the Ehursagkurkurra temple was "the gate of Wagon" and two other had the names of firmament and of Enlil's path (KOCH-WESTENHOLZ 1995: 155).

Table 3. The winds, their constellations, and parts of the year.  
Tabela 3. Wiatry, ich konstelacje i części roku.

	N	E	S	W
the name of wind	im <sup>si</sup> .sá "the proper wind"	im <sup>kur</sup> .ra "wind from mountains"	im <sup>ulu</sup> "stormy wind"	im <sup>mar</sup> .dú "wind from Amurru"
MUL.APIN II i 68–71	mul <sup>mar</sup> .gíd.da (Wagon)	mul <sup>šu</sup> .gi, mul.mul (Old Man, Pleiades)	mul <sup>ku</sup> 6 (Fish)	mul <sup>gír</sup> .tab (Scorpion)
W (Warka) 26030/121	... Ululu – ... Kislimu –	... Kislimu 13 Addaru	14 Addaru – 5 Simanu	6 Simanu – ... Ululu

Table 4. The properties of eclipses in four Moon's disc sectors.  
Tabela 4. Właściwości zaćmień w czterech sektorach tarczy Księżyca.

	N	E	S	W
Moon's disc sector	right	bottom	left	top
Direction	Akkad	Subartu	Elam	Amurru
path on the sky	Enlil	—	Anu	Ea
part of the night	evening	morning	midnight	—
Month	Nissanu I	Du'uzu IV	Ajaru II	Simanu III
Month	Abu V	Arahsamna VIII	Ululu VI	Tašritu VII
Month	Kislimu IX	Addaru XII	Tebetu X	Sabatu XI
day of eclipse	13	14	15	16

### Interpretation

It is obvious that the association of the south with Ea and of the west with Anu repeats both in MUL.APIN, in the catalogues of winds and in the gates of Dur-Šarrukin. On the other hand, the association of the north with Enlil is attested only in MUL.APIN and Sargon's document, and not in the catalogues of winds. It suggests that the priests, Sargon's learned counsellors, used the astronomical schema rather than esoteric texts. The only seeming discordance concerns the eastern gate, attributed to Šamaš and Adad, although one would expect Anu if astronomical tradition is assumed or Enlil if two catalogues of winds are to be believed. However, such a discordance is very easy to explain taking into account a fact that both Anu and Enlil have already been attributed to other gates and the god perfectly associated with eastern direction is Šamaš, the Sun-God who every morning departs the great gate in the mountains of the east.

Thus, the explanation of the first "row" of gods related to the gates of Dur-Šarrukin is quite easy: here are the gods of three sky-sectors and the Sun-God representing the east, the direction of sunrise. Moreover, one may say that the relation between gods and their gates was more likely based on astronomical tradition represented by MUL.APIN than on secondary catalogues of winds. Also the deities of the second "row" fit well to the system. In three cases they are the goddesses related to the gods of the first "row". Mullissu is the spouse of Aššur, the main god of Assyria, associated with Enlil as the supreme king of gods and men. She was also connected to the north gate of Nineveh (see above). The association of Ištar and Anu is even stronger in Mesopotamian tradition since at least the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium when in Urukite tradition Ištar was believed to depose Anu from the throne of heavens (SJÖBERG 1988: 167). The planet Venus was her planetary attribute and for that reason her relation to the heaven was firm and obvious, at least for Mesopotamian sky-watchers.

Belet-ilani, the Mother-Goddess, is a co-creator of the mankind in Mesopotamian mythologies, together with Ea, the god of wisdom. And finally the last god of the second "row", Adad, the master of storms, although not feminine, was often coupled with Šamaš in learned religious tradition, since both gods were frequently summoned by the priests as the patrons of divination (ROCHBERG-HALTON 1984: 136). It appears then that the names of gates in Dur-Šarrukin are arranged in such a manner that each direction has two divine patrons: one related to sky-watching tradition and the other associated to the first.

The further astronomical background of four directions may be traced with the use of the catalogue of winds included in MUL.APIN (Table 3). The north direction is associated with the constellation of Wagon (<sup>mul</sup>mar.gíd.da), which can be identified as our modern *Ursa Maior*, the circumpolar constellation seen in the northern sky, also referred to in the name of the northern gate of Nineveh. Also the southern direction is quite clearly represented by the constellation of Fish (<sup>mul</sup>kuġ), "heading the stars of Ea", and identified as *Piscis Austrinus*. In Mesopotamia it was observed close to the southern horizon. Two other constellations are not so obviously related to their directions. The west is associated with Scorpion (<sup>mul</sup>gír.tab), the east with Pleiades (<sup>mul</sup>.mul) and the Old Man (<sup>mul</sup>šu.gi), also known under the name of Enmešarra and identified as *Perseus* (HUNGER, PINGREE 1989: 125). Scorpion is located close to one visible end of the Milky Way while the remaining two constellations stand near the other end and this observation may have been a reason of their association with opposite directions. All tree constellations rise in the east and set in the west, but their association with one of these directions only is possible to explain in the grounds of symbolical geography. The association of Enmešarra (one of dead gods in Mesopotamian mythology) and the eastern direction may be caused by the relation of the dead gods-ancestors to the mountain of decision-making (*duku*), identified with the mountain of sunrise in the far east (GEORGE 1992:

46,47; SEUX 1976: 223). The heliacal rising of Pleiades announced, at least according to the tradition of MUL.APIN, the beginning of the New Year in Mesopotamian calendar (HUNGER, PINGREE 1989: 89,90). Thus, both constellations are symbolically connected with the east, and for that reason Scorpion, the constellation observed in opposition to them (cf. MUL.APIN I iii 13), may have been viewed as connected with the west. Of course, such an astral symbolism is not directly referred to in Sargon's inscription, but very likely it makes the background for the association of deities with the eight gates of Dur-Šarrukin.

### Conclusion

The orientation of Dur-Šarrukin, resembling the orientation of Mesopotamian temples, and the divine names of its gates indicate rather clearly that Sargon decided to use the sacred geographical and cosmological tradition for placing his capital into the very centre of the world, between

north and south, between east and west, precisely according to directions defined by the gods as main axes of the world. In Sargon's time the Mesopotamian sky-watching entered the phase of its greatest development and this interest in the "world above" was translated into Assyrian imperial ideology and, among others, into the plan of new capital. Dur-Šarrukin may have been seen in terms of Sargon's intention as the ideal city, representing the universe and embodying the world order set by the gods in remote times.

Acknowledgements: This paper is a result of inspiration by Dr. Franciszek M. Stępniewski who also kindly provided me with various details about Dur-Šarrukin. Thanks are due to an anonymous referee for several important comments.

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### BRAMY DUR-SZARRUKIN

Dur-Szarrukin, stolica państwa asyryjskiego założona przez Sargona II, zostało zaplanowane i zbudowane we wcześniej niezasiedlonym miejscu pod koniec VIII wieku p.n.e. Miasto na planie zbliżonym do kwadratu było zorientowane według tradycyjnych mezopotamskich kierunków kardynalnych, tzn. jego narożniki kierowały się na północ, południe, wschód i zachód. Według inskrypcji

Sargona, Dur-Szarrukin miało osiem bram, po dwie na każdym boku kwadratu, każda brama poświęcona innemu bóstwu. Analiza listy tych bóstw wskazuje, że Sargon świadomie wykorzystał ezoteryczną tradycję babilońską w celu symbolicznego ustawienia swojej stolicy jako centrum świata.