

Ancient Mesopotamian Temple Building In Historical Texts And Building Inscriptions

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In his article “Temple Building, a Task for Gods and Kings,”¹ Arvid S. Kapelrud discusses the similarity between the historical accounts of temple building of Gudea of Lagash, Moses, and Solomon as well as the similarities between the mythical accounts of temple building found in the Ras Shamra texts and the Babylonian *Enuma elish*. He concludes his article by listing the common features found in these accounts of temple building. Concerning the historical accounts of Gudea, Moses, and Solomon, Kapelrud writes:

In the cases where a king is the actual temple builder the following elements are most often found: 1. Some indication that a temple has to be built; 2. The king visits a temple over night; 3. A god tells him what to do, indicates plans; 4. The king announces his intention to build a temple; 5. Master builder is engaged, cedars from Lebanon, building-stones, gold silver etc. procured for the task; 6. The temple finished according to plan; 7. Offerings and dedication, fixing of norms; 8. Assembly of the people; 9. The god comes to his new house; 10. The king is blessed and promised everlasting domination. (Kapelrud, 1963: p.62)

As already noted, Kapelrud’s article only discussed the historical accounts of the temple building of Gudea, Moses, and Solomon. It was not his intention to make an exhaustive study of the similarities of all historical accounts of temple building. The focus of this paper will be to examine other ancient Mesopotamian texts that make reference to temple building and then compare them to the ten common features found by Kapelrud in the Gudea, Moses, and Solomon temple building accounts.

This paper will proceed in the following manner. First, an examination of temple building among the three major cultures of ancient Mesopotamia will be given.² The first culture

¹ Kapelrud’s article comes as a response to Julian Obermann’s book, *Ugaritic Mythology*, (New Haven, 1948), who notes the similarity between the mythological accounts of Ugarit and the O.T. accounts in Ex. 25ff. I Kings 6 ff., II Chron. 2 ff. and Ezekiel 40 ff.

² It must be pointed out that unlike the historical accounts of Gudea, Moses and Solomon, there are no known Mesopotamian texts that give a complete account of the procedures and rituals followed by the king in building a temple. What information we do have concerning the task of temple building comes from the often fragmentary historical accounts and building

looked at will be the early Mesopotamians: the Sumerians and Akkadians. This will be followed by a chronological outlay of temple building among the Assyrians. Finally, the Babylonian empire will be examined. In this last section, a few references to temple building in the post Neo-Babylonian period of Mesopotamia will be noted showing the persistence of certain rites established centuries earlier³. Upon the conclusion of this investigation a summary will be made of the common features found in ancient Mesopotamian temple building. These common features will then be compared to the ten features found by Kapelrud in a conclusion.

Temple Building Among the Early Mesopotamians: the Sumerians and Akkadians

According to Sumerian mythology, the first temple built was to the god Enki at Eridu (Van Buren, 1952: p.293). Thorkild Jacobsen states that the god Enki “was god of the underground fresh waters that come to the surface in rivers, pools, and marshes” (Jacobsen, 1987: p.455).⁴ The Sumerians called this “vast subterranean freshwater sea” the Abzu (Jacobsen, 1987: p.455). A myth describing the construction of a temple in Eridu by Enki tells how “The lord of the abyss, the king Enki . . . Built his house of silver and lapis lazuli

inscriptions found on such things as bricks, cones, floor slabs, door-sockets and the like. Sometimes these references are short. Sometimes they are long. But no one account gives all the details. Consequently, one must examine all the references concerning temples which are relevant to the topic under consideration, extracting all the common features to get an idea of how the task of temple building was performed.

It must also be pointed out that most of the Mesopotamian accounts of temple building are actually accounts of temple *rebuilding*.

³ As in Kapelrud’s article, this paper does not pretend to examine every text concerning temple building yet of the available texts enough have been sampled to give the reader an appropriate idea of the activity of temple building among the ancient Mesopotamians.

⁴ Jean Rudhardt describes Enki in these terms: “The Sumerian god Enki, who comes by sea from a faraway land, established his residence or temple on the underground waters of Apsu, whom he has subdued. Enki is the lord of the waters. After being the major organizer of the world and one of the creators of humanity, he remains the master of fate. Along with An and Enlil, he belongs to the supreme triad” (Rudhardt, 1987: p.355).

Mircea Eliade disagrees with the concept that Enki is the god of water stating that Enki is “‘Lord of the Earth,’ god of the ‘foundations,’ who has wrongly been taken by modern scholars to be the god of the primordial waters because, in the Sumerian view, the earth was supposed to rest on the ocean” (Eliade, 1978: p.57).

. . . in the abyss.” The temple is also characterized as being a “pure house” which was decorated “greatly with gold”. This description is followed by Enki raising “the city Eridu from the abyss” and making it “float over the water like a lofty mountain.” The gardens in the city are filled “with birds; fishes, too, he makes abundant.” The completion of the temple construction was celebrated by Enki with his father Enlil⁵ with a feast of oxen, sheep and drinks prepared by Enki. Enlil then pronounces a blessing upon “The abyss, the shrine of the goodness of Enki, befitting the divine decree” (Kramer, 1972: p.62-63). E. D. Van Buren points out by quoting from Sumerian sources that “Later temples were founded in conformity with the ordinances and ritual of Eridu” (Van Buren, 1952: p.293)⁶ making the pattern of construction of Enki’s temple of the Abyss the prototype for all other temples. If a text existed that set forth these ordinances and rituals, then understanding temple construction among the early Mesopotamians would be much simpler. However, the “ordinances and ritual” associated with the founding of Enki’s temple are never specifically delineated in any known text. Therefore only by examining an array of religious texts and building inscriptions can we get a hint of the construction pattern set forth in the “ordinances and ritual” of temple of Enki in Eridu.

The religious texts and building inscriptions found among the ruins of the early Mesopotamians are replete with references to temple building. However, these references contribute little to our knowledge of temple building among the Sumerians and Akkadians. The majority of these texts simply inform us about various kings and rulers who built or rebuilt a myriad of temples. The following is an example: “Ur-Nina, king of Lagash, son of Guindu, son of Gurshar, the house of Ningirsu built; the house of Nina he built; the house of Gatumdug he built . . .”(Barton, 1929: p.21). Such laconic inscriptions are quite surprising when it is realized that it was during this same period that Gudea of Lagash wrote his

⁵ “God of wind and storms . . . the most prominent member of the divine assembly and executor of its decrees” (Jacobsen, 1987: p.453).

⁶ Van Buren elaborates further: “Kings of Larsa expressly state that they carefully complied with those ordinances when they built temples for the deities Nannar, Ilabrat (Ninshubur), and Ninisanna. Therefore when a temple is said to be like the temple of the Abyss, or some comparison with that famous sanctuary is made, it does not imply that the architectural aspect of the temple at Eridu was reproduced, but that in the construction of the later building all the rules laid down at Eridu were faithfully observed” (Van Buren, 1952: p.293).

For a brief review and comment on Van Buren’s article, see Ellis, 1968: pp.7-8,78.

extensive inscription of the building of the temple of Ningirsu (see Barton, 1929: pp.205-255 for the full text).⁷

However scanty these texts and inscriptions may be, we do learn the following. From a brick inscription attributed to **Enannatum I** (c.2424-2405 B.C.), ensi of Lagash, we learn that Enannatum built a temple when “Ningirsu, his heart illumined.” Enannatum brought “cedar from the mountain” to build the temple with (Barton, 1929: p.47). **Entemena** (c.2404-2375 B.C.), ensi of Lagash, records on a field-stone that he built a temple for Ningirsu and “with gold and silver he adorned it.” It is also told that a “garden within he constructed” (Barton, 1929: p.53). A statue-inscription of **Ur-Bau** (c.2155-2142 B.C.) states:

He dug a foundation-pit(?) (to a depth) of x cubits; he heaped up the earth from it like stone and purified it with fire(?) like precious metal. As with a measuring-vessel he brought it to the broad place. He put the earth back and filled in the foundation with it. On it he built a *kisu* of ten cubits, and on the *kisu* he built “The House of Fifty Gleaming Anzu Birds,” thirty cubits high (Ellis, 1968: p.169; cf. Barton, 1929: pp.173-175).

Why this procedure was followed is not stated. However, Richard Ellis tells of a similar procedure used in the site preparation at the Temple Oval in Khafajah.

When the Temple Oval was first built, in the ED II period, the site chosen was occupied by private houses or their ruins. In the occupational debris a huge hole, the size of the oval’s enclosure wall, and averaging eight meters deep, was dug. The earth was taken elsewhere, and the hole was filled up with clean sand, on which the oval was then built. At most points the outer face of the enclosure wall was set just beyond the edge of the cavity (Ellis, 1968: p.10).⁸

⁷ “Most building inscriptions earlier than the Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian periods are fairly terse and include no circumstantial details; Gudea’s cylinder inscriptions are unique, and are actually building hymns rather than ‘building inscriptions’ in the accepted sense. Only in the second half of the second millennium B.C. do building inscriptions begin to describe events leading up to, and accompanying the work of construction” (Ellis, 1968: pp.6-7).

⁸ Ellis compares the Temple Oval at Khafajah with the text found on the statue of Ur-Bau of Lagash in these words: “Although several parts of this text are very difficult to understand, it seems to describe a procedure somewhat like that followed in building the Temple Oval. One of the principal differences is that instead of bringing clean earth from elsewhere, Ur-Bau appears to have in some way purified the earth dug out of the pit and then put it back. Then, instead of placing his building on top of the clean fill, he dug foundation trenches into it. Unfortunately the text gives no reason for this” (Ellis, 1969: pp. 10-11).

Urnammu (c.2112-2095 B.C.), the founder of the Ur III dynasty, is probably best known for “his extraordinary activity as a religious builder” (Castellino, 1957: p.3).⁹ From a religious text (a hymn) describing the building of the Ekur (the temple of Enlil in Nippur) by Urnammu, we learn that “The ‘Great Mountain’ Enlil” commanded Urnammu to rebuild his temple. Urnammu immediately set out to build the temple by first preparing bricks. “Knowing the (prescriptions) of right and being lord of [large] understanding, he prepared the brick mold.” The text then states that “Enlil reduced into order for [shepherd Ur]nammu his hostile enemy bearing land.” The foundations of the temple were laid “carefully” and “the holy terrace” filled under the protection of “Enkum and Ninkum.”¹⁰ The temple is built very high while “Enki lavishes beauty on the temple.”¹¹ The temple gates are built and “With splendid metal (and) pure silver he adorned their ‘brow’.” The “interior” was “established like a sublime masterpiece.” The temple was referred to as a “Storied Mountain” upon which “the *gigunu*, the holy dwelling” was placed. Upon the completion of the temple a banquet was held in which Enlil honors and blesses Urnammu (Castellino, 1959: pp.108-110).¹²

We read from a clay cone inscription from **Warad-Sin** (c.1834-1823 B.C.), king of Larsa, that the temple of Nannar, the moon god, was rebuilt “When the god of the new moon, his favorable sign permitted by eyes to see, by his life-giving vision he illumined me, and to build his temple to restore its place he directed me.” It is said that Warad-Sin “the regulations and taboos of Eridu fulfilled” (Barton, 1929: pp.319-320).¹³

⁹ See Castellino, 1957: pp.3-8 for a brief review of Urnammu’s religious building activities in Uruk, Ur, Eridu, Nippur, Adab, and Larsa. Yet, even though Urnammu produced so much religious building activity, G. Castellino points out, “Besides the short dedicational inscriptions, only very few literary or religious texts of, or about, Urnammu have come down to us” (Castellino, 1957: p.9).

¹⁰ Enkum and Ninkum are the protective deities from Eridu sent “To safeguard the foundations from harm of every kind” (see Van Buren, 1952: p. 298 ff.).

¹¹ The fact that Enki is said to be present at the rebuilding of the Ekur reflects back to the idea expressed by Van Buren that “Later temples were founded in conformity with ‘the ordinances and ritual of Eridu.’”

¹² See also Castellino, 1957: pp.12-14 for an outline of the text, and Pritchard, 1969: pp.583-584 for an alternate translation.

¹³ The “regulations and taboos of Eridu” is the same as saying the “ordinances and rituals of Eridu.”

Very few of the inscriptions found among the ruins of the early Mesopotamians suggest that temples were built or rebuilt at the command of a god. But that such a tradition was commonly held among the Sumerians and Akkadians is seen in “The Curse of Agade,” a text devoted to the “rise and fall of the first great Mesopotamian empire” (Cooper, 1983: p.5). The composition relates how **Naramsin** (c.2254-2218 B.C.), grandson of Sargon and founder of the Akkadian empire, attempted to receive permission from Enlil to build a temple for Inanna, the goddess of war. However, “the (omen for) building the temple was not” given. Naramsin endeavored again to receive permission for the temple’s construction. But again “the (omen for) building the temple was not” given. In order to “alter Enlil’s pronouncement,” Naramsin brought his armies to Nippur and devastated Ekur, Enlil’s sanctuary. This however only caused Enlil to avenge the destruction of his sanctuary by destroying the Akkadian empire (see Cooper, 1983: pp.50-63; cf. Pritchard, 1969: pp.646-651). The suggestion from this composition is that a temple cannot be built unless the gods command or approve it.¹⁴

Such is the information relative to temple building in the early Mesopotamian religious texts and historical inscriptions.

Temple Building Among the Assyrians

Temple Building Among the Early Assyrian Rulers to 1781 B.C.

¹⁴ “The story of the *Cursing of Akkad* told of the dire consequences of King Naram-sin’s willful decision to rebuild Ekur in Nippur without Enlil’s permission. Even rebuilding after enemy attack and demolition needed divine cooperation. The god had to be roused from his state of shock after the catastrophe to make him able to act, so laments to soothe him and to recall past happiness were part of the ritual. Originally these laments had clear reference to a specific historical situation; later they were generalized for wider use. In later times they became obligatory for any rebuilding, since that implied demolition of the existing structure, and some even became part of the daily program of temple music and were used to awaken the temple personnel in the morning. Older than the laments for the destruction of a temple are, it would seem, hymns to temples. They celebrate the specific powers inherent in the temple to uphold the welfare of the country. The *Cursing of Akkad* tells how the peace of the country, its harvest of grain, and so on vanish when corresponding parts of Ekur are demolished” (Jacobsen, 1987: p.463).

Texts concerning temple building and rebuilding from the early Assyrian rulers are very scant. From the accounts that we do have, however, we can see some interesting patterns in temple building which appear to have developed by this time. Two accounts from **Zarriqum** (c.2050 B.C.) and **Ilu-shuma** (c.1950 B.C.) simply mention that they had built the temples of Belat-ekallim and Ishtar (Grayson, 1972: pp.4,7). However, on an alabaster block found in the Ashur temple at Ashur appears an inscription in “mirror-writing” from **Shalim-ahum** (c.1975 B.C.) declaring “The god Ashur *requested of him* a temple.” The texts also tells us that Shalim-ahum had “beer vats and storage area” built in the “temple area” (Grayson, 1972: pp.6-7). From a door-socket found in the temple of Ashur at the time of **Erishum I** (c.1875 B.C.), we learn that “Into (the mortar) of every wall [he] mixed ghee and honey and (then) laid one layer of bricks” (Grayson, 1972: p.10; see also p. 13).¹⁵ From a clay tablet, we read that Erishum I had a “high throne” built and “adorned the front of it with a precious stone.” He, like others before him, had beer vats built in the temple area (Grayson, 1972: p.12). From an alabaster tablet found in Ashur and ascribed to **Shamshi-Adad I** (c.1813-1781 B.C.), the first ruler of Assyria claiming kingship instead vice-regency, we have a similar account. Shamshi-Adad roofed the temple with “cedar beams” and “erected in the rooms cedar doors with silver and gold stars.” He also laid¹⁶ the walls of the temple on “silver, gold, lapis lazuli, and carnelian; cedar resin, best oil, honey, and ghee I mixed in the mortar” (Grayson, 1972: p.20).

Temple Building From Ashur-uballit I to the Beginning of the Late Assyrian Period

We glean nothing of great importance regarding temple building from the Assyrian royal inscriptions between Shamshi-adad and Ashur-uballit I, a period of demise in Assyrian history. These rulers merely mention the rebuilding of temples that had fallen into disrepair. But beginning with Ashur-uballit, we find Assyria making its first bid for power beyond the confines of Ashur and its immediate area. The detailed accounts of military activities which

¹⁵ Concerning the mixing of liquids into mortar, Richard Ellis has said: “These liquids were not libations or drink-offerings. Though all are pleasant in some way, some, such as cedar oil and resin, are not potable except in small quantities as medicine. I know of nothing to suggest that the liquids had any specific symbolic significance; probably they contributed to the theoretical sumptuousness of the building and to the solemnity of the ceremonies. They are comparable to the use of ivory brick-molds, and to the golden trowels and the like that modern dignitaries wield when laying cornerstones” (Ellis, 1969: pp. 30-31).

¹⁶ See Ellis, 1969: p.173.

have come to characterize Assyrian royal inscriptions had their beginnings in this period. The inscriptions concerning the building and rebuilding of temples become a little longer and more detailed as well. As one examines these inscriptions, it becomes quite obvious that the pattern which had developed early in Assyrian history regarding the practice of certain rituals associated with the building and rebuilding of temples, such as placing silver and gold in the foundations or mixing honey and ghee in the mortar, continued during this period as we shall now see.

In an inscription appearing on a clay tablet found in the Ishtar temple at Ashur, **Ashur-ballit I** (c.1365-1330 B.C.) informs us that

I roofed [the temple] with beams and inside installed the doors. I renovated and restored it from top to bottom and settled the goddess Ishtar-*kidnittu*, my mistress, inside that temple. I deposited my clay cone. (Grayson, 1972: p.45)

When **Arik-din-ili** (c.1319-1308 B.C.) had the temple of Shamash rebuilt, he had it built on a “high place.” Two items regarding building of the temple of Shamash are of interest. First, the reason Arik-din-ili gives for building the temple is so “that the harvest of my land might prosper.” Perhaps this was a reflection back to the temple building story of Gudea where Gudea is told that when the foundation of the Ningirsu temple is laid “abundance shall come; enlarged fields shall bear for thee” Barton, 1929: p.217). The second thing of interest is the “high place” that the temple is built on was a place where “previously the decisions of the land were made but now had become a mound of dirt and around it the ‘shrines’ of the people” (Grayson, 1972: p.54).

From **Shalmaneser I** (c.1274-1245 B.C.), we get several inscriptions regarding the rebuilding of different temples, especially the temple of Ashur which seems to have burned down. He tells us that when the temple of Ashur had burned down, he “considerably enlarged, beyond previous extent, the temple of Ashur, my lord” (Grayson, 1972: p.87). Concerning the rebuilding, Shalmaneser recounts that he “removed the dirt down to the bottom of the foundation pit. I laid its foundation in bedrock like the base of a mountain”. Into the foundation, like many of his predecessors had done, he “set stones, silver, gold, iron, copper, tin, layers of aromatic plants.” And also into the mortar he mixed “oil, scented oil, cedar resin, honey, and ghee” (Grayson, 1972: p.84). The putting of the precious stones and metals and the special mixing of the mortar was done by Shalmaneser in other of his temple

rebuilding as well (see Grayson, 1972: p.89). When Shalmaneser had finished the rebuilding of the temple of Ashur and “placed therein the gods” (Grayson, 1972: p.87), he “made a joyful festival” (Grayson, 1972: p.84). After recounting this, Shalmaneser offers a plea that “When Ashur, the lord, enters that temple and joyfully takes his place on the lofty dais, may he see the brilliant work of that temple and rejoice.” Then Shalmaneser prays that “For eternity may He (Ashur) greatly decree with his mighty voice a destiny of well-being for my vice-regency” (Grayson, 1972: p.84). Shalmaneser, after the rebuilding of the temple of Ashur, referred to the temple as the “shrine of the gods (and) mountain of the lands” (Grayson, 1972: p.80).

From an alabaster tablet written during the reign of **Tukulti-Ninurta I** (c.1244-1208 B.C.), we read that Ashur-Enlil “requested” Tukulti-Ninurta to build him “a cult centre on the bank opposite” of Ashur. Tukulti-Ninurta called the name of the “cult centre” Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta. He “completed within it the temple of the gods Ashur, Adad, Shamash, Ninurta, Nusku, Nergal, Sibitti, and the goddess Ishtar.” A canal was made to “flow as a wide (stream) to its site (and) arranged for regular offerings to the great gods” (Grayson, 1972: pp.116-117). From another alabaster tablet, we read where Tukulti-Ninurta built the city “in uncultivated plains (and) meadows where there was neither house nor dwelling, where no ruin hills or rubble had accumulated, and no bricks had been laid.” Concerning the canal, he states that “I cut a wide path for a stream which supports life in the land (and) which provides abundance, and I transformed the plains of my city into irrigated fields.” But Tukulti-Ninurta adds, “I arranged for regular offerings to Ashur and the great gods, my lords, in perpetuity from the fish of the water of that canal” (Grayson, 1972: pp.121,122). And yet from another alabaster tablet, we learn that Tukulti-Ninurta built inside the temple of Ashur of Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta a “great ziqqurat as the cultic chair of the god Ashur” (Grayson, 1972: p.120).

From other inscriptions ascribed to Tukulti-Ninurta, we find that the temple of Ishtar has fallen into ruins. Tukulti-Ninurta tells us that “at that time, in my accession year, the goddess Ishtar, my mistress, requested of me another temple which would be holier than her (present) shrine.” This new temple was built in a different location and the old one left discarded (Grayson, 1972: pp.110-112).

Another inscription from Tukulti-Ninurta found engraved on an alabaster molding is concerned with Tukulti-Ninurta asking Ashur for approval in building a temple. The inscription reads in part: “I (Tukulti-Ninurta) asked for his (Ashur’s) firm yes as to whether

the god Ashur, my lord, loved Mount Abeh, his mountain, and whether he commanded me to build in it a lofty dwelling” (Grayson, 1972: p.126).

In an octagonal clay prism inscription, it is reported that when **Tiglath-Pileser I** (c.1115-1077 B.C.) ascended to power, An and Adad “commanded” Tiglath-Pileser to rebuild their temple which had fallen into ruins. Like other temple rebuilding accounts, Tiglath-pileser “dug down to the bottom of its foundation pit, and laid its foundation upon bedrock.” He also “constructed two large ziqqurats which were appropriate for their great divinity.” The interior of the temple was “decorated like the interior of heaven” and the walls were decorated “as splendidly as the brilliance of rising stars” (Grayson, 1976: p.18). This is obvious reference to the use of gold, silver and other precious metals in the decoration of the temple making an earthly representation of a heavenly ideal. From a tablet inscription, it is told that An and Adad commanded Tiglath-Pileser to go to Mount Lebanon and cut down “cedar beams for the temple of the gods An and Adad” (Grayson, 1976: pp.26,28). This is the first reference that we have of a god commanding the use of cedar from mount Lebanon in a temple. As we have seen, previous to this time the records merely mention that cedar was used in the temple construction, never commanded. After the temple construction account on the octagonal prism inscription, Tiglath-Pileser offers a plea that “Because I made plans without ceasing and was not slack in the work (but) quickly completed the pure temple May the gods An Adad faithfully have mercy upon me . . . may they firmly place my priesthood in the presence of the god Ashur and their great divinity forever like a mountain” (Grayson, 1976: p.19).

Temple Building in the Late Assyrian Period

With the ascension of Ashur-nasir-apli II (883-859 B.C.), Assyria begins an ascendancy which finally culminates with the reign of Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.). At the end of the reign of Ashur-uballit II (611-609 B.C.), Assyria was no more. The art of this period makes quite a radical change. In Early and Middle Assyrian art, the central theme was religious. In the Late Assyrian period, we have very little actual religious art. Most of the art is in the form of wall reliefs, the central theme being historical narrative. The literature of this time follows the same course. There are long and detailed accounts of the military campaigns made by the several kings which ruled during this period. Both archaeology and historical inscriptions indicate that there was considerable building going on as Assyria expanded beyond the borders of Ashur. Associated with this building are the building inscriptions

describing the king's activities. The several references to temple building and rebuilding found during this period follow the order of the day. They are much longer and more detailed than found in any other period of Assyrian history, yet the information given concerning temple construction is similar to the patterns already established in earlier periods.

From the inscriptions of **Ashur-nasir-apli II** (883-859 B.C.), we find the king building his new capital, Calah (or Kalach), over the ruins of an old demolished Assyrian city. From a stone slab giving details of Ashur-nasir-apli's reign, we learn that when the king began work on the city that he "cleared away the old ruin hill (and) dug down to water level." He then sunk "(the foundation pit) down to a depth of 120 layers of brick" and "founded therein the temple of the god Ninurta" (Grayson, 1976: p.136). The inscriptions that we have seen to this point have dealt almost exclusively with temples that have been rebuilt. They have shown that when a temple was rebuilt the king simply "dug down" to the previous foundation. But in this inscription, we see that Ashur-nasir-apli was not rebuilding but building anew, and in so doing, he was not digging down to a previous foundation. Therefore he dug down to "the water level." A limestone inscription informs us that Ashur-nasir-apli built in Calah a temple to Ishtar "with the cunning which the god Ea,¹⁷ king of the *apsu* . . . gave" to him.¹⁸ Then after completing the temple, he "established for her offerings" (Grayson, 1976: p.178).

Ashur-nasir-apli tells us in another limestone tablet that when he took it upon himself to renovate the city of Imgur-Enlil, he built a temple for the god Mamu. He specifically mentions that he "marched to Mount Lebanon and cut down beams of cedar." This he used in the construction of the temple (Grayson, 1976: p.179). And in another large stone slab concerning the rebuilding of the temple of the goddess Ishtar of Nineveh, Ashur-nasir-apli states that "With the wisdom of the god Nudimmud [Enki], the great lord, with the wide

¹⁷ Ea is the Akkadian name of Enki (see Jacobsen, 1987: p.455).

¹⁸ The sinking of the foundation walls to the water level and the rare mention in an Assyrian text of Ea (Enki) is an apparent reflection to the ancient idea that a temple represented the primordial hillock rising out of the *apsu* or primordial waters. In the Sumerian "Kesh Temple Hymn," the temple "founded by An, praised by Enlil" is described as "Growing up like a mountain, embracing the sky" and a "Temple, whose platform is suspended from heaven's midst, Whose foundation fills the Abzu" (Gragg, 1969: pp.167,169; cf. Biggs, 1972: pp.200-201). This reflects the image portrayed by Enki's temple of the abyss in Eridu. For a further discussion of this idea see Lundquist, 1983: p.208 and Lundquist, 1984: p.60-66.

understanding which the god Ea had granted to me, for the adornment of the heroic nature of the goddess Ishtar” he built Ishtar’s temple (Grayson, 1976: p.185).

From the inscriptions of Assyrian kings from **Shalmaneser III** (c.858-854 B.C.) and to **Tiglath-Pileser III** (c.744-727 B.C.), we learn nothing of great importance concerning the Assyrian building of temples. Both Shalmaneser III and **Adad-Nirari III** (810-783 B.C.) claim that in their ascension year they marched “to the shore of the sea of the setting sun” washed their “weapons in the sea.” They then “cut cedar and cypress” trees (Luckenbill, 1926: vol.1, p.201). Adad-Nirari states that this wood was “material needed for my palace (and) temples” (Tadmor, 1973: p.143; cf. Page, 1968: p.143). These kings offer a few interesting references to the temple in Babylon, the Esagila, and its patron god, Marduk that are worth mentioning. From the Bronze Gates of Balawat, we read that when Shalmaneser visited Babylon, he went to the Esagila to offer sacrifices and gifts. In this account, the temple at Babylon is referred to as “the bond (connecting link) of heaven and earth” (Luckenbill, 1926: V.1, p.231). In connection with this, Tiglath-Pileser speaks of Marduk as he “who holds the cord of heaven and earth “ (Luckenbill, 1926: V.1, p.278).

Sargon II (c.721-707 B.C.) moved the capital of Assyria to a new area where he built a new city naming it Dur-Sharrukin (Khorsabad). When he built the city, he also built temples in his palace, the “Palace Without a Rival,” for Ea, Sin, Shamash, Nabu, Adad, Urta “and their consorts.” According to the account, the Foundation platform” was laid “Upon dedicatory tablets of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, jasper, alabaster, bronze, lead, oron, *abar* (magnetite), boughs of evergreens.” Cedars were used for the roof and the doors were made of cypress and maple and sheathed with “shining bronze.” After the construction was completed, we are informed that “in a favorable month, on an auspicious day” Sargon invited the gods into their temples. Then offerings of gold, silver, and other things were given as gifts to make “their spirits glad.” The text continues:

Sleek bullocks, fat sheep, (barnyard) fowl, geese (?), doves, the brood of fish and birds, the immeasurable wealth of the deep (*apsu*), wine and honey, the products of the gleaming (snow-capped) mountains, the best of the lands which my hands had conquered, which Assur, begetter of the gods, had added to the wealth of my kingdom, (there) I offered up before them with sacrifices of pure----, spotless oblations, clouds of incense,--unceasing service.

Following this scene of homage, the account then tells us that “The great mountain, Bel (Enlil), lord of (all) lands, . . . the gods and goddesses who abide in Assyria, turned aside (and

entered) their city amid jubilation and feasting” (Luckenbill, 1926: V.2, p.37-39). According to an inscription carved on the pavement of the gates of Dur-Sharrukin the construction of the city and palaces were completed upon “the command of god” (Luckenbill, 1927: vol.2, p.49.50,52,54,55,56,57).

By the time **Sennacherib** (c.704-681 B.C.) came to power, a temple known as “the Temple of the New Year’s Feast of the Desert,” located outside the walls of Ashur, had fallen into disrepair. An inscription on a foundation stele relates that Sennacherib “sought by oracle” the gods Shamash and Adad who “commanded” Sennacherib to rebuild the temple. The text tells that Sennacherib sought “the aid of master-builders” in his building of the temple. He built the foundation out of “mountain limestone.” Into the foundation he put precious stones and choice herbs as well as gold and silver. He also sprinkled the foundation “with the choicest oil as with water from the river.” Prior to the building of this temple, Sennacherib had destroyed Babylon along with the Esagila. It mentions in this inscription that Sennacherib “removed the dust of Babylon” and “in that Temple of the New Year’s Feast I stored up (some) in a covered bin” (Luckenbill, 1926: V.2, p.184-186). This last measure seems to be an attempt on the part of Sennacherib of reducing the importance of Babylon by suggesting that the popular recognition of Babylon as the “bond of heaven and earth” had been transferred to the Temple of the New Year’s Feast at Ashur.

When the Temple Eharsaggalkurkurra at Ashur had fallen into ruins, Sennacherib rebuilt it. But in the rebuilding, he found that the entrance into the shrine opened to the south. Upon finding this, Sennacherib tells us that “in the wisdom which Ea gave me, with the cleverness with which Ashur endowed me, I took counsel with myself alone, and to open the gate of Eharsaggalkurkurra to the east instead of the south, my heart moved me.” Before doing this, however, he sought the divine approval of Shamash and Adad. It was granted (Luckenbill, 1926: V.2, p.189).

With **Esarhaddon** (c.680-669 B.C.), we have the final Assyrian inscriptions regarding temple building and rebuilding which are of importance to our study. Esarhaddon rebuilt several temples during his reign adorning each “with silver and gold, making them shine bright as the day” (Luckenbill, 1926: V.2, p.267-268). In a tablet inscription from Ashur, we have an account of Esarhaddon rebuilding the temple of Ashur. The account is very similar to all the accounts we have seen to this point thus showing that the pattern of temple building established early in Assyrian history was preserved even until Assyria was overtaken by the

Babylonians and Medes. The inscription records that Esarhaddon rebuilt the temple in the same spot as the previous temple. He established the foundation walls upon gold, silver, precious stones, herbs and cedar oil (Luckenbill, 1926: V.2, p.271). From a fragment of a prism inscription, we learn that the gods commanded Esarhaddon to rebuild the temple of Ashur (Luckenbill, 1926: V.2, p.273).

Several inscriptions describe Esarhaddon's rebuilding of Babylon and the temple which was destroyed by his father (see Luckenbill, 1927: V.2, pp.242-264). Esarhaddon attributes his desire to rebuild Babylon and its temple to the appearance of "favorable signs in the heaven and on earth."¹⁹ Nevertheless, Esarhaddon proceeded to act with caution inquiring through an oracle whether his desire was right. Says one text:

To (await) the decision of Shamash and Adad, I prostrated myself reverently; to (learn) their final decree, I arranged the soothsayers at the entrance to the Bit-mummu. I saw a vision concerning Assur, Babylon and Nineveh. (For guidance) concerning the artificers who should accomplish the work and carry out (lit. bring in) the (divine) decree, I laid down the portions of the sacrificial animals right and left (lit. at both sides) (Luckenbill, 1927: V.2, p.260).

The positive affirmation was given and the gods caused their "order to be written" down (Luckenbill, 1927: V.2, pp.244, 246,251). Then Esarhaddon was commanded to enter the Bit-mummu with the "artificers" to "abide there." They then fashioned new images of the gods and other precious items for the temple (Luckenbill, 1927: V.2, pp.260-262). Esarhaddon then proceeded to rebuild the temple. He employed the use of "wise architects and skillful builders." He laid its foundation walls in "choice oil, honey, butter, wine of the mountain." He spanned the roof "with beams of cedar, the product of Mount Amanus" (Luckenbill, 1926: V.2, p.250-251). One text describes how Esarhaddon caused bricks to be

¹⁹ Esarhaddon gives an interesting description of the sign that he saw that caused him to rebuild Babylon and the Esagila. A broken prism states the following: "The planet Jupiter arose, determining the fate of Akkad, and in the month of *Simanu* it drew near to the station of the sun (Shamash). It approached, it stood still. The appearance of its countenance was ruddy. It changed and in the month *Pit-babi* it reached the place of its 'watch' and stood (still) in its station. For the complete restoration of the metropolis, the rebuilding of the sanctuaries, the revival of the cult of Esagila, the temple of the gods,--that this be done, monthly Sin and Shamash (i.e. the moon and the sun) commanded at their appearance. That Akkad should be vindicated, they were in perfect agreement with one another" (Luckenbill, 1927: V.2, p.246; see also p. 259).

made and carried by “headpad” by the people. Then it says, “I raised the headpad to my own head and carried it.” Having completed the building, the “offerings, which had ceased (to be brought), I re-established” (Luckenbill, 1927: V.2, p.244).

From another text we are informed of the rebuilding of the Ebarakugarra, “the house of the Great-Mistress of Nippur.” It says that Esarhaddon “sought out its ground plan, removed its fallen brickwork, viewed its foundation and rebuilt it completely to the old specifications . . . and raised its top like a mountain” (Goetze, 1963: p.130). And finally, in an inscription describing the construction of a palace/temple complex, we find Esarhaddon inviting the gods Ashur and Ishtar into their respective temples. “Extravagant sacrifices of (cultically clean animals)” were laid before them. Then the text reads: “These gods (then) sincerely bestowed a blessing upon my royal rule” (Heidel, 1956: p.35).

Temple Building in the Neo-Babylonian Empire

In this section, temple building from the Neo-Babylonian empire will be briefly examined. This will be followed by noting a few items of interest from texts of the post Neo-Babylonian period in Mesopotamia.

The Neo-Babylonian Empire

From **Nabopolassar** (626-605 B.C.), founder of the Neo-Babylonian empire, are a few statements of interest regarding temple building during his reign. When setting out to build the temple tower in the main temple precinct in Babylon, Nabopolassar claims that first he sought a divine oracle. He not only received divine approval but the measurements of the temple tower as well. The text claims that Nabopolassar “kept the measurements in his memory as a treasure.” Then, before proceeding to build the temple tower, Nabopolassar states: “By means of the act of exorcism, the wisdom of Ea (Enki) and Marduk, I purified that site.” When the temple work actually began, the King states that he actually was involved in the carrying of the bricks (Langdon, 1912: p.63).

When **Nebuchadnezzar** (605-562 B.C.) rebuilt Ebabbara in Larsa, he states that “I packed down clean earth on its old foundation and laid its brickwork” (Ellis, 1968: p.180). A similar claim is made in the reconstruction of Emah, the temple of Ninmah: “I surrounded it with a thick revetment of bitumen and backed bricks. I filled its interior with clean earth” (Ellis, 1968: p.180). In another inscription, Nebuchadnezzar states that he “carefully

searched for the ancient foundation of his temple in Marad, the old foundation of which no earlier king had seen since the old days.” When he found it, the King claimed it to be the foundation laid by “Naram-Sin, my distant ancestor.” He then laid the foundation of the new temple exactly over the old one (Ellis, 1968: p. 180-181).

From stone slabs found at Harran, we are given an interesting account in which **Nabonidus** (c.555-539 B.C.), king of Babylon, is commanded of Marduk and Sin to rebuild the temple, Ehulhul. One text reads: “In the night season he caused me to behold a dream (saying) thus `Ehulhul the temple of Sin which (is) in Harran quickly build, (seeing that) the lands, all of them, to thy hands are committed” (Gadd, 1958: p.57). Another text reads:

During my lawful rule, the great Lords became reconciled with this town and (its) temple out of love for my kingship; they had mercy (upon the town) and they let me see a dream in the very first year of my everlasting rule: Marduk, the Great Lord, and Sin, the luminary of heaven and earth, stood (there) both; Marduk said to me: “Nabonidus, king of Babylon, bring bricks on your own chariot (drawn by your own) horse, (re)build the temple *E.HUL.HUL* and let Sin, the Great Lord, take up his dwelling there!” (Oppenheim, 1956:250)

Nabonidus, like his father Nebuchadnezzar, was very concerned about rebuilding temples exactly over the foundation of previous temples. In a text concerning the rebuilding of the temple of Shamash in Sippar, Nabonidus remarks:

. . . an earlier king looked for the old foundation, but did not find it. He had a new temple built for Shamash on his own, but it was not worthy of his lordly rank nor fitting for his status as a god. The pinnacles of that temple fell down prematurely; its upper parts crumbled (Ellis, 1968: p.181).

In another text concerning the restoration of Etbarra, it is said that

. . . by order of Marduk . . . the four winds approached, the [violent] tempests; the sand dunes with which that city and that temple were covered over were blown away and Etbarra, the awe-inspiring dwelling, became [visible] (Frankfort, 1948: p. 270).

Nabonidus also claims that when rebuilding temples that he built “solidly on the foundation . . . neither protruding nor receding an inch” (Ellis, 1968: p. 181; see also p.182,183; cf. Frankfort, 1948: p.271).

One final note of interest from the reign of Nabonidus comes not from building inscriptions but from archaeology. According to Sir Leonard Woolley, when Nabonidus built the “Harbour Temple” in Ur he

began by digging a deep rectangular pit, in the bottom of which he laid out the ground-plan of the temple, and accordingly he built walls to the height of just over 20 feet;²⁰ these were neatly plastered and whitewashed. In the temple he built in burnt brick the proper tables of offering, altar, and statue-base,²¹ fixed doors and the doorways, and put on a temporary roof . . . Undoubtedly there was a service of consecration in the building, with the god's statue set on its base. After that, the roof was taken off and the whole building was filled with sand; the old earth that had been dug out could not be purified, considering the mixed nature of the soil here inside the city walls, but clean sand would be a perfectly good substitute. As the sand was poured in from above, workmen laid bricks on the altar and tables, keeping pace with the rise of the sand . . . until, when the whole was filled, there could be seen only as it were a ground-plan formed by the tops of the walls and of the temple furnishings, flush with the smooth sand surface. Then there began a new phase. The sand was topped with a pavement of burnt bricks, on the top of the walls, now become a foundation, new walls were built . . . and new tables and altar, built above-ground, rested on the bricks piled above the old (Woolley, 1982: pp.247-248).²²

Post Neo-Babylonian Inscriptions

From the period which followed the ending of the Babylonian empire, we have two inscriptions which are of interest. **Antiochus Soter** (c.281-261 B.C.), an Achaemenid ruler, tells us that when he “conceived the idea of reconstructing Esagila and Ezida” he ade with his

²⁰ These walls had no foundation but were built on the open earth (see Woolley, 1982: p.246).

²¹ All of these were placed on open earth for there was no paved floor (see Woolley, 1982: p.246).

²² Woolley's interpretation of Nabonidus' ground and foundation preparation is as follows: “This (the temple proper built on top) was the temple in which man worshipped his god and did sacrifice; it derived its peculiar sanctity from the fact that it not only was a replica of but was based directly on the real house of god, inaccessible to man; the altar on which the priest made his sacrifice was holy because it was one with the altar of that hidden and inviolate shrine” (Woolley, 1982: p. 248). This interpretation though plausible is based on no textual evidence therefore can only remain tentative.

See also Ellis's discussion of the Harbour Temple in Ellis, 1968: pp. 11-12.

“august hands” the first brick²³ “with the finest oil and brought it . . . for the laying of the foundation of Esagila and Ezida” (Pritchard, 1969: p.317).

From two texts recovered at Uruk and written during the **Seleucid** period, we have a long detailed recitation of the ritual performed when rebuilding a temple (Pritchard, 1969: pp.339-342). One text reads in part:

When the wall of the temple falls into ruin--for the purpose of demolishing and founding anew the temple in question . . . The director of the reconstruction of the temple in question shall put on clean clothes, place a (tin) bracelet on his hand, take up an axe of basalt, shall (lift up) the first brick,²⁴ and put (it) away in an inaccessible place. You shall set up a single sacrificial stand in front of the brick for the god of the foundations and shall sacrifice the sheep (Pritchard, 1969: p.341).

After different libations are poured on it, the director is then to “recite in front of the brick” the *Enuma Anu ibnu same*, a composition of which the following is a part:

²³ Leo Oppenheim discusses the use of the ‘first brick’ in his paper on Mesopotamian temples: “The orientation of the building was determined by the setting of the *libittu makhritu* (‘first brick’) which was placed ceremoniously on clean earth, surrounded by precious beads and anointed with perfumed oil. This brick was conceived as harboring the protective numina of the building, the ‘god,’ ‘goddess,’ and ‘genius’ (*ilu, ishtartu, Lamassu*) with which the temple was endowed like any living human being. In case of the desecration of the sanctuary, by repair-work or reconstruction, the *libittu makhritu* had to be taken from its location by the temple-architect and brought to a ritually clean and secluded place in the open air. Here, penitential songs, continuous aspersions, and fumigations were enacted for the sustenance of this ‘temple in exile’ till it could be put in place again” (Oppenheim, 1975: pp. 164-165).

²⁴ Ellis has suggested that perhaps sometimes *libittu mahritu* translated “the first brick” could be better translated “the former brick.” The “former brick” was taken from the ruins of the old temple and set aside to be placed in the new temple, thus “preserving the continuity of worship. The single brick embodied the essence of the god’s home and bridged the gap between the destruction of the old building and the founding of the new” (see Ellis, 1968: pp. 26-29 for a complete discussion).

David Petersen sees a reflection of this practice in the building of Zerubbabel’s temple. He translates Zechariah 4:6-7 as follows: “6. This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel saying: Not by might, not by power, but by my spirit says the Lord of Hosts. 7. What are you? A great mountain? Alongside of Zerubbabel you are a plain. He will bring out the former stone (There will be) shouts of ‘Grace, Grace’ for him.” Having examined Ellis’ discussion of the “former brick,” he then concludes: “By analogy, the *ha’eben harosah* in Zech 4:7 is probably a building deposit which signified continuity with the earlier temple. Such a ‘former brick’ emphasized sacral continuity” (see Petersen, 1974: pp. 366-372 for complete discussion).

When the god Anu created heaven,
(When) the god Nudimmud²⁵ created the *apsu*-ocean, his dwelling,
The god Ea pinched off a piece of clay in the *apsu* ocean
Created the (brick-god) Kulla²⁶ for the restoration of [temples], (Pritchard, 1969: p.341)

A Summary of the Features of Mesopotamian Temple Building

At this point, a summary of the features found in Mesopotamian temple building must be given.²⁷ It should be understood, however, that these features are general and will not apply to every king at all times. Our records are not detailed enough to provide that kind of conclusive evidence. Consequently, these conclusions must only be tentative.

1. In many cases, the building or rebuilding of the temple came at the command of a god, or with their divine approval.²⁸
2. Where the texts are detailed enough, we learn that the king used the help of “master-builders.”²⁹

²⁵ The Sumerian god Enki.

²⁶ “The idea of a god whose special function was to govern the making of bricks can be traced back at least to the period of the First Dynasty if Isin. The Sumerian myth ‘Enki and the World Order’ tells how Enki put the god Kulla, whose name is written simply with the sign for ‘brick,’ in charge of the pickaxe and brick-mold” (Ellis, 1968: p.18).

²⁷ At the conclusion of each feature will be a footnote explaining on which page in the paper evidence for that feature can be found.

²⁸ See Urnammu, p. 6; Warad-Sin, p. 7; Shalim-ahum, p.9; Tukulti-Ninurta I, p.12; Tiglath-Pileser I, p.13; Sargon II, p.16; Sennacherib, p.17; Esarhaddon, p.18; Nabopolassar, p.20; Nabonidus, p.21. It is not always clear where the command or the oracle proof is given. It would presumably be in a temple or holy sanctuary. The command to rebuild Babylon and its temple complex, the Esagila, was given to Esarhaddon through “favorable signs in the heaven and earth.” Those ‘heavenly signs’ were in the form of Jupiter, the Sun and the Moon (see footnote #17). As most ancient temples were at the same time astronomical observatories (see Lundquist, 1983: pp.210-211), it would seem most likely then that, in this case, the command to rebuild Babylon and the Esagila came in a temple.

²⁹ See Sennacherib, p.17; Esarhaddon, p.19.

3. When rebuilding the temple, the king dug down to the foundation of the previous temple or down to water level if it was a new temple.³⁰

4. The site of the new temple was often purified.³¹

5. The foundation and walls were built of stone or brick with gold, silver and other precious metals used to adorn them making them “shine bright as the day.”³²

6. Rituals were performed when the foundation and walls were put in. Normally these consisted of either laying the foundation and walls in oil, butter (cream), honey, etc., or by mixing, pouring or sprinkling the same on the walls or foundation. There were rituals regarding the making of the bricks and the placing of the first brick in the foundation.³³

7. Cedars from Mount Lebanon and Mount Amanus were used in the construction of the temple. Sometimes the cedars were given as gifts and offerings. Sometimes the cedars were used at the command of the god for whom the temple was being constructed.³⁴

8. Often the texts are written so that it suggests the king is actually involved in doing the work.³⁵

9. Some texts inform us that the temple was built according to a plan normally drawn by “wise architects.” Sometimes these plans are revealed by god.³⁶

³⁰ Tiglath-pileser I, p.13; Ashur-nasir-apli II, p.14; Sennacherib, p.17; Esarhaddon, p.18,19; Nebuchadnezzar, p.20; Nabonidus, p.21,22.

³¹ See Ur-Bau, p.5; Temple Oval in Khafajah, p.5; Nabopolassar, p.20; Nebuchadnezzar, p.20; possibly Nabonidus in his building of the “Harbour Temple” in Ur, p.22.

³² The Abzu temple in Eridu, p.3; Entemena, p.5; Urnammu, p.6,7; Erishum I, p.9; Shamshi-Adad I, p.9; Tiglath-Pileser I, p.13; Esarhaddon, p.18-19.

³³ Urnammu, p.6; Erishum I, p.9; Shamshi-Adad I, p.9-10; Shalmaneser I, p.11; Sargon II, p.16; Sennacherib, p.17; Esarhaddon, p.18.

³⁴ Enannatum I, p.5; Shamshi-Adad I, p.9; Tiglath-Pileser I, p.13; Ashur-nasir-apli, p.15; Shalmaneser III, p.15-16; Adad-Nirari III, p.15-16; Sargon II, p.16.

³⁵ Most texts are written in the person of the king, therefore they all sound like the king did the work. We know this could not be the case. Nevertheless, there are a few inscriptions which actually say the king did some of the work: Urnammu, p.6; Esarhaddon, p.19; Nabopolassar, p.20; Antiochus Soter, p.23.

³⁶ Esarhaddon, p.18-19; Nabopolassar, p.20. It must be remembered that most of the accounts looked at in the scope of this paper are accounts of temple rebuilding and that most of those temples were rebuilt directly over the preceding temple suggesting the continuance of the previous plan. There are no known texts regarding the first building of most of the temples examined in this paper. Therefore this point is a difficult one to fully justify. However, if it is

10. Some texts reveal that canals and gardens were built in the temple precinct.³⁷
11. The god of the temple was always invited or ushered into the new temple built in his behalf followed by a time for the bringing of sacrifices, offerings and gifts.³⁸
12. Great festivities and jubilation followed the completion and rebuilding of the temples.³⁹
13. Once the temple was built, the establishment of its feast and the fixing of its dues was accomplished.⁴⁰
14. Most temple building inscriptions conclude with the prayer for a blessing from the god for the king's efforts in building or rebuilding his temple.⁴¹ A few, however, suggest the god actually gave that blessing.⁴²

Conclusion

Having come thus far, it can be noted that several of the features found in the historical texts and building inscriptions of temple building in ancient Mesopotamia coincide with the list of ten elements found in Kapelrud's article. We shall now briefly proceed through Kapelrud's list indicating whether or not that feature can be attested among the accounts of temple building in the historical texts and building inscriptions of ancient Mesopotamia.

assumed that the plan of first temple was given by the god, that would suggest why most kings were concerned about digging down to the old foundation and building new temple directly over the former foundation. Both Nebuchadnezzar's comment that he "carefully searched for the ancient foundation" (p.20) and Nabonidus' assertion that Marduk ordered the winds to blow the sand away that covered the foundation the temple (p.21) would give evidence of this.

³⁷ See the Abzu temple in Eridu, p.3; Etemena, p.5; Tukulti-Ninurta I, pp.12. Othmar Keel states that "Temple gardens are attested throughout Mesopotamia, from Eridu and Uruk in the south to Assur in the north, and also in Canaan" (Keel, p.135). Keel gives as visual evidence a wall painting from Mari (see Appendix A), a wall relief from the palace of Assurbanipal in Nineveh (see Appendix B), and a cultic stand from Meggido (see Appendix C).

³⁸ See Shalmaneser I, p.11; Sargon II, p.16; Esarhaddon, p.19.

³⁹ The Abzu temple in Eridu, pp.3,4; Urnammu, pp.6,7; Shalmaneser I, p.11; Sargon II, p.16.

⁴⁰ Tikulti-Ninurta I, pp.12; Ashur-nasir-apli I, pp.14,15; Esarhaddon, p.19.

⁴¹ Though many inscriptions end with the king's provocation for a blessing, only two were included in this paper; see Shalmaneser I, p.11; Tiglath-Pileser I, p.13

⁴² The Abzu temple in Eridu, pp.3,4; Urnammu, pp.6,7; Esarhaddon, p.19.

1. *Some indication that a temple must be built.* We can see this in those cases where the king or ruler saw signs in heaven and earth provoking him to build the temple.⁴³

2. *The king visits a temple over night.* This is not specifically mentioned in any of the texts. But that the king visited a temple may be seen when he sought an oracle for rebuilding a temple.⁴⁴

3. *A god tells him what to do, indicates plans.* The only clear evidence of this is from Nabopolassar's account of the building of the temple tower in Babylon.⁴⁵

4. *The king announces his intention to build a temple.* This can be seen in the inscriptions of Sargon II and Esarhaddon. Sargon announced his intentions by bringing the peoples of the lands whom he has captured to build the temples. Esarhaddon announced his by collecting his artisans, builders and architects to plan and build the Esagila.

5. *Master builder is engaged, cedars from Lebanon, building-stones, gold, silver etc. procured for the task.* In many of the inscriptions this point has been quite evident.⁴⁶

6. *The temple finished according to plan.* Every temple was built according to the plan of "wise architects," however, no time limits are mentioned.

7. *Offerings and dedication, fixing of norms.* This feature is a common occurrence in the Mesopotamian tradition of temple building.⁴⁷

8. *Assembly of the people.* This can clearly be seen in the building of the temple of Sargon II at Dur-Sharrukin. After the temples were completed, people from all over the kingdom came to the city and their was "jubilation and feasting."⁴⁸

9. *The god comes to his new house.* A theophony of god showing his divine approval of the newly constructed temple is not clearly seen among any of the accounts we have looked at. The only possible indication of this item would be the inviting of the gods to the temple by the kings as well as the placing of the gods statue in the edifice.⁴⁹

⁴³ See footnote #28.

⁴⁴ See footnote #28.

⁴⁵ See page 20. A vague reference to this may be seen in Ashur-nasir-apli's statement concerning the rebuilding of Ishtar's temple in Nineveh (see p.15).

⁴⁶ See footnotes #29, #32 and #34.

⁴⁷ See footnote #40.

⁴⁸ See footnote #39.

⁴⁹ See footnote #38.

10. *The king is blessed and promised everlasting domination.* This may be seen only in the case of Urnammu and Esarhaddon.⁵⁰

The preceding examination of ancient Mesopotamian temple building has shown that with the exception of the second item, Kapelrud's list of common features is vindicated. Each item is confirmed by at least one example from other temple building traditions in Mesopotamia. And most items are repeatedly affirmed thus showing the uniformity that exists in temple building in the ancient Near East. It has also shown that Kapelrud's list might be extended even further.

Purification of the Temple Site

For example, added to Kapelrud's list might be feature no. 4 from the summary section of Mesopotamian temple building which states: "The site of the new temple was often purified." This might even be expanded to include not only the temple site, but the city and people. The cylinder inscriptions describing Gudea's building of the temple of Ningirsu describe this in great detail. The account reads:

The *patesi* his city as on man made a pure place. The land of Lagash united its heart like the children of one mother: tall brush-wood they burned; thorns they pulled up; they filled the vessels with vegetables; they performed the mysteries; with the ziggurat that temple he raised up. The speech of the whip the overseer prohibited; sheep's wool he bound on to it. A mother did not chide her child; a child also separated from its mother, did not cry for her. For a servant whose arm was injured no one raised a cry to the king. A maid who had done a great wrong--her mistress did not strike her in the face. Before the *patesi*, the builder of Eninnu,--before Gudea no one made a claim. The *patesi* purified the city; (its) brightness he made visible. Porters and reliable men he brought from the city. in a brick-mould this omen he established: "I will lay a brick as an omen; along its deep face I will look with faithful eye the shepherd, whose name was named by Nina, will make it perfectly. The mould I will then break; the deep face which I have made perfectly like the divine black storm-cloud." Then to the deepest pit he purified the city and cleansed it; cypress and bright-burning wood of the mountain he heaped on the fire; with aromatic cedar, the delight of divinity he created the brightness of that fire (Barton, 1929: pp. 117-118; see also Frankfort, 1948: p.272).⁵¹

⁵⁰ See footnote #42.

⁵¹ Samuel Kramer reviews the purification by Gudea in the following words: "He issued instructions to the people of his city, who responded enthusiastically and unitedly. He first purified the city morally and ethically: there were to be no complaints and accusations or

Though the account informing us of Solomon's temple building activity is silent on this point, we find a similar pattern of purification procedures in the account of the construction of the tabernacle. Before Moses received the command to build a temple, the people were purified by covenant. It may be seen from Exodus 19:5,6 that this purification was in preparation for temple worship. In these verses, Yahweh tells the Israelites that they "shall be unto me a kingdom of priests"⁵² and as priests who worship in a temple, they must first be purified. The first part of the purification ritual is described in Ex. 19:10-13 where we are informed that the people are to "sanctify" themselves, wash their clothes, not engage in sexual intercourse, and build "bounds" around Mt. Sinai, the mountain of God. While the people were engaging themselves in this, Moses went up on the mountain where he received the Law (Ex. 20-23) which if the people lived would purify them morally and ethically. In Exodus 24:3-8, the people agreed by covenant to keep the Law. Moses then returned to the mountain sanctuary wherein he received the instructions for the building of a desert sanctuary for Yahweh. After he received the divine pattern for the portable temple, the Lord informed him that the Israelites had "corrupted themselves" by making a golden calf (Ex. 32:7). The account then informs us that Moses proceeded to rid the camp of this "great sin" (Ex. 32:25-29). Once the people had been purified, the construction of the Tent of Meeting was accomplished.

Further Biblical support for purification rituals may be found in the account of Josiah's reparation of Solomon's temple. According to the II Chronicles 34 the land was "purged" of all its idolatry by Josiah. Then verse 8 says:

Now in the eighteenth year of (Josiah's) reign, when he had purged⁵³ the land, and the house,⁵⁴ he sent Shaphan the son of Azailah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the Lord his God.

In the rebuilding of the temple after the exile by Zerubbabel, we have one final bit of evidence for purification rituals. Before rebuilding was initiated, the altar of Burnt Offering

punishments; the mother must not scold her child, nor must the child raise its voice against the mother; the slave was not to be punished for wrongdoing; the slave girl was not to be struck by her mistress for disrespect; all the unclean were banished from the city" (Kramer, 1963: p.139).

⁵² The meaning of this phrase is that the king of the Kingdom is Yahweh. The people were to be as priests consecrating themselves wholly to his service.

⁵³ The Hebrew word used here (*taher*) means to purify.

⁵⁴ The temple.

was first restored upon which sacrifices were then offered (Ezra 2:3). The feast of the tabernacles was also celebrated after which all the normal offerings were instituted. Before any of this could have been done properly, both the people and the altar would have to be purified according to normal Israelite tradition.⁵⁵ After these rites were instituted, the foundation of the temple was laid (see Ezra 2).

Gardens and Water

We might also add to Kapelrud's list no. 10 of the summary section which states that "Some texts reveal that canals and gardens were built in the temple precinct." For confirmation of this in Gudea's account of his building the temple for Ningirsu we read that Gudea covered the walls of the inside of the temple "with panels of cedar attractive to the eye." Upon these panels were carved "real *riqqu*-plants and abundant *azal*-plants." He also carved "creatures of the deep" (Barton, 1929: p.227,229). It also appears that a large garden was planted in the temple and given the name "The-shade-of-the-plain" (Barton, 1929: p.235). It seems obvious that if there are gardens there must also be a canal, well, cistern, or some other container for water nearby. Though Gudea's account remains silent on this, it does make a vague reference to a section of the temple known as "the water place of the gods" (Barton, 1929: p.229).

There does not appear to be any Biblical evidence of plants or gardens, whether real or ichnographic, in the Mosaic tabernacle with the sole exception of the menorah (the KJV "candlestick"). Exodus 25:31-36 describes the design and construction of the seven branched candlestand as representing a blossoming almond tree, the first of the trees that blossom in the Near East.⁵⁶ Though this is the only Biblical mention of flora in the design of the tabernacle,

⁵⁵ For traditional purification rites of the altar see Leviticus 8; Ezekiel 43:18-27.

⁵⁶ Concerning the almond design of the menorah, R. Alan Cole has said: "If the references to the almond-tree are to be taken as literal designs used for decoration (and this seems the obvious interpretation), then we are reminded of Aaron's almond rod that budded (Nu. 17:8) and Jeremiah's vision (Je 1:11,12). It would seem from Jeremiah that the almond, as the first tree that blossomed in the spring-time, was an appropriate symbol of God's wonderful care over His people, and of His fulfillment of the promises made to their forefathers. But all this is guesswork, and we do well to tread cautiously" (Cole, 1973: p.193).

Of the three pairs of branches, Carol Meyers has said: "Three pairs of branches are a convention in Near Eastern iconography as far back as the Old Akkadian period. By far the most common theme expressed by branched forms of any kind is that of fertility and sustenance

Josephus adds that his belief was that the veil between the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place “was very ornamental, and embroidered with all sorts of flowers which the earth produces” (Antiquities Book 3, 6:4). Evidence for the importance of water in the tabernacle is clearly seen in the position and use of the Laver (Ex. 30:18-21). It was the only thing that stood between the altar of Burnt Offering and the door of the tabernacle and was used for ritual cleansing of the priests “that they die not” while in the presence of deity.

Turning to the temple of Solomon, we find the same kind of wall construction as in the temple of Ningirsu built by Gudea. I Kings 6:15-18 says that the walls of the Holy Place were covered “on the inside with wood” so that “there was no stone seen.” Carved on the wood were “knops⁵⁷ and open flowers.” I Kings 6:29 describes the walls of both the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies as being covered with cedar with “carved figures of cherubims and palm trees⁵⁸ and open flowers.”⁵⁹ According to I Kings 6:31-32 on the two large olive wood doors at the entrance of the Holy of Holies were “carvings of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers.” Psalm 52:8 and 92:12 might suggest that olive trees, palms, and cedars of Lebanon were planted in the temple courts.⁶⁰ Water, as in the tabernacle, was an essential feature in the Solomonic temple. Unlike the tabernacle, however, Solomon had eleven lavers

of life.” In other words, the Menorah is a possible symbol of the Tree of Life. Meyers continues: “The association of life trees with celestial symbols is a recurrent pattern” (Meyers, 1976: p.587). Josephus sees this same cosmic association. He describes the menorah “as having as many branches as there are planets, including the sun among them. It terminated in seven heads, in one row, all standing parallel to one another; and these branches carried seven lamps, one by one, in imitation of the number of the planets” (Antiquities Book 3, 7:7).

⁵⁷ Gourd shaped ornaments (Holladay, 1971: p.296).

⁵⁸ J.C. Trever comments concerning the symbolic nature of palm trees in the ancient Near East: “Sacred associations with the palm are found throughout the ancient Near East, especially in glyptic art. It often appears as the Tree of Life on cylinder seals and in other forms of art” (Trever, 1962: p.646).

⁵⁹ A note in the New International Version Study Bible gives this interesting comment concerning palm trees: “The depiction of cherubim and beautiful trees and flowers is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, from which man had been driven as a result of sin (Gen. 3:24). In a symbolic sense, readmission to the paradise of God is now to be found only by means of atonement for sin at the sanctuary.”

⁶⁰ This view is held by Othmar Keel (Keel, p.135) and is debatable.

constructed (I Kings 7:23-40). The most prominent of the eleven was the “molten sea.”⁶¹ It was a large bowl shaped structure with the capacity of 2,000 baths (11,000 gallons?)⁶² which was placed on the back of twelve oxen. The other ten were smaller by comparison yet each held 40 baths (200 gallons?) and were placed on movable stands.⁶³

The foregoing discussion has shown that purification rituals and the use of gardens and water existed in Gudea’s temple of Ningirsu, the tabernacle, and the Solomonic temple supporting the idea of adding no.s 4 and 10 of the summary section to Kapelrud’s list.

In conclusion, this paper has shown that the tradition of temple building in ancient Mesopotamia, though covering over 2500 years, is uniform in style. Beginning with Enki’s temple of the Abzu in Eridu, with its “ordinances and ritual,” and concluding with the texts of temple rebuilding from the Hellenistic period, a common thread can be traced linking the different traditions of temple building. In so doing, the validity of Kapelrud’s comparison of two different temple traditions is confirmed, reaffirming that even divergent religions can share commonalities.

⁶¹ “The term ‘sea’ indicates that this is no mere wash basin (though it naturally fulfilled that function). Rather, its water represents the harnessed, subdued Chaos from which the world arose. Whether it represents the heavenly or the subterranean ocean is an irrelevant question, since both oceans (and the earthly ocean as well) originally and essentially belong together” (Keel, p.136; see also Wright, 1941: p.25).

⁶² 2 Chron. 4:2-5 says the molten sea held 2,000 baths. For a discussion of this see Mihelic, 1962: p.253.

⁶³ For discussion and artists rendering see Garber, 1962: pp.76-77.

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