The mystery of the second temple: Comparing the two Aššur temples in the Middle Assyrian period to understand the temple in Kār-Tukulti-Ninurta

Idrissi, Imen el

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The mystery of the second temple

Comparing the two Aššur temples in the Middle Assyrian period to understand the temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta

Imen el Idrissi

The mystery of the second temple

Comparing the two Aššur temples in the Middle Assyrian period to understand the temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta

Imen el Idrissi s2577941
Bachelor Thesis 1083VBTHEY
A. Politopoulos Ph.D.
Leiden University, Faculty of Archaeology
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Chapter 1: Introduction

For the entirety of the Assyrian Empire, from its start as a city-state called Aššur until its collapse in 612 CE, the god Aššur stood at its heart. They were so intertwined, that it is unclear whether their first capital city Aššur was named after the god, or vice versa, and it is often difficult to distinguish the two in texts. The city of Aššur hosts a large Aššur temple, which served as a cult centre for the entire duration of the state. Only one other Aššur temple was erected, in the second capital city Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, which was closed after a brief period of usage; unusual, as most (important) Mesopotamian deities had multiple temples spread across various cities. There has been little research on this second temple, and its function remains unclear. This thesis aims to offer new insights on the function and usage of the second Aššur temple, and on why it was closed. This will further our understanding of the god's role in the Assyrian Empire, and why no other king built a temple dedicated to him after the second temple was abandoned.

1.1 Summary of previous research

The city Aššur and its Aššur temple have been researched extensively, starting in 1840 by William F. Ainsworth (Politopoulos, 2020, p. 33). Between 1903 and 1914, German archaeologists led by Walter Andrae excavated the site, followed by Iraqi archaeologists in 1979, R. Dittmann in 1988-89, B. Hrouda in 1990, and P. A. Miglus in 2000-01 (Politopoulos, 2020, p. 34). The last comprehensive analysis of the temple was done by Helen Gries in 2017, where she discussed the architecture, including possible functions of separate rooms, and the objects found on site. Most archaeological evidence from these excavations pertain to the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods, and little has been recovered from the first stages of the city and the temple. According to Assyrian historical tradition, the temple was built by king Ušpia, but no (archaeological) proof of this has been found as of yet (Maul, 2017, p. 338; van Driel, 1969, pp. 1-2). The chronology of the earliest foundations is unclear, but we know that the temple was completely rebuilt by a later king, Šamši-Adad I, who reigned between ca. 1808-1776 BCE[1] (Maul, 2017, p. 342; van Driel, 1969, p. 5). This was the first building sequence of which a complete plan could be reconstructed, based on the remains of the foundations. Excavation data and ancient texts detail the changes made and remodelling done by other kings, such as a large addition in the southwest of the temple made by Shalmaneser I in the 13th century BCE (Andrae, 1938/1977, p. 122). Until Sennacherib (704-681 BCE), who made various structural changes, only minor parts were altered or restored according to various inscriptions, which are barely noticeable in the excavation data (van Driel 1969, p. 20).

Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta was first excavated in 1913-1914 by Walter Bachmann and Walter Andrae, where they uncovered an Aššur temple and ziggurat (Politopoulos, 2020, p. 37). They never published their research, which was instead done by Tilman Eickhoff in 1985, based on a part of their excavation notes (Politopoulos, 2020, p. 37). In 1986 and 1989 a German team led by R. Dittmann conducted surveys and excavated to determine the size and borders of the site and collect pottery (Dittmann, 2011). The last archaeological fieldwork in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta was conducted in 2002, by a team of Iraqi archaeologists, which focused mostly on (parts of) the Northern and Southern palace (Mühl & Sulaiman, 2011). Gilibert (2008, p. 182) reviewed these excavations and argued that this Aššur temple was merely a branch of the first Aššur temple. Politopoulos (2020, p. 54) disagreed with this, arguing instead that while its exact function remains unknown, it was clearly important as attested by royal inscriptions, albeit possibly lower in status compared to the temple in Aššur. An important point of discussion in a variety of these texts is the founding date of the city, as the archaeological evidence seems to contradict royal inscriptions from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, the king who had Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta and its Aššur temple built. The current consensus is that building started in the first decade of the king's reign, which would be around 1223 BCE (Schmitt 2020, p. 262). Another disputed point is the timing of its abandonment. Schmitt (2020) states that this cannot be linked to the king's death itself, as it is clear the temple and the city were used for some time afterwards. According to Eickhoff (1985, p. 34), an inscription from the time of Tiglath-Pileser I (1114-1076 BCE) indicated the end date of the temple, as it stated that the gods of the city Aššur had returned.

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[1] This thesis uses Middle Chronology for all the dates, based on the work of Düring (2020), who mentions that this chronology is most widely agreed upon.

1.2 Research questions and aims

As made clear above, the temple in Aššur has been researched more extensively than the temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, and there is still a lot still unknown about the latter. Additionally, the temples have not often been compared, especially not in a detailed and systematic way against the backdrop of their religious and ideological context. This thesis addresses this gap in our knowledge of the temples and does so by answering the following questions.

1.2.1 Main question

What were the main functions of the new Aššur temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta (ca. 1243-1207 BCE) and why was it abandoned?

1.2.2 Sub-questions

1: How do the two Aššur temples compare to each other based on architecture, rationale, and usage?

2: What was the connection between the Assyrian kings (in the Middle Assyrian period) and the two Aššur temples?

3: How did the temples represent the god Aššur, and how are they connected to broader Assyrian religion?

1.3 Methodology

The main method for this thesis will be literature review, focusing on final publications of the mentioned excavations, and publications on relevant theoretical background and discussions. While this thesis focuses on the Middle Assyrian period, there are more sources of information from the Neo-Assyrian period, and I will sometimes rely on those as well. This is feasible since, in many ways, the Neo-Assyrian Empire continued most practices, traditions, and beliefs.

For the discussion on the religious context of the temples, especially the publications by Hundley (2013), Hrůša (2015) and Maul (2017) will be of importance. Hundley (2013) discusses ancient Mesopotamian temple building traditions through the ages. Hrůša (2015) provides a comprehensive overview of Mesopotamian religion, its major gods and their connections to their temples. Maul (2017) provides a detailed discussion of the god Aššur specifically, his place in theology and his temples, and his relation to the Assyrian kings. Also relevant are the following publications: van Driel (1969), which discusses the cult of Aššur and its history; Lambert (1983), which looks at the god Aššur in detail; Alstola et al (2019), which uses statistical analysis to determine Aššur's role within the pantheon of gods based on cuneiform texts; Brisch (2020), which gives a brief overview of Mesopotamian religion and the current approaches from religious studies.

For the comparison of the architecture of the two temples, I will rely mostly on the publications by Andrae (1938/1977; 1955) and Eickhoff (1985) discussed briefly above. Additionally, Gries (2017) provides a good, detailed overview and analysis of the architecture of the temple in Aššur, which will be contrasted to Andrae's account. For the comparison based on function and usage, I will mainly use Andrae and Eickhoff's interpretations, as well as the discussions by van Driel (1969), Miglus (2001), Gilibert (2008), Novotny (2010), Gries (2017), Maul (2017), Politopoulos (2020), and Schmitt (2020). They all discuss in some way the function and/or use of either one or both temples. Most, if not all, base their discussions on both archaeological and textual data. Especially for the temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta the function and usage are unclear and much disputed, and I will discuss the various options offered by the authors mentioned above. Novotny (2010) does not as much specifically discuss the Aššur temples, but discusses the Assyrian tradition of temple building, providing a useful tool for further comparison and contextualisation. Politopoulos (2020) also does not focus on the temples themselves, but still provides worthwhile arguments and overviews on past discussions.

1.4 Reading guide

After having discussed previous research, my research questions and aims, as well as the methodology, I will briefly discuss the contents of the following chapters here. In chapter two, the focus will be on the geographical, chronological, and ideological context of the Aššur temples. I will give a brief overview of the Assyrian Empire, looking at the three main periods: the Old Assyrian period, the Middle Assyrian period, and the Neo-Assyrian period. In chapter 3, the religious context of the temples will be discussed, focusing on the god Aššur, wider Assyrian religion, and traditions of temple building and temple usage in Assyria. Chapter 4 will constitute the comparison of the two Aššur temples, looking at the architecture, function, and usage of both, based on excavation data and ancient texts discussed in literature. For both temples, the focus will be on the period during which the second temple was built and used, roughly speaking between 1233-1207 BCE. Chapter 5 will discuss the contents of the previous chapters and reflect on the role of the temples and their god in Assyrian religion and kingship, and specifically the relation between king Tukulti-Ninurta I and his new Aššur temple. In chapter 6, the research questions laid out above will be answered and possibilities for future research will be offered.

Chapter 2: The Assyrian Empire

2.1 Introduction

An important part in understanding the Aššur temples is first laying out their geographical and chronological context. In this chapter, a very brief overview of the Assyrian state will be given, following the periodization visualised in table 1. Extra attention will be paid to the Middle Assyrian Period, as the second temple was built and used during that time, and it is therefore the most relevant for this thesis.

Table 1. Periodization of Assyria, based on Frahm 2017.

Period	Dates	Phase
Old Assyrian Period	20th – 18th century BCE	City state
Transition Period	17th – 15th century BCE	Decline and Mittani vassal
Middle Assyrian Period	14th – 11th century BCE	Territorial state
Neo Assyrian Period	10th – 7th century BCE	Empire

2.2 Assyria from rise to decline

2.2.1 Old Assyrian Period and Transition Period

The Assyrian state started out as the city of Aššur and grew outwards from there over the course of several centuries. It constituted the very heart of Assyria, being both the political and religious capital for a long time and sharing its name with the name of their state, their people, and their main god. During later periods, the role of the political and administrative centre fell to other cities, but Aššur remained the religious capital until the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and hence remained the centre around which the rest of the state revolved (Maul, 2017, p. 340).

The city of Aššur arose on the west bank of the Tigris, in what is now northern Iraq, likely during the early 3rd millennium BC (Düring, 2020, pp. 27-33; Maul, 2017, p. 337). Little is known about the early phases of the city, and archaeologically speaking the biggest sources of information are the ancient Ištar temple, which has deposits dating back to 2500 BCE, and the 'Urplan' palace, an uncompleted palace in the city (Düring 2020, pp. 31-38). The discovery of Old Assyrian cuneiform texts from Assyrian traders in Kültepe-Kanesh (Central Anatolia) confirm that the city was central to a long-distance trade network from at least 1950 BCE onwards (Düring, 2020, pp. 33-34). During this early period, Aššur was possibly temporarily part of other Mesopotamian states, specifically Ur III and Akkad, although this is unclear and contested (Düring, 2020, p. 31; Radner, 2015, p. 2). In 1808 BCE, Šamši-Adad conquered Aššur, and from there he conquered various regions and established a relatively large state ('Kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia') north of Babylon (Mieroop, 2007, p. 107). This state fell apart after his death, and while one of his sons managed to keep Aššur, it would diminish greatly in power (Mieroop, 2007, pp. 109-111). King Puzur-Assur III managed to restore some power to the state between 1521 and 1498 BCE, but from 1430 BCE this power was lost as Assyria became a vassal of the powerful Mittani state; this would last about 70 years before they regained their independence (Düring, 2020, p. 42).

2.2.2 Middle Assyrian Period

The first significant king of the Middle Assyrian period was Aššur-uballiṭ I (1363-1328 BCE), who conquered the 'Assyrian triangle', which was delineated by the cities Aššur, Nineveh and Arbela, after freeing Assyria from the Mittani (Frahm, 2017; Radner, 2015). He was the first Assyrian ruler to use the title of 'king', as previous rulers called themselves 'great one' or 'overseer', indicating a change in power structures and ambition (Düring, 2020, p. 43; Maul, 2017, p. 341). The two kings ruling directly after him were less successful in a military sense, but the three kings following them built Assyria into the (minor) Middle Assyrian Empire that was so successful (Düring, 2020, pp. 44-45).

The first was Adad-nirari I (1305-1274 BCE), who was the first Assyrian king to attack what was left of the Mittani state, after Assyria had previously gained their independence from them (Düring, 2020, p. 45; Jakob, 2017, p. 119). During his reign, there was for the first time an ideal of conquering Mesopotamia entirely, with Babylonia as the biggest opponent; no real attempts were made to wage such big wars, however, and personal prestige was likely his main motivation for military actions (Jakob, 2017, pp. 120-121). His successor, Shalmaneser I (1273-1244 BCE), also fought the Mittani and was likely the first to incorporate their territories into the Assyrian states, but he is also well-known for rebuilding the temple of the god Aššur in the eponymous city (Andrae, 1938/1977, p. 122; Düring, 2020, p. 45). During the reign of his son, Tukultī-Ninurta I (1243-1207 BCE), the empire reached its largest extent, conquering Babylon and 'nominally' the Kassite dominions (Düring, 2020, 45). He was the first king to construct a new capital, Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, and the first (as well as the last) to build another temple for the god Aššur (Düring, 2020, p. 57). His assassination in 1207 BCE led to conflicts over his succession, and the subsequent three kings did not manage to maintain the extent and the power of Assyria (Jakob, 2017; Düring, 2020, pp. 45-46).

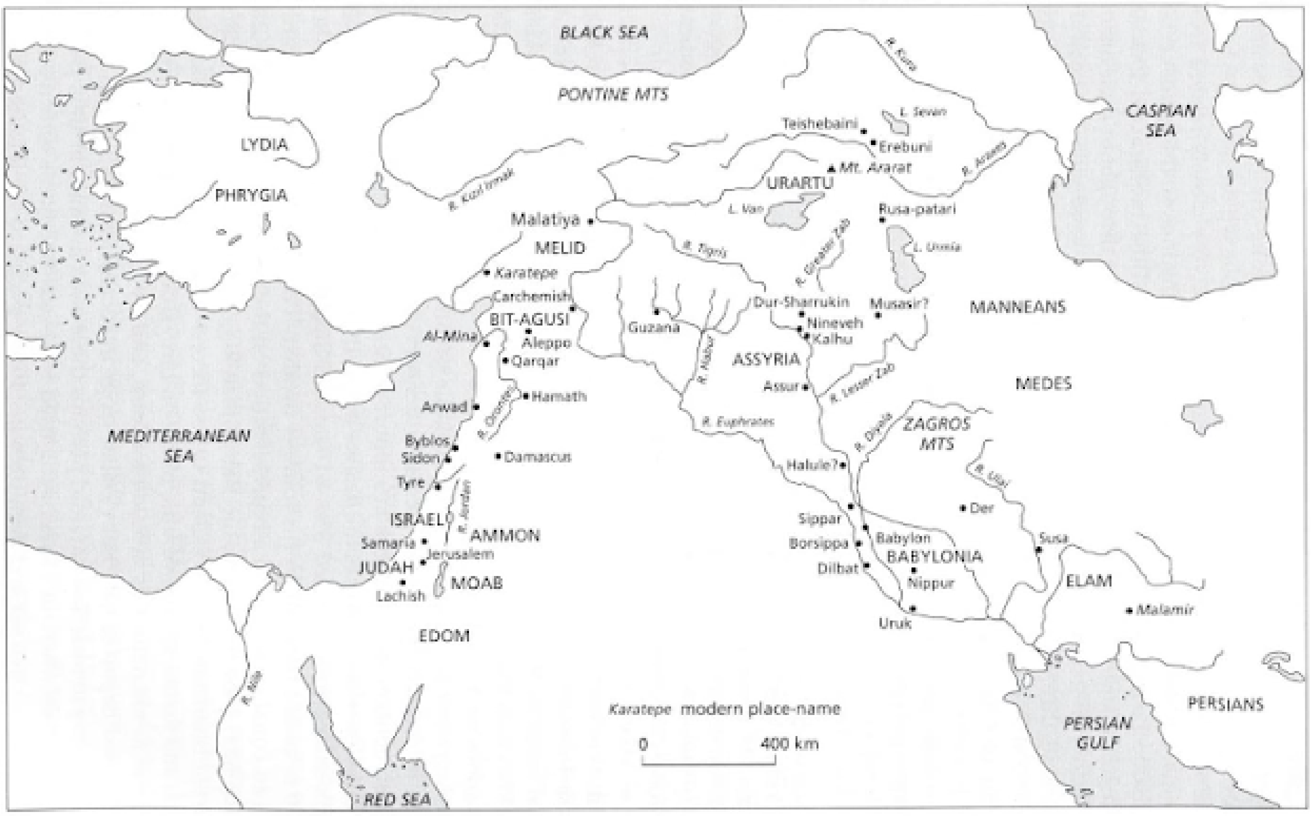
During this later period, the other Near Eastern states declined rapidly or disintegrated. While Assyria saw decline, there were also periods of territorial expansion, especially under king Tiglath-pileser I (1114-1076 BCE), who reached the Mediterranean Sea (Düring, 2020, p. 47). During the reign of king Eriba-Adad II, however, a long period of decline started, which would not change until the mid-tenth century (Jakob, 2017, p. 139). This is mostly seen as the end of the Middle Assyrian period.

2.2.3 Neo Assyrian Period

The transition from the Middle Assyrian Period to the Neo Assyrian Period was gradual and is difficult to date exactly. According to Frahm (2017, p. 165) it started in roughly 1050 BCE, which is the start of a phase he refers to as 'the crisis years', lasting till 935 BCE. Between 934 and 824 BCE, the Neo-Assyrian state regained power, and waged wars of conquest to recapture the regions that had once belonged to Assyria, focusing on the reconquest of Assyrian lands and the liberation of the Assyrian people (Düring, 2020; Frahm, 2017; Radner, 2015). During the reign of king Aššurnaṣirpal II (883–859 BCE) a new political capital was constructed, which was Kalḫu, and which would be used as such for 175 years, whilst Aššur remained the religious capital (Politopoulos, 2020, p. 58). After a short period of internal fragmentation caused by political unrest and competition, the imperial phase began with the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III in 744 BCE (Frahm, p. 2017; Düring, p. 2020). During this phase, two new political capitals were chosen (Dur-Šarrukēn and Nineveh respectively) during the last centuries, all the while Aššur remained the religious capital (Jakob, 2017, pp. 181-183; Maul, 2017, p. 340). The empire came to its end in a war with Babylonia, during which Aššur was destroyed in 614, and Nineveh in 612 (Frahm, 2017, p. 192). When the last king, Aššur-uballiṭ II, was defeated by the Medians and Babylonians in 610 and 609, the empire finally ended (Frahm, 2017, p. 192). Despite the end of the Assyrian state, some of the religious and cultural traditions would continue to live on in the Assyrian heartland for another eight centuries (Frahm, 2017, pp. 193-196).

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the rise and decline of Assyria, starting in the 3rd millennium BCE and finally ending in the 7th century BCE. While its position in the wider ancient Near East changed continuously, for the most part Assyria was a considerable power and on par with the other states surrounding it. This success is also reflected in the role and title of the king, with his power becoming more exclusive and adopting the title ‘king’ from the first period of great territorial expansions onwards. Understanding the chronology of the empire, and having the familiarity with key dates and kings, will provide a solid base for understanding and comparing the temples, as it is the context in which they were created and used.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BIT-AGUSI
Al-Mina
Aleppo
Qarqar
Hamath
Arwad
R. Orontes
Byblos
Sidon
Damascus
Tyre
ISRAEL
R. Jordan
AMMON
Samaria
Jerusalem
JUDAH
MOAB
Lachish
EDOM
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
R. Nile
RED SEA
Teishebaini
L. Sevan
Erebuni
Mt. Ararat
R. Kura
R. Araxes
URARTU
L. Van
Rusa-patari
L. Urmia
R. Tigris
R. Greater Zab
Dur-Sharrukin
Musasir?
MANNEANS
Nineveh
Kalhu
Guzana
R. Habur
ASSYRIA
Assur
R. Lesser Zab
MEDES
R. Euphrates
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Sippar
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Dilbat
Nippur
ELAM
Uruk
Malamir
PERSIANS
PERSIAN GULF
Karatepe modern place-name
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400 km

Figure 1. Assyria, within the ancient Near East, around the 1st millennium BCE (map 11.1 from Mieroop, 2007, p. 210).

Chapter 3: Religion and temples in Assyria

3.1 Introduction

To understand the function and usage of the temples, and how they represent the god Aššur, it is important to discuss the god himself and the wider religion he was a part of. First, the wider Assyrian-Mesopotamian religion will be discussed, followed by a discussion of the god Aššur and his characteristics, place in the pantheon, and relation with the Assyrian kings. Lastly, a brief overview of the Assyrian tradition of temple building and temple usage will be presented.

3.2 Mesopotamian religion

The term 'Mesopotamian religion' is used to denote the set of religious beliefs and practices upheld in most of Ancient Mesopotamia across several millennia, and, as Brisch (2020) noted, is a (modern) construct used to understand and study these beliefs and practices. It is a polytheistic religion, whereby a multitude of gods were worshipped: the gods represented or incarnated the "realities, elements or forces which are found and operate in the cosmos, in nature, and in human civilisation" (Hrůša, 2015, p. 23). They are more powerful than humans, who exist mainly to serve them, though they also depend on the world for their continued existence. They could be presented in either an anthropomorphic, an astral and/or a natural phenomenon form, and they knew a hierarchy in the form of a family structure (Brisch, 2020; Hrůša, 2015, pp. 24-25). Gods also assumed a principal seat (see table 2), a temple in the city in which the cult following originated or was the largest, with which they were intricately connected whilst usually also being worshipped outside of it (Hrůša, 2015, p. 26); temples were seen as the residences of the gods, which they owned and to which they were bound, and the most important god in a city was considered its owner (Lambert, 1990, p. 117).

While there was a general pantheon of gods, most of Southern Mesopotamian origin, local/regional variations and preferences did exist. An example of this is the variety of cults in different cities dedicated to variations of the goddess Ištar, most of which were likely understood as separate goddesses, and which were given names which incorporated the city the cult was located in, such as: Ištar of Nineveh, Ištar of Arbela, and Ištar of Aššur (Hrůša, 2015, p. 52; Lambert, 2004, p. 35). The most prominent and important gods (see table 2) were recognised across Mesopotamia, their exact importance varying per region and over time (Hrůša, 2015). One of the biggest changes in their importance can be seen in the development of the god Marduk, who started out as the god of the city Babylon, but later transformed into one of the great gods of Mesopotamia, and during the 2nd millennium BCE he became the head of the Babylonian pantheon (Hrůša, 2015, pp. 57-59). The Sumerian/Akkadian word for 'god' ('dingir'/'ilum') encompasses not just these 'great' gods, but also other supernatural entities and lesser divinities, as well as non-sentient things such as rivers, objects connected to a temple, or the temple itself (Hrůša, 2015).

Table 2. List of the most prominent Mesopotamian gods, featuring both their Sumerian and Akkadian name (if existent). Based on Black & Green (1992), Brisch (2020) and Hrůša (2015).

Name	Domain / Function	Symbol	Principal seat
An / Anum	God of the heavens, king of the gods	Tiara with horns	Uruk
Enlil	God of the earth and lands, king of the gods	Tiara with horns	Nippur

Enki / Ea	God of freshwater and wisdom	Vase overflowing with water	Eridu
Nanna / Sîn	God of the moon	Disk with crescent moon	Ur
Utu / Samaš	God of the sun and justice	Solar disk	Sippar and Larsa
Iškur / Adad	God of the storm and rain	Lightning	Karkar
Inanna / Ištar	Goddess of love and war	Bundle of reeds in the shape of a "ring-post"	Uruk
Ningirsu / Ninurta	Warrior of the gods, god of agriculture	Perched bird of prey, plough	Girsu
Nergal	God of pestilence and war	Lion-headed sceptre	Kutû
Nabu	God of scribal art	Single wedge	Borsippa
Marduk	God of the city and empire of Babylon, king of the gods	Spade	Babylon

3.3 The god Aššur

As has been previously mentioned, the god Aššur has always stood ideologically and physically at the heart of Assyria. Despite this, nothing is known about the origin of his name, and it is unclear when exactly the cult of Aššur started (Maul, 2017; van Driel, 1969).

Equally unclear are the god's characteristics and character traits. The only aspects that are repeatedly mentioned in texts are his omnipotence and strength, but other than that he seemingly has no personality, attributes or specific epithets (Maul, 2017; Politopoulos, 2020, 34). While he is (in some instances) credited with the creation of all living things and mountains, this does not say anything about the god himself, and it remains vague (Maul, 2017, p. 339). The only thing he was explicitly connected to, was to the rock formation ('Abiḫ') looking over the river Tigris on which his first temple was erected, which remained the main cult centre of Assyria until its downfall (Maul, 2017, pp. 339-340). Among others, Lambert (1983) argued that Aššur was the deified city, due to their shared name, the lack of distinction between the two in Old Assyrian documents, and because the god had no other connections or characteristics. Furthermore, during the Middle Assyrian period, Aššur was increasingly associated with the Assyrian kings and all related aspects of kingship, envisioning him as the king of the gods and men, as Assyria itself expanded and grew in power (Alstola et al., 2019).

Another interesting aspect of the god Aššur is that he is alone. Unlike most other Mesopotamian gods, he had no godly wife, parents, or any other relatives, and this left him at an unusual solitary position in the wider Mesopotamian pantheon (Alstola et al., 2019; Maul, 2017). In the late 19th century, when king Šamši-Adad rebuilt the Aššur temple, he dedicated the temple to the god Enlil to imply that he and the god Aššur were one and the same (Maul, 2017, p. 342). This led to him being associated with Enlil's godly relatives, with the gods Ninlil as his wife and Ninurta and Zababa as his sons, although this is only temporary, and at a later point in time Šērū'a is mentioned as his wife (Lambert, 1983, p. 82). Whether giving the god these relationships were theological attempts to cement Aššur in the Mesopotamian pantheon is unclear, but Aššur remained a completely Assyrian god; whilst Assyrians viewed him as the king of the gods, he was not worshipped as such or at all by others outside of Assyria (Alstola et al., 2019). Interestingly, as has been previously mentioned, the god Marduk did successfully transition from a city god to a widely recognised great god, or even king of the gods (Hrůša, 2015, pp. 57-59). This shows that it was not impossible to make such a change. The rise of Marduk has been mainly credited to the political situation at the time of his rise, which started with the rise of Hammurapi and the Babylonian Empire (Hrůša, 2015, p. 57). Key differences which may have facilitated Marduk's transition where Aššur's failed, are that Marduk figures in many myths and literary texts, has a divine family (parents, a wife, and children), and has specific symbols and creatures he is associated with (Hrůša, 2015, p. 59).

Lastly, a strong connection between the Assyrian kings and the god Aššur has always been a key facet of them both. In the Old Assyrian period, the main ruler of the city-state did not use the term 'king', nor did he have exclusive power. He was rather "a steward of the cult of Assur and the chairman presiding over city-assembly meetings" (Düring, 2020, p. 38). This is because the Assyrians viewed the god Aššur as the true king, and the ruler of the state was his representative, not a king in his own right (Maul, 2017; Radner, 2015). This changed in the Middle Assyrian period, when the city assembly disappeared, the royal power increased, and the Assyrian rulers called themselves 'king of the land of Aššur' (Faist, 2010, p. 17). The kings did remain stewards of Aššur, and from this point onward, wars and territorial expansions were done in the name of him and the other gods, and with their support (Faist, 2010; Maul, 2017). The kings also served as High Priest in the temple of Aššur, where even their coronation took place, and nearly all prayers dedicated to the god were formulated in their name (Maul, 2017).

3.4 Temple building and usage in Assyria

Most of our knowledge of the building processes comes from royal inscriptions, written on bricks that were then used to build the structure it described; such inscriptions only described some of the building stages that had taken place, and which stages were described varied greatly over time (Novtotny, 2010, p. 109). According to Novotny (2010), these stages include: reasons for building/restoring, initiating the project, preparing the building site, preparing the building materials, laying the foundations, building the structure, roofing and doors, decoration, and concluding ceremonies. Whilst each stage had its standards and traditions, they also varied over time.

Looking at the main structure, almost all Mesopotamian temples (Assyrian ones included) contained at least three elements: a vestibule, an inner sanctuary, and an outer sanctuary (Hundley, 2013). In the inner sanctuary (also called cult room), usually situated at the far end relative to the temple's entrance, the cult statue of the deity was situated, in some way demarcated from the rest of the room (Hundley, 2013, pp. 51-52). The room around it was the outer sanctuary, often containing a table with statues of important citizens, an incense altar, and various divine gifts (Hundley, 2013, 53). The vestibule was an extra, smaller, room between the sanctuary and the entrance, which usually had a gate attached to it (Hundley, 2013, p. 53). Mesopotamian temples are mostly classified based on the line of approach to the cult statue from the entrance of the inner sanctuary, either a direct approach or an indirect approach/bent axis, and on the shape of the sanctuary, either a broad room or a long room (Hundley, 2013, p. 50). Two common types in Assyria are the Assyrian long room temple, usually with a courtyard in front of the temple, and the herdhaustemple, which is a broad room temple with a bent axis (see Eickhoff, 1985; Miglus, 2001; Novák, 2001). Temples were "designed and equipped like a household" (Hundley, 2013, p. 76). Most contained additional spaces such as kitchens, reception rooms, and courts with their own vestibule and gate, and were often surrounded by workshops, service areas, and storage rooms (Hundley, 2013, p. 76). Next to the classic 'lower' temples, ziggurats were also common, which were massive stepped platforms with possibly a small temple on top of it, and in Assyria they usually had a square base with variable ways of access (Hundley, 2013; Novák, 2001). For the decoration of the temples archaeological evidence is sparse, while records (where mentioned) detail lavish decorations such as bronze statues or engravings of fantastical creatures (Novotny, 2010, pp. 131-135).

The temples functioned mainly as the house of the deity it was dedicated to, and as such it was the primary place to make contact with the deities and to serve them. Offerings were likely prepared in the courts, where people could also clean themselves before entering the sanctuary, and where they would gather for festivities (Hundley, 2013, p. 70). The sanctuary constituted the living space of the deity: the inner sanctuary served as a bedchamber for more 'intimate care' of the deity, the outer sanctuary as the place where daily rituals were likely performed, and the vestibule as an entree way, giving gradual access to the inner part of the temple (Hundley, 2013, p. 70). Furthermore, as has been mentioned, the state's main task was to take care of the gods, and this included building and maintaining their temples, which is why restoring and rebuilding temples was so important. Restoring the temples was often done according to the exact specifications of the original temple, if possible, to avoid divine disfavour (Hundley, 2013, p. 78). Lastly, each temple (and ziggurat) also had a name, which was an ancient tradition and considered sacred, and which was used to refer to the temple (Hrůša 2015, p. 117).

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the Mesopotamian religion, the main Assyrian god Aššur, and the traditions of temple building and usage. As has been demonstrated, the widespread religion focused on the worship of a pantheon of powerful and immortal gods. In Assyria, Aššur was worshipped as the king of the gods and men, alongside the other gods of the Mesopotamian pantheon, and while he was given connections to them over time, he remained isolated in practices and texts. The processes and stages of temple building, as well as the temple structures themselves, reflect the importance of the deities and their place above mankind, who existed to serve them. This is also shown in the religious obligations of the kings, who served as representatives of the god Aššur and the high priest in his temple. This background will be used in the next chapter to discuss and understand the structure and the usage of the two Aššur temples.

Chapter 4: Comparing the Assur temples

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the two temples of Aššur will be discussed side by side on their architecture, function, and usage. For the architecture of the temple in Aššur, the focus will be on the structure built by Šamši-Adad I in the Old Assyrian period, as it remained mostly intact until the Neo-Assyrian period, and the renovations and changes made by Shalmaneser I and Tukultī-Ninurta I in the Middle Assyrian period. The architectural history of the temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta is much shorter, as it was constructed only once, by Tukultī-Ninurta I, and it was closed off rather than renovated or changed. Rationale is understood as why the temple was built, looking at the tradition of recording the reasons for the building project, and what it represented. Usage is understood as the ways the temples were actively used, concerning (where possible due to scarcity of sources) festivals, ceremonies, and daily practices. The chapter will be concluded with a brief and general comparison of the temples on the mentioned three aspects, which will be explored further in chapter 5.

4.2 The temple at Aššur

4.2.1 Architecture

The temple of Aššur stood on top of a cliff looking over the river Tigris, in the north-eastern part of the city Aššur, close to the temples of other great gods, the Aššur-Enlil ziggurat, and the royal palace (Maul, 2017, p. 346; Politopoulos, 2020, p. 34). Figure 2 shows a reconstruction of monumental entrance gates, which people saw if they entered through the forecourt. From the time of Šamši-Adad I, the temple complex (see figure 3) consisted of the sanctuary, containing 31 rooms and two courtyards, and a large forecourt (Gries, 2017, p. 18). Shalmaneser I added an additional courtyard in the southwest part of the sanctuary, although Gries (2017, 133) has argued that this third courtyard, and the 11 rooms surrounding it, can be linked to Šamši-Adad I already. The sanctuary stood in the northern part of the temple complex, measured 110 x 60 metres, and had an elongated, rectangular shape (Andrae, 1938/1977, p. 122). This temple can be classified as a herdhaustempel since the inner sanctuary and vestibule are broad rooms, and the approach to the cult statue was likely bent-axial, with the entrance on the long side of the room (Novák, 2001, p. 371). Most of the temple was constructed using mudbricks while large blocks of stone were used for the foundations (Andrae, 1938/1977, p. 122; Gries, 2017, p. 18).

The main courtyard measured 37.40 x 32 metres, and was situated on the north-eastern side of the sanctuary (Andrae, 1938/1977, 122; Gries, 2017, 18). It had two monumental entrance gates, one coming from the forecourt, and one on the opposite side of the courtyard (Andrae, 1938/1977, p. 122). The courtyard was about 2 metres higher than the forecourt it was connected to, which was bridged by a short ramp, and it was surrounded by various smaller rooms, three on each side. The second courtyard was the smallest, measuring roughly 15 x 19.50 metres (Andrae, 1938/1977, p. 122; Gries, 2017, p. 29). It had two entrances, one in the south-western side from the outside of the temple (later leading into the south-western courtyard), and one on the north-eastern side, leading into the middle courtyard. It was surrounded by three rooms on the north-eastern and south-western sides, and four on the north-western and south-eastern sides (see figure 3). The third courtyard, connecting directly to the second courtyard, measured 36.25 x 23.35 metres (Gries, 2017, p. 31). It was surrounded by five rooms on the north-western side, four on the south-western side, and it had two monumental entrances (on the north-western and south-eastern sides) with a ramp, one of which led into the forecourt through two broad rooms (Andrae, 1938/1977, p. 126; Gries, 2017, p. 31).

The main courtyard connected directly to the vestibule, which measured 28.51 x 7.40 metres

(Gries, 2017, p. 26). It connected to two additional, smaller rooms, one on both the left and right side, measuring roughly the same as each other. It also contained the entrance to the inner sanctuary, which measured 28.30 x 8.45 metres (Gries, 2017, p. 28). It is much discussed on which side the cult pedestal hosting the cult statue stood, as nothing of it remains, though it is mostly accepted that it stood on one of the long sides of the room, making the cult axis indirect (Gries 2017, p. 132; Miglus, 2001). To the right of the cult room lay two smaller rooms, roughly equal in size, and beyond these three rooms lay a final row of five rooms. The forecourt in its entirety measured roughly 175 x 70 metres, and had an irregular shape due to the rocky slope it was built on (Gries, 2017, p. 47). After Shalmaneser I, the building on the eastern side of the forecourt consisted of a double row of rooms, connecting to the south-eastern corner of the third courtyard, while the western building consisted of a single row of mostly long rooms (Gries, 2017, p. 40).

Lastly, the ziggurat associated with the Aššur temple, which stands isolated, has a different orientation than the temple, and was originally dedicated to the god Enlil (Andrae, 1938/1977, p. 130). It was likely built around the time of Šamši-Adad I, and belonged to an Enlil temple established by an earlier king, becoming associated with Aššur and his temple during the Middle Assyrian Period (Andrae, 1938/1977, p. 130; van Driel, 1969). The base measured 61 x 62 metres, and it was constructed with mudbricks (Andrae, 1938/1977, p. 133). The north-eastern outer wall is structured with three-part grooves, each 1.20 metres wide and 76 centimetres deep, which start about 2.9 metres above the ground, and have large pillars that were 1.80 metres wide in between them (Andrae, 1938/1977, p. 133). The height of the building and the shape of the top part are unknown (Andrae, 1938/1977, p. 134). It had no built-in or attached stairway (that has been found), though it possibly had a separate staircase that has been removed since (Andrae, 1938/1977, p. 134).

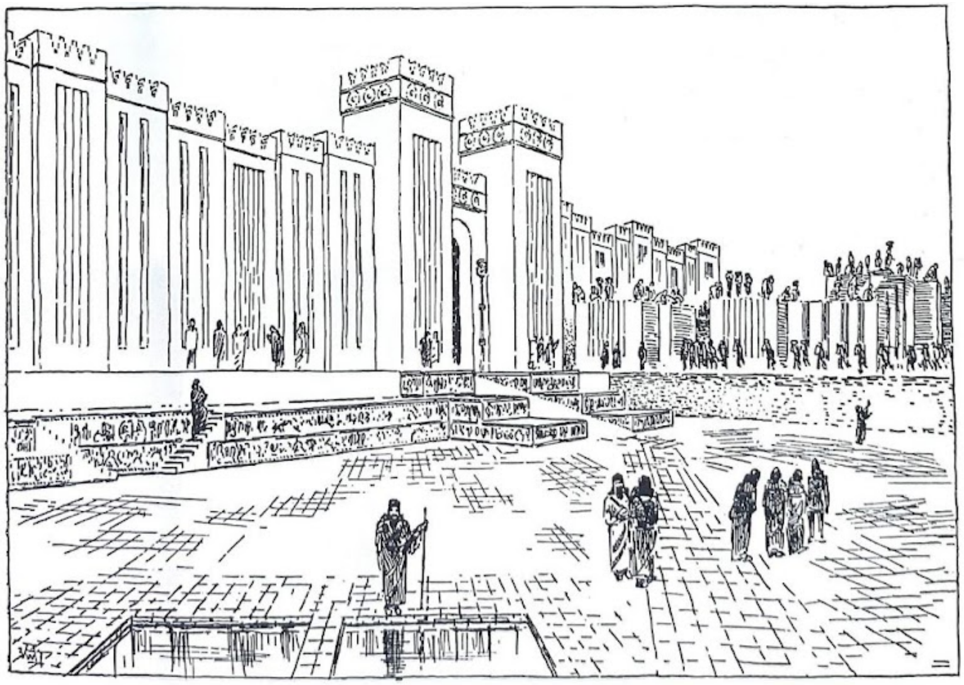

Figure 2. Visual reconstruction of monumental entrance gate of the temple of Aššur in Aššur, seen from the forecourt (figure 33 from Andrae, 1938/1977, p. 51).

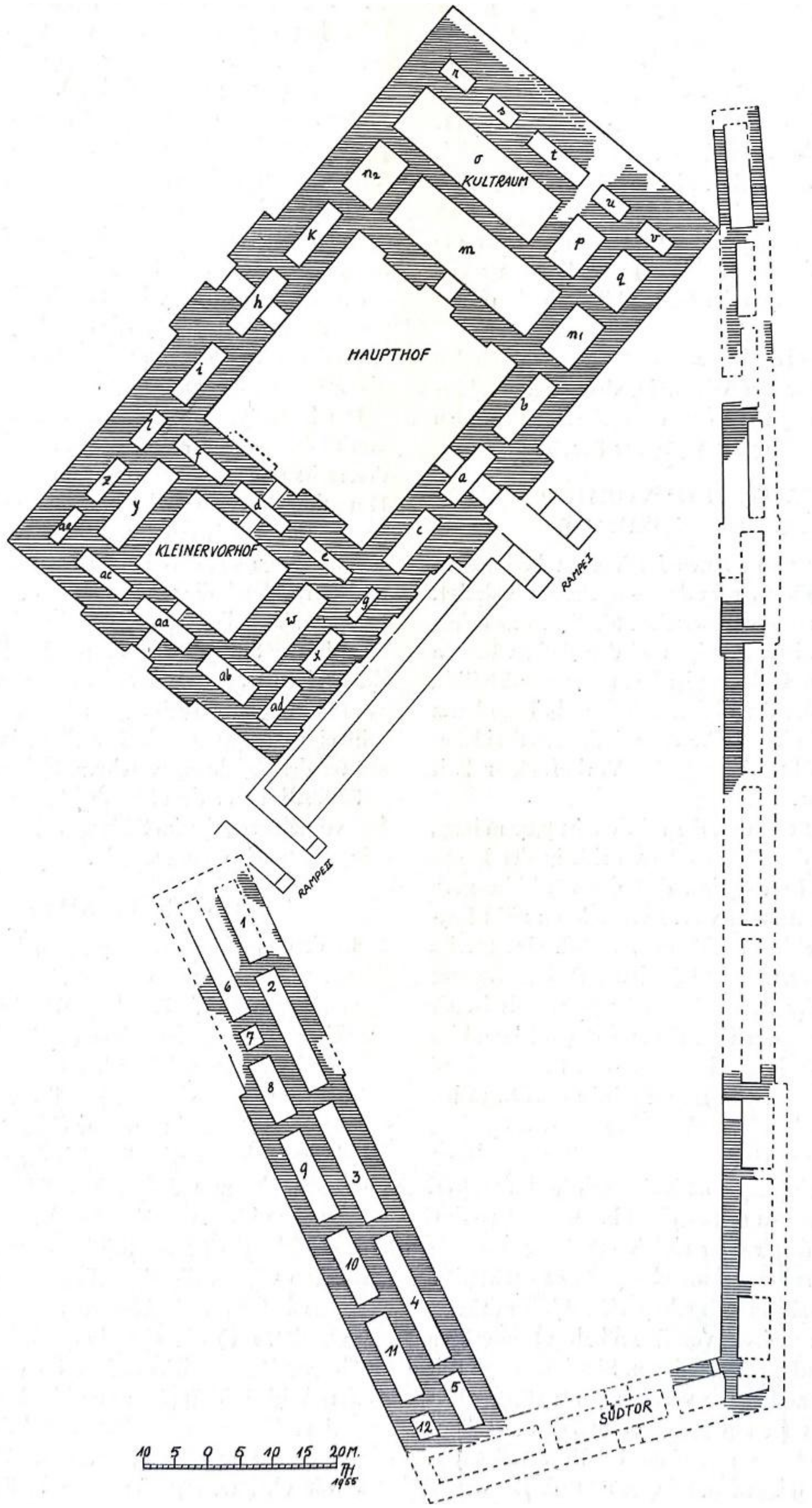
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Figure 3. Ground plan of the temple of Aššur in Aššur from Šamši-Adad I's time, scale 1:1000. Shalmaneser I later added the third courtyard next to the second courtyard, connecting with the western building flanking the forecourt (figure 2 from Haller & Andrae, 1955, p. 17).

4.2.2 Rationale

Since the temple at Aššur, called "House, Wild Bull" (Maul, 2017, p. 341), has been rebuilt and redecorated many times, it can be assumed it has had various functions and purposes. As has been mentioned earlier, it is unclear who exactly built the original Aššur temple, and while historically this role has been ascribed to the king Ušpia, there are no records of his original intentions for the temple (Maul, 2017; van Driel, 1969). What can be said with certainty is that is has served as the centre of the cult of Aššur and the god's seat since the moment the temple was first built, until the end of the Neo-Assyrian empire. The city it stood in functioned as the ideological and religious capital even after Assyrian kings moved their political seat to another city largely due to the existence of this temple (Maul, 2017, p. 340). When Tukultī-Ninurta I built his second temple of Aššur, the first one was likely still used to some capacity and still had an important function, also evidenced by his own renovations of the temple, although he does not detail his reasons for this in an inscription (Gilibert, 2008; Novotny, 2010).

The first inscription detailing the reason for working on the temple was found in the oldest foundation, and belonged to the Old Assyrian ruler Šalim-Ahum: it mentioned that the god Aššur had requested a temple of him, possibly providing him with extra authority, and it implied that this was the first temple to be built despite later historical tradition (Novotny, 2010, p. 110). Looking at the temple constructed by Šamši-Adad I, there is some confusion about his original purpose for it. Within the temple, various stone tablets have been found with a text where he is called "builder of the temple of the god Aššur" (A.0.39.1; Grayson, 1987, p. 48-49) and it is said the god commanded him to construct a (new) temple for the god Enlil (A.0.39.1; Grayson, 1987, p. 48-49). This had led some to assume that 'Enlil' was a translation for 'Aššur', or that a chapel for the god Enlil was built within the temple of Aššur, considering no separate Enlil temple has been found (van Driel, 1969, p. 10). Miglus (2001), based on these inscriptions and the architecture of the temple, has proposed that the temple was a double temple, with the second courtyard serving as an inner sanctuary dedicated to Enlil. After Šamši-Adad I, the temple was exclusively associated with Aššur, so even if Šamši-Adad I had had a different purpose in mind, it likely did not last.

4.2.3 Usage

The temple hosted various (daily) rituals, ceremonies, and festivals, of which little specifics are known. It is especially hard to reconstruct the usage of every specific room; a lot of the smaller rooms arranged around the courtyards will have been used for the worship of other gods, but it is unknown which rooms may have been dedicated to which gods. Some of these rooms held cult statues of gods that had been 'kidnapped' by the Assyrians after capturing a city, where they were housed and provided with a cult, in a sense becoming part of Aššur's royal household (Maul, 2017, p. 351). Additionally, at least some of the rooms of the western building along the side of the forecourt were used for the storage and transportation of water, as well as temple administration, while the eastern building will have housed the economic areas (Gries, 2017, p. 133).

Important daily rituals included the clothing and washing of the cult statue, and the regular offering (daily meal) provided to the god, called *ginā'u* (Gries, 2019; Jakob, 2017, p. 144-145; Maul, 2017). The foodstuffs used for these meals, consisting mostly of sesame, honey, fruits, and grain, were delivered by all the provinces of the state (Maul, 2013, 2017, p. 344). Kings and high dignitaries living in the city also provided various foodstuffs, and for the actual preparation of the meal, workers from all provinces of the state would be enlisted on at least some occasions; this way, the god was cared for by all people in Assyria (Maul 2017, p. 345). Another food-related ritual was the *tākultu*, carried out by the king on various (unknown) occasions likely inside the temple, whereby drinks and foodstuffs were offered up to all the gods housed in the temple (Maul, 2017, p. 348; van Driel, 1969). The coronation of the king also took place in the temple, whereby he was given the 'crown of Aššur' during the Middle Assyrian period (Maul, 2017, p. 348). At various points in the year, mostly during special occasions, processions were held whereby the cult statue was taken and carried in the city streets (Hrůša, 2015, p. 87).

Next to the rituals and ceremonies held by priests, personal worship also happened in the form of dedications to the god Aššur, which, unlike in most other Near Eastern temples, was done only "by the king and his family or by private donors for the life of the king" (Gries, 2019, p. 151). This was done with inscribed votive objects, such as mace-heads, beads, doorknobs, vessels, and statues, and probably other types of objects which have not been preserved (Gries, 2019, p. 151).

4.3 The temple at Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta

4.3.1 Architecture

The temple of Aššur stood in the western part of the capital city Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, connected to its associated ziggurat, and within the walled citadel also containing the South and North Palace (Eickhoff, 1985; Politopoulos, 2020). The temple measured 51.8 x 53.3 metres and it was oriented from east-north-east to west-south-west (Eickhoff, 1985, p. 27). The western side was connected to its associated ziggurat, and at a roughly 5 metre distance west of the ziggurat stood a freestanding staircase (Eickhoff, 1985, p. 27). The temple had a roughly square shape, and it contained ten rooms around a rectangular courtyard, but had no forecourt (see figure 4). According to Eickhoff (1985) it does not fall under an established temple type; while the rooms are broad rooms, it does not follow the Babylonian broad-room temple type completely, and the axis is direct, but the cult statue could not be seen from the temple entrance. Both the temple and the ziggurat were built entirely from mudbricks, and the temple was built on a base that protrudes roughly one metre on all sides (Eickhoff, 1985, p. 27).

The courtyard measured 20 x 17.7 metres, and it was surrounded by rooms on all sides, which it also gave access to (Eickhoff, 1985, pp. 27-29). It gave direct access to the inner sanctuary (room 1 in figure 3) through three gates, of which the middle one was the main entrance, recognisable by its generous façade design. The inner sanctuary itself is a broad room, with the same width as the courtyard and a ceiling span of 7.2 metres (Eickhoff, 1985, p. 29). Against the back wall of the room stood the mudbrick altar pedestal, behind which was the central cult niche (Eickhoff, 1985, p. 30). The niche was extended to the back by a 2 metre wide second niche, protruding into the ziggurat structure (Eickhoff, 1985, p. 30). A door on the north-western side of the room gave access to a small broad room (2); on the opposite side of the room stood a similar door, which led outside, but may have been intended to lead to a similar small room which was never finished (Eickhoff, 1985, p. 29).

The temple could be accessed through two entrances, and the main entrance (on the south-eastern side) was connected to the flat terrace with a stairway (Eickhoff, 1985, p. 29). The gate was framed by two large pillars, and two additional pillars stood on the terrace where once the access road ended (Eickhoff, 1985, 29). The gate also led to a gate room (4), which gave access to the courtyard and to the broad room on the northern side of the temple (3); the inner sanctuary and the altar pedestal could be seen from this room by looking through the courtyard. The second entrance was on the northern side, it was framed by two large pillars, and it led to room 3. This was 30 x 5 metres, and it had various deep or flat niches in the walls (Eickhoff, 1985, pp. 29-30). The courtyard and the gate room give access to a five-room complex in the south-east corner of the gate room, rooms 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. Room 9 could only be accessed through room 7. Directly next to this, on the south-eastern side of the temple, is another broad room (10) which can only be accessed through a gate in the courtyard.

The ziggurat's sides measured 31 metres, and it was built on a low base (Eickhoff, 1985, p. 31). The core was at the time of excavation 8 metres high, with a thin shaft in the middle (Eickhoff, 1985, p. 31). The north-eastern side was connected to the temple, and in the middle of the other three sides, decorative flat pillars of 50 centimetres thick and 12 metres wide were designed, the space in between them divided by double-stepped niches (Eickhoff, 1985, p. 31).

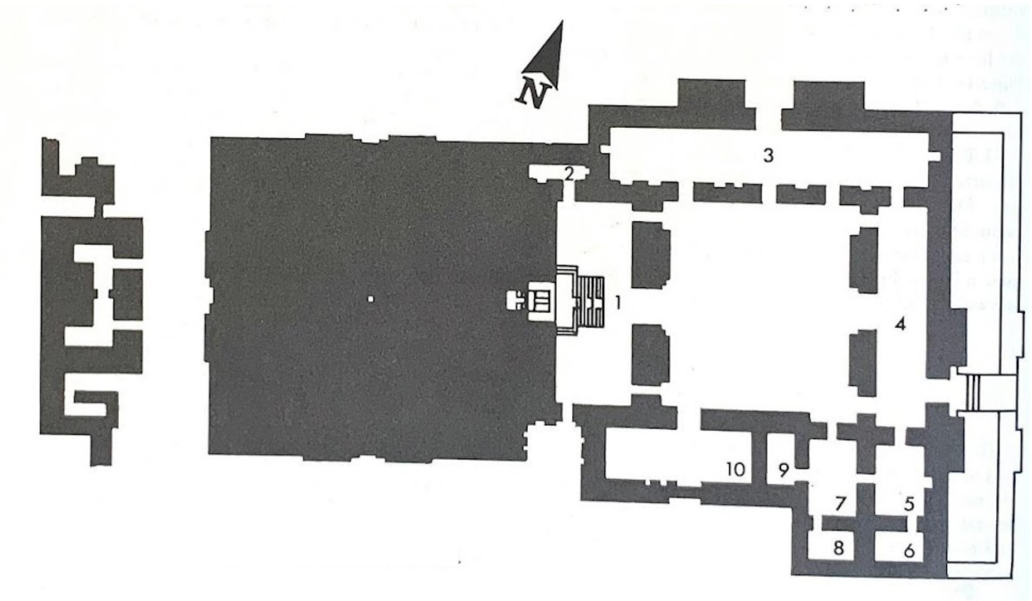

Figure 4. Ground plan of the Aššur temple and ziggurat in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta (figure 8 from Eickhoff, 1985, p. 28).

4.3.2 Rationale

The second temple of Aššur, which was called "House, Mountain of the Totality of Divine Powers" (Maul, 2017, p. 347) has a much shorter but still complex history. The building of this temple is connected to the building of the city it was in, Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, which was meant to be the new capital of Assyria (Düring, 2020, p. 57; Politopoulos, 2020, p. 40). In royal inscriptions, Tukultī-Ninurta I claims to have built both the city and the temple by command of the god himself, mentioning specifically that he constructed the temple for "the dwelling of the god Aššur'' and the ziggurat "as the cult platform of the god Aššur" (A.0.78.23; Grayson, 1987, pp. 271-274). It is not clear what the practical reason was for constructing the new capital, or the second temple. A common theory is that it was related to the conquest of Babylon, and that the city was built as a monument to celebrate the king's victory over the Kassites, supposedly also reflected in the 'Babylonian' character of the temple (Eickhoff, 1985; Politopoulos, 2020, p. 42). Research also shows, however, that the fighting continued after the fall of Babylon and there is not enough textual or archaeological material to back this idea (Politopoulos, 2020, pp. 42-44). There was also the idea that the temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta was built to replace the original temple, which Gilibert (2008, pp. 181-182) argues against by saying that the temple was too small for that, and that it will have been a "branch of the main temple". Politopoulos (2020, pp. 47-49) argues against both these ideas, saying instead that the capital city was built to "project an imperial ideology" and create an economically stable core which had the space for large monumental projects. He also suggests that the function of the second temple, though perhaps less important than the original one, is simply not known yet (Politopoulos, 2020, p. 54).

4.3.3 Usage

The usage of this temple is a difficult subject due to lack of data and the short duration of its function. Since the temple was almost completely emptied out before being closed and abandoned, a lot is left up to comparison and imagination. It is unknown whether similar ritual activities as in the other temple were carried out here. Likely, some festivals and ceremonies were, but the largest and possibly most important ones were probably still carried out at the original temple, if only for the lack of space in this smaller temple. Due to its short usage, it is not possible to say whether the coronation ceremony had been meant to take place in this temple instead, but its smaller size makes that very unlikely.

Both the original excavators and Eickhoff had some ideas about the usage of specific rooms. Room 3 (see figure 3 above) may have contained cult statues or symbol bases of a variety of deities based on the niches found in the walls, and could have been used for worship to these other deities (Eickhoff, 1985, p. 30). Room 10 had similar niches, and may also have been a cult room or chapel (Eickhoff, 1985, p. 31). It is unclear what the five-room complex was used for. Bachmann interpreted room 7 as a courtyard, and while it may have served as a passageway, there is little evidence for this (Eickhoff, 1985, p. 30). The other four rooms were interpreted as the residence of the temple guards, whilst others have disagreed with this and suggested they were used as chapels (Eickhoff, 1985, p. 30). If they were chapels, or shrines, they may have been dedicated to a variety of different deities. According to Gilibert (2008, p. 182) the temple was architecturally designed for festivals and processions, based on the amount of doorways, in particular the three-fold access to the inner sanctuary, and the cult niches not being secluded.

Due to the limited inscriptions and finds from the temple, not much is known about ritual activities, and it is thus not possible to confirm whether the temple was indeed designed for festivals and processions. The regular rituals and the daily meal were likely still performed, as they are considered key elements in the care of a god, but it is unclear if the king was still as involved with the daily meal as in the first temple. At the very least the daily meals will not have been made from foodstuffs from all the Assyrian provinces, as there were no (or not enough) storage rooms present in the temple, nor were there workrooms (Gilibert, 2008, p. 182).

4.4 Conclusion

As can be seen from the discussions above, the two temples vary greatly in their architecture, function, and usage. Their most notable difference is their size and the amount of rooms: the first temple has 42 rooms, after Shalmaneser I with three courtyards, while the second temple has 10 rooms and one courtyard. Architecturally speaking, both temples fall under a different type. The temple in Aššur is generally seen as a herdhaustemple, whilst the temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta does not follow a recognized type. For the most part, they have the same types of rooms, although the second temple does not have a vestibule, and the buildings surrounding the temples are quite different as well. The second temple is physically connected to its associated ziggurat, while the ziggurat linked to the first temple is isolated, and has a different orientation than the temple.

Rationale wise the temples are equally different, partially due to the much shorter life span of the second temple. However, Tukultī-Ninurta I's recorded reason for building his Aššur temple is the same as the reasons recorded by Šamši-Adad I and Šalim-Ahum (by decree of the god) for the building of the first temple. Regarding usage, there were some notable differences, again partially due to size differences. Whilst both temples will have seen the common ritual activities such as the daily meal, the second temple may have been used more for festivals and processions, while the first temple also has evidence of extensive votive practices and other rituals limited to the king and high dignitaries.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the concepts and theories from the previous chapters will be brought back and discussed in relation to each other. Firstly, I will compare the two temples side by side, including new theories on and interpretations of the differences and similarities. Secondly, I will discuss the relation between kings and their temples by looking more in depth at the relation between king Tukultī-Ninurta I and his Aššur temple, and contrast this with his renovations of other temples in the city Aššur. Lastly, I will discuss the relation between Assyrian temples and the Assyrian religion, focusing on how temples visualise religion, and drawing specifically from the examples of the two Aššur temples. A short conclusion of the new insights and interpretations will close the chapter.

5.2 The two Aššur temples side by side

Starting off with the architecture, as has been noted previously, the two temples differ considerably. The first temple is much larger in terms of size and amount of rooms, it presents a different type of temple, and it is surrounded by different side buildings and rooms. The types of room present inside the temples, however, are for the most part similar: both contain a courtyard flanked by smaller rooms which may have been used for worshipping other deities, an inner sanctuary, and a gate room. The smaller size of the second temple is interesting in relation to not just the first temple, but also its own urban context: the city Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta was huge, covering at least 240 ha, possibly even 500 ha, and the new royal palace that was built exceeded the palace in Assur by 20.000 m², indicating that the resources to build large projects were present (Politopoulos, 2020, p. 38; p. 53). This leaves the question why no such effort had been made for an arguably important temple, especially so because it was the first new temple dedicated to Aššur. It must have either been a deliberate choice to put more resources into building other parts of the city, or the temple was added in a later stage after most resources had already been allocated elsewhere. Considering the south-western side of the cult room held a door that is theorised to lead to an unfinished room as noted above, evidence leans slightly to the latter scenario; plans for the temple may have been bigger, but as resources ran out, they had to stop. On the other hand, part of the reason the first temple was so large was because it has been rebuilt, renovated, and added upon over the centuries. Though there is no direct evidence, I suggest that Tukultī-Ninurta I may have kept his temple relatively small so that it could go through a similar, albeit maybe more limited, process. Renovating and adding on to temples built by previous kings was an important tradition, so it would not be out of place. Based on the outline of the city as we know it now, there would have been room for expansions (Schmitt, 2020).

Another difference between the two temples is their temple type, though both vary a little from the type they are usually classified as. The first temple is generally considered a herdhaustemple (first mentioned by Andrae in 1938), but its size, the shape of the forecourt, and the additional courtyards are not seen in other temples of this type. I would argue that this irregular shape, the temple's size, and perhaps its orientation as well, are the combined result of the rocky slope the temple was built on, the continuous rebuilding and renovating, and the temple being the only one dedicated to the king of gods and men. The temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, in contrast, has often been connected to the war Tukultī-Ninurta I was fighting against Babylonia, which happened either before or during the building of the city and the temple. It is possible that there is a relation between the king's presence in/attention to Babylon and the temple: according to Eickhoff (1985) the plan is very similar to the Babylonian broad room temples, and the temple is attached to its associated ziggurat, which is seen with seen with some

Babylonian temples. There is no direct evidence for this however, nor a clear idea of why Tukultī-Ninurta I would use inspiration from Babylonian temples, especially since it is unclear whether the war had started before he started the building project. The only suggestion I would make is that the second temple is so visually and structurally different from the first temple, that the intention was likely to set the new temple apart from the old one.

The differences in rationale and usage, whilst mostly theoretical due to the lack of adequate sources, are connected to the architectural differences and similarities. Considering the difference in size, it is unlikely the second temple was meant to replace the first temple or be used in the same way; the nature of the most important rituals and ceremonies also make this less likely. Moreover, as Gilibert (2008) has noted, the second temple seems to be designed to host processions and festivals. The side room 2 in the second temple may have functioned as a vestibule, but compared to the vestibule in the first temple, it is extremely small and accessed through the inner sanctuary, instead of vice versa; this would give processions direct access to the cult statue. Some of the regular daily rituals could have taken place in both temples, considering their importance in the care of the god, but the scale would have been different. This is indicated not only by the lack of a (large) vestibule in the second temple, but also the lack of storage rooms, or rooms for temple administration and other economic matters. I suggest that the king's main intention for the second temple may simply have been to exist as a physical manifestation of his connection with the god Aššur as king of Assyria without overshadowing the first temple. Whilst still hosting the needed rituals, processions and spaces for worship expected of any temple, the extensive day-to-day care of the god could have remained the main duty of the first temple, which was better equipped to deal with this. To underline this, I would argue that Tukultī-Ninurta I possibly felt obligated to include the god in his new capital because of the importance of the first temple to the character and role of the city of Aššur; he may have felt that a new capital would require a temple to Aššur to succeed.

5.3 Tukultī-Ninurta I and his new temple

It has been made clear throughout this thesis that the Assyrian kings played a key role in the Assyrian religion, and just as much in the first Aššur temple. Whether Tukultī-Ninurta I intended for as strong a connection between him and his new temple, is unclear. It is interesting to note, however, that his recorded rationale for constructing this temple (by decree of the god) is the same reasoning used by two other kings who previously built and renovated the first Aššur temple: Šalim-Ahum and Šamši-Adad I. This reason has been used only a few times in recorded Assyrian history, and both kings who used it before consecutively built something that was arguably special, as Šalim-Ahum may have been the first to construct temple to Aššur, and Šamši-Adad I built a completely new temple, with possibly a second inner sanctuary dedicated to the god Enlil (Novotny, 2010, pp. 110-111). I suggest that there is a clear link between the building of 'special' and innovative temples, and the usage of the decree of a god as the recorded rationale. Temple building held a lot of traditions, and the direct order of a god could have helped to prevent public dissatisfaction, or at least have been intended to help. There is another example to illuminate this. Tukultī-Ninurta I used the same rationale for his Ištar temple in Aššur. Schmitt (2020) has discussed how, according to the king's own inscriptions, Tukultī-Ninurta I had introduced 'innovations' with this temple that were incompatible with tradition. Like I suggested above, this may be linked to using the decree of the goddess herself as the main reason for constructing the temple.

Furthermore, both the Ištar temple and the New Palace (which may have seen similar 'incompatible innovations') built by Tukultī-Ninurta I in Aššur were never rebuilt or renovated by subsequent kings, despite the tradition to do so (Schmitt, 2020). This creates a possible link between three of his building projects, and their (lack of) continuation after his death. It is possible that the reasons for abandoning Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta and thus also the Aššur temple within, are the same as or connected to the reasons of subsequent kings to not renovate the Ištar temple and the New Palace. As Schmitt (2020) notes, it has been suggested that these 'innovations' were the cause, but one would in that case expect to find public condemnation of the king's actions by subsequent kings, or attempts to remove him from historical records. Since neither has been found any evidence of, it remains unclear. Schmitt (2020) has argued that the abandonment of the king's projects was a rejection of his innovations that were seen as a mistake, while otherwise still recognising his other projects and (military) successes. I would add to this that subsequent kings could have abandoned the buildings because they wished to continue long standing Assyrian (temple) building traditions. This would not fit with the structures built by Tukultī-Ninurta I due to their 'incompatible innovations', and therefore the next kings started new projects instead. It is also possible that the temple of Aššur in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta was abandoned simply because the entire city was abandoned, and the temple was not deemed important enough to either keep the city in use for or to use on its own.

Lastly, it is unfortunately unknown how involved Tukultī-Ninurta I was in either of the Aššur temples on a day-to-day basis, as there are no mentions of this in his recordings. Considering the local, regional, and state-wide importance of some of the daily rituals traditionally held in the temple in Aššur, as well as the involvement of many parties in those, it is likely the king continued with them in that temple. He possibly held scaled down versions of these rituals in his new temple, next to the festivals and processions that may have been organised there, aimed at the local population.

5.4 The relation between the temples and religion

As has been explained in chapter 3, the god Aššur is unique in the way that he does not have any attributes or characteristics, and his only true connections that we know of are to the Assyrian kings, and the rock (Abiḫ) that his first temple was constructed upon (Maul, 2017). Both of these connections can be seen in the Aššur temples, the connection to Abiḫ less so in the second temple, in several ways.

Starting with Abiḫ, like mentioned earlier, Lambert (1983) makes a case for Aššur as the deified city. There is no other city or god in Ancient Mesopotamia that has a similar situation, and the closest to this concept are the deities that are deified natural phenomena, such as mountains and rivers (Lambert, 1983, pp. 84-85), a phenomenon that extends beyond Mesopotamia and into Anatolia (Tuba Ökse, 2011). In my view it could be equally possible that Aššur was more connected to the rock than to the city as a whole. Considering the rock has its own name, I would not say that the god Aššur was the deified rock, but he could have been seen as living on the rock. There are Hittite parallels for this as well: in some myths, gods live on mountains, and "rocks facing water sources were preferred for cultic activities, since these rocks symbolised mountains" (Tuba Öske, 2011, p. 220). As Abiḫ overlooked the river Tigris, this could be a reason why the temple was built there in the first place, despite its rough surface and the slope. Furthermore, I suggest that this deep physical connection to the rock played a role in both the structure of the second temple, and why it eventually failed. Having a temple dedicated to Aššur on a location far removed from Abiḫ could have been a reason why Tukultī-Ninurta I decided to design it so structurally different from the first temple. Additionally, this lack of connection may have contributed to the second temple not being successful enough to persist, also meaning that the god's connection with Abiḫ was stronger than the connection with the kings.

The second connection, between the god and the kings, can be seen in both temples. Both stood close to the royal palaces in their respective cities, and the inner sanctuary in the first temple had a special, direct entrance reserved for the king (Maul 2017, p. 346). The first temple also hosted ceremonies and rituals which involved the king, such as the coronation ceremony. The second temple is additionally connected to the royal palace in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta by name: the temple was called ‘House, Mountain of the Totality of Divine Powers’, and the palace ‘Palace of the Totality of Divine Powers’, which shows that they were “two inseparable counterparts that mirrored each other” (Maul 2017, p. 347). This may have been done deliberately to make up for the lack of connection to Abiḫ.

Finally, looking at the broader Assyrian religion, it is unclear how much this was represented physically in the temples. Evidence of shrines or niches in separate rooms with cult statues of other gods in the Assyrian pantheon have been found in both temples, but it is unknown which exact gods were worshipped there. The ritual *tākultu* mentioned in chapter 4 is an example of a ritual taking place inside the Aššur temple in Aššur involving ‘all’ of the gods within the temple, indicating that multiple deities were housed there and were connected to the temple itself, the god Aššur, and the king, who performed the ritual. It may have been performed at the temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta as well, but again considering the smaller size, and the theory that it was mainly used for processions, I would not consider it likely.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has seen a more detailed and in-depth discussion of themes and concepts raised in earlier chapters. The detailed comparison between the two temples focused on differences noted in chapter 4, making an effort to contextualise and explain them, using both existing and new interpretations. The two temples are evidently very different in their architecture, both in size and structure, and this is linked to some of their differences in usage, which are mainly seen in the practical limitations of the temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta. Looking at the latter within the context of Tukultī-Ninurta I’s other building projects and their abandonment by subsequent kings has shown a possible link between them, whereby his ‘innovations’ in his construction projects may have been a factor. Furthermore, the unique character of the god Aššur, specifically his connection to the rock ‘Abiḫ’ and the king, has been shown to be visible in the design of the temples, their location, and their surroundings; and, while limited, the likely inclusion of other deities within both temples showcase their connection with Aššur and his place within the Assyrian pantheon.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6. 1 Introduction

In this final chapter, the research questions posed in the first chapter will be answered, based on the themes and concepts discussed in chapters 3, 4, and 5. First, the three sub-questions will be answered, followed by the main research question. Finally, the chapter will be closed with various short suggestions for future research on the two temples, the god Aššur, and the city of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta as a whole.

6.2 Answering the research questions

6.2.1 Sub-questions

1: How do the two Aššur temples compare to each other based on architecture, rationale, and usage?

The two Aššur temples are different in most ways for all three of the aspects, and the similarities are few and minor. Their size, temple type, amount and type of rooms, placement of rooms, side buildings, orientation, and entrances are all different; they only share the god to which they are dedicated to, and the presence of key features such as the inner sanctuary and cult statue. These differences are linked to their differences in rationale and usage. The temple in Aššur during the Middle Assyrian Period was likely built to house the gods Aššur and Enlil, and it hosted a variety of daily rituals, festivals, processions, and ceremonies on a large scale, necessitating on-site storages, economic offices, and temple administration spaces. The temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta was likely built to include the god Aššur in the new capital city, to physically strengthen the relation between Aššur and the king, and to house sanctuaries to various gods. It was likely mostly used for festivals and processions, and (smaller) daily rituals and worship, aimed at a more local population. Tukultī-Ninurta I likely intended to set the second temple structurally apart from the first one, possibly because it was far removed from the god's original cult site. Overall, the biggest difference is their scale, which impacts all other aspects of the temples.

2: What was the connection between the Assyrian kings (in the Middle Assyrian period) and the two Aššur temples?

There was a strong, personal connection between the Assyrian kings and the first Aššur temple, as they served as the High Priest in the temple, led various rituals and ceremonies such as the *tākultu* and the *gināʾu*, and their coronation took place in the temple. This meant that the kings were very active and visible within the temple on various occasions. Both the Old and the Middle Assyrian Period saw impactful changes to the structure of the temple, which will have impacted its usage and its relationship with the king as well: Šamši-Adad I rebuilt the temple and introduced a completely new structure, possibly serving as double temple to Aššur and Enlil, Tukultī-Ninurta I made changes in the forecourt, and Shalmaneser I added an extra courtyard with side rooms and door knobs with inscriptions dedicated to the god. It is unclear how strongly connected Tukultī-Ninurta I was to his Aššur temple, or how present he was, but the building of the temple was recorded as a proud achievement requested by the god himself, and it stood close to the royal palace, so he will have felt somewhat personally connected. Since the bigger rituals mentioned above likely still took place in the first temple, he was likely more or at least as much present in the first temple as in the second temple.

3: How did the temples represent the god Aššur, and how are they connected to broader Assyrian religion?

Considering the lack of decorations or a clear idea of what the cult statue (at that time) would have looked like, this question is less suitable for the methods and results of this thesis than estimated. I have argued that the temples represented the god Aššur, and especially his connection to the rock Abiḫ and the Assyrian kings, in their structure, location, and/or name. The importance of Abiḫ was possibly a reason why the first temple was built there, its rough shape impacting the temple's structure, while it may also be why the second temple is so structurally different. Both temples are closeby to the royal palaces, and the name of the second temple reflects this connection to the kings, as well as possibly a connection to Abiḫ. Not much can be said about the temples' connection to broader Assyrian religion, other than that both temples had various rooms which likely held cult statues of other gods and were hence used to worship them; this is based mostly on the presence of deep, flat niches in some of the walls.

6.2.2 Main question

What were the main functions of the new Aššur temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta (ca. 1243-1207 BCE) and why was it abandoned?

While it cannot be said with certainty, I argue that the Aššur temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta likely had at least the following three main functions: it served as a (secondary) temple, alongside the first one, to Aššur, as well as a host of other deities; it hosted various processions and festivities (of which the specifics are unknown) which the structure of the temple is well-suited and possibly designed for; and it served to meet a need or felt obligation to include the god in the new capital due to his relationship with the king and role in the original capital city.

The abandonment of the temple is tied to the overall abandonment of the city Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, and there were likely many various reasons responsible, that go beyond the topic of this thesis. Theologically, I have argued that the god Aššur is more connected to the rock his first temple was built on, than either the city of Aššur or the Assyrian kings. This, combined with the suggestions that the second temple was used mainly for processions and festivals, and that much of the day-to-day care was still performed in the first temple, make that the second temple became obsolete when the city of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta was abandoned. Additionally, I have argued that subsequent kings may have wanted to abandon the temple because it diverged from Assyrian temple building traditions which they wanted to continue, and that the temple was simply not important or successful enough to continue to use.

6.3 Limitations of this thesis

The lack of extensive data on various topics and aspects discussed in this thesis has impacted the results, and has limited it to an extent. For the temple in Aššur, far more, yet patchy, data is available on the structure itself as well as material finds and its usage, than for the temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, which has made the comparison uneven. An extensive room-by-room comparison could have yielded more specific results, but due to the limited time available for this thesis, this lay beyond its scope. Furthermore, this thesis has only been able to answer the second part of the main research question (why the second temple was abandoned) partially, because much of the reasons it was abandoned will have tied together to the abandonment of the city itself, which was beyond the scope of this thesis.

6.4 Suggestions for future research

To truly answer the questions posted above, and any other related questions, further excavations or other field-based research would be necessary. Since the area the temples are in are unsafe for any fieldwork excursions, this will not be possible in the foreseeable future, and literature reviews like this work will continue to be the main source of investigation. Since I have put forward new theories and interpretations on what the main functions of the Aššur temple in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta were, and why it was abandoned, research can look further and try to answer the question of why no other Aššur temples were built at any other point in the history of the Assyrian Empire. Additionally, contrasting either or both Aššur temples with systematic overviews of other temples either from the same period, built by the same king, or of the same temple type could improve our understanding of what makes these temples so unique and so different. An in-depth comparison of the second temple and a Babylonian temple (such as the temple and ziggurat of Karana; see Eickhoff 1985) could explore the Babylonian influences on the second temple, and in what way they were combined with typical Assyrian aspects.

Lastly, I have highlighted the complex characters of the god Aššur as well as the king Tukultī-Ninurta I. Future investigations into their characters within different contexts could show much more than what this thesis has been able to achieve, which could then help further the understanding of their relation to the Aššur temples and the Assyrian religion. A detailed comparison of the god with the god Marduk, for example, who has a similar story with a completely different historical trajectory, could illuminate why Aššur could never be fully integrated into the Mesopotamian pantheon, and why he remained so isolated. Similarly, comparing the innovations introduced by Tukultī-Ninurta I with innovations of later kings such as Sennacherib, and the general reaction towards them should improve the understanding of both of them, and answer the many questions still surrounding Tukultī-Ninurta I.

Abstract

The god Aššur, the main god of the Ancient Assyrians, had two temples dedicated to him, of which the second temple is shrouded in mystery. The first temple was built in the capital city Aššur, and it was used for centuries, rebuilt and kept up by generations of kings. The second temple was built in a new capital, Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, it was used for a couple of decades, and it was abandoned after the king who built it died. While much is known about this particular king, Tukultī-Ninurta I, not much is known about the function of his Aššur temple, nor why it was abandoned so quickly. To fill in this gap of knowledge, this thesis compares the two Aššur temples side-by-side based on their architecture, their recorded rationale, and their usage. Here I show how different the two temples are in their structure and what that meant for their usage, by drawing from the broader context of the Assyrian religion, the nature of the god Aššur, and his relationship with the Assyrian kings. The primary difference is their size, while further differences are seen in their style and lay-out, which likely correspond to differences in usage. I argue that its main purposes were threefold: it served as a (secondary) temple to Aššur, it was mainly used for processions, and the king felt a need to include the god Aššur in his new capital city due to the god's importance in the capital city Aššur. Moreover, I argue that the second temple was abandoned because the god was too connected to the first temple to be moved, the main ceremonies and rituals could not be hosted due to its size so it became obsolete, and subsequent kings were not interested in using it. This is a relevant starting point for a deeper understanding of the god Aššur, why no further temples were dedicated to him, and in which ways the two temples dedicated to him are structurally different from other Assyrian temples.

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