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von
Barbara BÖCK
Eva CANCIK-KIRSCHBAUM
Thomas RICHTER

Literature and Political Discourse in Ancient Mesopotamia

Sargon II of Assyria and Sargon of Agade

Marc van de Mieroop (New York)[1]

While my contacts with the recipient of this Anniversary volume have revolved primarily around our shared interest in economic history, this article will attempt to comment on two different aspects of Jo Renger's well-known wide interests, namely the historical tradition in Ancient Mesopotamia and the person of King Sargon II of Assyria. I hope he will accept my small contribution with the same kindness he showed before, when we first discussed economic history.

Ancient Mesopotamian culture is known for its long adherence to traditions: the Mesopotamians lived with their past. Although their factual knowledge may have been poor, they were aware of the past and saw it as important for the present. This is most directly visible in their preservation of the memory of past rulers, amongst whom those of the Old Akkadian or Sargonic period stand out. The long-lasting historical tradition regarding these kings of the mid-third millennium, primarily Sargon and Naram-Sin, has been studied extensively, and has led in recent years to a methodological discussion in the discipline about the use of literary texts in historical research. Do literary creations, often only known to us from manuscripts dating hundreds of years after the events they claim to describe, provide factual information that can be integrated in a historical description of the reigns of these kings? It had been customary in the discipline to search for what was called the "historical kernel" of these texts in reconstructions of political and military history. For instance, the possibility that Sargon campaigned in Central Anatolia, a feat unattested in his own inscriptions or in their Old Babylonian copies, was weighed at great length on the basis of

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information from various later literary sources, such as "The King of Battle".[2]

It was Mario Liverani who pointed out the methodological difficulties of such an approach, first in a programmatic statement,[3] later in a detailed analysis of the Mesopotamian traditions regarding the Old Akkadian period,[4] which has caught the attention of many scholars. In his opinion the literary traditions regarding Old Akkadian, or other early Mesopotamian, kings cannot be used as sources for the periods they describe, only as sources for the periods in which they were composed. Amongst the reactions to Liverani's contention, the most explicit disagreement has been voiced by William W. Hallo.[5] He identified four problems: 1) the written evidence of the Old Akkadian period itself was given too much credence; 2) the later Mesopotamian sources are still millennia closer to the events they describe than we are; 3) the use of those later sources as evidence for their period of composition can lead to circular reasoning; and 4) to believe that we can know more than the authors of our sources is a "historians' fallacy." While I do not want to elaborate on this debate here, I would like to point out that it reveals a difference in opinion regarding the aims of historical research. The need to rely on later Mesopotamian literary sources to reconstruct the history of the Sargonic period is driven by the wish to write a history of events of that period. In such a reconstruction it becomes indeed important whether or not Sargon campaigned in Central Anatolia. If, however, we focus less on individual events in history, but on trends and patterns, we avoid the need to evaluate the "historical truth" in the Mesopotamian sources at hand. We can then write more of an intellectual history, one that investigates how the Mesopotamians perceived their own past, one that does not try to determine whether texts contain facts or fiction, but sees them as reflections of the thoughts of their authors.

Hallo's criticism of Liverani's work contains the legitimate concern that we are often unable to identify the date of composition of the literary sources regarding the Old Akkadian kings. For instance, the association of "The General Insurrection against Naram-Sin" with political events in the reign of

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[2] E.g., C.J. Gadd, *The Dynasty of Agade and the Gutian Invasion* (*CAH*, 3rd ed., vol. I/2, Cambridge 1971), 426-431.

[3] M. Liverani, "Memorandum on the Approach to Historiographic Texts", *OrNS* 42 (1973), 178-194.

[4] Idem, "Model and Actualization. The Kings of Akkad in the Historical Tradition", in M. Liverani (ed.), *Akkad. The First World Empire* (Padua 1993), 41-67.

[5] W.W. Hallo, "New Directions in Historiography (Mesopotamia and Israel)", in M. Dietrich/O. Loretz (eds.), *dubsar anta-men. Studien zur Altorientalistik. Festschrift für Willem H. Ph. Römer* (*AOAT* 253, Münster 1998), 109-128.

Sumu-la-El of Babylon[6] may fit our current ideas about the latter's reign well, but cannot be demonstrated with certainty. We cannot even say that the text was known in Sumu-la-El's time, as all available manuscripts are undated and might postdate that reign. I would like to circumvent that problem by focusing, not on the date of "original" composition, but on the date of the manuscripts that are available to us today. What is the function of these texts in the period when the manuscripts at our disposal were written? Unless we believe that there was a mindless copying of texts because of antiquarian interests, there should have been a relevance to them when they were written. This approach allows us to work with the texts in the form that is available to us. It becomes irrelevant whether they were newly composed, verbatim copies of an earlier manuscript, or reworkings of something earlier. I contend that in all three cases the texts still had a meaning within the society for which the manuscripts were written. I would like to demonstrate the possibilities of this approach by focusing on one moment in the long history of traditions regarding Sargon of Agade: the neo-Assyrian Sargonid period, especially the reign of Sargon II (721-705) or soon thereafter.

Sargon of Agade and Sargon II of Assyria obviously had something in common: their throne-name. It is important to keep in mind that the Mesopotamians did not see a person's name as accidental to him or her. The naming of an individual, or object for that matter, was an important act. It contributed to the identity of the person, or the object.[7] Thus in rituals of substitution the transfer of the name could function as the transfer of the identity. When a substitute image was made, physical resemblance was not necessary, but the name had to be inscribed in order to make the substitute function.[8] Hence, we should not see the adoption of an existing name as something with only a superficial meaning. By using the name Sargon, the king of Assyria must have attempted to adopt the characteristics of his famous ancient predecessor. The name chosen, Šarru-kēn, "The king is legitimate", is usually taken as a sign that both men were usurpers.[9] And indeed, the early Sargon seems to have grabbed power from his master Ur-Zababa of Kish,[10] while the later one seems to have come to the throne during a rebellion of the citizens of Assur against his predecessor,

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[6] M. Liverani, in *Akkad*, 59-61.

[7] Z. Bahrani, "Assault and Abduction: the Fate of the Royal Image in the Ancient Near East", *Art History* 18 (1995), 377.

[8] C. Daxelmüller/M.-L. Thomsen, "Bildzauber im alten Mesopotamien", *Anthropos* 77 (1982), 55.

[9] W.W. Hallo/W. Simpson, *The Ancient Near East: A History* (Fort Worth, 2nd ed., 1998), 52 with note 78.

[10] Ibid., 52.

Shalmaneser V.[11] It has been observed before that interest in the ancient Sargon flourished in the period of Sargon II of Assyria as visible in the large number of chronicles, omens, legends, and epics.[12] What I would like to demonstrate here is that the stories about the ancient king were used in two, antithetical, ways in late Assyrian history: on the one hand they were an easy way to glorify the ancient ruler and present him as the inspiration of the current one; on the other hand, criticism of Sargon of Agade could be used to criticize the Assyrian king.

By the end of the eighth century, the military greatness of Sargon of Agade had been legendary for a long time. Ever since the Old Babylonian period he had been presented as the conqueror of the entire world, although the exact extent of his conquests had not been systematically described. This changed in the neo-Assyrian period, when a text now referred to as "The Sargon Geography" appeared.[13] The text is known in two manuscripts only: one of neo-Assyrian date (Ass 13955eb; *ALA* II, 62 No. 117), found in Assur in the so-called house of the exorcists, the other of neo-Babylonian date and of unknown provenance, now in the British Museum (BM 64382). The neo-Assyrian tablet was found together with a large group of texts, many of them from the Sargonid period: some of the tablets from this house were dated with *limmu*'s ranging from 714 to post-canonical ones, while others refer to neo-Assyrian kings from Assurnasirpal II to Sin-šar-iškun.[14] Archaeological information suggests thus that the Assur tablet was from the last century of the neo-Assyrian period, but we cannot date it more precisely.

Also the "original" date of composition of the text has been a matter of dispute.[15] In the opinion of many scholars the text represents an early tradition, which was slightly reworked in the neo-Assyrian period. Albright sees the tablet from Assur as a late copy of a text with roots in the late third or early second millennium.[16] Grayson states that the author of the Sargon Geography could have used earlier documents, perhaps even of a third millennium date, and that "some editing was done in the first millennium".[17] Potts, on the other hand, states that it is a work from the period of Sargon II

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[11] A.K. Grayson, *Assyria: Tiglath-Pileser III to Sargon II (744-705 B.C.)* (*CAH*, 2nd ed., vol. III/2, Cambridge 1991), 87-88.

[12] Ibid., 88.

[13] Idem, "The Empire of Sargon of Akkad", *AfO* 25 (1974-1977), 56-64.

[14] O. Pedersén, *ALA* II, 44.

[15] M. Liverani, in *Akkad*, 64.

[16] W.F. Albright, "A Babylonian Geographical Treatise on Sargon of Akkad's Empire", *JAOS* 45 (1925), 242.

[17] A.K. Grayson, *AfO* 25, 57.

of Assyria.[18] All these proposals for the dating have been based on the contents of the text, namely its toponyms. The text lists a large number of geographical names whose usage can be dated from other texts. We find a mixture of names used in the third millennium, such as Marhashi, the early second millennium, such as Emutbalum, the late second millennium, such as SURginiash, and the first millennium, such as Baza. Only a few names are exclusively of first millennium usage, but they are important as their appearance forces us to regard the text in its present form as having been written down at this late date. But if an earlier "Vorlage" existed, we could regard the core of the text to be old, with only some additions made in the first millennium, when the manuscripts available were written. Many scholars held this opinion, and conclude that an earlier date of composition, thus closer to the actual reign of Sargon of Agade, is likely and that the Geography therefore can be used as a statement regarding the extent of the Old Akkadian king's empire.

Disagreement with this attitude was expressed by Mario Liverani who did not look at the toponyms, but at the formulations used in the text.[19] He focused on the fact that it gives measurements of the regions of Sargon's empire by using the length-measure of *bēru*, the Akkadian term usually translated as "mile", but indicating the distance one can cover in a two hour period, thus about 10 kilometers. The text states, for instance, in Akkadian, 40 *bēru rebīt māt Marḫaši*, "40 miles is the extent of the land Marḫaši" (l. 33). According to Liverani it was only under Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal that the distance of far-away lands became measured in *bēru*. And indeed Esarhaddon states, for instance: 30 *bēru qaqqar ultu* ᵘʳᵘ*Apqu ša pāṭi māt Same[na] adi* ᵘʳᵘ*Rapiḫi ana itê naḫal māt Muṣur ašar nāru lā išu ina eblī ḫarḫarrī kalkaltu mê būri ina dilûti ummānāte ušašqi*, "in 30 miles of land, from Aphek, which belongs to the territory of Samena, to Raphia, beside the Brook of Egypt, where there is no river (at all), I gave my troops to drink by pulling well-water with ropes, chains, and buckets(?)".[20] In the Rassam Prism A, Assurbanipal describes his ninth campaign against Arabian tribes as a number of stages measured in *bēru*. For 100 *bēru* out of Nineveh his troops followed the Arabian rulers through the desert. Then they continued for another 8 *bēru* before they reached the safety of land with water. Thereafter the troops had a number of 6 *bēru* marches each from settlement to settlement. For instance: *ultu libbi* ᵘʳᵘ*Azalla adi* ᵘʳᵘ*Quraṣiti 6 bēru qaqqaru ašar ṣummê kalkalti irdû* "they marched from the middle of Azalla to

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[18] D. Potts, "The Road to Meluhha", *JNES* 41 (1982), 288.

[19] In *Akkad*, 64-67.

[20] R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien (AfOB* 9, Graz 1956), 112 ll. 16-18.

Quraṣitu for six miles through an area of thirst and hunger".[21] Liverani thus concludes that the composition of the "Sargon Geography" is to be dated in the reigns of either Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal, and for unstated reasons he prefers the first.[22]

A closer examination of the text leads me to a somewhat different conclusion. There are two formats of geographical description in the text; one measuring the extent of regions in *bēru*, the other locating two toponyms on the borders of an area, and then giving the name of that area or of its inhabitants. For instance, *ultu Uruna adi Ṣinu māt Lullubi* "from Uruna to Ṣinu: the land of the Lullubi." The entire text starts with this statement: [*ultu ...*] x *titurri Baza*^ki *ša pāṭ ḫarrān māt Meluḫḫa*^ki [*adi ... šadê e*]*rēni māt Ḫanu 9 šarrānu,* "[From ...] the bridge of Baza on the border of the road to Meluḫḫa [to the] cedar [mountains]: the land of the Haneans: nine kings" (ll. 1-2). This type of description of an area conquered by an Assyrian king is very commonly found in the royal inscriptions of Sargon II of Assyria. For instance, in his cylinder inscription from Khorsabad is stated: *ištu māt Rāši miṣir māt Elamti* ^lú*Puqudu* ^lú*Damunu Dūr-Kurigalzu Rapiqu madbar kalāma adi naḫal māt Muṣri māt Amurru rapaštum māt Ḫatti ana siḫirtiša ibellu ištu māt Ḫašmar adi māt Ṣimaš patti māt Madāja ruqūti ša ṣīt šamši māt Namri māt Ellipi māt Bīt-Ḫamban māt Parsua māt Mannāja māt Urarṭu māt Kasku māt Tabālum adi māt Muski ikšudu rabītum qāssu,* "he who rules everything from the land Rāši in the area of Elam, the Puqudu and Damunu tribes, the cities Dūr-Kurigalzu and Rapiqu and the entire steppe up to the Brook of Egypt, the broad land Amurru and the land Hatti; whose mighty hand conquered everything from the land Hašmar to the land Ṣimaš on the border of the land of the distant Medes in the East, the lands Namri, Ellipi and Bīt-Hamban, and from the lands Parsua, Mannāja, Urarṭu, Kasku, and Tabālum as far as the land Muski".[23] The concept that he ruled from Western Iran to the border of Egypt stated here, is explicitly expressed in the Sargon Geography as well, which says: *ultu Anzan adi Miṣri* "From Anzan to Miṣrû" (l. 45) in a summary of the extent of his conquests.

Geographical indicators are very common in Sargon's inscriptions, and the quote from the cylinder inscription above provides a description of the borders of his state.[24] The Sargon Geography contains the same type of information in the same format. That text sums up at one point: "Anaku and Kaptara, the lands across the Upper Sea, Dilmun and Magan, the lands across the Lower Sea, and the lands from where the sun rises to where the sun sets,

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[21] Idem, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals: die Prismenklassen A, B, C = K, D, E, F, G, H, J und T sowie andere Inschriften* (Wiesbaden 1996), 65 ll. 120-123.

[22] M. Liverani, in *Akkad*, 66.

[23] A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen 1993), 33 ll. 12-15.

[24] Ibid., 396.

which Sargon, the king of the universe, three times conquered" (ll. 41-2). The idea that regions across the Upper and Lower seas were conquered is very strong in Sargon II's texts as well. In the inscriptions found on the pavements of the gates at Dūr-Sharrukin it is stated: *mušakniš 7 šarrāni ša māt Ia'a nagê ša māt Iadnana ša mālak 7 ūmē ina qabal tamtim šitkunāt šubāssun*, "he who subjected the kings of the Land Ja'a, a district in Cyprus, whose dwellings are located in the midst of the sea at a distance of seven days travel".[25] Somewhat later in the text Sargon says: *Uperi šar Dilmun ša mālak 30 bēri ina qabal tamtim kīma nūni šitkunu narbāṣu danān bēlūtija išmema iššâ tāmartuš*, "when Uperi, the king of Dilmun, whose nest lies in the midst of the sea like that of a fish, heard of the might of my rule, he brought his gifts".[26] The overseas regions of Cyprus and Dilmun in the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf are thus found in Sargon II's inscriptions as being at the edges of his area of control. In the Sargon Geography, this is extended to include Crete and Anaku, possibly another name for Cyprus[27] in the north-west, and Dilmun and Magan in the south-east. That the toponyms in the two texts do not exactly correspond is due to the difference in nature of the texts: the Sargon II inscriptions might be boasting, but must still adhere to standards of reality. The Geography is an imaginary description of an ancient empire whose extent the current ruler is to emulate. It should be pointed out that the last passage quoted does indicate a distance in *bēru*, which shows that such concept was used in Sargon II's reign and thus one does not have to wait to the reign of Esarhaddon to find such a technical term.

I would thus suggest that the Sargon Geography, as known to us, was composed in the reign of Sargon II. In this case I doubt that the author(s) had a set of earlier similar texts at hand, as the formulation of the text seems so much inspired by contemporary royal inscriptions. But the question is irrelevant in my approach, as I am only interested in reading the text we know, not in the tradition(s) that could have inspired it. The text presents an idealized view of a world-empire, indeed ascribed to the third millennium ruler, but intended to reflect on the living Sargon. He is portrayed here as the follower of the great king of the past, Sargon of Agade, who was the paradigm of a successful ruler. The Geography contains a mixture of topographical terms from all periods of Mesopotamian history. This indicates that the author had access to such names, which were used to give a sense of greater antiquity to the text. Their presence does not justify us saying that an earlier version of the text existed, however. The use of antiquated

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[25] Ibid., 262-263 ll. 41-45.

[26] Ibid., 264 ll. 54-58.

[27] A. Malamat, "Campaigns to the Mediterranean by Iahdunlim and other early Mesopotamian rulers", in H.G. Güterbock/Th. Jacobsen (eds.), *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger* (AS 16, Chicago 1965), 365-366.

geographical names for foreign regions was commonly found in Assyrian inscriptions. It was a literary technique used to suggest that time stood still outside the borders of Assyria, that only in Assyria was progress and civilization possible. Thus we can find the name Gutians in first millennium texts to indicate people from the east of Mesopotamia. The third millennium people of this name had certainly disappeared by then, but to the Assyrians the current inhabitants of the region might as well have been Gutians as time had not progressed there.[28] The sense of confusion and conflation of the two kings named Sargon is intentional. As the past was always important to the present for the Mesopotamians, and as the names of individuals were not accidental to them, but an integral part of their identity, the presentation of a Sargon of the past as ruler of the world reflected a sense of similar greatness of the living king. Just as his predecessor had controlled the universe, he had that destiny within him.

But just as the ruler of the past could be used to glorify the present one, a negative message about Sargon of Agade could also be used to criticize his later namesake. In the first millennium we see for the first time the appearance of a disapproving attitude towards the king who earlier on had always been presented as a good ruler. That new information is contained in two chronicles. The first is the so-called Weidner-chronicle known from seven manuscripts from neo-Assyrian and neo-Babylonian dates. The best preserved manuscript is from Assur, found in the same collection of tablets as the Sargon Geography (Ass 13955gv; *ALA* II, 64 No. 184). The Chronicle is presented in the format of a letter from one Old Babylonian king to another: Damiq-ilishu or Enlil-bani of Isin to Rim-Sin of Larsa or Apil-Sin of Babylon, and describes events regarding the Esagil-temple of Marduk in Babylon starting with Akka of Kish. When it reaches Sargon it states as follows:

> Ur-Zababa ordered Sargon, his cupbearer, to change the wine-libation cups of the Esagil: "Change them!" Sargon did not switch them; on the contrary, he was careful to deliver them to the Esagil. Marduk, son of the prince of the Apsu, looked with joy upon him and gave him kingship over the four quarters. He took care of the Esagil. [All who] dwelt in the palace [brought] their tribute to Babylon. But he himself [neglected] the word Bel (i.e. Marduk) had spoken to him. He dug up the earth of the clay pits and in front of Agade he built a new city and called it Babylon. Because of the [transgression] Sargon had

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[28] P. Machinist, "On Self-Consciousness in Mesopotamia", in S.N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (New York 1986), 189.

committed, Enlil changed his word and from east to west his subjects rebelled against him, and he was afflicted with insomnia.[29]

A new element enters the story here, one that is found in several other first millennium sources: Sargon committed a sacrilege by building a new city, and therefore the gods caused his people to rebel against him. What city exactly is intended is confusing: the Weidner chronicle states that he built Babylon next to Agade, yet Babylon is mentioned many times before in the same text, so this must be a mistake. "The Chronicle of Early Kings," known from one neo-Babylonian manuscript only, has this version:

> He dug up earth from the clay pit of Babylon and made a counterpart of Babylon next to Agade. Because of this transgression the great lord Marduk became angry and wiped out his people with a famine. From east to west they rebelled against him, and he (Marduk) afflicted him with insomnia.[30]

Also two omen collections of the first millennium mention the building of a new city near Agade named Babylon and a general revolt against the old king.[31]

The glory of Sargon is still depicted in these chronicles, yet the end of his life, a subject never really addressed earlier on, is now related as a disaster. Although the Sumerian King List mentioned that Sargon built Agade,[32] this fact did not seem to have been of great interest prior to the first millennium. At that time it became a negative aspect of his career. How can we explain this?

It was not unusual for Mesopotamian kings to build new cities, or totally refurbish existing ones, to act as their capitals. Several such kings are known throughout Mesopotamian history, including the Babylonian Kurigalzu in the fourteenth century; and the Assyrians Tukulti-Ninurta I (thirteenth century), Assurnasirpal II (ninth century), Sargon II (eighth century), and Sennacherib (seventh century). The remarkable aspect about these massive projects was that all but one of the rulers never boasted of this accomplishment. Although they commemorated the construction of new buildings or walls, the fact that an entire new city was founded was not mentioned in the royal inscriptions. The only exception to this rule was Sargon II of Assyria. The building of his city, Dūr-Sharrukin, is commemorated in his inscriptions as a personal feat:

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[29] J.-J. Glassner, *Chroniques mésopotamiennes* (Paris 1993), 217.

[30] Ibid., 219.

[31] L.W. King, *Chronicles concerning Early Babylonian Kings*, vol. II (London 1907), 27-28; 34-35.

[32] J.-J. Glassner, *Chroniques mésopotamiennes*, 140.

he selected the site, made the plans, and supervised the work. His cylinder inscription is explicit about this repeatedly. It states, for instance:

> The wise king, bearer of good words, who paid attention to the settlement of uncultivated steppeland, the cultivation of wasteland, and the planting of orchards, set his mind to make high mountains, which before had never grown vegetation, yield produce; his heart urged him to plow furrows in abundant fields which had not known a plow under all earlier kings and to make the work song resound there; to open up springs in areas without wells, to make abundant water come forth above and below like a new flood. The king, who is wise, knowledgeable in all professions like the sage (= Adapa), who grew in counsel and wisdom and matured in understanding, ... ; day and night I planned to build that city.[33]

It was thus Sargon's personal initiative to build the city in an area that had never been settled before. He continues to state that he personally compensated the owners of the lands confiscated, either by paying silver or by giving them another equivalent field. Then he supervised the making of the bricks, and finally he laid out the city wall and its gates:

> 16,280 cubits, the numeral of my name, I established as the measure of its wall and I set its foundation on solid bedrock. In front and the back on both sides I opened up eight city-gates into the eight wind-directions. I named the gates of Shamash and Adad which point east "Shamash makes me reach my goal" and "Adad holds its abundance." I designated the gates of Enlil and Mulissu which point north "Enlil establishes the foundation of my city" and "Mulissu makes yields plenty." I established as names for the gates of Anu and Ishtar which point west "Anu preserves the work of my hand" and "Ishtar makes its people flourish." I called the names of the gates of Ea and Belet-ili which point south "Ea takes care of its spring" and "Belet-ili increases its offspring." "Assur makes the years of the king, its builder, grow old and guards its troops" was its wall, and "Ninurta establishes the foundation of its ramparts for long days" was its outer wall.[34]

The detailed description of his participation would not have been remarkable had other city-builders not been so silent about the urban character of their projects. In other reigns the focus of building inscriptions was always on individual structures, not on entire cities. The work was

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[33] A. Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons II.*, 37-38 ll. 34-43.

[34] Ibid., 42-43 ll. 65-71.

represented as an extension of something that already existed, not as something new.

But Sargon II differed in this respect. He presented Dūr-Sharrukin as a new city, and as the project of his own mind. He even goes so far as to state that the measure of the city-wall represents a numerical cryptographic writing of his name. Unfortunately, the exact interpretation of this cryptogram escapes us, but that the reported measure was used as the basis for the layout of the town can be determined from the archaeological record.[35] Again we see here an association of two entities by their name, something that was of great importance to the Mesopotamians as stated above. Sargon's name, rewritten as a number, became the measure of the city wall that he planned. Thus he imbedded his identity into the very fabric of the city. Moreover, the primordial aspect of this work, the fact that it was an original creation, was stressed in the language utilized by Sargon II in his building inscription. As Parpola pointed out, some of it is directly taken from the description of the creation of the universe by Marduk in the Epic of Creation.[36] The opening of the city-gates of Dūr-Sharrukin is described in the same terms as the layout of the gates of the universe in the Enūma Eliš. Sargon II states: *ina rēše u arkate ina ṣēlē kilallān miḥret 8 šārī 8 abbullāti aptema*, "in front and back on both sides, I opened up eight city-gates into the eight wind-directions",[37] while the Enūma Elish has this line: *iptema abbullāti ina ṣēlē kilallān*, "he opened up gates in both ribcages".[38] The term *ṣēlū* used here has the basic meaning of rib, which does actually reflect the side of a body. With Sargon, it becomes transformed to refer to the side of a city, where rib obviously makes no sense. That the phraseology used by Sargon is clearly intended to refer to the Creation Epic is demonstrated by the fact that what he says does not accurately reflect his work. The city plan of Dūr-Sharrukin[39] shows that there are two gates each in three of the city-walls, while the fourth wall, where the citadel is located, has only one gate. The Akkadian *ṣēlē kilallān* "both sides" thus cannot refer to the city, while it perfectly well represents the two sides of the vault of heaven, each with one gate to let the stars and planets pass through. This may explain the rather awkward statement by

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[35] M.A. Powell, "Maße und Gewichte", *RlA* 7 (1987-1990), 474.

[36] S. Parpola, "The Construction of Dur-Šarrukin in the Assyrian Royal Correspondence", in A. Caubet (ed.), *Khorsabad – le palais de Sargon II, roi d'Assyrie* (Paris 1995), 69 note 1.

[37] A. Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons II.*, 42 l. 66.

[38] W.G. Lambert, *Enuma Eliš. The Babylonian Epic of Creation – The Cuneiform Text* (Oxford 1966), 27. For this translation see W. Heimpel, "The Sun at Night and the Doors of Heaven in Babylonian Texts", *JCS* 38 (1986), 134.

[39] Cf. M. van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City* (Oxford 1997), 92.

Sargon that he built eight gates in the eight wind-directions.[40]

Finally, Sargon's personal involvement with the project is also borne out by his official correspondence. Ten percent of the entire letter corpus from the reign of Sargon II deals with the building of Dūr-Sharrukin, including several letters written by the king himself. In total there are forty references to royal orders in these texts. When labor or goods were needed, Sargon himself made the request to officials from the entirety of the empire. He interfered with everything down to the discussion of architectural details. That he was driven to accomplish the work fast is demonstrated by the fact that it took only slightly more than ten years to finish, a very short period considering the vast size of the city involved.[41]

At the same time that Sargon of Assyria built his city, and proudly proclaimed that it was a novelty and his personal achievement, we find stories about Sargon of Agade having done the same. The Old Akkadian king's act was described as a sacrilege, however, something for which he was punished in his old age. The building of Agade led to a general uprising by his people and punishment by the god. The simultaneity of the appearance of new stories about Sargon of Agade and the acts of the Assyrian king could obviously be coincidental, but it seems likely to me that we have here a condemnation of Sargon of Assyria's project by his own contemporaries through analogy with the ancient king. While not directly criticizing the living ruler, it seems no innocent statement that work of similar nature had led to disaster in the past.

The building of a new city by a mortal man was considered to be an act of *hybris*; to the Mesopotamians only gods were allowed to found cities, and numerous are the texts that depict a city as the seat of a deity, founded by him or her. When Sargon II of Assyria described his building of Dūr-Sharrukin, he likened himself to the sage, Adapa, who brought civilization to the Babylonians. By utilizing language of the Creation Epic, Sargon presents himself as performing a primordial act, a repetition of what Marduk had done during the original creation of the universe. But such an act was not for man in the Mesopotamian opinion, it was reserved for the gods. Sargon had thus committed a sacrilege. We may find here then an ironic situation where a king consciously invoked the figure of an ancient ruler, who had died some 1700 years earlier, to be his shining example. Yet in the eyes of some of his subjects, the Assyrian committed the sin of *hybris*: he built a new city. This story finds its way in the Weidner Chronicle, a text whose interests go beyond Sargon. It depicts the successes and failures of rulers as the result of

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[40] I am aware that Sennacherib, Sargon's successor, used the same expression, *ṣēlē kilallān* when describing the gates he built in his palace at Niniveh (D.D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, *OIP* 2, Chicago 1924, 111 l. 71). This is a repetition of Sargon's statement, the exact meaning may have become unclear.

[41] S. Parpola, in *Khorsabad*.

Marduk's attitude towards them. Those favoring the Esagil, Marduk's temple in Babylon, receive his blessings; those not honoring it are doomed. Sargon's story became thus integrated in a text with a different ideology, but it contains a criticism of the king that finds its rationale in his own reign.

I am fully aware of the fact that it cannot be demonstrated with certainty that the texts regarding Sargon of Agade discussed here were known during the reign of Sargon II of Assyria. We lack the tools for dating manuscripts with such precision. Based on the archaeological information from Assur, we can say that both the Sargon Geography and the Weidner Chronicle derive from the house of the exorcists, and thus were known at the end of the Assyrian empire. But the archaeological information available does not indicate whether these tablets were present in the house in the late eighth or in the seventh century. Paleography is not sufficiently developed for us to be able to date manuscripts with the accuracy of less than a century. Akkadian grammar as attested in the literary texts did not evolve enough over short time periods, so that we cannot use that, either, as a tool for dating. The Sargon Geography and Weidner Chronicle could thus be late Sargonid texts, unknown in the time of Sargon II.

But I think that it is important for us to see that the Mesopotamian texts had a meaning to their owners, and were not kept just as collectors' items. It is that meaning that I have hoped to explore here. A geographical description of the empire of Sargon of Agade made more sense in the reign of Sargon of Assyria than in other reigns, if the latter and his court wanted to portray the idea of world domination as an imperial goal. But political imagery can be used against a ruler as well. If Sargon of Assyria wanted to identify himself with his illustrious predecessor by the same name, he could also be criticized indirectly by portraying that example in a negative light. I think such criticism was expressed in the Weidner Chronicle. A study of texts in this way seems to me a step forward from the debate of whether or not they can be used as historical sources on early Mesopotamian rulers. Whether or not Sargon of Agade campaigned in Anatolia (or Cyprus for that matter) is impossible to determine from the information we have. It seems futile, then, to try to answer such questions in the affirmative or negative. It seems more fruitful and interesting to me to investigate how the image of this ancient king survived, and was used over the centuries by later Mesopotamians. Research of that nature takes us beyond a history of events, towards a history of ideas.