

Muayad S. B. Damerji: *The Development of the Architecture
of Doors and Gates in Ancient Mesopotamia*

pp. xx + 250, 6 photos, 72 figures, 158 plans, 1 map, The Institute for Cultural Studies of Ancient Iraq, Kokushikan University, Tokyo, 1987; ISBN 4-930821-89-4.

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This book will undoubtedly come to be seen as filling a gap in our understanding of the rich variety of ancient Mesopotamian architecture, and is accordingly to be warmly welcomed. The erudition which it displays is enhanced by the arrangement of the text and by the numerous and excellent illustrations. As the author early on observes, there has been no comprehensive treatment of Mesopotamian architecture to compare, for example, with Naumann's *Architektur Kleinasiens...* (Tübingen, 1955): his task, however, was the easier for the smaller volume of data. Mesopotamian architecture was not simply a phenomenon of the empires of Assyria and Babylon, although it is those which have bequeathed the most impressive monuments to posterity, monuments resurrected by the labours of archaeologists of different nationalities since the days of Botta and Layard. Mesopotamian architecture had its roots in the earliest prehistoric settlements. The author, who acknowledges his debt to German and other authorities from earlier and more recent times, studied under Professor Dr. Barthel Hrouda, completing his doctoral thesis in 1972. This book is the English translation of the German text, with some annotations by the translator.

The different types of building, forms and groupings of rooms and situation of doors in each grouping are here carefully and systematically expounded. The extent to which the builders were aware of a deliberate choice of plan is perhaps not always clear, although, for example, the tripartite plan has long been associated with temples from the Ubaid period onwards, with good reason. Not all types of building plan can so readily be associated with a particular function: for example, as the

author states, the Mesopotamian disjunctive design, including a unit standing on its own, and exemplified in the Enunmak of Ur (Ur III) and the southern Citadel of Babylon (Neo-Babylonian period), was used for religious and secular buildings alike. The long room, so common in Mesopotamia and elsewhere in the Near East, had the practical advantage of requiring only relatively short timbers for roofing, being equally convenient for brick vaulting. The author handles the wealth of evidence with assurance and skill, being well aware of the shortcomings in the archaeological record, such as the limited height of surviving remains, inhibiting precise reconstructions. Those offered in earlier publications are sometimes modified. The doors and gates are described not merely in themselves but also as a means to a wider discussion of much of Mesopotamian architecture (e.g. figs. 12-13, showing chained rooms and those lying transversely round a courtyard).

In the second chapter, on the plan and construction of doors and gates, five types of door are distinguished: simple interruption of the wall; interruption of the wall with a 'genuine door stop' inside; interruption of the wall with a 'rabbeting' (*sic*) outside; interruption of the wall flanked by 'projections'; and interruption of the wall flanked by ornamental or genuine towers (pp. 53-4). The varieties of placing of gates and doors, jambs, thresholds and upper closures are successively dealt with. A chart (p. 97) tabulates the occurrences of doors with or without passage room; with two and more rooms; with guard rooms on one or two sides; and gates or doors with a forecourt. The successive periods, from Hassuna to Neo-Babylonian, are indicated, demonstrating the inevit-

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ably disproportionate weighting of examples in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods. Thresholds coated with bitumen (asphalt) occur as early as the Anu Ziggurat E at Uruk. Copper plates might occasionally be used for a similar purpose. The finely decorated stone slabs used as thresholds in Neo-Assyrian palaces clearly represent carpets. Arched and otherwise spanned doors are discussed in detail.

In the third chapter the door leaf and its mechanism are described. Cuneiform sources, to which reference is made as appropriate throughout this book, reveal very much more of wooden doors than do the meagre remains discovered, although there is of course better evidence of decorated bronze sheeting from Balawat and Khorsabad and also from Assur and Borsippa; but this was essentially an Assyrian tradition. The sliding door at Mari, as reconstructed by Parrot, is thought questionable. One of the best of the innumerable examples of door sockets comes from the throne room of the palace of Level II at Nuzi, the marble pivot-stone being set in baked brickwork, the base of the pivot being one metre beneath the level of the stamped clay pavement. Bolts are not well documented, locks even less so, although on Akkadian seals servants of Shamash are depicted using a "stick-like object" to open the "Gate of Heaven".

In the fourth chapter city and precinct gates are discussed. Here a parallel from outside Mesopotamia is cited, although, as stated, the south gate at Alişar Hüyük, in south central Anatolia, dates to

the Early Bronze Age, millennia later than the gate at Tell-es-Suwan. City and precinct gates at Assur, Tell Asmar, Tell Taya, Ur, Khorsabad, Nineveh and Babylon, of widely varying plans, are illustrated, here as elsewhere in convenient form.

City gates naturally served for defence, and were therefore particularly well constructed: Neo-Assyrian gates especially reveal much of the structural techniques used. They could also, as literary sources in and beyond Mesopotamia record, serve as meeting-places, notably for merchants. As for recessed doorways, so characteristic of temples from the days of Eridu onwards, these were widely imitated outside Mesopotamia, as, for example, in the burnt citadel of Hasanlu IV (c. 1100–800 B.C.) near Lake Urmia, Iran; and likewise in Urartian rock inscriptions set in niches and evidently inspired by the design of contemporary temple doors. Gates and doors thus had more than their purely practical purpose, the doors of Mesopotamian buildings allowing light and air as well as access. The palace of Zimri-Lim at Mari is one of the best-known examples of indirect access, presumably for reasons of security.

The author has done his best to guide the reader over the wide range of examples cited, from sites covering a long time-span. This will assuredly remain a valuable work of reference long after other such publications have become obsolete. The archaeological profession is greatly indebted to Dr. Damerji. The Japanese translators are also to be congratulated.