

27) The layout of the ziggurat temple at Babylon¹ – In the course of studying the Neo- and Late-Babylonian house with a view to reconciling the Akkadian terms for its parts with the excavated ground plans, it became clear to me that what is conventionally interpreted as a “west wing/room” (*bīt amurri*) must in fact mean the exact opposite. The same principle applies to the other three terms for rooms/suites named after the principal winds, namely, the *bīt iltāni*, *bīt šadî* and *bīt šūti*.² A detailed exposition of this finding and its implications for understanding the layout and composition of the 1st millennium Babylonian house will be published shortly.³ Essentially it is based on the fact that, in documents which mention one of these house sectors in the context of a detailed property description, the room or suite in question – which in such cases is invariably mentioned together with an adjacent courtyard (Akk. *tarbašu*) – is always located on the opposite side of that courtyard to that which we would expect. The unroofed central courtyard formed the principal source of light and air for the rooms opening off it, and it is surely this factor that lies behind the way in which these terms are used. Thus a *bīt amurri* (or the variant *bītu ša amurri*) is actually a “west(-facing) wing/room,” a *bīt iltāni* is a “north(-facing) wing,” a *bīt šadî* is an “east(-facing) wing,” and a *bīt šūti* is a “south(-facing) wing”.⁴

An improved understanding of the Akkadian terms such as those discussed here sheds light on how the Babylonians conceptualised the built environment and helps to bridge the gap between texts and archaeology in the understanding of Mesopotamian architecture. This new interpretation clearly has implications not only for understanding

¹ The research on which this note draws was conducted as part of the START Project on “The Economic History of Babylonia in the First Millennium BC” funded by the Fonds zur Förderung der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung (Austria).

² The terms *iltānu*, *šadî*, *šūtu* and *amurru*, traditionally translated “north”, “east”, “south” and “west” (retained here for the sake of brevity), correspond rather to “north-west”, “north-east”, “south-east” and “south-west” respectively; see E. Unger, *Babylon. Die heilige Stadt nach der Beschreibung der Babylonier* (2nd ed., Berlin, 1970) 122-8.

³ H. D. Baker, *The Urban Landscape in First Millennium BC Babylonia* (forthcoming).

⁴ It is clear that these expressions can be used to refer either to a single room, or to a main room opening off a courtyard together with its associated rooms; for further details see the aforementioned study.

the layout and composition of the house, but also for any other architectural context in which these terms occur, including cultic structures. In this note I shall address one such case, that of the ziggurat temple at Babylon

A written description of this temple, situated on top of the ziggurat Etemenanki, can be found in lines 25-35 of a metrological text, the so-called “E-sagil Tablet”.⁵ According to this passage the temple contained a *bīt šadî*, two *bītāti ša iltāni*, a *bītu ša šūti* and a *bītu ša amurri*. The “cella of the god (Marduk)” is said to be located in the *bīt šadî* (l. 25) and would therefore be situated on the east side of the temple, according to the conventional view. However, our revised interpretation places it on the west (strictly speaking, south-west) side of the central courtyard (Akk. *kisallu*, l. 33).⁶ When we take into account the layout of the excavated Neo-Babylonian temples, such a location makes much better sense than the traditional one. The proposed new arrangement mirrors the layout of Esagila, the main temple of Marduk, where the principal cella was located on the south-west side of the building.⁷ It also conforms to Neo-Babylonian architectural conventions in temple-building whereby the main cella typically lay on the south-west or south-east side of the courtyard but never on the north-east side,⁸ which is where the main cella of the ziggurat temple would be if we retained the bedroom (*bīt erši*), lay opposite the main cella on the east side of the building. On the north side lay the *bītu ša šūti* which comprised the shrine of Anu and Enlil, and on the south side lay the two *bītāti ša iltāni* which housed the deities Ea and Nuska.

Further attestations of these terms in a cultic context include the tablet BM 68840* (CT 22, Pl. 50) bearing a detailed drawing of a ground plan of a Neo-Babylonian temple,

⁵ A.R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*. OLA 40 (Leuven, 1992) 109-119, no. 13 (edition), 423-430 (commentary on ll. 25-35).

⁶ In this case the courtyard is said to be roofed (l. 33) but this may be owed to the fact that it was an unusual temple, being located on top of the ziggurat; normally we are dealing with rooms adjoining an open courtyard. George (1992: 429) suggests that the building may have had an upper storey; however, even if that were the case, a second storey could be supported without roofing the central courtyard.

⁷ For a plan see George 1992: 86, Fig. 6.

⁸ The cella locations in excavated Neo-Babylonian temples include the following: north-west side: Egipar (Ur), Enunmaḥ (Ur); west side – Emašdari (Ištar-of-Akkad temple, Babylon); south-west – Ezida (Borsippa); Esagila (Babylon); Ebabbar (Sippar); Nin-ezen temple (Ur); Ningal temple (Ur); Eḫursagtila (Ninurta temple, Babylon); both cellas of the “double temple” (Kish); south – Nabû-ša-ḫarê temple (Babylon); south-east – Ešasurra (Išḫara Temple = “Temple Z,” Babylon); Emaḥ (Ninmaḥ/Bēlet-ilī temple, Babylon); Harbour Temple (Ur). The relevant ground plans are conveniently assembled by C. Castel, “Temples à l’époque néo-babylonienne: une même conception de l’espace sacré,” *RA* 85 (1991) 169-182 with Pl. 1-5.

where a caption identifies one of the rooms as a *bīt amurri*.⁹ Also, there is a reference to a *bīt šūti ša bīt Bēltiya* in the tablet known as “The Measurements of E-sagil and E-zida”. This is understood as “the south room of the chapel of Bēltiya”; however, in the light of our proposal it should rather be “the south(-facing) room of the Bēltiya chapel,” denoting its position as a room on (and accessible from) the north side of the main courtyard within Esagila.¹⁰

H.D. BAKER (12-03-08) heather.baker@univie.ac.at
Institut für Orientalistik, Universität Wien, Spitalgasse 2, Hof 4, 1090 WIEN (Autriche)

⁹ A detailed study of this building plan is being prepared by the author.

¹⁰ George 1992: 126 (no. 14: 10), with commentary (pp. 122, 437) suggesting an identification of this room with room 11 of Esagila (see the plan, Fig. 6). According to the excavators’ ground plan, room 11 has no doorway connecting it with the courtyard (room 5) to the north; therefore even if room 5 were to be identified as the “court of the chapel of Bēltiya” mentioned in l. 11 of the text, it has no clear connection with the *bīt šūti* which supposedly forms part of the same chapel. However, as George makes clear in his discussion, the interpretation of this part of the text is problematic.