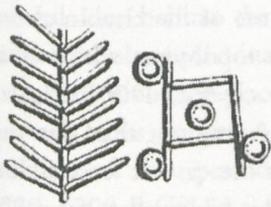


CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Phenomenon of Residential Cities and City Foundations in the Ancient Near East

Common Idea or Individual Cases?



Mirko Novák

Abstract *In the history of the Ancient Near East a considerable number of residential cities were built, either as a foundation ex nihilo on virgin soil or as the result of a massive transformation of an already existing town. Created as the center of an empire, every residential city constituted a symbol of political, economic, and ideological power. Several periods of ambitious building programs of residential cities can be identified: one certain peak was the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550–1200 B.C.) with almost contemporary foundations in Babylonia, Assyria, Elam, Mittani, Hatti, and Egypt. Another peak took place in the Iron Age (ca. 1200–600 B.C.), with that period's shift of the region's political center of the Assyrian Empire. But the phenomenon of major urban building projects in the Near East continued even until the medieval Islamic period. Determining the factors that inspired these urban projects and their ideological backgrounds is not easy: each case has to be examined on an individual basis. It seems that the Late Bronze Age examples were the result of competition between territorial empires, whereas the Iron Age examples were an expression of exclusivity and claim for universal power.*

If one approaches the question of what monumentality is and how it finds its physical expression, there is hardly any doubt that the foundation of a new or the recreation of an already existing city requires a huge effort in labor and acquisition of enormous economic resources and thus produces a monument, “an object that is generally huge in size, that commemorates or memorializes, that is historically significant, and that has

longevity" (Osborne *infra*). All people involved in a project such as building or reforming a complete city—either as workmen, architects, and artisans, or as subjects who were obliged to pay for the labor, or as attending visitors of foreign citizenship—recognized that the political will of the ruling system was able to plan, organize, and conduct it. Hence, the building process and its result were easily recognizable as a symbol of political, social, and economic power. If we follow Osborne's introductory remarks on the relationship of monument and monumentality as similar to form and meaning, we have to reconsider the perception of this newly built city as a monument by its contemporary and later inhabitants: Did it function as a (cosmological or any other kind of) symbol? Did it inhere and transpond a social memory? Did it fulfill all the other possible criteria for monumentality?

Let us start with a very obvious and simple matter: the name of the city. In almost all cases under discussion here we deal with politically chosen toponyms, which guaranteed either the remembrance of the city's founder (as in the cases of Dūr-Kurigalzu, Āl-Untaš-napiriša, Pi-Ramesses, Dūr-Šarrukēn) or of a religious program that was promoted (as in the cases of Akhet-Aten or Tarḫuntašša). This was the case at least as long as the city did exist and was not renamed (Novák 1999:381–384).¹ However, expressing and transmitting a certain political or social message by a city works even on a much higher and more sophisticated level than just its toponym: by the spatial organization of the city, its layout, its outer shape, and its inner structure.

Every urban settlement is a reflection on the society that created it (Novák 1999; Pezzoli-Olgiati 2002; Harmanşah 2013; Liverani 2013; Wirth 2000). The outer shape may follow either the morphology of the natural landscape or any geometrical patterns. The latter could be the reflection of a cosmological idea, a symbol of the image of the world. This is the case with some historical circular or rectangular cities, which were supposed to represent the *axis mundi*.² The alignment of the streets, their breadth and decoration were not only the result of traffic requirements but also of political or religious expressions, being manifested by ceremonies or processions. The position of the main architectural elements of the city, either palaces or temples or other features within the urban organism, reflected the ideological system, maintained by their visibility or hiddenness for every visitor or inhabitant moving inside the city. Was the temple in the center of the city or at its periphery? Was the street system oriented toward a temple, a citadel, or a palace? What was the building that was the focus of the perception of the urban inhabitants in their daily life? A medieval European town, for example, was centered on the main church or cathedral. In contrast, the baroque city, founded in the spirit of absolutism, was centered on the royal palace. Whether the layout of the city is the result of a long-time evolution or of a punctual foundation process, it is always a symbol of a political and socioeconomic system. Social dynamics may transform the original layout and structures and thus also the original semiotic message. However, this process takes a long time and huge efforts.³

Following these thoughts, we can conclude that both the building process of a city and the final monument itself constitute political messages that perpetuated after the

generation of the founders, irrespective of all later modifications. Hence, we can ascribe to each foundation of a city an inherent monumentality, either a performative one, lasting only during the building activities, or a perceptual one in the time of the city's existence.

This is especially the case with so-called residential cities, a phenomenon that has appeared frequently in human history all over the world. Creating a residential city, including the building activities involved, demonstrates in the highest degree the will and ability of a ruling class to initiate and fulfill such a huge project. The residential city is thus a "monument of power" and also the reflection of a certain ideology. Hence, there is hardly any need to discuss *whether* a residential city represents and expresses monumentality. Instead, research questions should address *how* it did it: What were the reasons for the creation of specific cities? Which ideology was expressed? Was there a general idea behind the concept of all residential cities, or does each known example indeed require individual explanations?

This is not the place to deal with all the examples attested in ancient history. Instead, we will focus on the Ancient Near East, where the first creations of residential cities are attested. Two periods are of particular interest here. First, the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1500–1200 B.C.), in which residential cities appear almost contemporary and suddenly in every major territorial state of that time, namely, Babylonia, Elam, Assyria, Mittani, the Hittite Empire, and Egypt. And second, the Iron Age (ca. 1200–600 B.C.), in which this phenomenon is almost exclusively restricted to Assyria, with only very few exceptions outside of this region. Both periods will be examined briefly to get an impression on how the crucial question—common idea or individual causes?—might be answered. But first we have to determine how a residential city can be defined.

CAPITAL AND RESIDENTIAL CITIES

The distinction between a capital and a residential city is difficult and, of course, somewhat artificial: almost every capital city hosts the residence of a ruler or government, and a residential city could easily, and sometimes also quickly, be transformed into a real capital. The crucial difference between both types of cities is its primary function, as function is the basis of urban classifications; although every city fulfils a number of purposes, this defines its attribution to a special "ideal type" of a city (Novák 1999:52–57). Whereas a true capital represents the economic, administrative, political, religious, and cultural center of its political entity, the main characteristic of a residential city is the domination of the representational, administrative, and political functions (Liverani 2013; Novák 1999:56f.). Moreover, the economic dependency of all inhabitants of a residential city is decisive: the palace forms the economic basis of nearly all of its inhabitants, while alternative factors and autonomous structures do not exist on any larger scale (Braunfels 1976:155). Thus, there are always cities with important economic or religious, most often also cultural, functions existing apart from the residential cities, and in many cases (but not necessarily) they are identical with the capital. However, we have to keep in mind that the type of the "residential city" is still a subjective construction, since the distinguishing features between it and a "capital" are fluid.

The arrangement of any urban settlement depends on socioecological factors, climatic conditions, geomorphological assumptions about the site, and local building traditions. Furthermore, political concepts influence the external shape and internal structure of a city. This last factor is disproportionately present in the formation of a residential city because of its special economic background and its function as a symbol of the ruling system.

This type of city can only be founded in a social context characterized by the strong ideological and economic position of the king (or his substitutes) as an institution. In almost all cases, a residential city is either a creation *ex nihilo* or, at least, a large-scaled transformation of an existing (but in most cases rather unimportant) town into the residence of the king. A basic prerequisite for its existence is the significant economic power of the responsible institution. Such economic might can only be generated by a large territorial state, hardly ever by a small entity such as a city-state or a moderate principality. Hence, the construction and the existence of a residential city can be seen as a physical expression of the ideologically based and economically manifested power and self-understanding of a king, a ruling class, or a specific political system (even if it has a democratic constitution). Well-known examples in history are Constantinople, Versailles, Potsdam, or Washington, D.C. Some of them gained the position of a real capital, while others remained residential cities, or were abandoned, or suffered substantially from the collapse and change of the political system. Due to the efforts undertaken to construct a residential city, the labor required and the dimensions created, there is no question whether it did express monumentality or not; it is a monument *par excellence*.

THE FIRST RESIDENTIAL CITY IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM B.C.

Hardly anything is known of the earliest intentionally built residential city of the Near East: Agade. It was the center of the first so-called “world empire” of the Akkadian dynasty (around 2200–2050 B.C.; Sallaberger and Westenholz 1999). Both empire and city were founded by the charismatic king Sargon, a *homo novus* who subjugated the Sumerian city-states in the southern and Semitic polities in Upper Mesopotamia (Sallaberger 2004, 2012). He raided the northern Levant, southern Anatolia, and western Iran. His successors even expanded the empire to the southern Gulf region and far into the countries on the Anatolian and Iranian plateaus.

The designation of Agade as residential city follows the premise that the economic base of this city type is exclusively the royal court. Since the city did not exist before Sargon, it was obviously his foundation; and since it continued to exist long after the collapse of the Akkad Empire, but never again gained any economic or political significance, it was obviously lacking any independent economic resources. Thus, its glorious period was exclusively the result of the political will and economic power of an empire, which made it its political seat. The religious center of Babylonia, however, remained even during the Akkad dynasty in Nippur.

The reasons for the foundation of Agade are obscure. Unfortunately, the city has never been excavated or even identified. Nevertheless, there are indications concerning its

approximate location. Several scholars have argued that the city must have been situated along the middle Tigris Valley, somewhere upstream of Baghdad (Wall-Romana 1990). J. Reade (2002) has furthermore argued that it is most probably buried under the Abbasid residential city of Samarra, halfway between Baghdad and Ashur.

Since we know that the city already existed before the empire was established, when Sargon was still struggling with other Sumerian city-states, it was at the beginning not the result or expression of imperial power. It seems much more likely that it owed its existence to the circumstances under which Sargon and his people gained power. There is evidence that the "Akkadians," or at least their troops, had a nomadic or semi-nomadic background. As depictions on monuments and cylinder seals indicate, their warfare tactics differed completely from those of the soldiers of the Sumerian city-states: contrary to the (urban) tactic of heavy phalanx infantry equipped with long spears and big shields, the Akkadians fought in light and more mobile infantries with bow and arrow (Sallaberger and Westenholz 1999:65–68). This tactic was presumably developed and preferred by rural or nomadic populations. Hence, the area in which Sargon could most successfully establish his power was outside the urban landscapes of the alluvial plain of Babylonia with its huge cities. The core of Akkadian territory seems to have been farther upstream the Tigris, outside the dry farming belt of Upper Mesopotamia but also outside the alluvium, where the narrow river valley cuts deeply into the Northern Mesopotamian plateau. Here, no huge urban entity could grow, depending only on the resources of its agricultural hinterland. Only small towns existed in the river valley and the plateau was populated by nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes and pastoralists.

Although Sargon adopted the prestigious and historic title "King of Kiš," named after the traditional urban center of northern Babylonia, he decided to keep his seat at Agade and not to move it to Kiš or any other major city. Instead, he transformed Agade into a flourishing metropolis, where the resources to run the city, obtained by receiving tribute and booty, were concentrated: "He moored the ships of Meluhha [Indus valley], Magan [Oman and/or Baluchistan] and Dilmun [Bahrain] at the quay of Agade" (Frayne 1993:28; Sargon E2.1.1.11, 9–13). Thus, the city must have been considerably wealthy. Contemporary and later inscriptions suggest the city was fortified, had a palace built by Sargon himself, and two major temples, dedicated to the tutelary goddess Ištar and Abā respectively (for the summary, see Novák 1999:83–84).

Agade, which was the political center of an empire for three generations and continued as the center of a reduced political entity for two more, came to an unfortunate end. It was seized and raided first by the Gutians and finally by the Elamites under their king Kutik-Inšušinak. Although the city was not abandoned completely—it is still attested in written sources in the first millennium B.C.—it never regained any larger political importance than a purely symbolic one (McEwan 1980). This again indicates that Agade did not have a rich natural hinterland, which allowed for independent prosperity without being supported by a large political power.

The experience of a newly founded residential city was not repeated in Mesopotamia until the middle of the second millennium B.C.⁴ Hence, the "project" of Agade was exceptional and did not create a pattern for the following dynasties.

THE SECOND MILLENNIUM B.C.: COMPETING EMPIRES AND RESIDENTIAL CITIES

The Late Bronze Age was a period of competing empires, whose relationships were characterized by military conflicts, political tensions, intensive diplomatic correspondences and economic exchange, friendly relationships, and dynastic marriages (Liverani 2001). For the first time, a close international network existed, covering the entire Near East from Egypt to Iran, and Anatolia to Mesopotamia. The political landscape saw the dominating powers Egypt (New Kingdom), Hatti, Mittani, Assyria, Babylonia, and Elam, and a number of vassal kingdoms in between (Figure 15.1). In the context of this situation, the foundation of several residential cities took place, starting in Mesopotamia by two newly established dynasties (Figure 15.2).

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY B.C.: KASSITE BABYLONIA (DÜR-KURIGALZU) AND THE MITTANI EMPIRE (WAŠŠUKANNI AND TĀ'IDU)

The foundation of the earliest examples of residential cities in the second millennium B.C. in the Near East is closely connected with two dynasties that both derived from mercenaries: the Kassites and the Mittani.

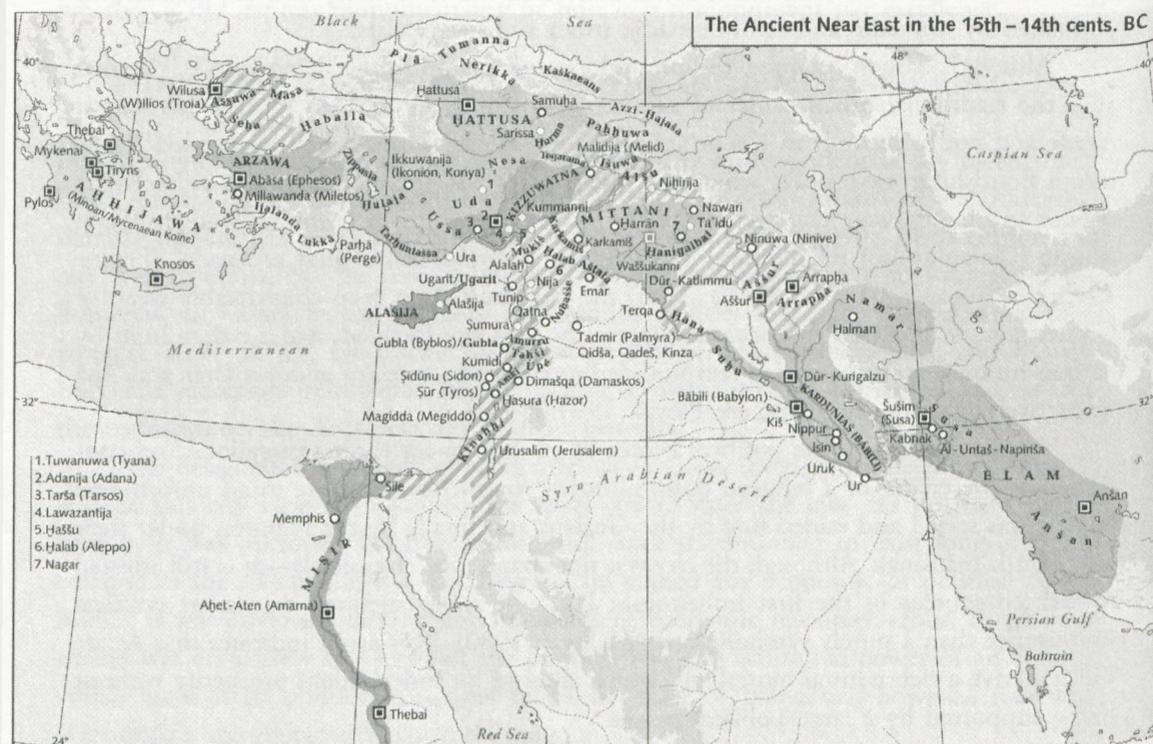


FIGURE 15.1 Map showing the political situation in the Late Bronze Age (from: A. Wittke et al., eds., "Historical Atlas of the Ancient World" (Leiden: 2009), originally "Historischer Atlas der Antiken Welt," Supplement of "Der Neue Pauly.")

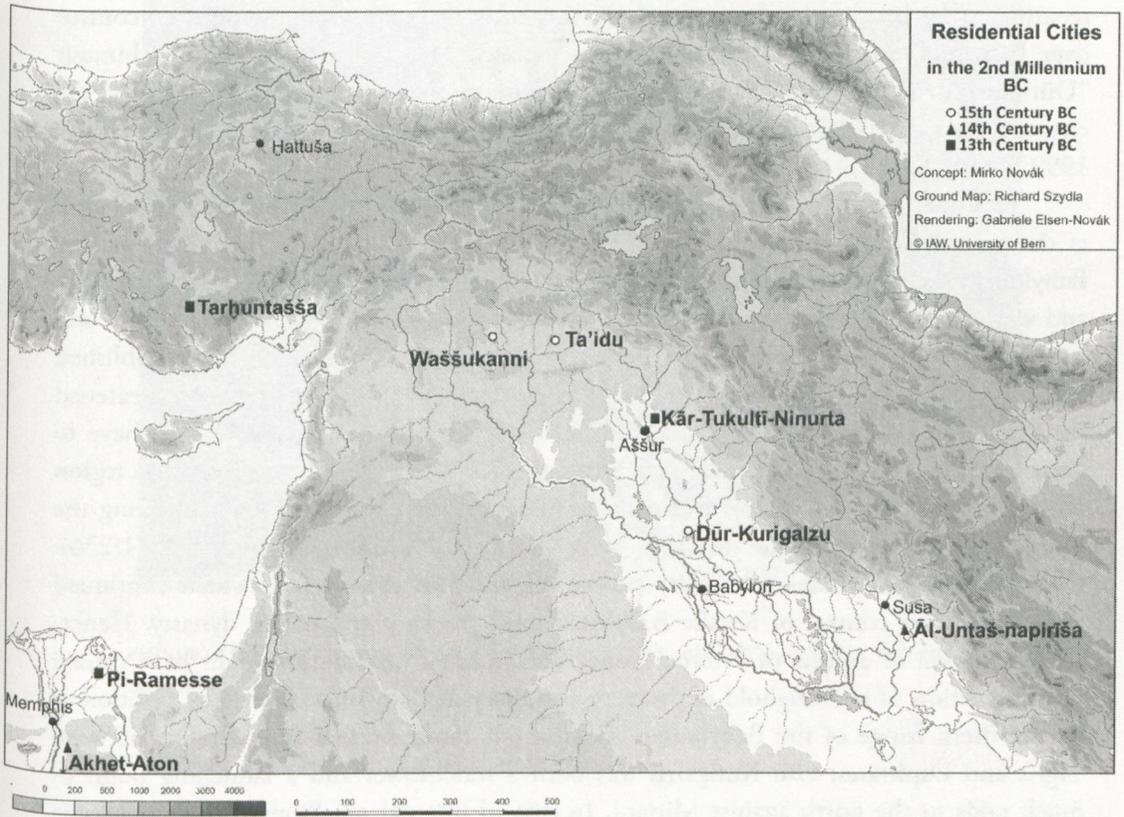


FIGURE 15.2 Map showing the Late Bronze Age residential cities in the Near East.

The origin of the Kassite dynasty goes back to the Old Babylonian Period when mercenaries, coming from the Zagros ranges or beyond, were taken into the service of the kings of the First Dynasty of Babylon (von Koppen 2010). Kassite soldiers from several tribes infiltrated Babylonia, either summoned by the rulers of the Babylonian kingdom themselves or attracted by the success and income of their tribesmen in Babylonia. After building a strong position in the Babylonian military during the last generations of the Old Babylonian period, they were the beneficiaries of the Hittite raid that led to the sack of Babylon in 1522 B.C. (date after Mebert 2010) and thus terminated Hammurapi's ruling dynasty. The role of the Kassites at this crucial point of Babylonian history is still unclear. Either they were not able to protect their overlords against the Hittites or they were not willing to do so. Probably they are even to be seen as secret supporters of the Hittites. Eventually, they gained power in Babylon after the retreat of the aggressors. For the coming four centuries, a Kassite dynasty ruled over Babylonia.

There are many indications that support identifying of Babylon as the continuing and unchallenged cultural and economic capital of Babylonia. Even more, there was an ongoing and irreversible shift of the religious center of the country from Nippur, seat of Ellil, to Babylon, seat of the new national god Marduk, during the Kassite period. Nonetheless, a new city was founded by king Kurigalzu I in the last decade of the fif-

teenth century B.C., approximately one century after his predecessor Agum took control over Babylonia and established the Kassite dynasty. He named the city after himself “Dūr-Kurigalzu” (“stronghold of Kurigalzu”). Due to the enormous dimensions of the city and the main palace, it was a prominent, if not the primary, seat of kingship (Novák 1999:85–91; Clayden in print).

To understand the reasons for the foundation of the city, it is necessary to look at the geopolitical situation during the early reign of the Kassites: The southern part of Babylonia up to Nippur had long been under the control of the so-called Sealand Dynasty and was conquered only shortly before Kurigalzu I. Large parts of the country might still have been latently hostile toward the new ruling caste. Furthermore, the newly established and constantly expanding Mittani kingdom in upper Mesopotamia might have threatened the integrity of Babylonia just as the Hittites had done shortly before. We also have to keep in mind that the original homeland of the Kassites was somewhere in the region of, or even beyond, the Zagros Mountain ranges alongside the main road following the Diyala river upstream in the direction of Behistun and Kermanshah (Fuchs 2011:236). Obviously, large numbers of Kassite people remained in that region, which continued to be under the control of Kassite Babylonia until the very end of the dynasty. Hence, a combination of aspects of external policy and internal instabilities might have caused the foundation of a stronghold at the very periphery of Babylonia: due to its position at the northern fringe of the Babylonian alluvium, at the narrowest funnel point between Tigris and Euphrates, Dūr-Kurigalzu was both a watchtower and a launching point of quick raids to the north against Mittani. In case of internal rebellions within Babylonia there was a short distance to the Kassite homeland in the Zagros, either to escape or to get reinforcements. The foundation may thus have been a result of relative regional instability, paired with the wish to express power and offensive abilities by the new rulers. Religious reasons may also have played a role: at the time in which Marduk’s move to the top of the pantheon was still fresh and ongoing, the new city was dedicated to Ellil, probably to offer a kind of compromise.

The huge city stretched alongside a canal system—probably a watercourse connecting the Euphrates and Tigris rivers—and was situated on top of a limestone ridge. This caused a relatively narrow (less than 2 km) and extremely long (more than 5 km) shape of the overall urban layout. The monumentality of the city itself and its public buildings, the central temple area (Figure 15.3) with the ziqqurat (Figure 15.4) and the huge royal palace in particular, illustrated in impressive manner the Kassite claim of power in Babylonia.

Almost contemporary to the Kassites in Babylonia, the Mittani dynasty gained power in upper Mesopotamia (van Koppen 2004). They were most likely descendants of mercenaries and deportees brought from the Zagros region or western Iran to upper Mesopotamia by the Assyrians already in the seventeenth century B.C. Shortly after they established an independent kingdom, which existed from the late sixteenth until the middle of the fourteenth century B.C. and expanded from the Mediterranean coast and the northern Levant in the west to the Zagros Mountain ranges in the east. Since

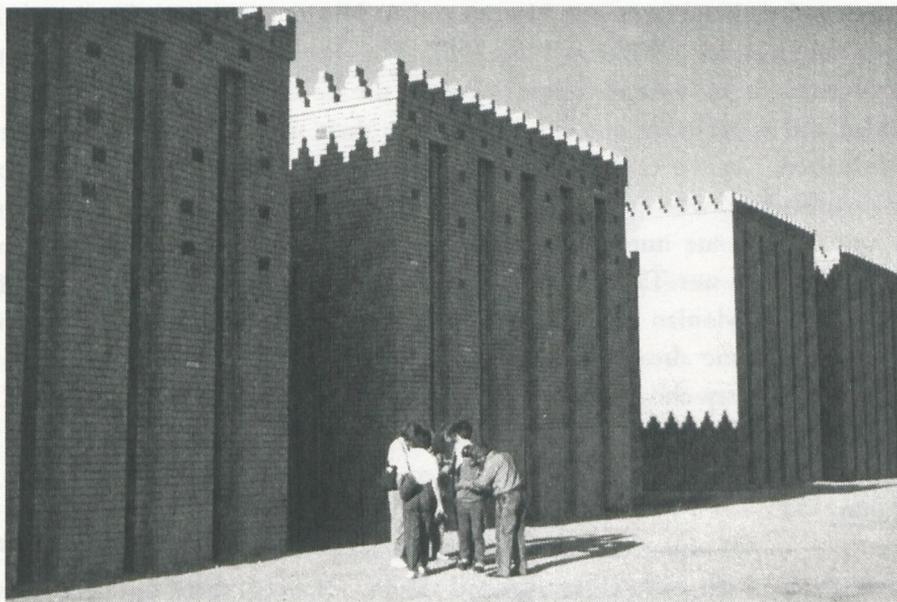


FIGURE 15.3 Reconstructed temples in the center of Dūr-Kurigalzu (photo by the author).

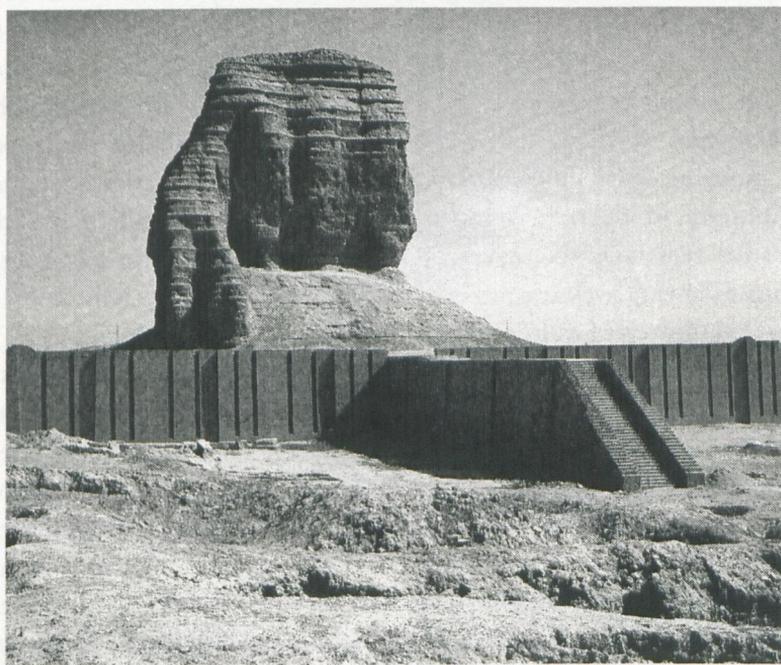


FIGURE 15.4 Remains of the *ziqqurat* of Dūr-Kurigalzu (photo by the author).

the majority of their subjects were Hurrians, their Hittite opponents designated them as “Kings of the Hurrians” (Wilhelm 1982:29ff.). Whether or not the Mittani dynasty itself was of Hurrian or Indo-Aryan origin (as their throne-names seem to indicate) cannot be decided and is probably not important, since their members were almost completely “Hurrianized.” In the early time of their reign, the heartland of the kingdom was widely de-urbanized, with the exception of their two residential cities, Waššukanni and Tā’idu, and a moderate number of smaller towns (Novák 2013). It is remarkable that neither Waššukanni nor Tā’idu was of any significant political importance during the preceding Old Babylonian period. Both cities were clearly overshadowed by neighboring—and at that time already vanished—cities such as, for example, Šeḫna/Šubat-Enlil. Why the new dynasty chose two less important towns for their main residences cannot be determined so far. However, it may have been the political decision of a foreign military caste, which ruled over a heterogeneous and presumably at least partly hostile population.

Little is known about the layout of the first residential city, Waššukanni. Even its precise location is not yet defined beyond doubt, although there are good reasons to identify it with modern Tall Fahariya at the source of the Ḫābūr river (Novák 2013:346). As in the case of Agade, it was of moderate significance before and again after the period of the Mittani Empire, hence indicating a strong economic dependency of the city’s fate from the royal court. The other residential city, Tā’idu, is identical with modern Tall al-Ḥamidiya. The site covered an area of 250 ha *intra muros*, if the reconstruction of the excavators is correct (Kaelin 2013; Wäfler 2003). The nearly oval city was divided into two parts by the course of the Ġāḡḡāḡ, the main tributary of the Ḫābūr (Figure 15.5). The old settlement mound, located slightly south of the city center, was transformed into a 20 ha large citadel with the main buildings placed upon an artificial terrace (Figure 15.6). The central part of the citadel was occupied by a five-step mudbrick-terrace with a monumental staircase, reaching from the lowest terrace to the uppermost one. Only small portions of the building, which had once stood on top of the terrace, have survived. Contrary to the excavators’ assumption that the building was the “Central Palace,” it rather represents the remains of the main temple of the city, constructed as a *ziqqurat*, thus following a clear southern Mesopotamian pattern (Novák 2013:353). The neighboring “Southwestern Palace” was most likely the main palace.

Summing up the information available, it seems as if the foundations of the earliest residential cities of the second half of the second millennium B.C. in Babylonia and upper Mesopotamia were initiated by two new dynasties, both of them offspring of former mercenaries, who came to power under obscure circumstances. Military and strategic aspects may have been the dominant factors leading to the foundation of these new residences, reflecting both a still-fragile internal and an unsecure external situation. However, these initial considerations surely became obsolete within a short period of time after the foundation of the cities, leaving the notion of a residential city as an expression and demonstration of political power. This idea even emerged far beyond the limits of Mesopotamia proper.

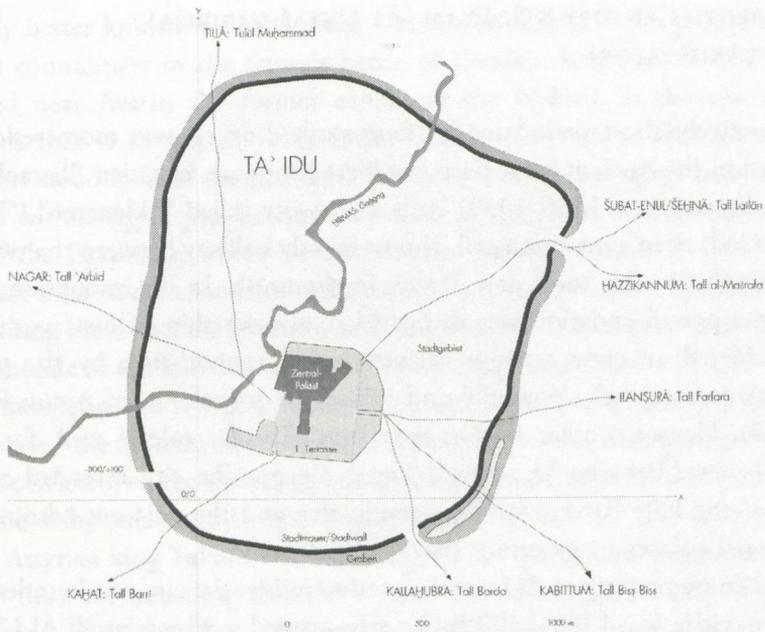
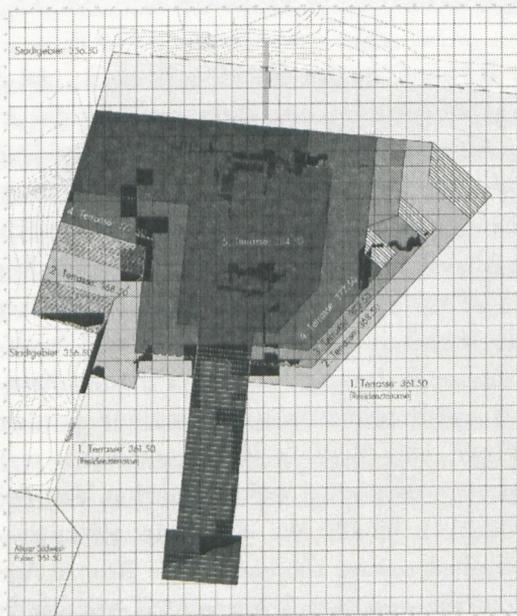


FIGURE 15.5 City plan of Ta'idu (from Kaelin 2013:185, Fig. 3).



Tall al-Hamidiya 1984-2001 (2003)

Maitanisch: Zentral-Palast: schematische Rekonstruktion



1 : 2500

FIGURE 15.6 Ta'idu, Central Building (from Kaelin 2013:187, Fig. 4).

THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY B.C.: ELAM (ĀL-UNTAŠ-NAPIRIŠA)
AND EGYPT (AKHETATON)

Within a relatively short period in the fourteenth century, two more residential cities were founded in the Ancient Near East: the New Kingdom Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten (Eighteenth Dynasty, ca. 1356–1339) built a new city called “Akhetaten” (“The Horizon of the [Sun-God] Aten”) on virgin soil, almost exactly halfway between the two traditional capitals, Memphis in the north and Thebes in the south. In his inscriptions, Akhenaten states that the new foundation was dedicated to the worship of his favorite god Aten. This is considered an early attempt at introducing monotheism by the pharaoh, but also as a way to escape the powerful and influential priesthood of Amun-Râ at Thebes (Kemp 2012). However, other reasons may have played a role as well, for instance, to restore the balance between Upper and Lower Egypt. The city extended alongside the right bank of the Nile River, with the temple area and the adjacent administrative and representational palaces in its center (Kemp 2012).

Almost contemporary to Akhetaten, another residential city was founded in Elam by king Untaš-napiriša (ca. 1340–1300 B.C.), who named it after himself Āl-Untaš-napiriša (“City of Untaš-napiriša”) (cf. Potts this volume).

THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY B.C.: HATTI (TARḪUNTAŠŠA),
EGYPT (PI-RAMESSES), AND ASSYRIA (KĀR-TUKULTĪ-NINURTA)

The thirteenth century B.C. saw further founding of residential cities. The first of them was Tarḫuntašša (“[City] of [Storm-God] Tarḫunzas”) by the Hittite king Muwattalli II (1295–1272 B.C.). Although the Hittite kings had residences in several cities of the Hittite heartland, the position of Hattuša as the religious, political, and economic capital of the empire had always been unchallenged until the foundation of Tarḫuntašša (Doğan-Alparslan and Alparslan 2011). The motivations for Muwattalli’s move remain obscure due to the lack of written sources on the subject. It seems as if a combination of several considerations may have influenced the decision, such as the rapid expansion of the empire toward the south, leaving Hattuša at the northern periphery and situated far from the prosperous and important new provinces in northern Syria. Moreover, the tribes of the Kaška people, who lived in the mountainous regions north of Hattuša, caused a permanent threat to the capital and managed at least twice to plunder it (Bryce 2005:223; Klengel 1998:211). Finally, the economic relevance of Hattuša and its hinterland may have diminished toward the end of the Bronze Age. Since all the gods of the old capital moved to the new city, it seems as if Muwattalli planned a permanent and irreversible shift of the capital to the south. Hattuša was left in the hands of his younger brother Hattušili II (III) as governor of the “Upper Lands.” It was the death of Muwattalli and Hattušili’s coup d’état against his nephew, Muwattalli’s son and legitimate heir Urhi-Teššup, that enabled the reestablishment of Hattuša as capital. Tarḫuntašša has not yet been located. Hence, nothing is known about its layout and urban structure. Even its precise location can only approximately be determined.

Slightly better known is Pi-Ramesses (“House of Ramesses”), the residential city of Muwattalli’s counterpart in the famous battle of Qadesh, Ramesses II (1279–13 B.C.). It is situated near Avaris, the former capital of the Hyksos, at the eastern fringe of Lower Egypt, that is to say, the Nile Delta (Pusch 2004). It is obvious that strategic considerations stood behind the pharaoh’s decision to move the court here. The city was still situated within Egypt proper, but very close to the main road to the Near Eastern provinces of the Egyptians, which were threatened by the Hittites.

The “last actor in the concert of main powers” was Assyria. Dominated by Mittani and Babylonia during the sixteenth, fifteenth, and early fourteenth centuries, it gained independence in the middle of the fourteenth century under king Assur-uballit I (1353–1318 B.C.). Within the time span of a few generations it not only expanded its territory drastically, but also incorporated the Mittani heartland and replaced it as the dominant power in Upper Mesopotamia. Moreover, the Assyrians could defeat the Hittites in the battle of Nihriya as well as the Babylonians under the Kassite king Kaštiliaš IV. This enemy was caught alive by the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197 B.C.), an enormously prestigious success. It is thus not surprising that this victory was celebrated in many ways, including the composition of an epic about Tukulti-Ninurta. Masses of Kassites were deported and settled in Assyria. For a short period—and for the first time in history—Babylonia was ruled by an Assyrian king. At the peak of its power, Assyria had to realize that it was the only main power in this international concert lacking a really representative capital. Ashur, the birthplace and religious heart of the kingdom, seat of the national god and home of the Assyrian elite, was a small and moderate town compared to even second-class cities in Babylonia, Elam, or Egypt. Its position on the western bank of the Tigris River close to the borderline of the dry-farming region of upper Mesopotamia made urban expansion almost impossible. Furthermore, within the city the king was only the high priest and physical substitute of the tutelary god, who was considered the real king of the city. All this led the victorious Tukulti-Ninurta, now the most powerful king of the Near East, to found a new residential city as the seat of his kingdom and expression of power. The city was built slightly north of Ashur on the opposite bank of the Tigris River and named after him, “Kār-Tukulti-Ninurta,” the “Harbor of Tukulti-Ninurta” (Gilibert 2008).

Its layout comprised elements of the city of Ashur, but combined them with some urban innovations, including a fortified citadel. Hence, Kār-Tukulti-Ninurta marked a new step in the development of Assyrian town planning (Novák 2004). However, its size and the monumentality of its public buildings enabled it to compete with the residential cities of the other Near Eastern powers.

LATE BRONZE AGE RESIDENTIAL CITIES: AN EXPRESSION OF COMPETITION?

As demonstrated above, the phenomenon of newly founded residential cities appeared during the period of the fifteenth to the thirteenth centuries B.C. in all empires of the Ancient Near East. In contrast, we lack any attestation for such foundations in smaller kingdoms or vassal states, making it a clear characteristic trait of large-scale territorial dominions.

A detailed analysis of each case demonstrates that internal particular motivations for the creation of residential cities existed, they be military (Dūr-Kurigalzu), strategic (Tarhunšašša), or religious (Akhetaton) in nature, or as a result of topographic conditions (Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta). In most cases, it was likely a combination of several factors.

Nevertheless, residential cities were such a characteristic feature of all the existing territorial powers that it is too striking a similarity to be coincidental. On the contrary, it is very likely that the phenomenon was actually part of a region-wide political concept, an expression of power in a time of competing territorial empires.

In the political ideology of almost all of the major powers, the claim for universal rule over the entire world existed, as can easily be recognized in the royal inscriptions. But the political reality looked completely different: none of them was actually able to overwhelm its rivals (with the exception of Mittani, which was first defeated and later completely erased by the Hittites and Assyrians in the late fourteenth century B.C.). This tension between ideology and reality resulted in a competition of the empires not only for economic, political, and military dominance, but also for ideological supremacy. The addressees of the growing battle of propaganda—which influenced, for example the style of inscriptions or royal images on monuments—were the rivals (and their representatives), their own subjects and vassals, and, of course, the gods.

A perfect expression of economic and ideological power, therefore, was the foundation of new residential cities. The diffusion of this idea, which was originally born out of strategic necessities, was made possible by the frequent exchange of correspondence, goods, and personages between the courts (Liverani 2001). Once this scheme was recognized by the competing rivals, it was adapted and reinterpreted within their own cultural syntax. Thus, although the layout, the structure, and even the individual motivation for the foundation of the specific residential cities differed substantially from case to case, the idea behind it was a common one.

THE FIRST MILLENNIUM B.C.:

RESIDENTIAL CITIES AS AN EXPRESSION OF CLAIMS OF WORLD RULE

The Late Bronze Age sociopolitical system collapsed in the twelfth century as a result of severe political, social, and economic changes. Some political entities vanished completely, such as the Hittite Empire, while others were only temporarily reduced to unimportance, like Egypt. The system of competing equal territorial powers was replaced by a strongly fragmented structure of small principalities, some of them hardly more than city-states. Ethnic changes as the result of movements and several processes of ethnogenesis created a colorful map of mixed Luwian, Aramaean, Phoenician, and Hebrew entities in the Levant, as well as the foundation of the Phrygian and the Urartean kingdoms in Anatolia (cf. the maps and explanations in Wittke et al. 2007:32f., 38f., 40f., 42f.). In Assyria, Babylonia, and Elam the former territorial states survived, although reduced in territorial extent.

It was primarily Assyria that managed to keep its infrastructure. Although it too lost most of its territory and was reduced to its original heartland along the middle of the Tigris River, Assyria's political, economic, and military institutions survived. For this

reason, it was able to recover after a period of weakness. It had also been put under pressure by Aramaean tribes, who established small kingdoms up to the Habur triangle and along the Middle Euphrates. From the tenth century B.C. onward, Assyria started to reconquer its former territories. The policy of incorporating the troops of the defeated enemies and vassals (Fuchs 2005) let Assyria's army grow rapidly and brought an enormous advantage against all rivals. Already in the ninth century only a few other powers were left in the Near East, none of them really capable of challenging Assyria's power. Only Phrygia (for less than two generations), Urartu, and Elam were able to maintain their independence and flourished as independent territorial empires (a special case was Babylonia, which was treated in a special way by the Assyrian kings).

The foundation of new cities was still well known in most of the countries, however (Mazzoni 1994). The Aramaeans built new capital cities beside the old and mostly depopulated or ruined urban settlements from the second millennium. The Urartians had to urbanize their country, which hitherto did not have any urban infrastructure at all. They began a tradition of building castles, which in turn became the core of urban sites (Salvini 1995:122–126). In Elam, it seems as if some new residential cities, such as Madaktu, were founded beside the traditional capitals Susa and Anšan, probably for security reasons. The Babylonians, after having established the Late Babylonian Empire following the destruction of Assyria, decided to rebuild Babylon, the cultural, economic, religious, and political center of the country. Babylon thus regained its traditional position and became the unchallenged capital of Babylonia again (Novák 1999:91–104).

Assyria was thus the only empire that took up the idea of the newly founded residential city as a political statement (Figure 15.7).

NEO-ASSYRIAN RESIDENTIAL CITIES

The first Assyrian residential city built in the first millennium B.C. was Kalḫu (Oates and Oates 2001). In the ninth century, the ruins of this once (in the thirteenth century) flourishing city were chosen by Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.) as the new seat of his royalty. Kalḫu was situated close to the confluence of the Tigris and Greater Zab rivers in between the two major cities Ashur and Nineveh. The city was surrounded by extra-urban royal gardens and a “zoo,” in which plants and animals from conquered countries were settled, representing the conquered parts of the world. The same holds true for the inhabitants of the city itself, in which deportees from all countries subjugated to the Assyrian king were living. All public buildings were situated on top of a citadel on the edge of the city. The temples and the palace formed a close spatial connection, higher in elevation than the dwelling quarters. Since the citadel was physically connected with the lower city walls, the public buildings were visible from the outside and perceived as “riding” on top of the fortification. During the reign of Shalmaneser III (858–824), a second citadel was added on top of an artificial terrace near the southeastern city corner (Novák 1999:129–140; Novák 2004).

This urban layout was copied 150 years later by king Sargon II (721–705 B.C.) when he founded the next residential city Dūr-Šarru-ukīn on virgin ground, not far

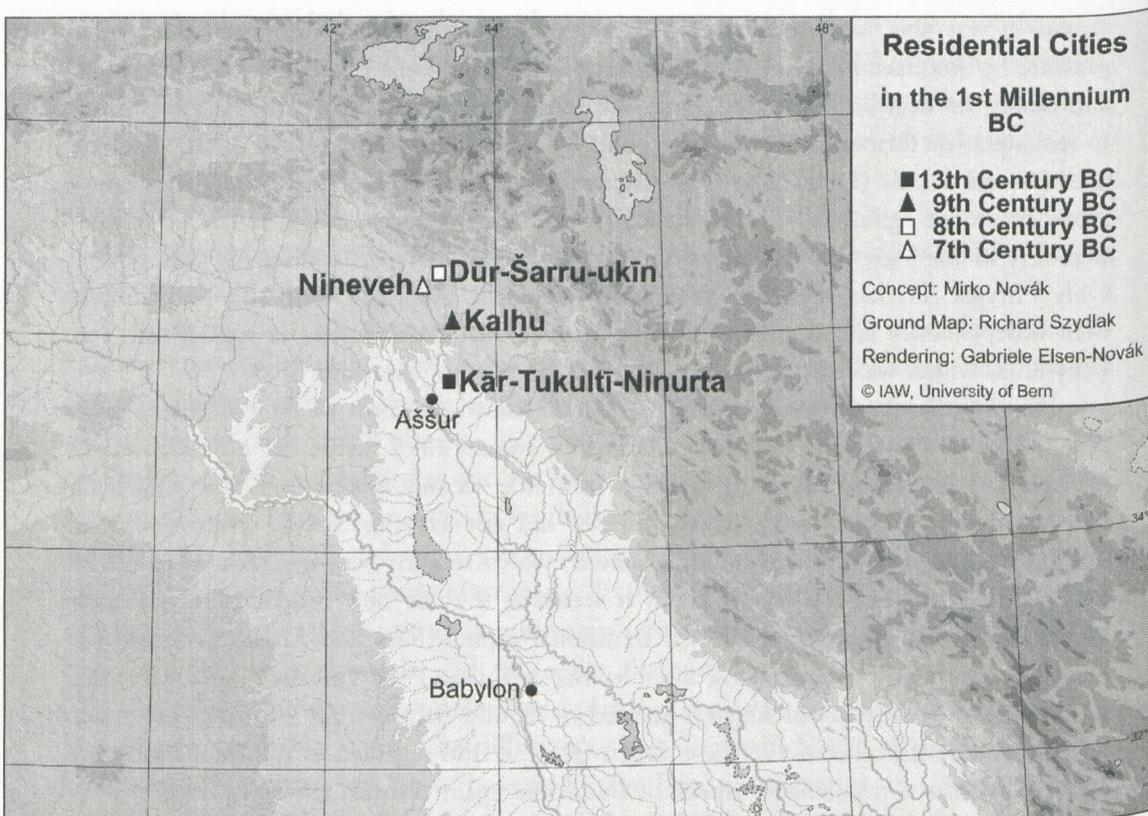


FIGURE 15.7 Map showing the Neo-Assyrian residential cities.

away from Nineveh. Here, an almost square layout was chosen for the city (Figures 15.8 and 15.9).

The last Assyrian residential city was Nineveh, an already existing city, which was rebuilt and significantly enlarged by Sargon's son Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.). As before, the environment was transformed into artificial landscape parks and gardens (cf. the contributions in Collon and George 2005). Two citadels dominated the skyline of the city: the larger one (Kuyunjik) was the main citadel, while the smaller one (Nebi Yunus) was the secondary one. On top of the main citadel and close to its edges, the palaces of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal were erected, while temples occupied the area in between them. Since the palace of Sennacherib lay close to the western slope of the citadel, it overlooked the riverside and the gardens, just as the palaces of his predecessors had (Novák 2004).

While the old capital Ashur remained the religious and ceremonial center of the country, the residential cities were the seats and manifestations of power, created artificially by the king.

The position, environment, layout, and structure of the Assyrian residential cities illustrated the ideology of Assyrian kingship and claim of universal power. Some of them were built on virgin ground, others the result of enormous re-creations, thus demonstrating the ability of the Assyrian king to transform desert land into a fertile landscape and

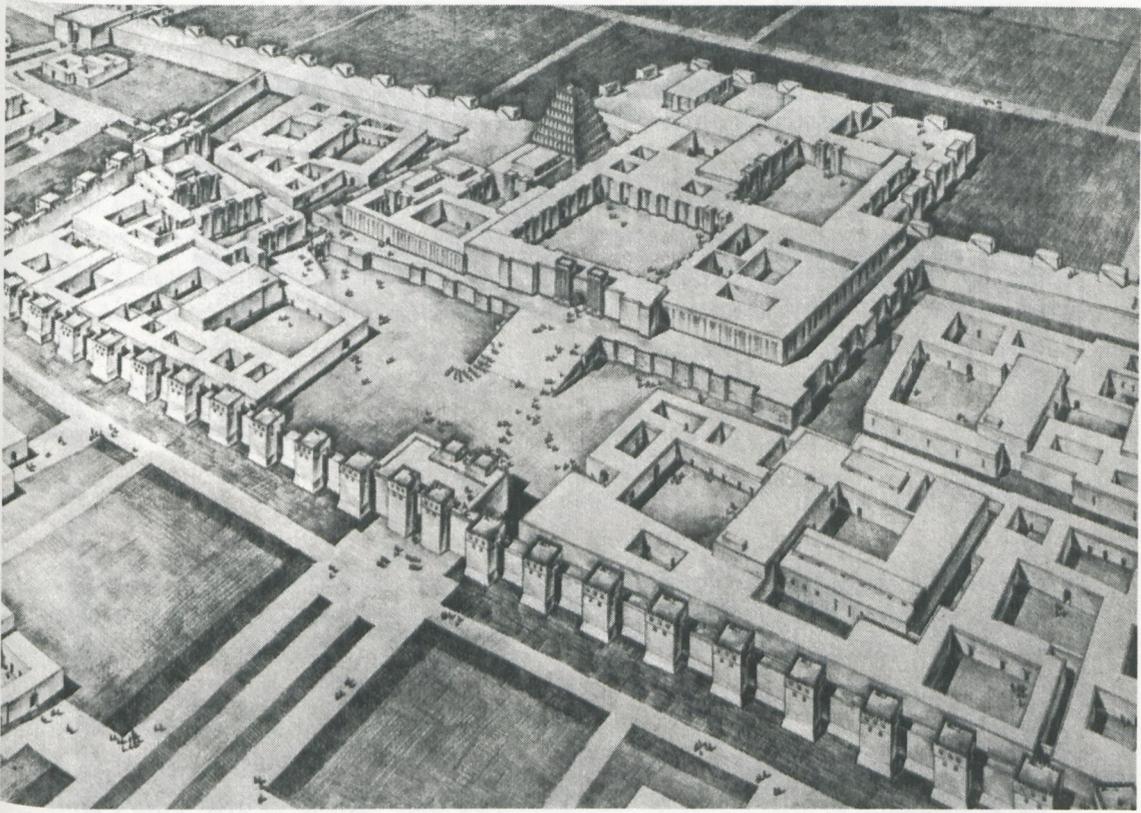


FIGURE 15.8 City plan of Dūr-Šarru-ukīn (from Loud and Altman, OIP 40, 1938, Pl. 69).

ruins into prosperous cities. This was accomplished by imposing horticultural activities, including landscape parks, botanical gardens, and “zoos” with plants and animals from all conquered countries. The residential cities had a more or less rectangular outline with two citadels at the periphery, the larger one being the location of the royal palaces and main temples. The visual communication between the public buildings (palaces and temples altogether) on top of the citadel and the dwelling quarters in the lower town, on the one hand, and the distance and different elevation between both, on the other hand, created the perception of the nearly supernatural position of the king, living in the sphere of the gods and dominating the world of his subjects.

The Neo-Assyrian city, with its mixed “international” inhabitants and artificial parks and gardens, is to be seen as a microcosm, that is, a symbol of the empire and its order (Novák 1999:385–387).

RESIDENTIAL CITIES AS EXPRESSIONS OF EXCLUSIVITY

The foundation of residential cities during period of the ninth to seventh centuries B.C. followed different concepts than those of the Late Bronze Age. There was only one dominating power left in the Near East—Assyria. The few other entities, such as

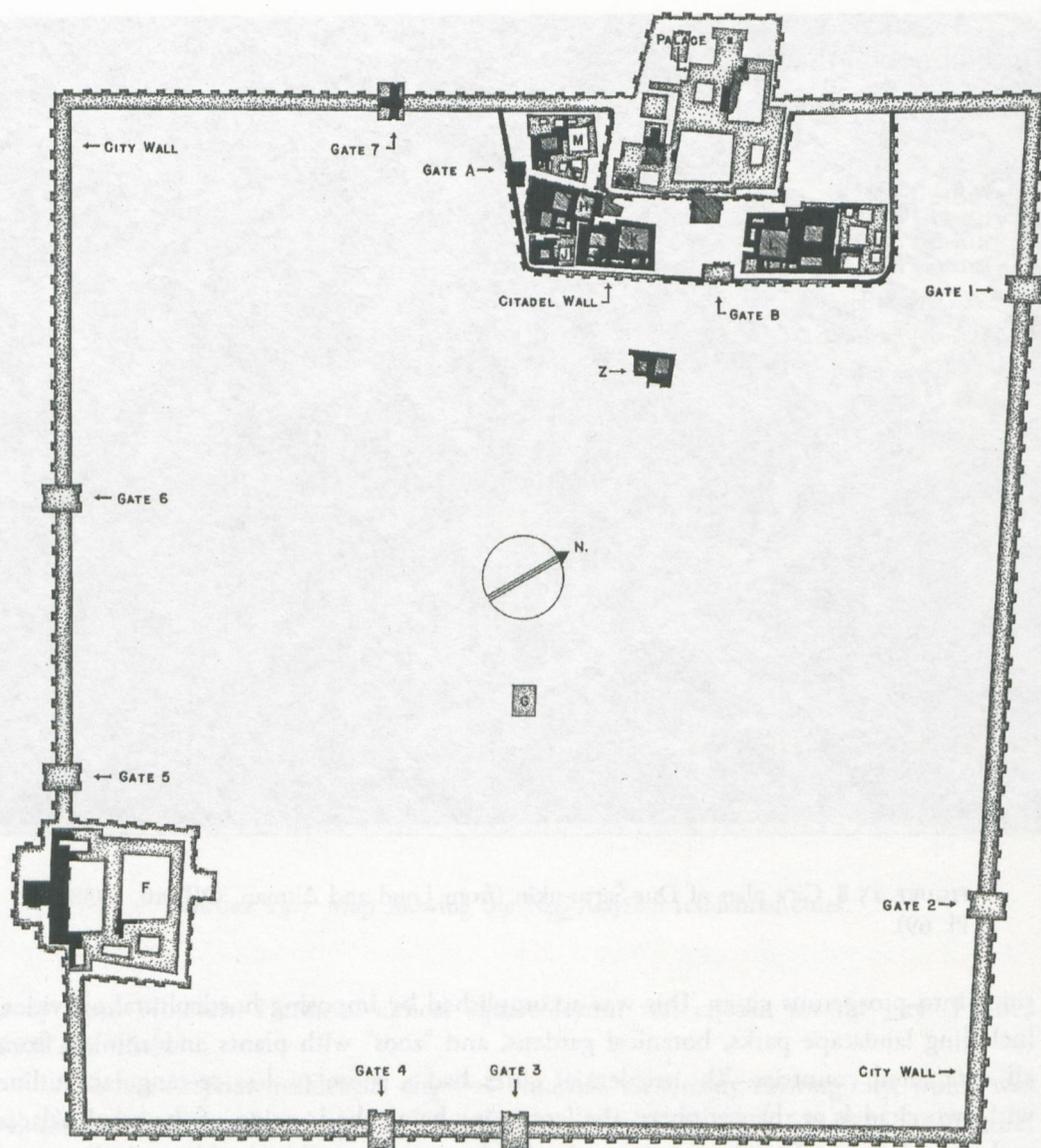


FIGURE 15.9 Reconstruction of the citadel of Dūr-Šarru-ukīn (from Loud and Altman, OIP 40, 1938, Pl. 1).

Urtu or Elam, were in a defensive position most of the time. Hence, the city-building programs outside Assyria had different backgrounds: in Urtu it was part of a general urbanization program of a former nonurbanized country; in the Luwo-Aramaeian entities it was the attempt to reconsolidate urban societies after the crisis years that followed the Late Bronze Age collapse.

In Assyria, city building was an instrument of imperial claim: residential cities were created to represent the empire and universe (which in ideology were the same), and to structure the position of the Assyrian king as the representative of the gods on earth. Ashur, home of the national god, kept its position as the religious and spiritual heart of the empire, but the “city of the kingship” was a symbol of unchallenged royal power. This idea of the residential city survived the collapse and final destruction of Assyria and its cities by far: Not only was Babylon re-embellished during the Late Babylonian period as an *axis mundi*—a combination of capital and residential city—the dynasties of the Achaemenids, Seleucids, Arsacids, Sasanians, and even the Muslim Abbasids founded residential cities in a comparable way: the ruins of Pasargadae, Persepolis, Seleucia on the Tigris, Ctesiphon, Firuzabad, Baghdad, or Samarra are witnesses of these enterprises (Novák 1999:385–398).

CONCLUSION

Doubtless, the foundation of a new residential city is always to be seen as a monument with a clear political message. It bears testimony to the will and power of a political system to create something important and transfer state institutions from their original location into it. This is the main purpose for such an act and the main function of a residential city.

However, there are a lot of reasons that may initiate such a building program. We thus always have to analyze each individual case to get a better understanding of the specific political, economic, or social circumstances leading to such a move. Nevertheless, general comparisons can be made as well, mostly when it is recognizable that the creation of residential cities took place almost contemporaneously in different regions, or, on the other hand, only in one region, but several times within a relatively short period of time.

Two such situations were examined above. It seems that the different political constellations in the Near East during the Late Bronze and Iron ages caused similar results due to very different factors and causes: the foundation of residential cities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the organizers of the conference, and James Osborne in particular, for inviting me to the very stimulating and informative meeting, and Alexander Ahrens (Bern) for improving the manuscript.

NOTES

1. As long as you live in a city named Leningrad you hardly can avoid remembering a person called Lenin, even if you still remember that it once was called St. Petersburg.
2. One of the most prominent and expressive examples is the Abbasid foundation Madīnat as-Salām “City of Peace” (modern Baġdād), a circular image of the Islamic universe, with

- the palace and the main mosque in its center and paradise-gardens surrounding it (Novák 2012).
3. Even nowadays, after several changes of the political system in Germany and the social structure of its inhabitants, Berlin still commemorates its Prussian and military character in many respects, such as the broad processional streets and the straight view axis from the original gates to the original place of the vanished (and now to be rebuilt) palace of the Prussian king.
 4. On the possible exaction of Šehnâ, a town in Upper Mesopotamia, which was refounded by Assyrian king Šamši-Adad and renamed as Šubat-Enlil, cf. Novák 1999:115–120.

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