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The Artificial Paradise: Programme and Ideology of Royal Gardens

Preface

To the inhabitants of the arid regions of the Near East, the flourishing garden always had been more than just a resource of fruits and vegetables. In their perception it symbolised, and still does, peace and fertility. As a place of romantic affairs it also had a strong sexual connotation. This had certain effects on Mesopotamian kingship ideologies: One of the aspects of a ruler was that of a gardener.

The Sexual Connotation of the Garden

The landscape of Southern Mesopotamia is characterised by far stretching steppes cut by the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. Since there is little rain, natural vegetation is very poor. Only on the base of irrigation it is possible to transform portions of the desert into fertile land, useable for a sufficient agriculture.

The perception of this difficult environment by its ancient inhabitants had the effect that a flourishing garden was seen as the ideal landscape. With its fresh air, cool shade, sweet fruit and cold water it was a perfect place for recovery and a nice setting for romantic affairs.¹

Since a garden is the result of hard and

The Assyrian kings developed the idea of huge gardens with botanical granaries and hunting parks. These “artificial paradises” were obviously a substantial element of their city planning programmes. The concept was adopted by all the succeeding dynasties until medieval times. In the following, the layout, the function, and the ideology of those gardens will be discussed.

constant labour, it became a synonym of civilisation. As a supernatural paradise and a symbol of fertility it also was a favourite topic in literature.² Its strong sexual connotation made it a source of metaphors like those of the male and female genitals and of sexual intercourse.³ The vulva, e.g., was described as a “well-watered low land, a wet place,” which should be “ploughed.”⁴ In an erotic poem a bride – or rather a prostitute⁵ – sings:

“Do not dig [a canal], let me be your canal, do not plough [a field], let me be your field. Farmer, do not search for a wet place, my precious sweet, let me be your wet place.”⁶

¹ Used by gods (Glassner 1991: 11, Leick 1994: 134, Haas 1999: 130) and humans (Haas 1999: 128ff).

² Andrae 1947-52.

³ Groneberg 1999: 183f.

⁴ Leick 1994: 92, Haas 1999: 130ff.

⁵ Haas 1999: 143.

⁶ Leick 1994: 93.



Fig. 1 The so-called “Lion Hunt Stela”. [from Uruk, Early Sumerian Period, from Orthmann 1975, Abb. 68]

The male lover was often called a gardener.⁷ This points to the fact that not only did the garden have a strong sexual connotation but also that the gardener was a person with pronounced sex appeal. It therefore is not astonishing that several of the lovers of the goddess Inanna were gardeners.⁸

⁷ Haas 1999: 129.

⁸ Groneberg 1999: 184f. The sex-appeal of the gardener is also visible in the legend about the origin of Sargon, the first king of Agade, whose stepfather is said to have been a gardener.

⁹ On the Babylonian and Assyrian kingship ideologies see e.g. Edzard 1972-75, Lambert 1974, Röllig 1981, Maul 1995, Maul 1998, Cancik-Kirschbaum 1995,

The Idea of the “Royal Gardener and Hunter”

The strong sexual connotation of the garden and the gardener as the lover of Inanna had several effects on the Sumerian and Babylonian kingship ideology from the end of the 3rd millennium BC onwards. Its predominant principle was the “charismatic ruler.”⁹ This means that the king was primarily qualified by his particular capabilities – his personal *charisma*¹⁰ – to fulfil his God-given mandate to rule, more than through genealogy.¹¹

Since the two pillars of pre-urban societies were stock-breeding and agriculture, the two pre-eminent, mythologically based duties of the Sumerian king were, first, to ensure a successful harvest – mostly by taking care of the irrigation channels – and, second, to protect the herds against wild beasts and enemies. Based on this, the archetype of the “royal gardener and hunter” was developed in literature and art.¹² On the famous “Lion Hunt Stela” from Uruk (Fig. 1) and on several cylinder seals of the Early Sumerian period the ruler is shown as gardener, shepherd or hunter of wild beasts.

Several of the early rulers known from the “Sumerian King List” or from epic literature were said to be gardeners or shepherds: Dumuzi, king of Bad-Tibira before the flood and divine lover of Inanna, was a shepherd and later became the god of fertility. In the ritual of the “Holy Marriage” the Sumerian king was a substitute of Dumuzi in order to awake nature after the dry

Franke 1995, Selz 1998 and Pongratz-Leisten 1994.

¹⁰ On the definition of *charisma* in the sense of M. Weber see Hillmann 1994: 125.

¹¹ Of course, ideology and reality were generally distinctive. Babylonian kingship was never based on a real “meritocracy.”

¹² For the royal gardener and hunter see Stähler 1997, Fauth 1979.

season.¹³ Being the main shepherd and gardener he naturally was the lover of the goddess Inanna with *kuzbu* “sex appeal” and *baltu* “potency.”

The idea of the “royal gardener and hun-

Babylonian Gardens

As a source of fruits and vegetables the garden had always been an important economic feature. Many of the written documents like legal texts or letters inform us about the distinction of different types and the economic organisation and cultivation of gardens, as well as about the duties of the gardeners.¹⁶ The gardens, named with the Sumerian loanword *kirûm* or the Semitic term *gannu*,¹⁷ were owned by the state or the palace, by temples and by private persons. The gardeners usually rented the gardens and had to pay fixed taxes as is described, for example, in the Codex Hammurabi.

It is known from a number of texts that all of the great gods of Babylonia possessed

ter” was alive until the end of Babylonian civilisations.¹⁴ It was adopted in Assyria, since most of the duties of the Assyrian king were comparable to those of his Babylonian counterpart.¹⁵

their own “holy” gardens.¹⁸ The economic dimension was the support of the temple staff with the yields. The religious aspect was the setting of several cultic ceremonies¹⁹ like the new year festival *akîtu*. That is the reason why gardens are mentioned in the surrounding of the *bît akîti*, sometimes named *kiri hallat*.²⁰

Gardens belonging to the Babylonian king are attested in textual references from the 3rd, 2nd and 1st millennia.²¹ All of them had primarily economic function because they had to supply the households of the royal families. There is no indication for a programmatic ideology connected with the cultivation of royal gardens in Babylonia.

The Universal Gardens in Assyria

A new type of garden was developed in Assyria at the end of the 2nd millennium. Tiglath-Pileser I (1114-1076 BC) mentioned in his inscriptions that he brought plants from all known regions of the world

to Assyria and cultivated them within the royal gardens²² to be a place *ana multa'it bēlūtija* “for the leisure of my majesty.”²³ In its centre a small palace was erected, where the walls inside were painted with the illus-

¹³ Haas 1999: 122ff.

¹⁴ In a poem king Ammiditana of Babylon is called a “gardener” (Haas 1999: 140). Even the great Babylonian god Marduk was named a gardener in an Old Babylonian poem which describes his love affair with Ištar and the blame of his wife Zarpanitum (Haas 1999: 159ff).

¹⁵ But in contrast to the Babylonian ruler, the Assyrian king unified the spiritual and secular power and was considered as the interlocutor between humans and gods. Based on his role as *iššiakkum* “governor” and *sangu* “high priest” of the god Aššur, he became a kind of “priest-king” of an extended empire, who had to supervise the property of the national god, the “true king” of

the city and the nation.

¹⁶ On the aspects of cultivation of date palm gardens in Babylonia see Renger 1982.

¹⁷ See also Arabic *ğanna*.

¹⁸ Glassner 1991, Margueron 1992.

¹⁹ The “Cultic Calendar” of the Ur III period informs us about a *kiri₆.maḥ* at Nippur and some offerings in gardens at Girsu. See Sallaberger 1993: 110ff, 303f.

²⁰ Cocquerillat 1973-74: 133.

²¹ Wiseman 1983 and 1984, Glassner 1991.

²² Lackenbacher 1982: 126-27.

²³ Glassner 1991: 14.

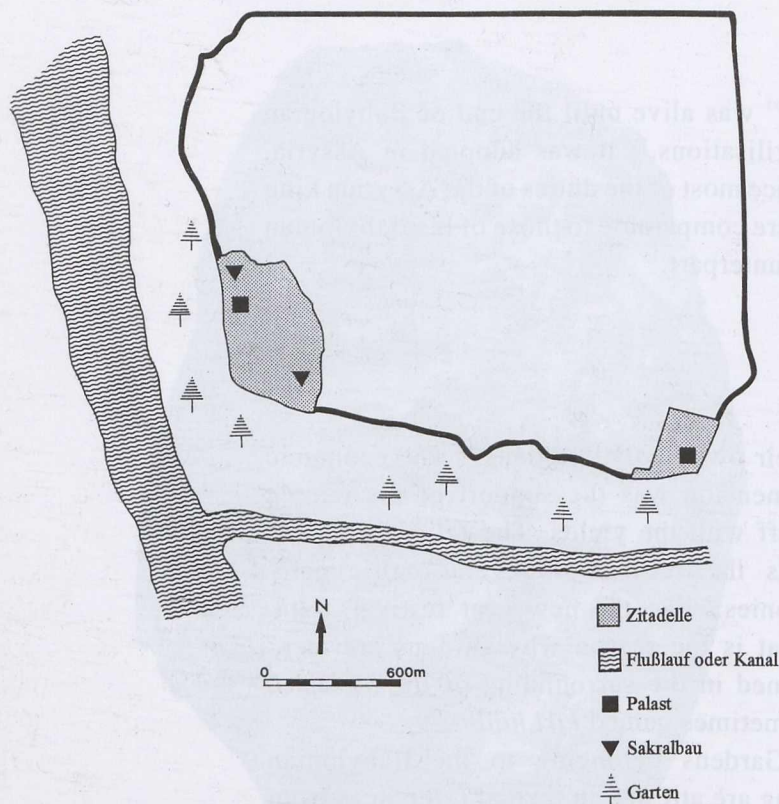


Fig. 2 The Assyrian residential city of Kalḫu, built by king Aššur-nāšir-apli II (883-859 BC). [drawing by Gabi Elsen-Novák]

trations of the deeds of the king.²⁴

Aššur-nāšir-apli II (883-859 BC) took up the idea of such a universal garden:²⁵ Close to his new founded residential city of Kalḫu (Fig. 2) he laid out a huge *kiri rišāte* “garden of pleasure” covering an area of 25 km². Forty-one different kinds of trees were planted and several kinds of wild animals were kept inside “for the astonishment of the Assyrian people.”²⁶ An irrigation channel was dug from the Upper Zāb, which led to the Wādī Sōr Darra at the southern flank of the city. As far as it can be reconstructed from archaeological and literary sources, the garden stretched south and west of the city.

Since the royal palace was situated at the western edge of the citadel, it overlooked both the Tigris valley and part of the gardens. Presumably some of the westernmost rooms of this palace had open access to a kind of panorama terrace as is known from the later Assyrian architecture.

Evidence for such a platform is, e.g., to be found in the palace of Shalmanasser III (858-824 BC). At the southern flank of this palace – built on an artificial terrace – there was an open area with a tripartite suite (Fig. 3). From here one could overlook the southern gardens. As far as is known, this was the first time in Mesopotamia that a visual communication between architecture and landscape was created.

King Sargon II (721-705 BC) erected his new residential city Dūr-Šarrukēn (Fig. 4) in the middle of a spacious park, which was called *kirimāḫu*²⁷ “mighty (or huge) garden” and laid out *tamšil kurḪamani* “like the Amanus Mountains.”²⁸ All plants of the “mountainous regions of Ḫatti” were cultivated within it.²⁹

Both in his main palace on the citadel terrace as well as in the secondary palace on another platform, the so-called *bīt kutalli*, Sargon erected the same kind of panorama areas with a tripartite suite just as in “Fort Shalmanasser” (Fig. 5). From there a view to the parks and gardens was possible.

Furthermore, a new element appeared in the Assyrian architecture: The so-called *bīt ḫilāni*, which is described as a “house of windows like the Hittite palaces.”³⁰ In contrast to the modern definition, the *bīt ḫilāni* of the Assyrian inscriptions was only the open entrance with a column hall.³¹ In the

²⁴ Novák 1996: 343.

²⁵ Wiseman 1984: Pl. 5, Glassner 1991: 13.

²⁶ Luckenbill 1926: 189, de Filippi 1977: 31, Fauth 1979: 16.

²⁷ The Sumerian term was used in another sense from the

Ur III period on. See Sallaberger 1993: 110f.

²⁸ Margueron 1992: 71.

²⁹ Stronach 1990: 172.

³⁰ Fuchs 1994: 309 (Z. 28-29).

³¹ Novák 1996: 340ff.

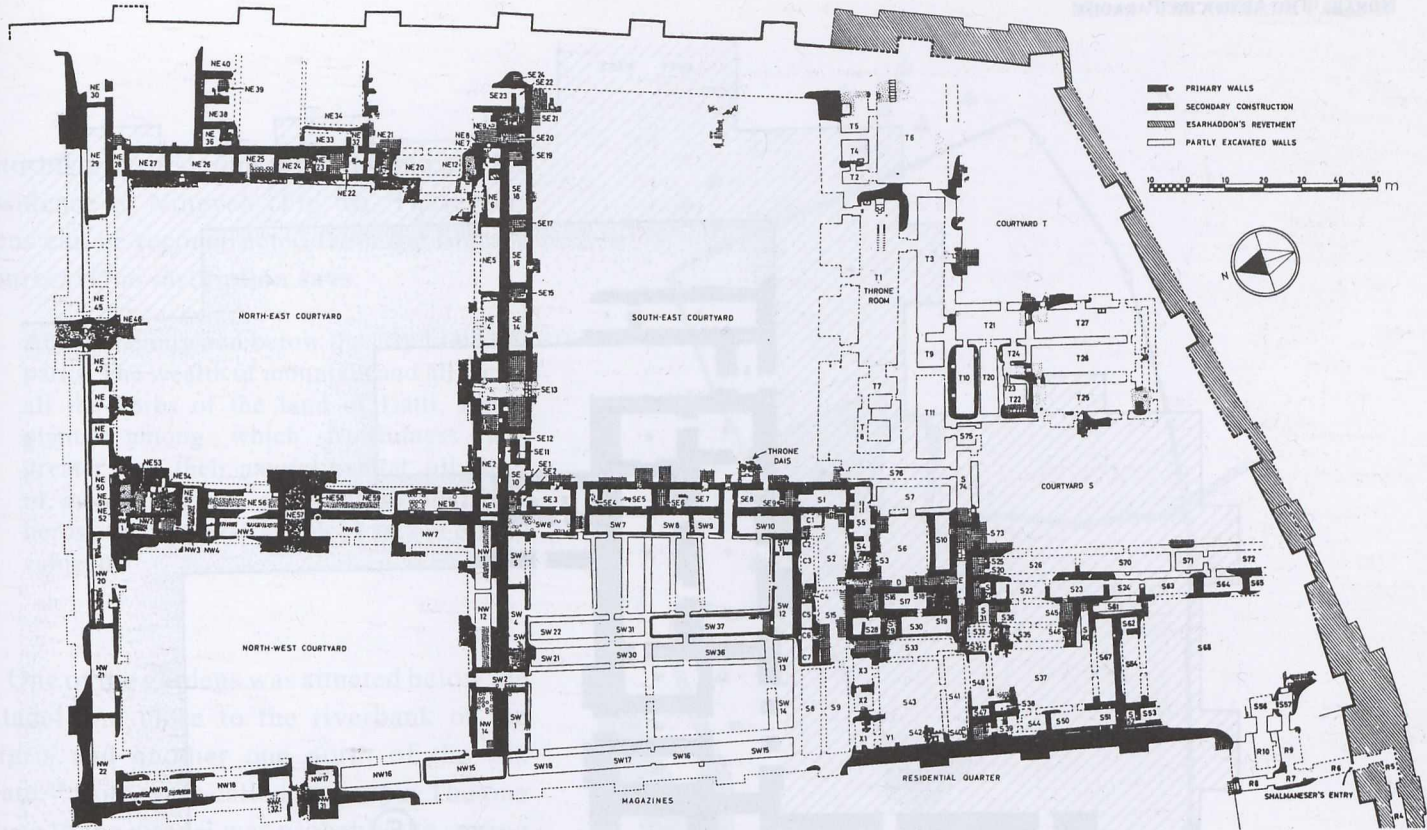


Fig. 3 The palace of Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC) in Kalḫu. [from Heinrich 1984: 114, Abb. 65]

bīt kutalli of Dūr-Šarrukēn such a *bīt ḫilāni* gave access from the panorama platform to the inner rooms of the building. From inside the hall the landscape could be overlooked.

Some reliefs of the palace show garden scenes: the king and his officials are riding on horseback or in chariots through the garden with plenty of plants and animals.³² In the centre of a small lake or river a pavilion can be seen with an open column hall like that of the *bīt ḫilāni*. In the inscriptions of Sargon's son Sennacherib such small garden palaces were called *bītānu*, a word deriving from western Semitic languages.³³ This, the architectural element of the *bīt ḫilāni* and the mentioning of the Amanus Mountains as model of the parks show that the Assyrian garden programmes were influenced by Syrian or Levantine models.

Like his father before, Sennacherib (704-681 BC) included horticultural programmes

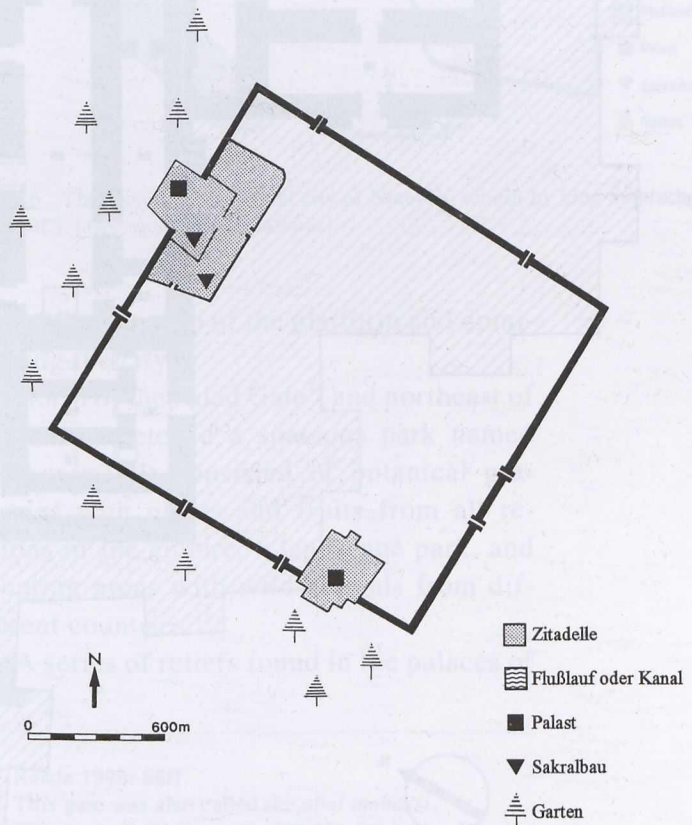


Fig. 4 The Assyrian residential city of Dūr-Šarrukēn, built by king Sargon II (721-705 BC). [drawing by Gabi Elsen-Novák]

³² See Albenda 1986, Pl. 86-90.

³³ Oppenheim 1965: 330.

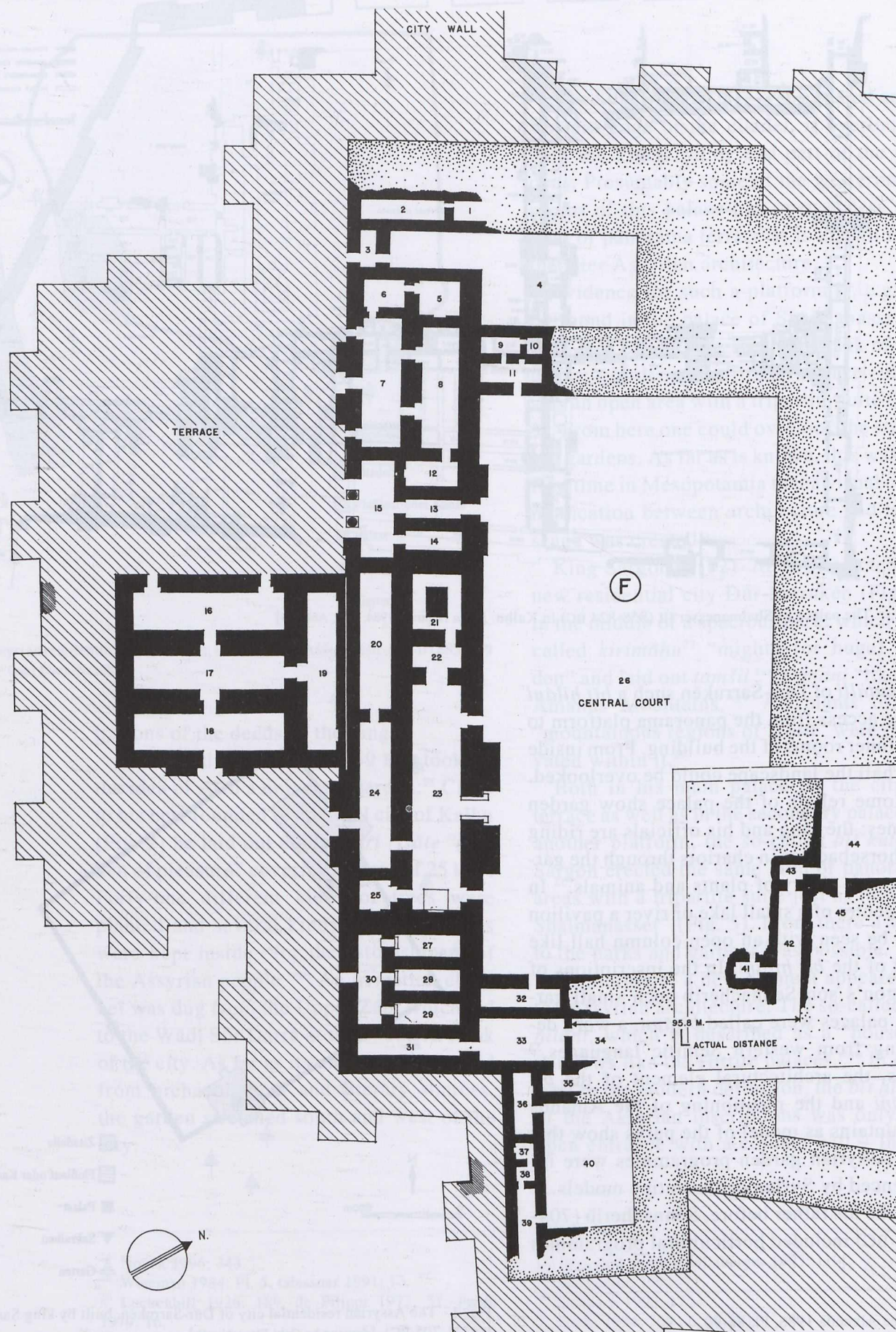


Fig. 5 Palace F in Dür-Šarrukēn. [from Heinrich 1984: 170, Abb. 106]

into his city planning when he moved his residence to Nineveh (Fig. 6). These gardens can be reconstructed from the literary sources. One inscription says:

Above the city and below the city I laid out parks. The wealth of mountain and all lands, all the herbs of the land of Ḫatti, myrrh plants, among which fruitfulness was greater than their natural habitat, all kinds of mountain-vines, all fruits of all lands, herbs and fruit-bearing trees I set out for my subjects.³⁴

One of the gardens was situated below the citadel and close to the riverbank of the Tigris and another one north of the Sin Gate.³⁵ Both were called *kirimāhu*. The one close to the citadel was probably the setting of the *bīt akiti* “New Year Festival House” and connected with the royal palace by a *mušlālu*-gate.³⁶

From the palace in the southwestern part of the citadel the gardens in the river valley were visible. The southwestern flank of the building was probably constructed as a series of small column halls that gave access from the inner palace to a panorama platform, which was situated at the very edge of the citadel high above the river and the gardens.³⁷

A relief illustrates this form of architecture (Fig. 7):³⁸ Above three rings of ramparts with towers a facade with at least two column halls is visible. Each one has two slim columns standing on bases in the shape of lions and is flanked by two strong pillars with *Lamassu*-bulls. The city was identified as Nineveh with its double city wall and the protection wall of the citadel.³⁹ The palace

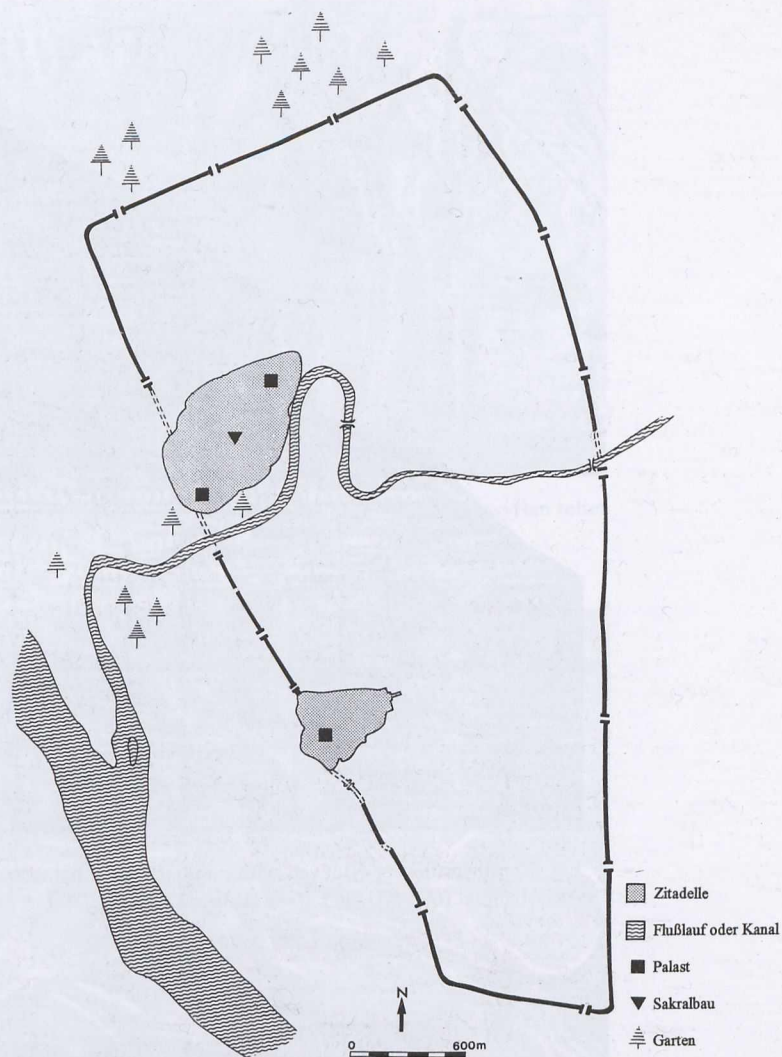


Fig. 6 The Assyrian residential city of Nineveh, rebuilt by king Sennacherib (704-681 BC). [drawing by Gabi Elsen-Novák]

is “riding” on top of the platform and dominating the city.

North of the Adad Gate⁴⁰ and northeast of the city stretched a spacious park named *ambassu*.⁴¹ It consisted of botanical granaries with plants and fruits from all regions of the empire, a landscape park, and hunting areas with wild animals from different countries.⁴²

A series of reliefs found in the palaces of

³⁴ Luckenbill 1924: 113ff.

³⁵ This gate was also called the *abul kirāte* “garden gate.”

³⁶ Wiseman 1983: 139.

³⁷ Novák 1996: 347f.

³⁸ Novák 1996: 341 and 1997: 186f.

³⁹ Reade 1998: 88ff.

⁴⁰ This gate was also called the *abul ambassi*.

⁴¹ The term derives most probably from the Hurrian language. See Oppenheim 1965: 333 and Glassner 1991: 10, 12.

⁴² Oppenheim 1965: 330, Wiseman 1983: 139.

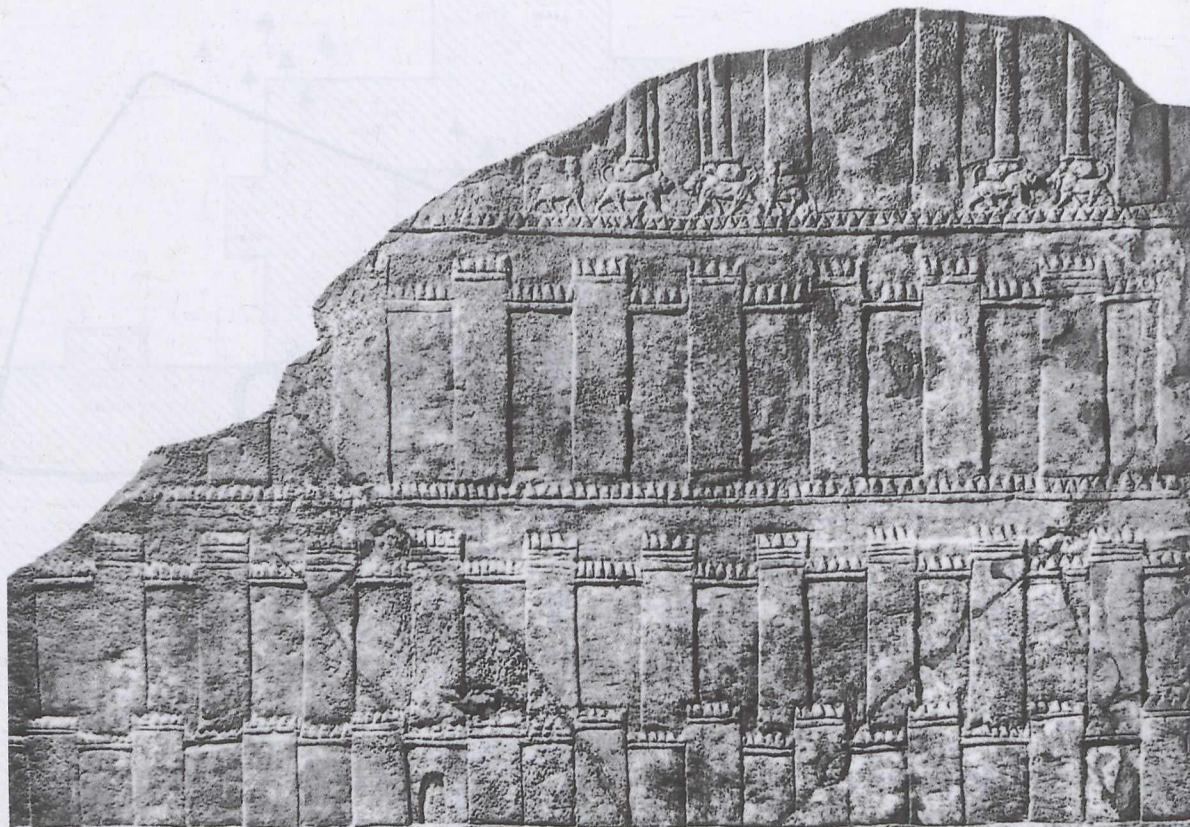


Fig. 7 Illustration of Nineveh with ramparts and a palace with a *bit hilani* entrance; Assyrian relief from Nineveh, time of Assurbanipal (668-631 BC). [from Orthmann 1975, Fig. 241]

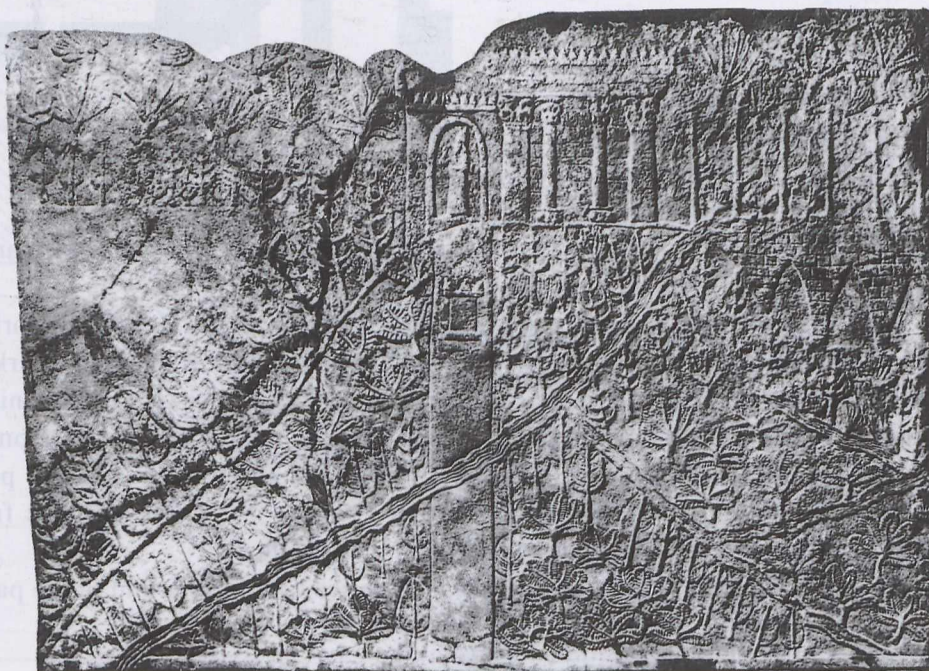


Fig. 8 Illustration of an Assyrian "Paradise Garden" in Nineveh, on top of a hill a garden palace with column hall entrance, beside of it an aqueduct; Assyrian relief from Nineveh, time of Assurbanipal (668-631 BC). [from Orthmann 1975, Fig. 240]

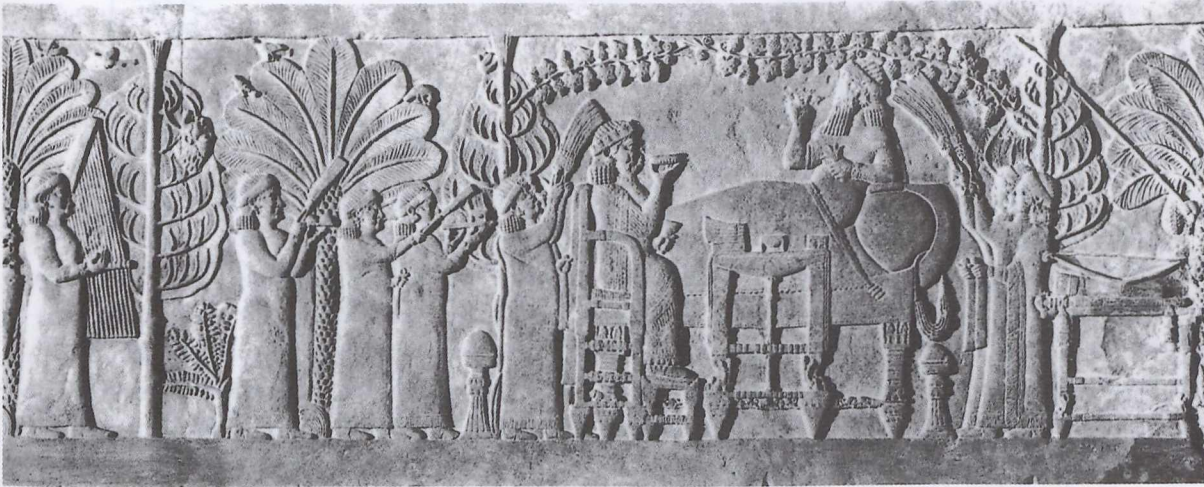


Fig. 9 The Assyrian king Assurbanipal (668-631 BC) and his wife lying in the *qiršu* "vineyard" of his garden; Assyrian relief from Nineveh. [from Orthmann 1975, Fig. 247]



Fig. 10 The royal lion hunt of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal (668-631 BC), Assyrian relief from Nineveh. [from Hrouda 1991: 353]

Nineveh reflect the royal gardens. One of them,⁴³ dating to the reign of Assurbanipal (668-631 BC), illustrates the garden itself (Fig. 8):⁴⁴ It shows a hill, planted with different trees. A system of channels and an aqueduct helped to irrigate the garden. The aqueduct looks very much like the one built by Sennacherib at Jerwān northeast of Nineveh.⁴⁵ A pavilion with a column hall, which again can be identified as a *bītānu*, is situated on top of the hill.⁴⁶

Another relief shows king Assurbanipal and his wife in a *qiršu* within the botanical granary (Fig. 9). The head of the Elamite king Te-Umman that hangs down from a tree creates a political, ideological and also ceremonial atmosphere of the scenery.⁴⁷

Other reliefs show lions in the hunting area, either recovering under the trees or being killed during the royal hunt by the king (Fig. 10).

⁴³ Orthmann 1975, Abb. 240.

⁴⁴ Novák 1997: 182ff, Reade 1998: 87f.

⁴⁵ Jacobsen 1935.

⁴⁶ Oppenheim 1965: 329.

⁴⁷ Deller 1987.

The Function and the Ideology of the “Artificial Paradise” in Assyria

It is evident that the creation of these paradise-like gardens in Assyria neither had economic purposes⁴⁸ nor did they – in contrast to their mentioning in the texts – serve only for the “leisure of the majesty.” The layout and character of the gardens as well as the manner of their illustration in visual art indicate that there was a programmatic message connected with them.

The kings often stressed in their inscriptions that the gardens were placed on former unused and desert land. As stated before, the flourishing garden was a symbol of civilisation. The cultivation of the steppe and the successful creation of an artificial paradise by the Assyrian king probably should maintain the fertility of Assyria under the reign of its charismatic ruler. In contrast to this, the king and his soldiers destroyed the gardens in hostile countries, as visible on some reliefs.⁴⁹

The layout of the paradise gardens was dependant on the ideological concept of the “royal gardener and hunter”: The botanical section symbolised the function of the king as gardener, the hunting areas the one of the protector of the herds and killer of the wild beasts. The sexual connotations of the garden underlined the virility, the power and the sex appeal of the king, which was supported in the visual art by the images of the strong and victorious king.

Plants and animals from all known countries were kept within the gardens and thus turned them into a microcosm in themselves, representing all parts of the world. This was a reflection of the cities, which

were populated by people of all conquered countries.

As an urban element with ideological meaning, the royal garden was just a part of a greater city planning programme. The Assyrian kings were active in shifting the political centre – the “horizontal axis”⁵⁰ – of the empire. Meanwhile, the city of Assur, the old core of the empire with the main temple of the national god Aššur, remained the cultic centre – the “vertical axis.”

The residential city, the *āl šarrūti* “city of kingship,” was surrounded by huge artificial paradise-gardens.⁵¹ A citadel at its periphery, where the royal palaces as well as the main temples were situated, was dominating the whole city and creating a distinct distance to the dwelling quarters of the common people in the lower town. The king himself lived in his palace high above the city, close to the temples of the gods. The public buildings were visible from outside as well as inside the city, so that everybody could appreciate the political and ideological message: the palace as the *šubat šarrūti* “seat of kingship,” built *ana tabrāt kiššat nišē* “for the astonishment of all peoples,”⁵² represented the king’s power over the citizens.

The assemblage of city and gardens was a symbol of the charismatic king and creator⁵³ of civilisation. Its universal character with people, plants and animals of all conquered regions within emphasised the claim of the Assyrian king to rule the entire universe as the *šar kibrāt erbettim* “king of the four edges.”

⁴⁸ Oates 1968.

⁴⁹ Galter 1989, Bleibtreu 1989.

⁵⁰ On the idea of a “horizontal” and a “vertical” axis of the world see Maul 1997.

⁵¹ Novák 1997: 186ff and 1999: 385 ff.

⁵² Winter 1993: 27ff.

⁵³ Lackenbacher 1982.

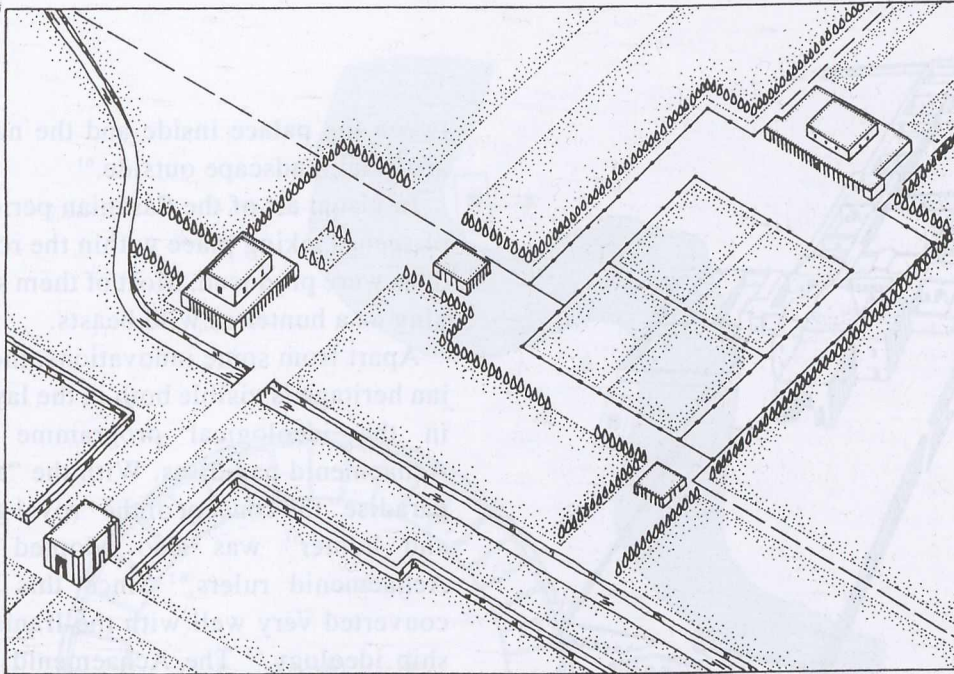


Fig. 11 The paradise garden and the *apadana* palaces in Pasargadae, the residential city of the Achaemenid king Cyrus II (559-530 BC). [from Kawami 1992: 89, Fig. 31]

The Iranian “Paradises”

The end of the Assyrian empire did not mark the end of the royal gardens; on the contrary, the history of the artificial paradise had only just begun.

Little is known of Babylonian royal gardens. The later legends about the so-called “Hanging Gardens of Semiramis” probably reflect real paradise gardens in the Assyrian tradition.⁵⁴

A new climax of horticultural ideology was reached in the Achaemenid period. Huge paradises, now named with that Persian-Avestic term *paeridaēza* “enclosure,” surrounded the *apadana*-palaces in the first Achaemenid capital Pasargadae (Fig. 11).⁵⁵ The *apadana* as architectural combination of a square column hall and an open column anteroom created a visual contact between inside and outside – between palace and garden.⁵⁶ The connection of garden and pavilion with column entrance room is remi-

niscient of Assyrian landscape parks.

As known from literary sources, both a botanical garden and a landscape park with wild animals were part of it.⁵⁷ The botanical section was formed as a symmetrical *čahar bagh* “four gardens,” divided into four equal quarters. The covered *qanawāt* supplied the gardens with water.

The principle of the paradise gardens and of the *čahar bagh*, which is supposed to symbolise the four quarters of the world, was adopted by the Parthians and Sāsānians. Well known examples of Sāsānian paradise gardens are Tāq-i Bustān, Bisotūn⁵⁸ and Qaṣr-i Širīn (Fig. 12).⁵⁹ Even the famous Tāq-i Kīsrā in Ktesiphon (al-Madā’in) was settled within a huge garden area.⁶⁰

The newly developed architectural element of the *iwān* – a huge open hall – helped to improve the visual contact be-

⁵⁴ Stronach 1990.

⁵⁵ Stronach 1990: 171ff, Kawami 1992: 81ff, Tuplin 1996: 88ff.

⁵⁶ Novák 1996: 350ff.

⁵⁷ Fauth 1979: 3, Tuplin 1996: 92ff.

⁵⁸ Kleiss 1996: 110ff.

⁵⁹ Stronach 1990: 177, Novák 1996: 359.

⁶⁰ Novák 1999: 228.

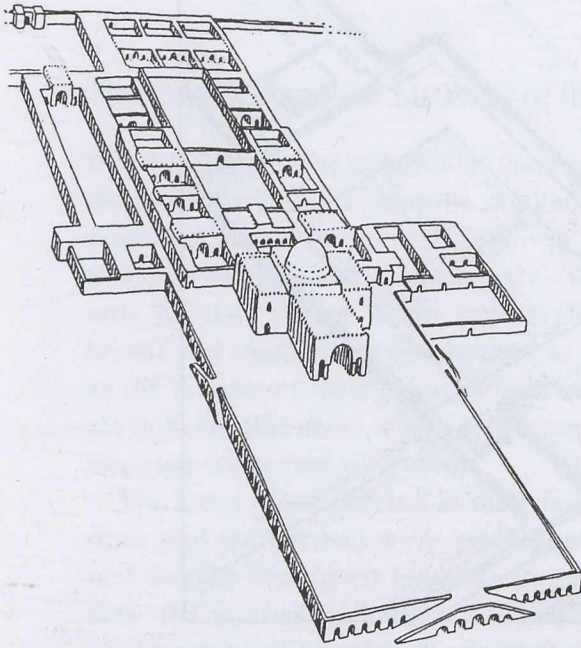


Fig. 12 The Sāsānian garden palace Imaret-i Ḥosrau near Qaṣr-i Šīrīn, built by king Ḥosrau II (AD 590-628) in the centre of a "paradise garden."
[from Kleiss 1989, Fig. 31b]

tween the palace inside and the natural or artificial landscape outside.⁶¹

In visual art of the Sāsānian period, a lot of scenes taking place within the royal gardens were produced. Most of them show the king as a hunter of wild beasts.

Apart from some innovations, the Assyrian heritage is visible both in the layout and in the ideological programme of the Achaemenid paradises. With the "artificial paradise" the concept of the "royal gardener and hunter" was also adopted by the Achaemenid rulers,⁶² since this concept converted very well with the Iranian kingship ideology.⁶³ The Achaemenid patterns themselves influenced the horticultural programmes of the following dynasties of the Parthians and Sāsānians.

The "Artificial Paradises" of the 'Abbasid Caliphs

In the 'Abbasid period the climax of paradise-gardens was reached: As an adopted principle from the Sāsānians, the caliph al-Manṣūr (AD 754-775) and his successors added an extramural paradise to their new founded, circular capital Madīnat as-Salām ("City of Peace," also named Baġdād; Fig. 13). As descriptions show, botanical granaries lay next to hunting parks. Palaces were built within the vast garden areas.⁶⁴

Although the main palace, the *Dār al-Ḥi-lāfa* "House of the Caliphate" in the centre of the circular city remained the official seat of the rulers, the actual residences of the caliphs and their families were moved into the garden palaces. The most prominent one was the *Qaṣr al-Ḥuld*, the "Palace of Eternity."

In AD 836 the caliph al-Mu'taṣim (AD

833-842) shifted his capital into the huge military camp Surra man ra'a ("The one is delighted who saw it," modern Sāmarrā').

His palace there was situated in the centre of the city at the edge of a natural plateau facing the alluvium of the river and huge paradise gardens.⁶⁵ A visitor to the palace first had to walk downward to the gardens (Fig. 14). Behind a large water-filled basin a broad staircase led to the gate of the palace. Here, in or behind the middle *īwān*, the caliph used to give his public audiences sitting high above the ordinary people and facing the gardens. This pointed out the distinct distance of the caliph to his obedient, which also was supported by complex court ceremonies.

The gardens inside the building were designed as a double *čahar baġh*. Though this

⁶¹ Novák 1996: 353ff.

⁶² Fauth 1979: 1ff.

⁶³ Ahn 1992, Knauth – Nadjmabadi 1975.

⁶⁴ Novák 1999: 236ff.

⁶⁵ Northedge 1993:143ff.

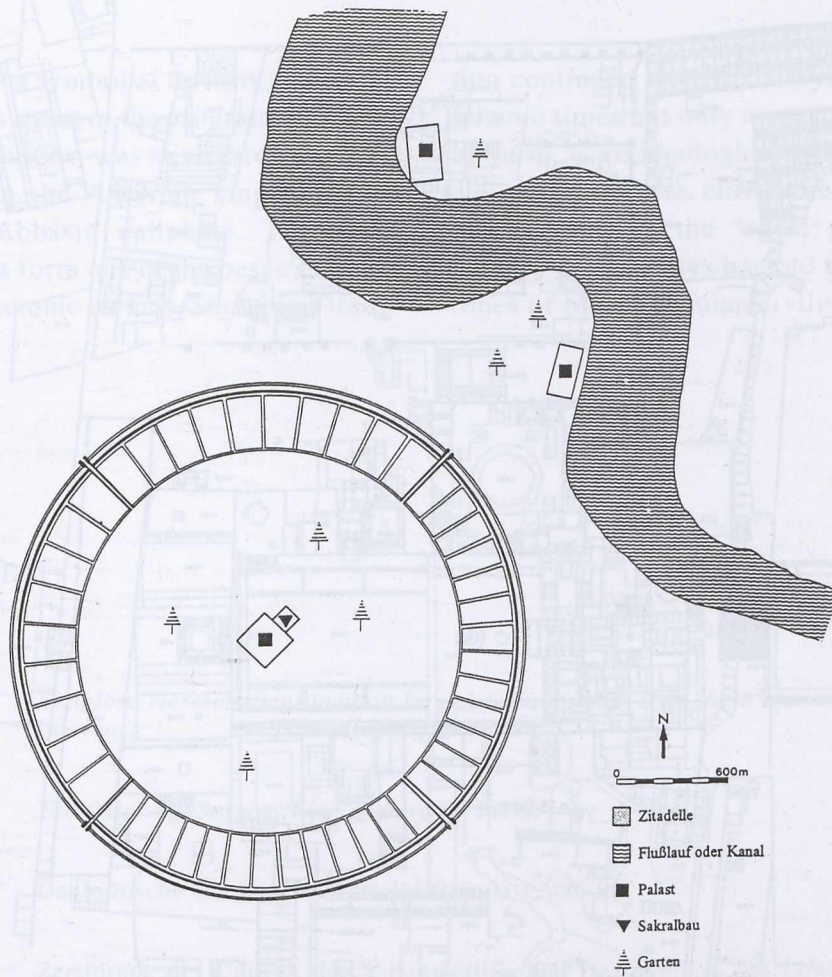


Fig. 13 The 'Abbasid residential city of Madīnat as-Salām / Bagdād, built by caliph al-Manṣūr (AD 754-775). [drawing by Gabi Elsen-Novák]

was a Persian type of garden it was reminiscent of a Qur'ān description of the supernatural *paradise* as a double garden (Sura LV, 62).⁶⁶

Neighbouring the palace was a vast area with hunting parks and racecourses. Inside the parks lay palaces like the one called al-Mušarraḥāt.⁶⁷ The main feature of all the palaces was the open *iwān*, which was adopted from the Sāsānians.

The combination of botanical granaries in geometrical layout and landscape parks for the "royal hunt" with including garden palaces obviously showed the tradition of Ancient Near Eastern programmatic *paradise* gardens. They copied Sāsānian patterns, which themselves were modelled after their Assyrian and Achaemenid predecessors.

⁶⁶ In the *hadīth* the paradise is described as having consisted of seven or eight parts. See Khoury – Hagemann –

Heine 1991: 610f.

⁶⁷ Northedge 1990: 22f.

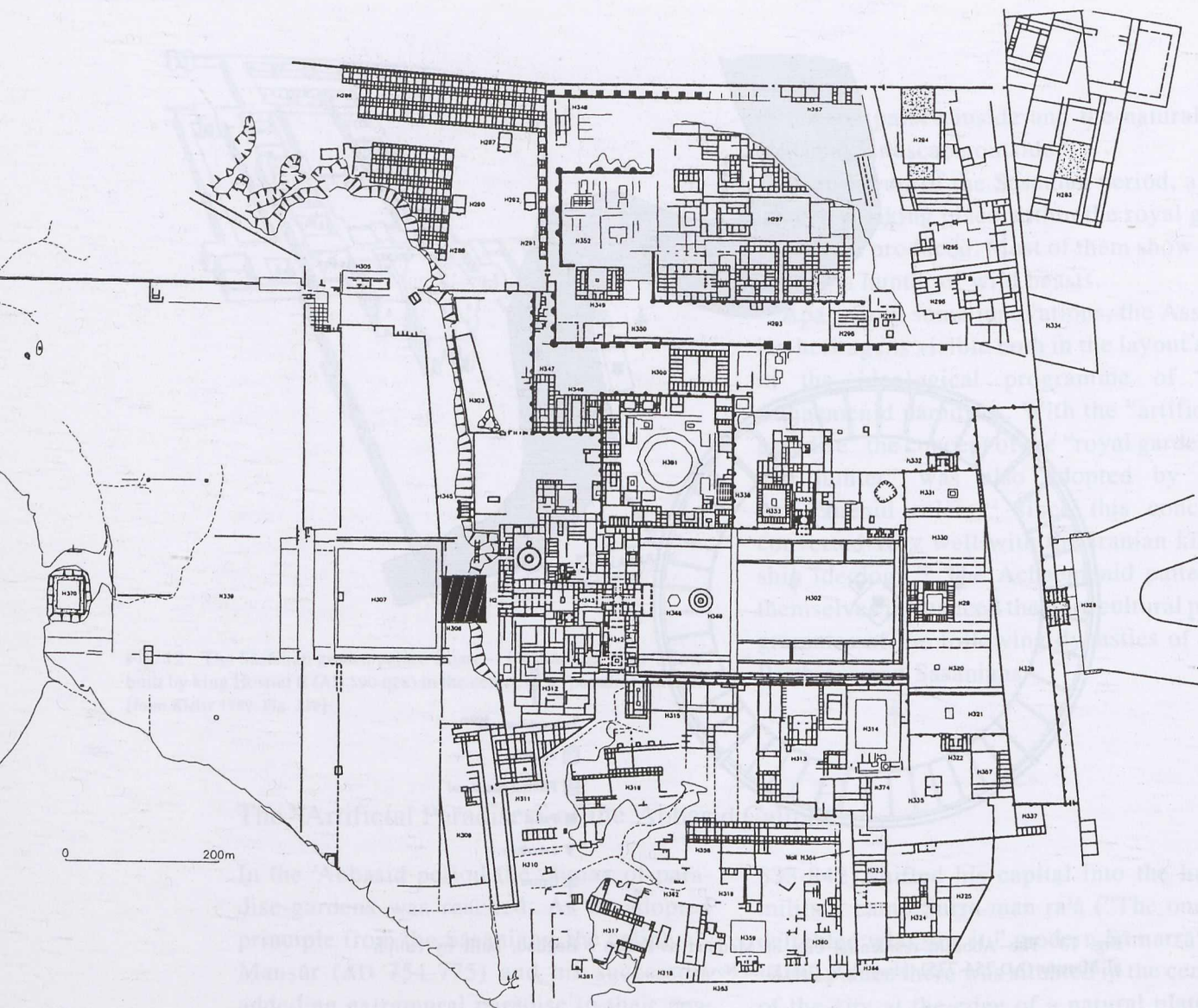


Fig. 14 The Dār al-Ḥilāfa at Surra man ra'ā, built by the caliph al-Mu'taṣim (AD 833-842). [from Northedge 1990: 11, Fig. 9]

Conclusion

Since the flourishing garden has always been a symbol of fertility in the dry regions of Mesopotamia, it therefore was seen as a place of pleasure and of sexual affairs. Thus the gardener naturally was a lover of the goddesses and a person of pronounced sex appeal. This was reflected by the Sumerian kingship ideology with its two pre-eminent principles of the king as gardener and as protector of the herds.

The Assyrian kings developed the idea of the universal garden with plants and ani-

mals from all known regions of the empire. The layout of the paradise garden with its botanical granaries and vast hunting parks was dependent on the two traditional main functions of the Mesopotamian ruler. Together with the layout of the Assyrian residential city itself the garden was a symbol of the virility of the Assyrian king and his success as creator of civilisation. Furthermore, it emphasised the claim to rule the entire universe.

The concept and the idea of the "artificial

paradise," as a symbol of fertility and civilisation and as a part of the programmatic city building activities, was alive throughout all periods from the Assyrian kingdom until the early 'Abbāsid caliphate. Therefore, such gardens form one of the best examples of an architectonic element showing a tradi-

tion continued from the Assyrian period to Islamic times not only as a physical feature but also as an ideological one. The "artificial paradise" was closely connected with the ideology of the "royal gardener and hunter," which dates back to the very early times of Mesopotamian civilisation.

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