

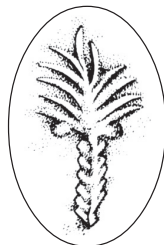
UNIVERSITÀ DI TORINO

# MESOPOTAMIA

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THE EVOLUTION OF ASSYRIAN IMPERIAL ARCHITECTURE:  
POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS AND UNCERTAINTIES

1. *Introduction*

The evidence of Assyrian architecture impinges on the basic functions of government and economy without which the Assyrian empire could not have existed at all. The current paper, adapted from that delivered at Torino in 2010, concentrates on some aspects of the archaeological evidence embodied in Assyrian public buildings. The evidence comes from several of the great metropolitan cities, which are considered here in broadly chronological order, but it is uneven in quantity and quality, and we can seldom be confident that we are comparing like with like. Some developments are well known, but there are misconceptions and problems, probably more than have been recognised. The paper further addresses some of the ways in which the evolution of imperial architecture may be related to Assyrian politics, raising questions that seem to merit further attention.

Most buildings and ancient documents discussed in this paper can be readily traced by reference to standard sources and compendia.<sup>1</sup>

2. *The status of capital cities*

The term “capital city” appears often in academic literature concerning ancient Mesopotamia. It can be helpful as shorthand, but there is no satisfactory equivalent in Akkadian. The nearest term is one meaning “city of kingship” i.e. “royal city”, but a single kingdom could include more than one such city at a single time.

The administrative and cult centre of the original Assyrian city-state, and consequently of the Assyrian empire, was of course the fortified “capital” city of Ashur, home of the city-god Ashur in person. While the administrative centre of the state was liable to move elsewhere, the god Ashur was irreplaceable, and the centre of his cult was fixed: the ideological status of his city could never be fully superseded. Yet the situation was more complicated. Even if Ashur was a permanent religious capital, other great administrative centres such as Nineveh, which were eventually incorporated into the empire, had their own ancient cults that were accepted and developed, so that such cities acquired ideological status as well as administrative importance within the Assyrian state. When in due course Nimrud (Kalah) was promoted as a major administrative centre, it too acquired a cult of appro-

priate status. Something similar happened, or was intended to happen, to the artificial cities of Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta and Khorsabad (Dur-Sharrukin).

At the same time the king was viceroy of the god Ashur and himself embodied the state; so the capital was, in a sense, wherever he happened to be resident. One could compare the mobile capitals of ancient and medieval Persia.

3. *Ashur*

Originally, then, say around 1300 BC, as the model from which everything else diverges, we have the ancient city of Ashur in northern Iraq. Although, thanks to the pioneer archaeologist Walter Andrae, Ashur has been far and away the best excavated of all Assyrian cities, it is also the least well preserved. Nonetheless Andrae established that the city had been dominated by a row of major public buildings positioned on the brow of a cliff at the northern end of the city (Fig. 1): the grand temple to the god Ashur, sometime equated with Enlil, supreme god of southern Iraq; a small unidentified building; the grand temple-tower of Ashur/Enlil; the so-called Old Palace (*Altpalast*), perhaps some 10,500 m<sup>2</sup>; and the Anu-Adad Temple. Nearby there were the Sin-Shamash Temple and, somewhere, a Gula Temple. A poorly understood complex comprised the so-called Temple of Ishtar, a goddess with many avatars (including Tashmetum). Virtually everything needed to maintain, in ideology and practice, a stable relationship between divine and royal spheres of influence, was presumably manifested in the architecture of this quarter of the city.

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<sup>1</sup> Royal inscriptions of all periods are still adequately covered, for the purposes of the current paper, by LUCKENBILL 1926, 1927. More modern editions include, for the period down to 745 BC, GRAYSON 1987, 1991, 1996; for Tiglathpileser III, TADMOR 1994; for Sargon, FUCHS 1993; for Sennacherib, FRAHM 1997, 1998; for Esarhaddon, BORGER 1956; and for Ashurbanipal, BORGER 1996. Further references to the buildings discussed in this paper can be found, for the most part, in ANDRAE 1938, for Ashur; in EICKHOFF 1985 and DITTMANN 1990, for Kar Tukulti-Ninurta; in READE 2000 and 2005, for Nineveh; in POSTGATE, READE 1977-80, OATES, OATES 2001 and READE 2002, for Nimrud; and in LOUD, FRANKFORT, JACOBSEN 1936, and LOUD, ALTMAN 1938, for Khorsabad. For the groundplans of Assyrian state apartments, see TURNER 1970.

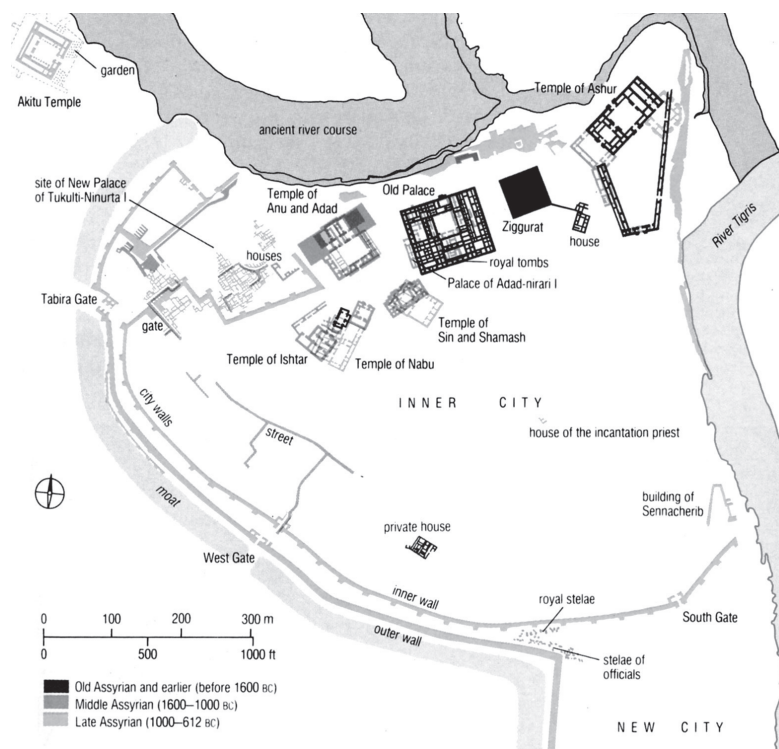


Fig. 1. Ashur. Detail after ROAF 1990, 148.

The great public buildings had a proclamatory function too, being designed to impress and intimidate everyone who saw them; they reinforced the status of the king.

There were naturally many developments affecting the history and functions of these buildings over the next 700 years, down to 614 BC. For instance, a temple to the divine couple Nabu and Tashmetum was established, perhaps in the eighth century, on the old Ishtar Temple site. In the 680s Sennacherib adjusted the Ashur shrine itself to accord with a restructuring of state theology. Other great changes included reconstructions of the city walls. On the whole, however, the developments at Ashur appear to reflect natural evolution, good sense and convenience. Political changes are more clearly attested in the state architecture of other imperial “capitals”.

At Ashur a particular question arises over the history of the Old Palace.<sup>2</sup> There is some textual evidence for royal use; also, while the groundplan evolved over time, some of the architectural features resemble those in other great Assyrian palaces. It is reasonable to suppose that, at least before the ninth century, the Old Palace did frequently house the king, his household and some government staff, and that it contained some shrines, offices and storage areas. If the building was a permanent residence, however, then people resident there should presumably have been buried beneath its floors, in accordance with standard Assyrian practice.

A few people certainly were: the looted remains of kings’ tombs occupied one area of the building, and some other tombs could have been totally destroyed or remained hidden. The number of missing tombs is so great, however, that we have to ask whether some other building was equally suitable for royal burials.

There is no intrinsic difficulty with the hypothesis of alternative royal residences at Ashur. There is the enigmatic area between the Ashur Temple and the temple-tower. The Old Palace was apparently not big enough for Tukulti-Ninurta I, who at least started building a large New Palace nearby, although he later built a new city instead. It is also known that other public buildings and domestic quarters spread away southward within the walls of Ashur. Perhaps, even before the establishment of a standing army, there was a substantial building like the later arsenals which, while providing for military requirements and storage, included accommodation suitable for kings. Finally there are indications (see below) that, long before Sennacherib transformed Nineveh into an Assyrian “capital” about 700 BC, some kings already chose to reside there; perhaps they could be buried there too. The question remains open.

<sup>2</sup> PEDDE, LUNDSTRÖM 2008.

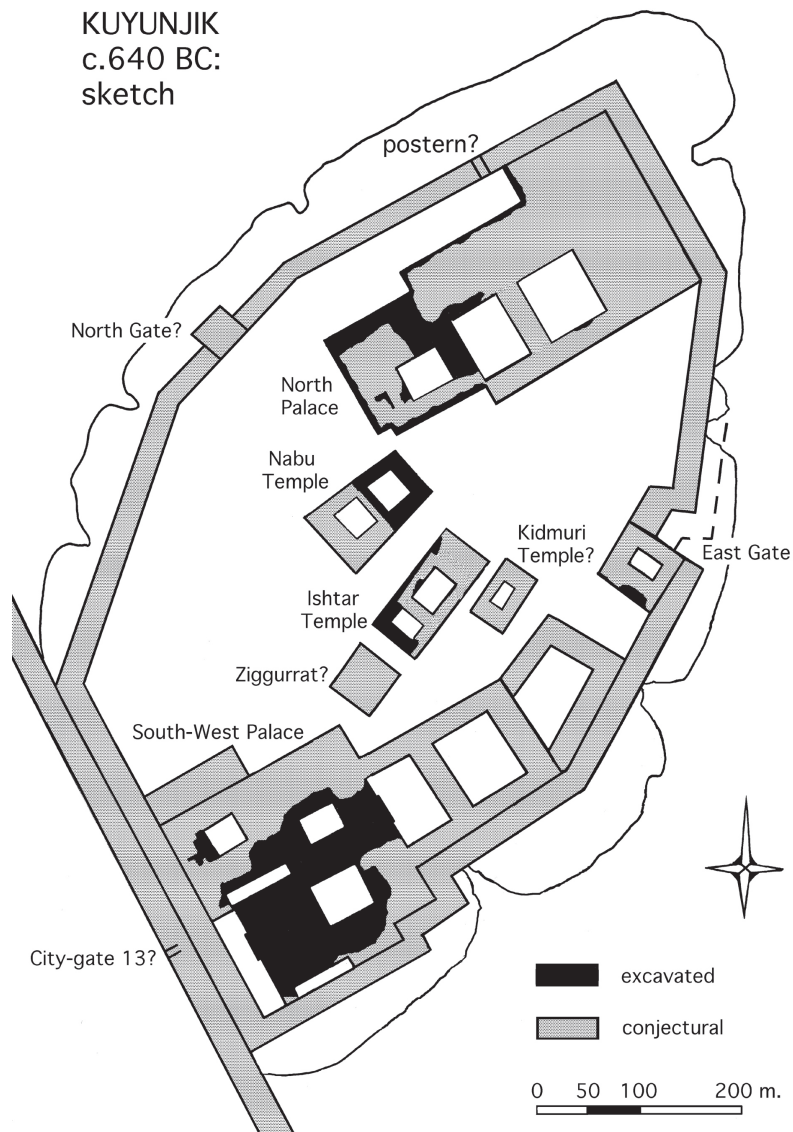


Fig. 2. Nineveh citadel. Drawn by author.

#### 4. *Kar Tukulti-Ninurta*

About 1200 Tukulti-Ninurta I was moving from Ashur to a spacious new city, on the opposite side of the Tigris, named after himself. Since this king had visited Babylonia, he must have observed the relationship that existed there between Babylon, a long-established city, and Dur Kurigalzu, an artificial city named after a king. It was presumably with this example in mind that Tukulti-Ninurta decided to do something comparable himself. It seems that *Kar Tukulti-Ninurta* was intended to replace the city of Ashur as the cult

centre of the state, and his new foundation also had a palace or palaces of appropriate size for administrative purposes. These public buildings seem to have been separated from areas intended to accommodate private houses, asserting the deliberate elevation of royalty above mundane city life. Further developments ended with Tukulti-Ninurta's death, an instance of the paradoxical phenomenon whereby kings seldom resided or resided long in the places commemorating them, because they were dead or otherwise distracted before construction was complete. Tukulti-Ninurta had, however, set a significant precedent.

### 5. *Nineveh before Sennacherib*

By 1300 BC Ashur had conquered Nineveh, a city with various economic and strategic advantages, and with space for expansion beyond the central mound on which its ancient buildings stood (Fig. 2). Nineveh already had its own grand temple and temple-tower, these dedicated to the celebrated local version of Ishtar (Mulissu), who ultimately entered Assyrian theology as the spouse of Ashur.<sup>3</sup> Assyrian kings repeatedly repaired or embellished this temple and other shrines at Nineveh. The reconstruction of the Ishtar Temple was one of the main enterprises of Ashurnasirpal II around 870, and the status of the goddess is reflected in the prominence of her symbol, the rosette, in the iconography of the royal palace that the same king built soon afterwards at Nimrud.

By at the latest 1100 BC, in a period when the city of Ashur was threatened by insecurity, kings were repeatedly building or repairing royal palaces at Nineveh. Thus Tiglath-pileser I appears to have rebuilt at least two palaces; several other texts, dated between Tiglath-pileser I and Ashurnasirpal II, refer to work on a palace or palaces at Nineveh. One was probably an early version of the North Palace, the size of which is unknown. The other was the Old South-West Palace, the final version of which was described by Sennacherib (who replaced it with his own Incomparable Palace) as measuring about 200 by 65 m, i.e. 13,000 m<sup>2</sup>, somewhat larger than the 10,500 m<sup>2</sup> of the Old Palace at Ashur. Although much of the area of a palace consisted of courtyards, these were not wasted spaces where nothing happened, so that such gross areal comparisons, while hardly conclusive, are helpful as a guide to a building's complexity.

We do not know when the South-West Palace at Nineveh had reached a size comparable with that of the Old Palace at Ashur. Perhaps it was as early as 1100, but by the ninth century, certainly, there was an additional reason for Nineveh to grow in importance. Successive kings were then rebuilding the Assyrian empire. Campaigns to east and south could still conveniently begin at Ashur, but Nineveh was a more natural base for most campaigns to north and west. For instance, when Adad-nirari II captured Nasibina, his major achievement, it was to Nineveh that he records bringing his prisoners. The annals for the short reign of Tukulti-Ninurta II, in the 880s, show him twice resident at Nineveh, twice at Ashur. Three of Ashurnasirpal II's first five campaigns, in 885-2 and 880, commenced there, as did many of Shalmaneser III's.

It might seem essential that a city being used in this way as a military base should possess, as a concomitant of empire, a permanent camp or arsenal, to act as an army barracks and for purposes such as the review and storage of military goods and tribute. It would have been sensible to locate any such building, like "Fort Shalmaneser" at Nimrud, well away from the

centre of the city (Fig. 3). No decisive early evidence for such a building at Nineveh has yet emerged, but Sennacherib about 690, in describing the foundation of his own arsenal (Nebi Yunus), does state that he first demolished the remains of another building on the same site, and it seems highly probable that this too had been some kind of arsenal.

All this suggests that Nineveh, long before Sennacherib, already functioned in some ways as an Assyrian capital city. Its palaces and palatial buildings may well have been more extensive than its temples. Generally, because seventh-century palaces at Nineveh overlie and have largely concealed whatever buildings preceded them, the latter constitute a missing link in the evolution of Assyrian architecture. Some of the standard groundplans, internal arrangements and decorative procedures familiar from the palaces of Nimrud and Khorsabad may have developed here.

### 6. *Nemid Tukulti-Ninurta*

At least one stone slab, inscribed by Tukulti-Ninurta II for a palace at 'Nemid Tukulti-Ninurta', was found in the Old North Palace area at Nineveh.<sup>4</sup> In the 1990s another slab naming Nemid Tukulti-Ninurta was found by Iraqi archaeologists; Menhal Jabr told me that it was built into an ancient stone structure on the eastern edge of the river-plain, some distance north of the north gate of Sennacherib's Nineveh. Its presence suggests that Tukulti-Ninurta II, who had himself visited Dur Kurigalzu and surely knew something about Kar Tukulti-Ninurta, was either attempting to promote the status of Nineveh and rename it after himself, or that he was planning to give his name to a new foundation just to the north of Nineveh. This might then have been another abortive attempt at creating a new capital city.

### 7. *Nimrud under Ashurnasirpal II*

We know far more about two capital cities of the ninth-eighth centuries, Nimrud and Khorsabad, which in many ways resemble each other. Nimrud, because of extensive research conducted there, is our best source of information on the architectural requirements of an Assyrian imperial city, but archaeologists have tended to cherry-pick the site, leaving the less obviously productive areas unexcavated. There is not a single building of which we have the complete plan.

Nimrud developed gradually as an administrative capital city. Changes of emphasis were less abrupt than

<sup>3</sup> READE 2005.

<sup>4</sup> GRAYSON 1991, 179-80.



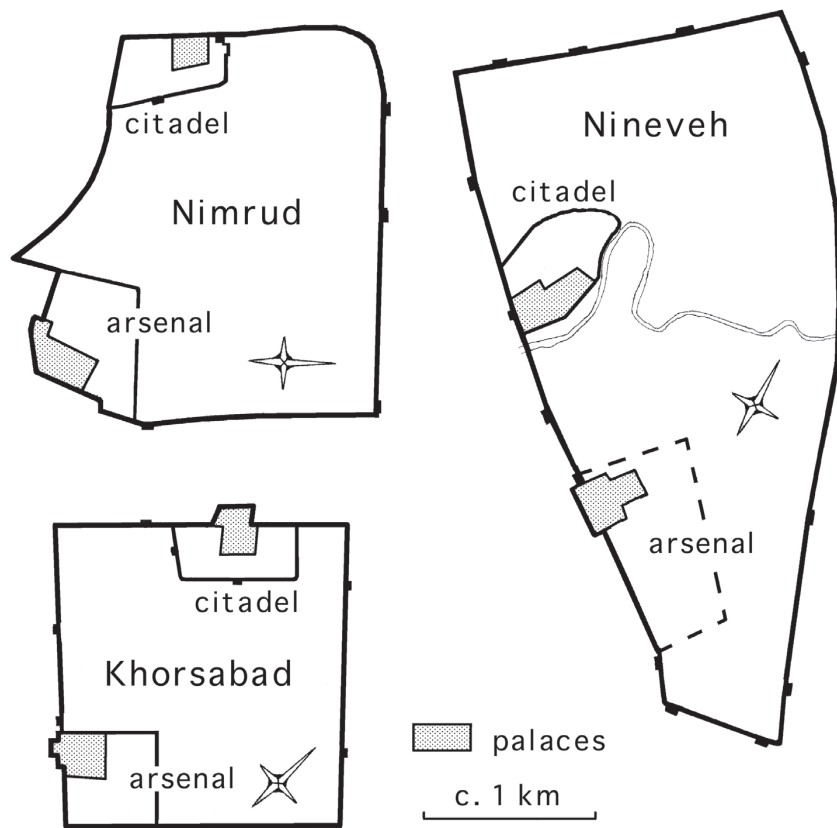


Fig. 3. Nineveh, Nimrud, Khorsabad: city plans. Drawn by author.

they may appear to us at first sight. It is not even clear what Ashurnasirpal II (883-859) really intended when he began work there about 879 BC. While this king is generally and understandably credited with the promotion of Nimrud to the status of capital city, and he probably built the walls and much of the citadel platform, the situation is not straightforward.

For instance, while a particular quarter at Ashur was dominated by temples and palaces, we cannot demonstrate a clear-cut topographical separation between state buildings of this kind and others such as private houses. At Nimrud, in contrast, by the mid-ninth century, there was a distinction between what we call the citadel, on its high mudbrick platform, and the low-lying outer town. No private houses on the citadel can be confidently dated before the seventh century, by which time Nimrud was not usually a capital city. So the groundplan, incomplete as it is, suggests that the citadel was largely intended for government use. This had presumably been the case at Kar Tukulti-Ninurta, however, and possibly at Nineveh. If so, this element of the Nimrud groundplan was not a sudden innovation.

Nimrud had been a provincial town. Why Ashurnasirpal thought it desirable to create a new expanded capital at all is arguable, but Nimrud plainly provided space for expansion. One reason for the specific choice of Nimrud must have been its convenient and strategic location between Ashur and Nineveh; the choice must also have caused less offence to vested interests in those two cities than the choice of either one of them in preference to the other. Ashurnasirpal states that the old town of Nimrud had become a ruin, together with its existing Kidmuri Temple which he rebuilt, but this is a conventional way of prefacing descriptions of demolition and reconstruction. Some parts of the old town, at the southern end of what became the citadel, probably continued to exist while the citadel platform was being extended northward. It may have been Ashurnasirpal's original intention that the citadel should indeed be close to its present final dimensions, but in fact only about one quarter of it, so far as it has been excavated, contains buildings with his name attached to them.

There is even a question-mark over the magnificent royal palace which we know as the North-West Palace.

We first learn of a palace built by Ashurnasirpal at Nimrud from the inscription on a large carved stela, which was found erected in the Ninurta Temple at Nimrud; this cannot have been its original position because the temple did not exist in the 870s.<sup>5</sup> The stela starts with grandiose statements, and then describes the events of the king's first five years of reign down to 879, during which he was campaigning energetically in different directions; it proceeds to state that he restored the city and city-wall of Nimrud, dug a canal, planted orchards, and built himself a palace. The palace is described in some detail as if it were complete, or at least fully planned, but there is no mention of items like the colossal carved stone figures and wall-panels that are familiar to us from the North-West Palace. Now, after 879, whenever we have details, Ashurnasirpal is said to have commenced his annual campaign at Nimrud. It sounds as if work was proceeding on the city during the 870s, and as if the king was often resident there in a palace, where the stela should originally have been erected. It was only about 864-859, however, that the stone panels in the state apartments of the North-West Palace came to be fastened on the walls and carved. A few details (blocked doors and inconsistent pavement alignments, together with some of the themes used in the wall-panels,) do suggest, however, that there may already have been a palace on the site, but that it had been smaller and more modest, perhaps with painted rather than carved decoration on its walls. It is unclear, however, how far the excavation records are compatible with this hypothesis; they need further study and publication.

One possibility is that the palace described in the 879 stela occupied, very roughly, the area later occupied by the core of the North-West Palace, namely the four suites around a single courtyard comprising the throneroom and areas for receptions, rituals, ritual cleansing and the king's residence, together with part of the women's quarters, and not very much else. The outer limits of the building could already have been decided, and the palace could have extended eastward into an area hardly excavated as yet. The facade of the throneroom, however, about 860, like that of the Old Palace at Ashur, could have faced an open space. Certainly the next king, Shalmaneser III, was responsible for building some of the rooms that faced the throneroom across a courtyard; these included offices in which royal correspondence of the eighth century was excavated. So it was only under Shalmaneser that the North-West Palace probably reached its eventual minimum size of about 26,400 m<sup>2</sup>, twice that of the Old South-West Palace at Nineveh. Other internal changes can be dated to the eighth and seventh centuries, especially under Sargon, but need not have affected its size.

Similarly, it was only in the 860s, apparently, that Ninurta emerged as city-god of Nimrud; he did not have this status on the 879 stela. His Nimrud temple

was built by Ashurnasirpal, but it was under Shalmaneser that the god acquired his own temple-tower, which thus became the city's most prominent architectural feature; by then Ninurta too, like the god Ashur at the city of Ashur, had been equated with Enlil. The Ninurta shrine is part of a temple that accommodated other gods also, including Sin and Adad. So Nimrud (followed by Khorsabad) retained or emulated the single most conspicuous architectural feature of Ashur, a temple-tower adjoining palaces and temples on an imposing high natural or artificial terrace. However, the main royal palaces at Nimrud and Khorsabad are much larger and more prominent and accessible than their associated temples. This is the reverse of the situation at Ashur.

The other notable building with Ashurnasirpal inscriptions on the Nimrud citadel is the poorly understood Central Building;<sup>6</sup> the excavators suggested that it was a temple, but inscriptions on wall-panels call it a palace. It consists, so far as excavated, of a grand facade decorated with colossal figures, and a gate-chamber leading through to an internal courtyard. Free-standing monuments along the facade included one obelisk set up by Ashurnasirpal and another inscribed for Shalmaneser as king, while another nearby gateway was flanked by the "Centre Bulls", again inscribed for Shalmaneser. Carved wall-panels inside the Central Building, which carried the same Ashurnasirpal text as wall-panels in the North-West Palace, were carved with unique themes - unusual protective spirits, and struggles between supernatural beings, a type of scene repeated at least once on wall-panels in the building behind the "Centre Bulls".

One possibility is the Central Building was part of the residence of Shalmaneser before his accession; the crown-prince and his household must have been accommodated somewhere, and this location on the approach to the North-West Palace would seem appropriate. From the late eighth century on, there is good evidence for palaces built specifically for members of the royal family:<sup>7</sup> from the reign of Sargon, Residence L at Khorsabad, which was occupied by the king's brother; from the reign of Sennacherib, the palaces of the queen or queen-mother at Kilizi, of the eldest son and another son of the king at Ashur, and of a third son of the king at Nineveh; and, from the reign of Esarhaddon, the palace of the crown-prince at Tarbisu. The need for such buildings must have already existed in the ninth century, and perhaps long beforehand too. Alternatively, the Central Building could have been

<sup>5</sup> GRAYSON 1991, 237-54.

<sup>6</sup> SOBOLSKY 1981, 256-60.

<sup>7</sup> LOUD, ALTMAN 1938, 104; POSTGATE 1980, 592-3; LUCKENBILL 1927, 194; THOMPSON, HUTCHINSON 1929, 83; BORGER 1956, 71-3.

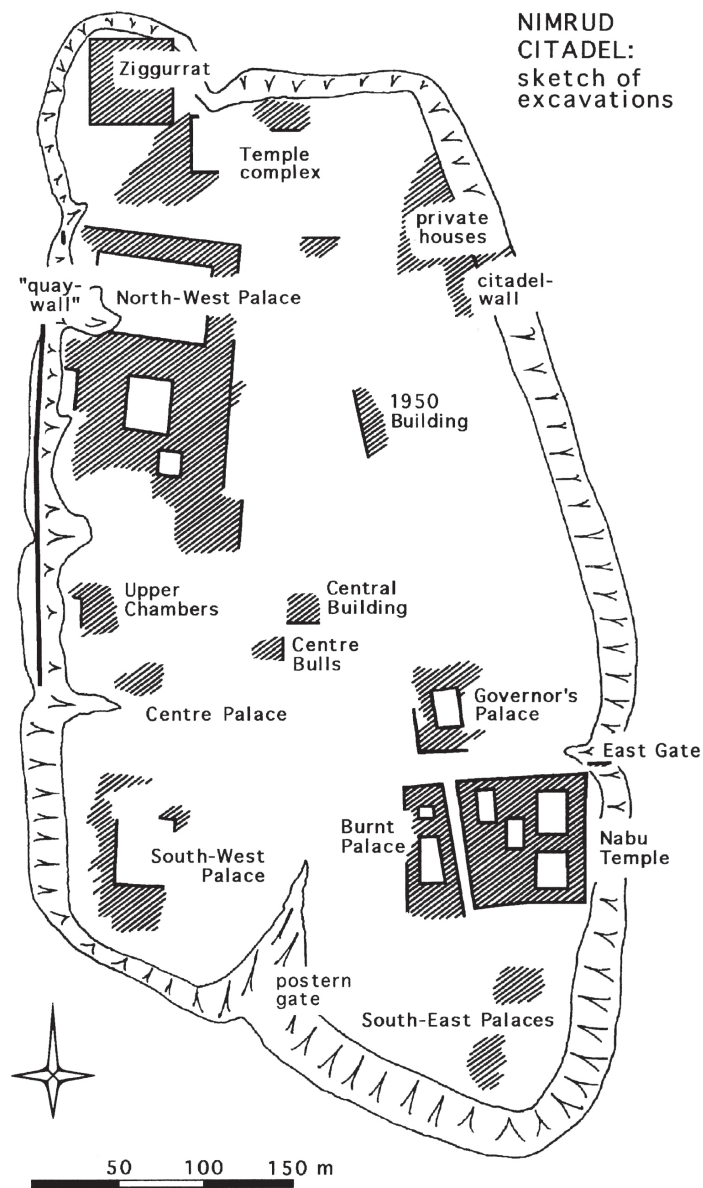


Fig. 4. Nimrud citadel. Drawn by author.

the outermost entrance to the North-West Palace, leading to a forecourt east of the state apartments. If so one might imagine the king receiving visitors or tribute-bearers there on relatively public occasions; a similar function is often ascribed to the *apadana* at Persepolis, the doors of which also showed supernatural struggles, but this is a very distant parallel.

Since within the period 875-867 Ashurnasirpal or his armies visited the Neo-Hittite/Luwian lands including Carchemish, as well as the Mediterranean coast with its Egyptian connections, an obvious hypothesis,

to account for what appear to be two phases in Ashurnasirpal's work at Nimrud, is that what he saw in the west and what was reported to him, such as the vast carved and inscribed public buildings of Egypt, led him to reconsider and upgrade his ideas about empire and the appropriate appearance of an imperial palace and capital city. His eldest son and heir, who became Shalmaneser III, demonstrated in due course that he was an even more determined and persistent empire-builder. Father and son will have discussed these issues. What could well have happened is that Ashurnasirpal



had been satisfied with what he had done until about 870, with a new walled city and a new palace, and that Shalmaneser reinvigorated the ideological promotion of Nimrud, with new temples and much grander palace architecture, at the same time as he renewed the process of imperial expansion.

#### 8. *Nimrud after Ashurnasirpal II*

So there was no significant break between the work done at Nimrud towards the end of Ashurnasirpal's reign and at the beginning of Shalmaneser's. Besides continuing work on the royal palace, building the temple-tower and placing colossal lions in the main gate of the citadel, this king was of course responsible for "Fort Shalmaneser", the arsenal building commensurate with his far-flung imperial ambitions. In due course there were equivalent arsenals at later capitals, Palace F at Khorsabad and Nebi Yunus at Nineveh; the so-called summer palace at Nebuchadnezzar's capital of Babylon could have been a similar arsenal. These were all fine buildings, promoting royal ideology by their appearance, evolving in step with the empires they supported. At Nineveh the gate of the arsenal, appropriately, was one of the places where, at least in the reign of Ashurbanipal, foreign trophies were displayed. Fort Shalmaneser was a building of great importance, and excavations have not yet explored its full extent; its complicated history, like that of the North-West Palace, deserves further study.

No less significant, however, but seldom mentioned in scholarly debate, is a group of independent structures of a type which seems to appear first under Shalmaneser III. These were substantial buildings with their own equivalents of the royal throneroom and private apartments. English-speaking excavators have called them "palaces" or, better, "residences" (since "palace" in English, unlike its cognates in European languages, nearly always means a building occupied by an authentic king or queen). Their scale, their locations, and the fact that they are liable to incorporate bricks or tiles inscribed with a royal name, strongly suggest (if not exactly demonstrating) that they were state property.

On the citadel at Nimrud, from the time of Shalmaneser III, there is the Governor's Palace, which contained archives of the governor of Nimrud; the 1950 Building, which also contained government archives; probably the original South-East Palace; and possibly the building represented by little more than the "Central Bulls". There is space on the citadel for several more buildings of comparable status. There is also the Burnt Palace which, although it did not contain inscribed royal bricks, did produce government archives of the late eighth century, and there is the much later South-East Palace of Ashur-etel-ilani. Away from the citadel, in the outer town, there is the PD5 Palace

which contained bricks of Shalmaneser III's grandson, Adadnirari III; this building was preserved well above floor-level, but did not form a distinctive mound, which suggests that more buildings of similar size and status remain unexcavated in the fields around the citadel. Who occupied these buildings?

Although Shalmaneser himself was far less successful than his father in enlarging the Assyrian empire, he had to cope with the long-term problems of imperial administration. During his reign civil servants became increasingly powerful. It was the emergence of this class of people that probably led to the civil war at the end of Shalmaneser's reign, between Ashur-nadin-apli, the man marked by his name as the king's eldest son and presumably once heir apparent, supported by virtually all the old Assyrian cities, and the civil servants' candidate, Shamsi-Adad V, who emerged victorious.<sup>8</sup> It seems probable that these minor palaces were the visible embodiment of the status of members of the extended royal household, especially the corps of eunuchs who administered the state on the king's behalf. Other buildings in the same category were the provincial palaces, where the king may occasionally have resided but which were primarily residences of local governors. So the proliferation of minor palaces at Nimrud, if indeed a novel development (since we do not yet have strictly comparable evidence from Nineveh), would be an architectural manifestation of the political decentralization that attenuated royal power in the course of the ninth and eighth centuries.

A feature of the governor's palace at Til-Barsip<sup>9</sup> is that its inner domestic courtyard has two fine residential suites, but attached to it there is no group of smaller relatively inaccessible rooms inviting identification as a harem. This building is incomplete, but it seems sensible that palaces without harems should have been built for occupation by eunuchs, with more than one officer sometimes sharing a single building. It should then be possible to determine, from a groundplan, whether or not the principal occupant of a building was a man who possessed his own household of women and therefore required a private harem area. This question affects especially the better known minor palaces at Khorsabad.

Presumably some grand palatial buildings belonged to people of inherited high status outside the royal establishment, but they are elusive. A possible example at Nimrud is the Town-Wall Palace. On the other hand, the fact that no inscribed royal bricks were excavated in that particular building may simply mean that they had been removed in antiquity.

The so-called palace of Adad-nirari III and the so-called "Upper Chambers", which were located on the

<sup>8</sup> READE 1981, 156-60.

<sup>9</sup> THUREAU-DANGIN, DUNAND 1936, plans A, B, D.

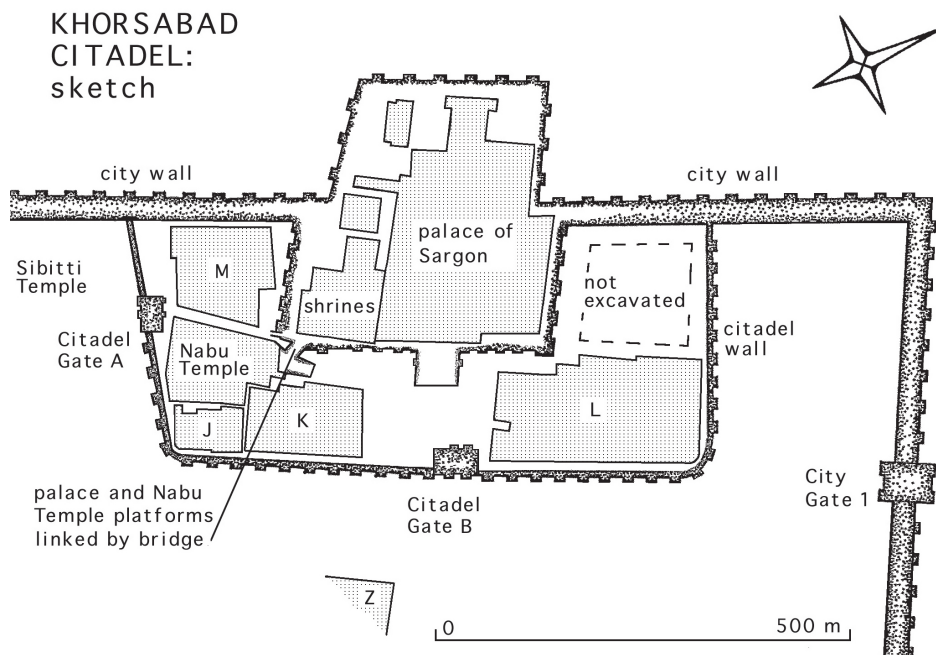


Fig. 5. Khorsabad citadel. Drawn by author.

Nimrud citadel immediately south of the North-West Palace, are exceptional. This strange elevated building would have been an appropriate residence for Sammu-ramat, Adad-nirari's mother, who clearly had great power during at least the early years of her son's reign. It would be an example of a palace built specifically for a member of the royal family.<sup>10</sup> Little is known of this building, however, nor of the royal palace (Central Palace) which Tiglath-pileser III eventually built for himself slightly further south about 730-726. From Tiglathpileser's description, and from the carved wall-panels that survive, we can conclude that his palace incorporated novel features, at least some of which were copied soon afterwards by Sargon at Khorsabad; the written description includes an explicit acknowledgement of western architectural influence.

During the reign of Adad-nirari III, there was also a remarkable development in temple architecture. In lists of temples or shrines built by Ashurnasirpal at Nimrud, the construction of a Nabu temple appears almost as an afterthought; his spouse Tashmetum is not mentioned although her presence can be assumed. A new Nabu Temple was built, however, under Adad-nirari III about 800, on what may have been a fresh site beside the main entrance to the citadel. It was a conspicuous building, albeit without its own temple-tower, and was much more accessible than the temples of Ninurta and most other gods which appear, by comparison, more as palace appendages. Also under

Adad-nirari III, a grand Nabu Temple was built at Nineveh, opposite the ancient Ishtar Temple. Sargon was to build a magnificent one at Khorsabad. At some date also at Ashur, as mentioned, a Nabu and Tashmetum temple occupied an ancient site previously sacred to various other manifestations of Ishtar.

Moreover the Nabu Temples at Nineveh and Nimrud and possibly that at Ashur, like the temples of Ashur at Ashur and of Ishtar at Nineveh, were continually repaired or renovated during the eighth and seventh centuries. There is a contrast with the situation in the temple complex beside the royal palace at Nimrud. This complex continued in use until destroyed by fire, presumably about 612 when the city was sacked; but items dedicated by royalty and found in the ruins could all be ninth-century, as if there was little subsequent royal patronage. The growing importance of Nabu in Assyrian official ideology and public esteem is amply documented in texts. The architecture is thus a practical expression of this process, while hinting at a corresponding decline in the significance of several other gods. Something that we would never have guessed, however, from the architecture alone, is that some of these temples in the seventh century apparently had a financial function as banks.

<sup>10</sup> OATES, OATES 2001, 70.

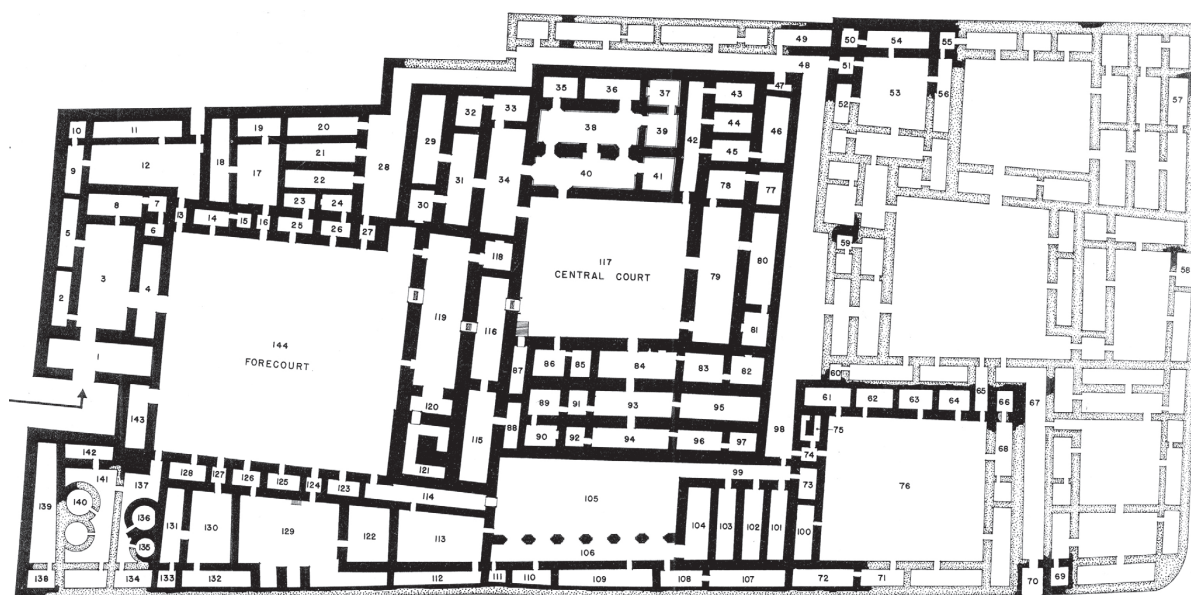


Fig. 6. Khorsabad, Residence L. After LOUD, ALTMAN 1938, Pl. 72.

Although Sargon, about 710, moved his capital to Khorsabad, there was another brief period, around 670 BC, when Esarhaddon seemed intent on reviving Nimrud as a major royal centre. He did extensive work on the arsenal, Fort Salmaneser, and set about building a grand new royal residence, the South-West Palace. The reasons for this project are as usual unclear, and it was interrupted by the king's death.

### 9. Khorsabad

Khorsabad is the one Assyrian capital-city whose location has no obvious practical merit and which was presumably founded as an ideal, ideological statement by a king, Sargon, who had seized the throne for himself and wished to be presented as a unique, universal emperor. The groundplan of the city, roughly square with a citadel on one side and an arsenal on another, is plainly copied from the plan of Nimrud.

The royal palace contained, besides the traditional royal quarters and extra reception suites, additional outer courtyards presumably for soldiers, storage, stabling, and perhaps administrative offices. It was around 50,000 m<sup>2</sup> in area, almost twice the attested size of the North-West Palace at Nimrud. Once again, however, because our information on the North-West Palace and the Central Palace at Nimrud is defective, the changes may have been less dramatic than they appear at first sight. Adjoining the palace was a cluster of temples for important gods; the principal god here was Sin, and he was presumably owner of the

Khorsabad temple-tower. It looks as if the construction of some such temple group with its own temple-tower was an ideological requirement, but the royal palace, which immediately adjoined it, was required for practical purposes and was much bigger.

The royal palace and its associated complex of shrines and temple-tower were even more inaccessible than those at Nimrud, being situated on a raised terrace of their own within the citadel; a neighbouring Nabu Temple was also elevated. Within the citadel, at a lower level, there were four other buildings, with space for a fifth, which the excavators called Residences. Each of these has its own suite equivalent to the royal throneroom, and they constitute our best evidence for secondary state palaces. A single building, Residence Z, which was partly excavated in the outer town, implies that there were many such buildings, but those in the citadel were evidently the most important.

One was Residence L, the palace of the king's brother (Fig. 6). It was some 24,000 m<sup>2</sup> in area, and occupied, if we exclude the royal palace and the temples, about one third of all the remaining space in the citadel. This building, prominently sited on the right side of the entrance to the royal palace, is unique in plan. It seems to include several residential suites around its main domestic inner courtyard, but there are no evident harem quarters attached to them. This could suggest that the building was occupied by royal eunuchs, though it must be emphasized that the excavation was not completed.

On the left side of the entrance to the royal palace

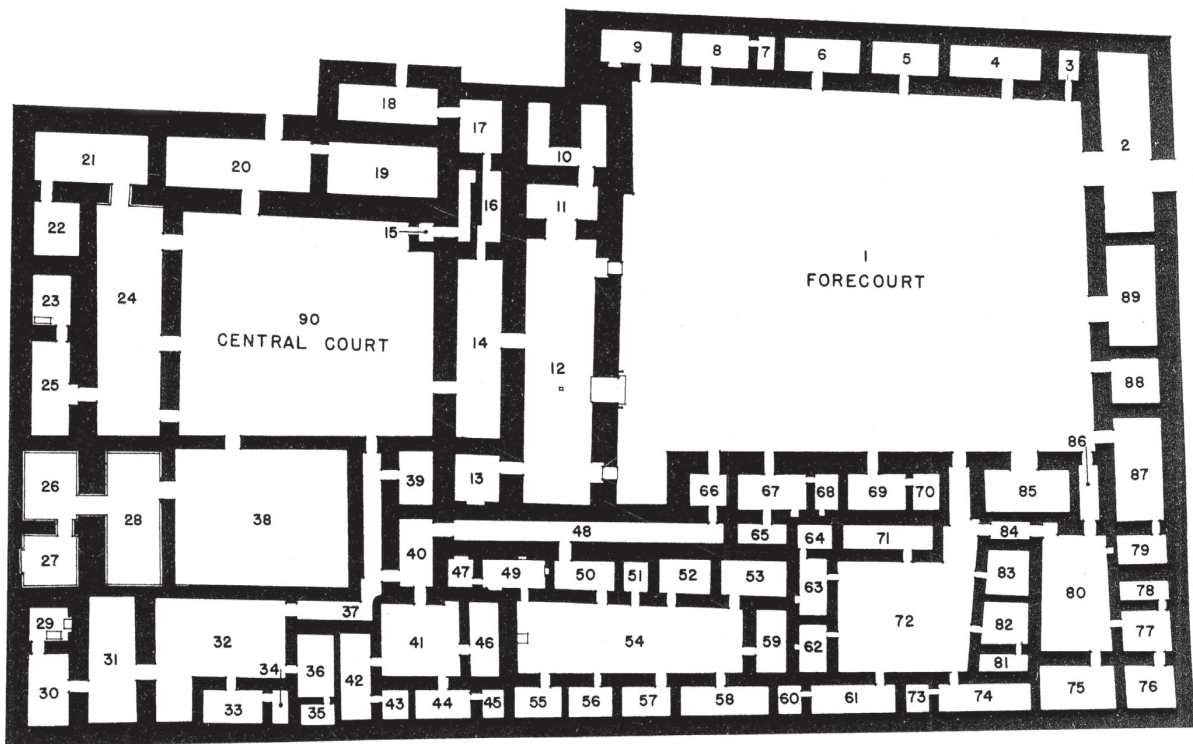


Fig. 7. Khorsabad, Residence K. After LOUD, ALTMAN 1938, Pl. 71.

was Residence K, smaller than Residence L but impressive in other ways (Fig. 7). The principal resident of this building was a male rather than a eunuch, since attached to the domestic inner courtyard was a separate courtyard with smaller rooms around, ideal as a harem. Exceptional items in Residence K included paintings, glazed bricks, column-bases, moulded orthostats, and door-sills which the excavator described as having "some of the most exquisite carving found throughout Dur Sharrukin".<sup>11</sup> The most remarkable feature recorded in the building was a painting in the main reception room. This represented the king in his distinctive royal hat, followed by a bearded man, standing in front of a god (Fig. 8); the natural deduction is that the bearded man was the principal occupant of the palace. He was restored by the excavators, in a famous colour image, as wearing a diadem with pendant bands hanging down behind.<sup>12</sup> This was intelligent speculation, but given the other special features of the building, the restoration may well be right. The diadem would identify the wearer as the crown-prince Sennacherib.

Residence M (Fig. 9), in a corner of the citadel, has three large residential suites facing its domestic inner courtyard, and three possible harem areas, albeit partly restored, in their vicinity; so perhaps this was occu-

ped by male members of the royal family or by male courtiers. Residence J, in contrast (Fig. 10), does not seem to possess quarters suitable for women, as if it was occupied by one or two senior eunuchs. Northeast of the royal palace, still within the citadel, there is space for one more large "residence", two medium, or about four small ones, or buildings of other kinds; a contour plan<sup>13</sup> suggests one building only.

All in all, the Khorsabad citadel provides fine accommodation for the king and some priests, and at a lower level for a select group of high officials. It seems that the principal residents of the minor palaces in the citadel may have been the king's brother, the king's eldest son, three people who were men rather than eunuchs, and one pair of unidentified eunuchs. Observations like this have to remain provisional and in isolation they prove nothing, but they can, by accumulation, contribute to our understanding of the relative status of the king, the crown prince, other male members of the royal family and highly placed eunuchs

<sup>11</sup> LOUD, ALTMAN 1938, 66.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, 85, pls. 88-9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, pl. 68.



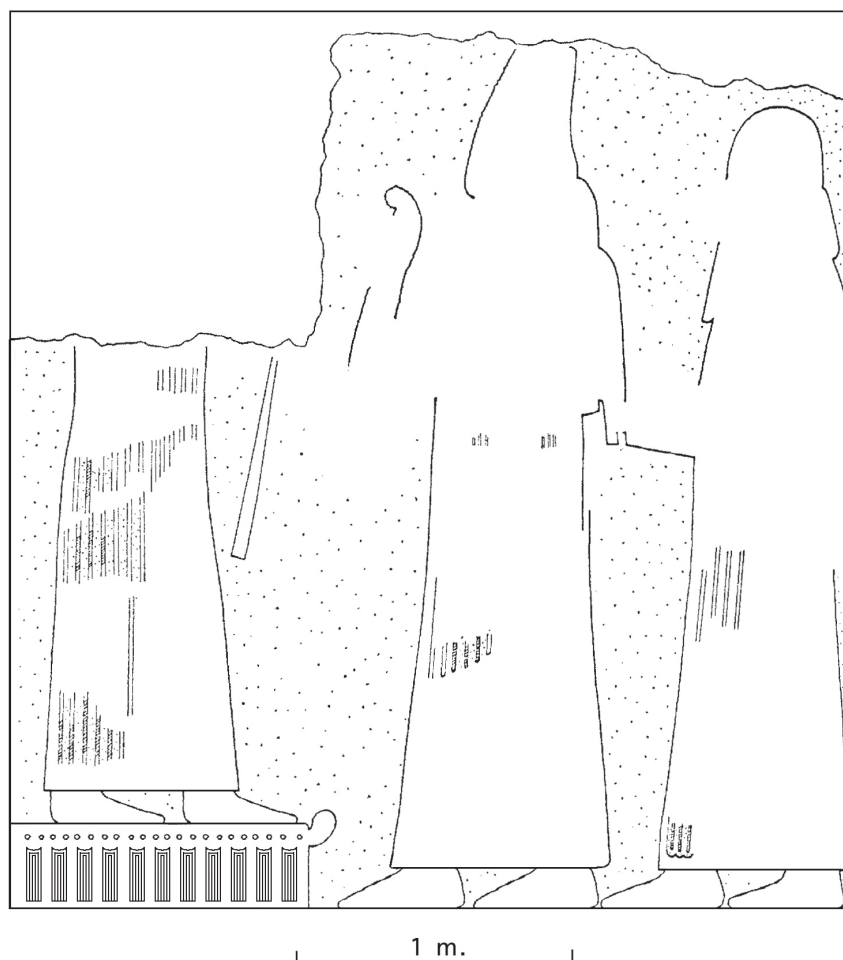


Fig. 8. Khorsabad, Residence K painting. After LOUD, ALTMAN 1938, 85, Fig. 12.

within the Assyrian state. It may be hoped that any plans to reopen the excavations at Khorsabad will include more detailed investigations of relevant groundplans.

#### *Sennacherib's Nineveh*

On Sargon's death his son Sennacherib moved the administrative "capital" of Assyria back to its natural position at Nineveh. What Sennacherib and later his grandson Ashurbanipal achieved at Nineveh was novel and exceptional in many ways. Their architecture too expresses a degree of grandiosity, centrality, and detachment from lower mortals that is far more conspicuous than it had been in the ninth century. The best archaeological evidence lies in Sennacherib's great South-West Palace, which stood on its own high terrace, with a total area in the range of 60,000 m<sup>2</sup>. There is no doubt that the building functioned convention-

ally as an administrative and residential palace, and numerous government documents were found there. Two details of its architecture, however, raise intriguing questions.

Besides the core units of a traditional royal palace present in the groundplan, there is an additional distinctive kind of suite. It incorporates a line of fine doors leading to an innermost central room (Fig. 11), a concept alien to traditional Assyrian architecture where the bent-axis approach is normal. There is only one well-preserved example of this suite in the South-West Palace; it culminates in a room containing a celebrated group of wall-panels representing the capture of the city of Lachish. There are other possible examples, however, and examples of the suite in other seventh-century royal buildings, so that the Lachish example is not unique. What, then, was the purpose of this novel kind of architectural unit?

What other purpose could these new suites have



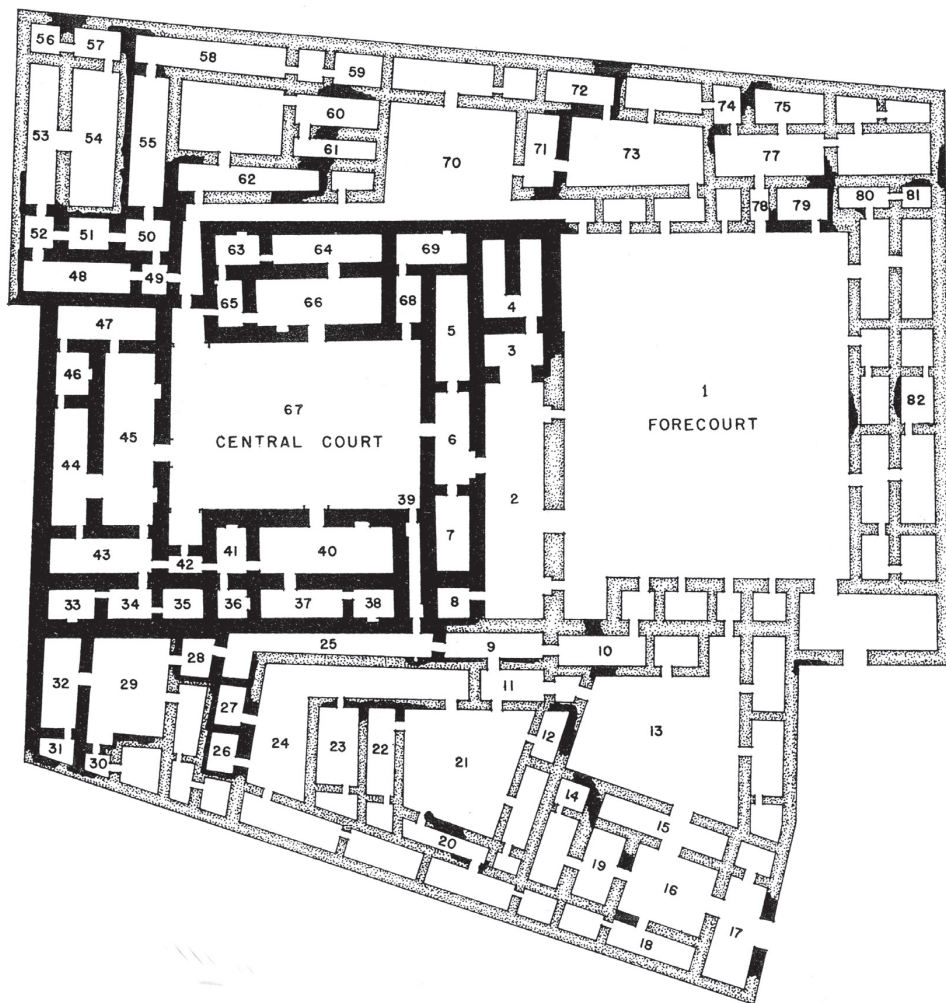


Fig. 9. Khorsabad, Residence M. After LOUD, ALTMAN 1938, Pl. 71.

served if not as places where very senior officials presided? Early scholars, unfamiliar with the standard Assyrian thronerooms, used to describe the Lachish room as Sennacherib's throneroom. This is misleading, but it is understandable, because the importance of the innermost room is unmistakable. Perhaps Sennacherib did sometimes preside there. A complementary explanation, however, or an alternative, is that Sennacherib, in founding his new version of Nineveh, centralized the administration. Instead of allowing high officials such as royal brothers and cousins to occupy their own residences in separate buildings, as at Nimrud and Khorsabad, with limitless opportunities for undesirable activities outside the reach of the king's eye, he brought them all together in a single vast palace. Instead of presiding over their own offices elsewhere, they had to work inside the royal palace in one of these nice new suites.

Another innovation in the South-West Palace at

Nineveh was the magnificence of the harem. This area was securely identified because one of its colossal doorway figures was inscribed with an unprecedented text for Tashmetum-Sharrat, Sennacherib's queen, wishing her long life in this house.<sup>14</sup> While the ground-plan of the harem area is far from clear, the queen had a far grander type of accommodation, with colossal bulls, than any of her predecessors probably enjoyed in earlier palaces. This raises questions over the status of women at the court of Sennacherib and other kings of the period.<sup>15</sup>

How far this kind of domestic evolution was reflected, 50 years later, in the architecture of Ashurbanipal's North Palace at Nineveh awaits further consideration.

<sup>14</sup> BORGER 1988.

<sup>15</sup> READE 1987.

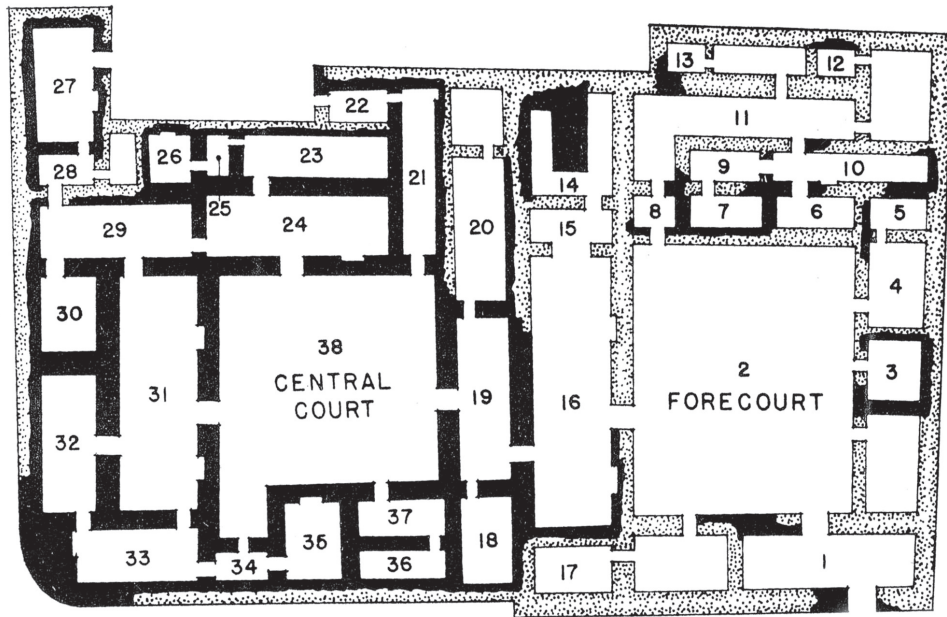


Fig. 10. Khorsabad, Residence J. After LOUD, ALTMAN 1938, Pl. 71.

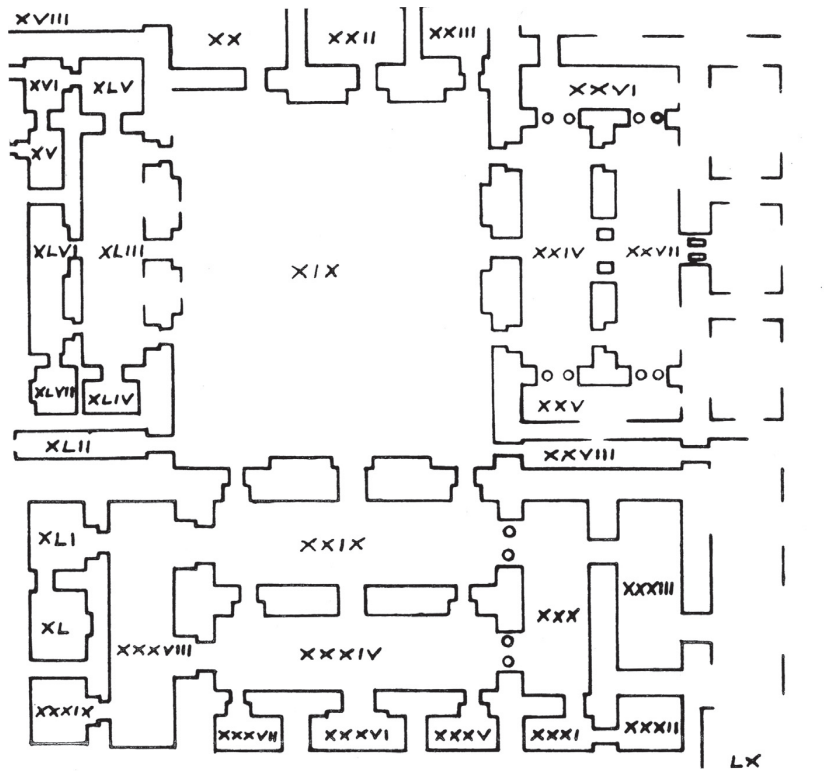


Fig. 11. Nineveh, South-West Palace, detail. Drawn by author.

*Harran*

Harran deserves a mention not only as the short-lived capital of Assyria, after the fall of Nineveh in 612, but also as an exceptionally important cult-centre of the god Sin. The architecture of this city, during the ninth-seventh centuries, constitutes another missing link.

*Conclusion*

We know a great deal about the architecture and contents of some Assyrian public buildings, from

which it is easy to reach general conclusions. At the same time there is a great deal which we do not know, and there are consequently many questions which need to be asked and discussed further. What is plain is that these cities and structures are not just groundplans, but that they can be understood collectively as a visible manifestation of the royal estate, a shadow moving and changing shape beside it. At Ashur the temples were originally far more impressive than the palace, and the king's most meaningful role was as priest-king; Sennacherib instead was an emperor. Ideology, and the logic of political evolution, found practical expression in the architecture.

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