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Creating capitals: The rationale, construction, and function of the imperial capitals of Assyria

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Citation

Politopoulos, A. (2020, November 26). *Creating capitals: The rationale, construction, and function of the imperial capitals of Assyria*. *Archaeological Studies Leiden University*. Leiden University Press (LUP), Leiden. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/138401>

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Issue Date: 2020-11-26

Chapter 1: Creating Capitals – Approaches, Perspectives, and Methodology

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study is concerned with the phenomenon of imperial capital creation and the archaeological study of imperial capital cities. Specifically, this study will focus on the creation of new capital cities in Assyria from the 14th century BCE until the fall of Assyria in 612 BCE. These cities are: Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, Kalḫu (also known as Nimrud), Dur-Šarrukēn (also known as Khorsabad), and Nineveh. The term ‘capital creation’ denotes the development of a monumental capital either in a new location or through the profound transformation of a pre-existing settlement. I will argue that this development is a practice directly connected to state and empire building processes in world history.

The term ‘capital city’ has been used widely in relation to modern states and broadly refers to a city that functions as the seat of the government and as the administrative center of a country. Capital cities are complicated entities which vary greatly in their nature (e.g. Hall 2006; Vale 2008). Oskar Spate (1942, 622) offered an influential definition of a capital as: “*the place wherein the political authority of a territorial unit is concentrated, it is the seat of the legislature, the headquarters of the executive, exercising a higher or lower degree of supervision over local administration according to the structure of government is highly centralized or federal*”. Capital cities are often, although not necessarily, the most dominant cities of their respective state both in political and economic terms. However, the present study is primarily concerned with capital cities in antiquity, when some parts of this definition do not apply (e.g. as the seat of the legislature, or federal governments). This study defines capital cities of antiquity as: *the political, administrative and ideological centers of their respective states or empires, often containing the primary residence/palace of a king.*

Capital cities were often intentionally created, from antiquity to recent history. Examples from recent history come from all over the world and include the redevelopment of already existing settlements (e.g. Athens; Budapest; The Hague), as well as the creation of completely new planned cities (e.g. Washington DC; Brasilia; Canberra; Astana) (Vale 2006; Minkenberg 2014b).

The first attestations of capital creation come from states and empires of the Ancient Near East. Starting from the Early Bronze Age, with the creation of the city of Akkad by Sargon (ca. 2350 BCE), this process continued and expanded in the Late Bronze Age with the development of major states and empires. This period also witnessed the creation of numerous large capital cities like Amarna in Egypt, the Hittite capital Hattuša, and Dūr-Kurigalzu, the city which replaced Babylon as the capital of the Kassite kingdom. However, the practice of capital creation is most systematically present in the Assyrian empire, which is the first empire to repeatedly relocate its capital: from the city of Aššur to Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, back to Aššur, then changing from Aššur to Kalḫu, then Dur-Šarrukēn, and finally to Nineveh. Thus, it presents a perfect case study for the study of the phenomenon in antiquity.

Despite the temporal and geographical pervasiveness of capital creation, it is a rather understudied topic, especially regarding antiquity. To this day, there is no comprehensive study that deals with ancient capital creation as a general topic, or in relation to a specific empire. Therefore, this study addresses two main issues: 1) the comparative study of Assyrian capitals in the context of capital creation, and 2) the concept of capital creation in antiquity.

Primarily, this study will produce the first comprehensive and comparative study of Assyrian capital cities. Each Assyrian capital has been thoroughly studied individually. Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, the only new capital of the Middle Assyrian

period (see Appendix 1 and below for details on chronology), has seen a limited number of excavation seasons, mainly in its citadel space, as well as two survey seasons (Eickhoff 1985; Dittmann *et al.* 1988; Dittmann 1989; 1997a; Schmidt 1999; Beuger 2011; Dittmann 2011; Dittmann forthcoming). Only a handful of studies have attempted to explore the reasons behind the creation of this new capital, and most have linked it with the personality and initiative of the king Tukultī-Ninurta I (ca. 1233-1197 BCE) (see for example Machinist 1978, 526; Eickhoff 1985, 49; Kuhrt 1995, 357; Dolce 1997).

The same holds true for the Neo Assyrian capitals. Kalḫu has been thoroughly excavated, at least in terms of its citadel spaces, which include palaces, temples, and large houses (see for example the publications of Mallowan 1966; Meuszyński 1981; Oates and Oates 2001). A brief survey took place in its large lower town (Fiorina 2011). Dur-Šarrukēn was excavated during the 19th (Place 1867) and early 20th century (Loud, Frankfort and Jacobsen 1936; Loud and Altman 1938) but has seen virtually no archaeological work since. Once again, its namesake king, Sargon II (721-705 BCE), is seen as the driving force behind its construction (see for example Battini 1998; 2000). Finally, the city of Nineveh has seen thorough archaeological and historical work, albeit once again focusing on its citadel spaces, temples, and palaces (see for example the overviews by Scott and MacGinnes 1990; Russell 1991; Reade 2002b). This city's creation has been directly linked to the initiative of Sennacherib (704-681 BCE), the king under whom it became the capital.

When investigating Assyrian capitals, one thing becomes apparent: the continuous focus of research on elite spaces (see for example the architectural overview of Russell 2017). Extensive excavations have taken place on the citadel area of each of these capitals, but research into their surrounding urban spaces is limited or even non-existent. At the same time, historical and textual studies have focused mostly on the publication of royal inscriptions and other elite documents (see for example Grayson 1987; 1991; 1996), creating an exclusively top down perspective of the construction of each capital. As a result, we are faced with the problem that previous interpretations of Assyrian capital creation were based primarily on elite spaces, and with kings as the prime agents of their creation. Notwithstanding

the impressive size of the capitals, and their impact on the administration and wider culture in Assyria (see for example Novák 2004; Cancik-Kirschbaum; Radner 2011), we know very little about how they were constructed, the reasons behind their relocation, and how these capitals functioned.

In addition, very few comparative studies have tried to create a broader understanding of capital creation in Assyria (Joffe 1998; Novák 1999 – looking at city creation in general; Radner 2011 focuses on Kalḫu and Dur-Šarrukēn; Harmanşah 2012; Thomason 2016 only discusses Neo Assyrian capitals; Carlson 2017 examines only Aššur and Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta). Most of these studies, while offering a comparative perspective, are limited only to some of the capitals, or look at city creation in general and do not focus on capital creation as a distinct phenomenon. They also suffer from the same issue as the study of the individual capitals: they offer only the perspective of the elite (be it through architecture or propagandistic texts), and the cities are seen as projects of individual kings. Furthermore, only the study of Joffe (1998) attempted to model the concept of capital creation in antiquity. That study provided a more coherent perspective on the subject through the concept of *disembedded capitals*, which will be thoroughly analyzed in this chapter. No attempt has been made so far to investigate capital creation as a political, ideological, and administrative strategy in Assyria.

This study addresses this fascinating but understudied issue and offers a synthetic approach that aims to model the creation of capitals in Assyria. This will be done through a comparative and holistic investigation of archaeological, historical, and geographical datasets. The comparative study of Assyrian capitals will provide important insights into the administration of the core of the Assyrian empire, its ability to mobilize, manage, and exploit large populations for infrastructural projects, as well as the ideological changes that happened throughout the 700 years of its existence.

Secondly, in doing so, this study will develop an approach to ancient capital creation that can be applied also to other instances of capital creation. In particular, this approach expands the explanatory framework underlying capital creation. In current scholarship, newly created capitals are often connected to the ruler under whom they were created, following textual sources about their construction. This study takes a different perspective and interprets capital creation more holistically, and as a process

connected to state and imperial formation, aligning more with some comparative studies on modern capital creation (e.g. Minkenberg 2014a).

Moving beyond the focus of singular explanations, I will investigate the process of capital creation in its different stages. This first requires an investigation of the historical conditions during the time of creation, then focusing on the process of construction and its social implications. Finally, it interrogates the function, role, and urban environment of these new capitals. Through the examination of archaeological evidence, this study aims to understand and explain the phenomenon of capital creation and its connection to imperial formation, control, and consolidation. For this, Assyria provides a unique case study, as it was the first empire in history to fully embrace and engage with the strategy of capital creation *repeatedly*.

To create the framework of this study, the main question I will be addressing is: *how can we explain the creation of capitals in Assyria?* This is a holistic question that includes the reasons and motivations behind the creation of new capitals, the construction process of those cities, and the function of these new centers. As such, the main question can be subdivided into three research questions, which form the backbone of this study:

- 1) *Why? The **rationale** behind the creation of new capitals*
- 2) *How? The **construction** process of the cities*
- 3) *What? The **function** and nature of capital cities (administrative, economic, urban, etc.)*

These questions will be applied to successive episodes of capital creation in Assyria in order to identify differences and similarities between capitals, and to produce different concepts for the examination and explanation of capital creation. This is a comparative study, in which every capital will be first studied in turn, followed by a comparative chapter, in which the results of each case study will be brought together.

1.1.1 ABOUT THIS BOOK

The creation of new capital cities is a recurring phenomenon in the history of states and empires, from antiquity to modern times. Up to this day, there is no comprehensive research on the newly created capitals of ancient states and empires. The

only exceptions are the studies by Novák (1999) and Carlson (2017), both of which are much broader however, and deal with city creation in Mesopotamia in general.

The first chapter of the present study outlines the key concepts and theoretical framework of this research. I will discuss the phenomenon of capital creation and how it is connected with statecraft (i.e. the creation and development of states). I will introduce and analyze theories of this phenomenon and discuss the role of ruling agents in creating capitals. Finally, the methodological approach will be presented, together with a detailed analysis of the research questions posed in the book.

In chapter 2, the focus shifts to Assyria. Firstly, I will discuss the reasons that make it the most appropriate case study for this research. Then I will offer a short discussion on Assyrian construction projects and how they relate to capital creation. I will also introduce Aššur, the traditional capital of Assyria, and discuss its implications for the discussion of capital creation. Chapters 3 to 6 will be dedicated to each of Assyria's capital cities, paying special attention to the characteristics of each city. The analysis of these capitals will reveal the breadth of possible dynamics behind capital creation, which makes Assyria one of the most interesting subjects to study imperial capital creation with. Subsequently I will discuss the characteristics of imperial capital creation as a phenomenon. Specifically, I examine how these capitals functioned and what the study of ancient capital creation can contribute to the broader study of capitals, as well as city creation in general.

The first city to be analyzed in chapter 3 is the Middle Assyrian capital of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, which is one of the most extraordinary cases of Assyrian capitals. Its proximity to Aššur, the preexisting capital of Assyria, is unique and the rectangular structure as well as the massive size are attested for the first time. Finally, its quick demise, which goes hand in hand with the decline of the Middle Assyrian empire, is particularly interesting. In this chapter I will also explore the connection between imperial formation and its connection to capital creation. The purpose is to disassociate the reasons of the city's construction from the biography of Tukultī-Ninurta (1243-1207 BCE), and to embed it in the general imperial process.

Chapter 4 concerns the first Neo Assyrian capital, Kalḫu. The connection between capital creation and empire building will be investigated further. The

creation of Kalḫu has often been described as the attempt of Aššurnāṣirpal (883-859 BCE) to distance himself from existing elites in the city of Aššur. This idea will be discussed in relation to other historical factors and archaeological data. This chapter also addresses an important aspect of capital creation, namely the creation of new capital as a way to shift the geographical focus of a state.

Chapter 5 deals with the creation of Dur-Šarrukēn. In this chapter I will also explore the connection between capital creation and imperial consolidation. An important part of the discussion will examine the administrative and military changes that occurred in the empire from the reigns of Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727 BCE) to that of Sargon II (721-705 BCE). It discusses how these factors might have played a role in the creation of Dur-Šarrukēn. The large textual dataset regarding the construction of the city provides a glimpse into the day-to-day issues of building a new city. Connecting it with the available archaeological evidence will provide a much better understanding of the organization and labor required when creating a new capital.

The last capital city creation under consideration is the relocation of the capital from Dur-Šarrukēn to Nineveh. This immediately followed the death of Sargon and is the focus of chapter 6. In this chapter I will address the possible reasons behind the relocation as well as the choice of Nineveh as the new location. An important part of the discussion here is the long occupation history of Nineveh, and how new capitals were created by transforming pre-existing settlements and urban centers. The fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE also marks the fall of the Assyrian empire.

The discussion presented in chapter 7 compares all of the capital cities. Each research question will be addressed separately, by comparing the concepts and ideas generated by this study. The broader issues arising from the study of capital creation in Assyria will be discussed first. Then I will discuss the questions of *why/how/what*. By identifying the reasons behind capital creation, I will compare the models presented, as well as demonstrate how each capital compares to the other. In the investigation of the construction process, there will be an assessment of the labor force required for the creation of city walls. This example will be used as a way to assess and compare the labor and economic investment required for the realization of a new capital. The different functions of each capital will be analyzed

in this section as well. In addition, gaps in our current state of knowledge and research agendas will be brought forward, and I propose perspectives for future research on capital creation.

The conclusions of this book contextualize the process of Assyrian capital creation within the wider context of the Ancient Near East. Finally, I propose avenues of embedding capital creation in antiquity in broader discussions of capital creation in the past, present, and future.

1.2 CLASSIFYING CITIES

As a term, a capital city has two components: it is a *city*, and it is defined as the *capital* of a given state and/or empire. Although these terms seem self-evident, their exact definitions require further definition in terms of past urban environments. When discussing a capital city, therefore, we need to describe what kind of *capital* it is, as well as the urban nature of that particular site (i.e. where it fits in the city taxonomy).

Previous studies have tried to classify modern and ancient cities and urban environments in different ways. Geographical, environmental, and economic sciences have been concerned with the typology of modern cities extensively, both in relation to their economic and physical growth, as well as their future developments (see for example Scott 2014; Rozenblat and Pumain 2018). In particular, urban anthropologists have investigated the idea of taxonomy and typology of western and non-western cities for the past and present (e.g. Fox 1977; Low 1999; Pardo and Prato 2012a). Of great interest to the present study is the foundational and still relevant study by Fox (1977), which dealt with the concept of the city in a much more holistic manner, looking at the structure of a city both in isolation, and at the social and cultural settings in which these cities have developed. It was Fox who thoroughly established the fact that the study of cities should be contextualized in their local, but also in their global system, and that historical analysis is a crucial parameter for this.

Since the 1970s, a lot of work in urban anthropology has been done regarding the categorization and comparison of cities (e.g. Monge 2010; Krase 2012). While these comparative models are useful, some scholars have stressed the importance of understanding the diversity of cities as individual and unique cases, especially modern cities; these

are affected by global forces and by local economic, social, and political conditions (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011; Pardo and Prato 2012b, 97-98). Despite these subsequent theoretical developments, I propose that the work by Fox remains relevant and applicable also to ancient contexts, as I will describe below.

This study is concerned with the study of capital cities, and as such, it is crucial to define cities in archaeological terms. Archaeology has dealt with cities, their creation, and their function for well over a century now, making it one of the most thoroughly analyzed topics. In a recent overview of the study of urbanism in archaeology, Osborne (2015, 8) suggested that we have two competing schools of thought: i) cities as analytical objects to be studied with quantitative techniques, and ii) cities as constellations of socially significant symbols. Osborne's approach is an interesting one, especially for this study, as he also deals with Assyrian capitals. Osborne follows the earlier work of Michael Smith, who suggested that cities should be viewed as phenomena in which certain settlements exercise political, religious, and economic influence over surrounding regions (Smith 2007). In Osborne's view, this "functional approach" to urbanism is the most applicable one, as it bridges the two aforementioned frameworks (Osborne 2015, 8-9). He used this approach to study the magnitude of power that Assyrian capitals exercised over their surrounding regions, by investigating the spread and size of the settlements around these capitals (Osborne 2015, 15-16). His results suggest that the creation of new capitals was done by centralized agents, who invested in tailoring the surrounding landscape with state-designed settlement patterns. While this functional approach is useful to investigate the impact Assyrian capitals had on their immediate landscape, and further support the deportation regime of Assyria, it only tells part of the story. I propose that Assyrian capitals had a much wider impact that surpassed their immediate surroundings.

Beyond the relationship between cities and their surrounding hinterland, or the ways in which cities exercised power, I suggest that it is important to understand how they functioned, what their primary role was, and to identify their main institutional, urban and social aspects, following the model proposed by Fox (1977, 32). While some cities can be characterized as primarily administrative cities (i.e. hosting mainly administrative institutions), others can function as primarily industrial centers

(i.e. hosting a robust production infrastructure and housing a large labor force). There can be cities that encompass all social and economic classes, or cities intended mainly for elite populations. It is, therefore, important to create a basic taxonomy of ancient cities. This taxonomy does not need to be absolute, or without variations. It also should not act as a checklist of criteria that all cities need to fit. It should rather act as a guiding principle for the investigation of diverse urban settlements.

Fox further organized his typology on the basis of two axes: the extent of state power and the extent of urban economic autonomy. The first axis assesses the relation between the urban environments and the degree of power and control a state could exercise over them. It ranges from weak, segmentary states, to strong bureaucratic states (Fox 1977, 32-33). The second axis assesses the degree of economic dependency of a city on outside sources, and consequently, the type of economic organization most dominant in the city. It ranges from autonomous to dependent (Fox 1977, 33-34; for a broader discussion on the evolution of urban anthropology and the contribution of Fox see Pardo and Prato 2012b). Fox's model is a very useful analytical tool for understanding the role and function of cities, because of its diverse approach to cities and city development. However, it must be noted that Fox based his model on cities within the spatial and chronological limit between medieval Europe to imperial Britain. While the cultural roles he defined are still applicable, some of the types of cities he proposed are not necessarily found further back in time. As such, and in order to use a model similar to what Fox proposed, it is necessary to create an expanded typology of cities that would fit the Ancient Near East, incorporating further works related to that period.

For the Ancient Near East, Elizabeth Stone (2008) has advanced the most thorough discussion on the typology of cities. Stone argued for a variability in interpreting the development in cities and city states. According to her, there is not one fundamental path towards city development. Rather, city states can have different trajectories of development based on their social organizations. In particular, she argued that cities can develop both hierarchical as well as heterarchical social systems of organization (Stone 1997; 1999). Through the study of different urban environments, she suggests that it is possible to identify the relation between the organization of a city (its urban type) and the sociopolitical sphere

(its social structure) (Stone 2008, 163). To illustrate her argument, she used two main examples, the city of Maškan-Šapir (ca. 1900-1720 BCE) in southern Mesopotamia, and the city of Ayanis (7th century BCE) in Urartu.

Maškan-Šapir was a planned city much like the capital cities studied here, and incorporated what Stone suggests were the dominant ideas about urban planning of the time (Stone 2008, 148). An example of this is the placement of the temple away from the palace and separated from the rest of the city by a canal, creating a clear division between the religious center and the rest of the city (Stone 2008, 150). Stone proposes a number of axes that cities can be assessed on, related to the social power relations. The first of these is the inclusivity of city, which ranges from inclusionary cities, which house all elements (i.e. classes) of society, to exclusionary cities, also termed elite enclaves. Another axis assesses the integration of a city, ranging from cities with neighborhoods clearly divided between the rich and the poor, to cities where the populations are economically mixed. I will draw upon the methods and conclusions of both Fox and Stone to propose a typology for studying ancient cities, which combines social and economic aspects of each city.

Based on the theoretical frameworks presented above, I propose the following three primary types for identifying the urban nature of ancient cities. It should be noted here that, as Fox also suggested, this taxonomy of cities is not exhaustive, and a city might include more types. However, I characterize each city based on what can be identified as its primary urban function. The proposed typology is:

- i. Elite enclaves: cities that are predominantly or exclusively occupied by members of the elite of a state/empire. These include religious centers, as religious centers often are occupied by members of the religious elite.
- ii. Administrative centers: residential cities whose primary functions are related to the administration of a state/empire.
- iii. Production centers: cities that have predominantly agricultural or industrial functions.

Following Fox, one of the main axes to assess these will be their urban economy, in terms of its degree of economic dependency on other cities/states.

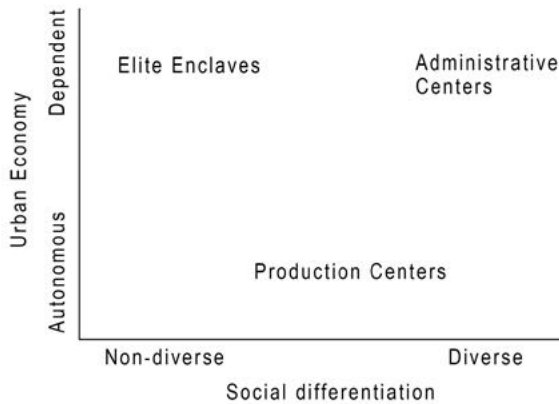


Figure 1: Primary urban types assessed on the basis of urban economy and social differentiation.

The second axis, following part of Stone's model, assesses the degree of social differentiation in a city. The proposed city types and axes are illustrated in Figure 1.

These two axes are relevant to the study of Assyrian capitals for a number of reasons. Traditionally, Assyrian capitals were seen as the administrative centers of the empire. However, it needs to be asked whether this was always their primary role. For example, Gilibert argued that the city of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta was a capital founded primarily in relation to agricultural production rather than serving as an administrative center (Gilibert 2008). Such hypotheses will be assessed and evaluated in this study.

The social stratum of Assyrian capitals will also be important to consider. As most of our knowledge about Assyrian capitals is restricted to the elite citadel areas, they often have been presented as "empty cities". Despite being large urban creations, this approach has created a fragmentary and misleading picture of these cities. This is exemplified in a recent study by Russell (2017) where, in describing Assyrian cities, he focuses exclusively on the temples, palaces, and citadel, and ignores the houses of common people, or craft production facilities. In order to fully interpret these capital cities, it is necessary to incorporate evidence from their so-called lower cities.

Finally, extensive hinterland restructuring, and large irrigation projects always accompanied Assyrian capital creation to ensure some degree of urban economic autonomy. It must be questioned, however, whether this economic autonomy was actually achieved. After assessing every Assyrian capital city and investigating their differences or similarities, I will discuss the type of cities Assyrian capitals can be categorized as. This will be done by also looking at parallels of other Assyrian cities.

1.3 CAPITAL CREATION AS A FORM OF STATECRAFT

In the definition of capital creation provided above, I mentioned that the creation or relocation of capitals is often connected to state or empire building processes. This section discusses this relationship in more detail. States have taken various forms over the course of history, including city states, kingdoms (Nichols and Charlton 1997; Hansen 2000; Smith 2003a), imperial states (Doyle 1986), and modern nation-states (Barrow 1993; Cudworth *et al.* 2007). The differences and similarities between the different types of states fall beyond the scope of the present study. However, out of these possible forms, Assyria is clearly an imperial state. A state is broadly defined as a territory occupied by a population, under some form of hierarchically organized government which maintains sovereignty and effective control over the population. The process of capital creation is attested in several different types of states and in both modern nations states and ancient empires (for the definition of empire see section 1.4). I will create an overview of capital creation in the past and present and assess whether it is possible to incorporate models from contemporary research on modern capital creation to ancient case studies. These models of modern and ancient capital creation will form the theoretical framework for this study. Based on this I will work towards a new approach to Assyrian capital creation and assess its applicability for other cultures and time periods.

Modern nation states

In modern nation states, the creation of capitals has been linked with the emergence and building of those states, and the creation of their national identity (Hall 1997; Wolfgang 2003; Daum and Mauch 2005; Gordon 2006; Vale 2008; 2014; Minkenber 2014a).

Defining the “nation-state” itself is a difficult task, as it consists of multiple terms that require definition. For the purposes of this study, the nation state is understood as a sovereign politico-military entity with a distinct geographical territory, the population of which manifests, to a greater or lesser degree, a sense of national identity (after Opello and Rosow 1999, 3). A significant part of the discussion on modern nation-state capital creation is connected with the development of national identities and ideologies, and how these are expressed through architecture and architectural developments (see for example Nemes 2010; Kirk 2014). In addition, the changing nature of modern economics had a crucial impact on capital creation as well as on the study of the phenomenon itself (see for example Abbott, 1999, 20f; 2005, 109). Several scholars highlight that in Europe, capitals emerged as part and parcel of state and nation building (see for example Schatz 2004, 114; Kirk 2014, 156). Especially the capitals created during early modernity, such as Berlin (Geyer 2005; Asendorf 2014), are linked to the emergence of early modern European statecraft, as well as the rationalization and standardization of processes of control, like taxation, which greatly enhanced the economic capacity of states (Scott 1998, 3). This redevelopment of states, in addition to the influx of resources and the ideological changes towards nationalism, allowed for the creation of new capital.

An interesting illustration of this phenomenon comes from the study *Capital Cities in the Aftermath of Empires* by Makaš and Conley (2010). That study identifies a connection between the creation of capital cities of Central and Southeastern European nation states, and the historical, ideological and identity building processes and developments in those states during their early stages. Their overview of capital creation in early 20th century Europe illustrates the extent of the phenomenon by examining 14 different cities (Athens, Belgrade, Bucharest, Cetinje, Sofia, Tirana, Ankara, Budapest, Prague, Bratislava, Krakow and Warsaw, Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Sarajevo). In the study of nation-state developments in Europe, the creation of capitals was always connected with the building of national identities and was used as a strategy to consolidate the emergence or creation of states.

A similar case can be made for the relocation of capital cities of states in Africa, Asia, and Latin America during the so-called post-colonial period

(Hall 1993). During colonial rule, the capitals of these states were often located on the coast or at strategic locations along trade routes, making it easier for the colonial rulers to control the movement of resources, goods, and slaves.

However, once colonial rule ended, most of those nations moved their capital cities inland or to more central locations (e.g. Islamabad, Gaborone, Lilongwe, Belmopan, Dodoma, Abuja, Yamoussoukro). This phenomenon is widespread and happened within about 30 years after the end of the official colonial rule. The use of central territories in the nation-building process has been highlighted by Smith, who suggests that “*the homeland is not just the setting of the national dream, but a major protagonist, and its natural features take on historical significance for the people*” (Smith 1991, 65). The creation of post-colonial capitals in inland territories of states in Africa, Asia, and America are examples of this development, and the connection between capital creation and state formation (see e.g. Vale 2006, 17). From the aforementioned cases of capital creations in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America, we can extrapolate models of modern capital creation. In these cases, there is a direct connection with the birth of nation states and the building of the corresponding national identities. In Europe, when empires were being dismantled and new states emerged, one of the strategies used to create those states was to build new capitals. Similarly, when the colonial system was falling, the nature of the states on different continents changed significantly, but along the same general lines: from directly dependent to and ruled by colonial forces, to politically independent.

It is important to note here that these instances of capital creation are not isolated phenomena but happen as part of a development of a new/different kind of state. It is also significant that the new post-colonial capitals also share another feature: they are in central geographical locations for their respective states. Thus, it can be argued that their creation was related to a shift towards the central area of these states, and away from the colonial centers located at their periphery. Finally, their creation was used as a strategy to bolster the development of a new, national identity.

An interesting recent instant of capital creation is the construction of Astana¹ in 1998. The capital

of Kazakhstan was relocated from Almaty, a predominantly Kazakh region, to Astana, a predominantly non-Kazakh region. It has been argued that this was a conscious choice, to strengthen national sovereignty within Kazakhstan, to shift the existing allegiances among powerful tribes, and to distance itself from its Soviet past (Wolfel 2002, 488). Schatz has also argued that in addition to nation building, the creation of Astana was a way of marginalizing specific power holders in favor of new power holders related to the president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev (Schatz 2004, 123-128). With the creation of a new capital came a massive institutional reorganization of the state, an aspect also related to nation building.

The case of Astana differs from what occurred in the capitals of Europe in the early 20th century and the post-colonial capitals of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Firstly, it does not belong to a wider regional trend of capital creation in post-USSR states (e.g. Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan did not change their capitals), but is a rather isolated phenomenon of its period. However, Kazakhstan ranks among the world’s top 15 oil producing countries and possesses 3% of global oil reserves (Vakulchuk and Overland 2018, 143). This makes it the only country in the area with easy access to resources, which might in part explain why no other country engaged with the rather costly project of creating a new capital.

Another aspect that is different, is that the new capital did not consolidate a change in the nature of the state, such as from a colonial state to an independent nation state. Rather, this strategy was used to strengthen the power of specific groups or power holders at the expense of others, and to exercise control and stabilize the otherwise relatively politically unstable area of Kazakhstan.

It is also worth noting here that the creation of Astana was a major labor project, which provided jobs to a large portion of the population. Such projects can strengthen the position of (often authoritarian) governments in the eyes of the broader population. Similar arguments, related to antiquity, have been put forward regarding the construction of the pyramids (Wynn 2008). The construction of Astana had similar effects. As such, Astana highlights two different paradigms of capital creation: a way to bolster the position of a government to the wider population, and to undermine traditional elites to strengthen the position of new power holders.

¹ Astana was renamed Nur-Sultan in March 2019 in honor of the departing Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev. This text retained the naming Astana, as it is addressing the creation of the capital.

The latter strategy can also be described as one of disembeddedness, which has been a crucial paradigm for the study of ancient capital cities (Joffe 1998) and might illustrate possible parallels between modern and ancient instances of capital creation.

Vale (2008, 14) identified and discussed a number of examples of capital creation and the choice of location for modern nation states. This overview was summarized in three main categories of capital cities in nation states: i) evolved capitals, ii) evolved capitals renewed, and iii) designed capitals (Vale 2008). Evolved capitals, in his definition, are capitals with a long and complex history of being capital cities. By evolved capitals renewed, he defines cities which were capitals more than once. Finally, designed capitals are capitals that were architecturally planned to become capital cities. The latter two types align with what I define as capital creation.

The cases of capital creation presented above highlight the connection between the creation of new capitals with the process of statecraft in modern nation states, as well as the complexity and multiplicity of capital cities (see also Hall 2006). Finally, the debate around modern capital creation heavily revolves around regime building and the differences between capital creation in democratic and non-democratic regimes (see in particular Mikenberg 2014c, 2-12). Although the example of Astana was mentioned above, the debate extends to several related topics, such as pre- and post-World War I nation states (see for example Daum and Mauch 2005), the concept of power, architecture and the political use of space in liberal and illiberal regimes.

Looking beyond modernity, capital creation occurred in antiquity from the Akkadian period onwards (ca. 2350 BCE). How then do these past instances of capital creation compare to modern examples? What are the strategies of capital creation used in the past? How can archaeology help us investigate capital creation in antiquity in greater detail? I argue that in antiquity capital creation is linked to imperial state formation, and that Assyria presents an excellent case to illustrate this point.

Capital creation in antiquity

One of the best-known examples of capital creation in antiquity is the creation of Amarna, the city constructed during the reign of Pharaoh Akhenaten (1351-1334 BCE) (Kemp 2012). During his reign, the

Pharaoh, together with his wife and with the support of the military, instigated a significant religious change in Egypt revolving around the worship of the god Aten. This change was consolidated with the creation of a new capital, as a place wherein the worship of the new religion would take place and served as a residence for the Pharaoh and court. This change has often been interpreted as centered on religious matters (Redford 1984).

While this instance of capital creation was executed within an already existing state, the relocation attempted to consolidate a significant ideological and religious change. In that sense, creating capital cities can be connected with statecraft, and with the creation and consolidation of a new social order. The creation of this capital was linked to the desire of one group to distance itself from existing centers in order to advance its own political, ideological, and religious agendas.

A different case of capital creation involves the creation of ceremonial capital cities. These ceremonial capitals are created either for the commemoration of an event (usually victories over important enemies) or to be used for ideological and ceremonial purposes. Their creation is initiated from a will to make an ideological statement.

One example is Persepolis, a city created during the Achaemenid empire (550-330 BCE). The main capital of the Persian empire remained Susa, and Persepolis was modelled largely after the palace of Darius at Susa (Garthwaite 2005, 50; Perrot 2013, 423). While Persepolis never functioned as the residence of the Achaemenid kings, it did act as a ceremonial center for the collection of tribute from the provinces of the empire. Persepolis was used to express and consolidate imperial ideology through large scale festivals and ceremonial procession. It is interesting to note here that the capital was created during the reign of Darius I (550-486 BCE), in a period of significant territorial and economic growth of Persia. This period is associated with a widespread construction boom, visible at Susa, Babylon, and Pasargadae (Cuyler Young 1988, 105-111).

The durability of capitals created in imperial states can be illustrated by looking at some examples of imperial capitals through time. A well-known example is the creation of Constantinople. Constantinople was created as the new capital of the Roman empire during the reign of the Roman emperor Constantine I in 330 CE (Harris 2007). The new capital, while it took its name from the founding emperor, was also

known for at least the first few centuries as Nova Roma (New Rome), Second Rome, Eastern Rome, or Roma Constantinopolitana (Georgacas 1947). This probably happened to signify both the legitimacy of the new city as a capital (i.e. to be compared with Rome itself), as well as to give a sense of continuity in the empire, despite the shift towards the east.

An important factor in the relocation of the capital from Rome to Constantinople was the shift of the empire's core from the west to the east (Ball 2016). The foundation was in part an administrative choice, as Rome was very far away from the turbulent eastern frontiers that were important at this time. However, it was also related to the consolidation of the Christian church, a religious movement that had obtained significant power through its connection with Constantine. The case of Constantinople shows that capital relocation can happen on the basis of administrative and geographical reasons, as well as the emergence of new power holders or social conditions (Korolija Fontana-Giusti 2012).

Capital creation appears to be tied to imperial states across the globe, and some examples of this come from the historical capitals of China. Throughout Chinese history, each dynasty, or in some cases each emperor, relocated the capital to a location for which they secured its political allegiance (Cotterell 2008). As this practice continued for thousands of years, it has resulted in a long list of capital cities. Some of the most well-known Chinese capitals include Nanjing, Luoyang, Xi'an, and Beijing, the current capital.

Concluding, it is evident that capital creation is a recurring phenomenon in antiquity and is closely tied to empires. It can be attested in different periods and in different regions, and it can serve widely different purposes. What seems to be the common denominator is that all the presented examples come from imperial states. Egypt, Persia, Rome, and China all represent past empires with vast territories under their control and access to large quantities of resources.

Ancient and Modern Capitals Together

From this overview of instances of capital creation, it is clear that this phenomenon occurs in two types of states: in antiquity in imperial states and in modernity in nation states. For the latter, this is largely to be expected, as nation states have been the dominant type of state for the last 100 years, and every nation state also has a capital city. After the so-called end of empires in the early 20th century, no other type

of state has emerged, even though it can be argued that some modern nation states can be described as imperial polities (see for example Bernbeck 2010).

In antiquity, the situation is only slightly different. Capital creation happens only in states with a considerable territorial extent that facilitates capital relocation. As such, we should not expect capital relocation in city-states. Further, capital creation happens in states which have the economic means to perform such an action, and these are predominantly empires.

In terms of capital creation, there is also an important similarity between how it occurs in modern nation states and imperial states of the past. The relocation of capitals is a process connected to significant changes in states. These changes can be related to: the nature of a state (i.e. the change from colonial to nation states); power relations (e.g. role of power holders in creating Astana and Chinese capitals); identity (e.g. the change from European empires to modern nation states); ideology and religion (e.g. Persepolis and Amarna). In addition, it has been shown that capital creation can happen as an isolated event (e.g. Rome to Constantinople in antiquity; the creation of Astana in modern nation states), or as part of a broader trend (e.g. European nation states in modern times; capitals of China in antiquity).

Despite the similarities, we should not consider ancient and modern cases of capital creations interchangeable since imperial and nation states have different political and economic structures. In addition, there are types of capitals which are specific to ancient states. For example, modern nation states do not have ceremonial capitals, as the payment of tribute to a ruler/king does not fit within the ideology of nation states. As such, comparisons between ancient and modern instances of capital creations should be done carefully and with awareness of the differences between the two periods.

1.3.1 DISEMBEDDED CAPITALS

I will now discuss the concept of disembedded capitals mentioned above, as it is one of the central proposals for how capital creation has traditionally been assessed. The investigation of ancient capital creation has proceeded, almost exclusively, from a historical or political perspective. The only archaeological discussion concerned with capital creation as a phenomenon is that of *disembedded capitals*. It was first applied to a Near Eastern context

by Joffe (1998). As a concept however, it dates back to 1976, when the term was first introduced by Richard Blanton. His research focused on the ancient Zapotec capital of Monte Alban, which he thoroughly investigated and mapped (Blanton 1978). To characterize the geographical position and the role of Monte Alban within the ancient Valley of Oaxaca, he described it as a disembedded capital (Blanton 1976a). His definition of the term was broadly explained in a subsequent paper the same year (1976b), which dealt with the anthropological studies of cities.

He based his approach on the central place theory of geography, which seeks to explain the number, size, and location of human settlements in an urban system. He suggested that in cases where there are spatially extended economies (i.e. locations with multiple settlements invested in the economic network of the area), there could be multiple highest-ranking economic centers, rather than a primate one. Therefore, in a location/state with multiple economic centers, the administrative center should be a separate settlement and be smaller than its major economic centers.

In that regard, he proposed that *“there are situations in which one would expect the highest-order decision-making institution to be spatially “disembedded” from the remainder of the central-place hierarchy”* (Blanton 1976b, 257). An apt example of this is Washington, D.C. in the United States, which, at the time of its elevation to a capital, was not an important economic center (Abbot 1999; 2005). Another interesting example here, albeit not used by Blanton, is the city of The Hague. The city acts as the seat of the government and administration of the Netherlands and the presence of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has led to it being described as the “legal capital of the world” (Krieken and McKay 2005). At the same time, it is not the capital of the Netherlands, which is Amsterdam, nor is it the most dominant economic center of the country. Blanton outlines three categories of disembedded capitals: i) capital centers (permanent but neutrally located centers) ii) roving palaces (high-ranking elites moving from center to center), and iii) temporary capitals (the creation of new capitals by every new ruler).

It should be noted that Blanton’s basis for categorization is primarily economic. It essentially suggests that there should be a compromise amongst economic centers in order to maintain a balance of

power. However, based on the examples of capital creation given in the previous section, it is clear that this is not always the case. In many cases, capitals are created exactly to shift the balance of power towards one elite group at the expense of others. Blanton also does not take into account other factors for the choice of new capitals, such as their geographical location, or the history of the location of the new capitals.

Blanton’s identification of Monte Alban as a disembedded capital was also criticized, mainly due to his choice of comparative case studies (Willey 1979; Santley 1980). However, his critics did not object to the idea of disembedded capitals per se. Willey (1979) carried out a comparative study with other ancient examples and suggested that, the concept is inapplicable in ancient contexts (such as Monte Alban or the Ancient Near East), but it could be useful in modern societies.

Joffe (1998) was the first to adopt and re-evaluate the term in an Ancient Near Eastern context. He defines disembedded capitals as *“urban sites founded de novo and designed to supplant existing patterns of authority and administration [...] Disembedded capitals were typically founded by new elites [...] as part of innovations designed to simultaneously undercut competing factions and create new patterns of allegiance and authority. [...] In an evolutionary sense disembedded capitals were short-lived phenomena which tended to create long term societal problems”* (Joffe 1998, 549). Furthermore, he provides a number of expectations that may serve to identify the presence of a disembedded capital (Joffe 1998, 551):

1. *A site being newly founded, or greatly expanded in a particular period or phase.*
2. *Evidence that a site has been founded or expanded by a new sociopolitical or ethnic group, such as changes in pottery and other material culture, architecture, foodways, or administrative practices.*
3. *A significant shift in regional settlement patterns. This may entail either a decline in, or expansion of, rural settlement and similar changes in middle-level settlement.*
4. *Evidence of centralized administrative activities, such as writing, sealing, storage or redistribution.*
5. *Evidence of a sudden appearance or an increase in flows of specialized materials into a site.*

6. *The presence of military equipment and personnel within the new site.*
7. *Sudden shifts in the evidence for political legitimation, such as new iconographic techniques, a new symbolic vocabulary, or the distinctive combination of new and old elements.*
8. *The association of religious and palatial institutions within a new site.*
9. *A non-organic urban pattern, in which residential, administrative, and royal elements are rigidly planned and segregated.*

These expectations, however, are somewhat inconsistent with his primer definition in some points. For example, while Joffe described disembedded capitals as sites founded *de novo*, his point one given above also includes sites that have been greatly expanded. This incorporation is crucial for the study of capital creation because it includes another large subset of the phenomenon: the significant redesign or expansion of already existing urban settlements. Joffe also suggested that evidence for a disembedded capital can consist of centralized administrative activities such as writing, sealing, storage, or redistribution. However, such traits can be found in any major urban center. A similar argument can be made regarding the shifts in evidence for political legitimation.

Some of these issues are, indeed, recognized by Joffe, who acknowledged that several points of his list can be used to identify any city, and not necessarily a capital city. Joffe therefore suggested to look at how many of his listed expectations are present. However, he does not provide a threshold of how many of these factors are needed to qualify a site as a disembedded capital. This is a common issue in checklist approaches, and one that is not solved in this case.

Continuing to interrogate his own arguments, Joffe suggested at some point that even the term “disembedded” was a misnomer (Joffe 1998, 552). He suggested that the only way to understand those capital cities is not by their disembeddedness, but how embedded they were in existing matrices of politics and economics. Also problematic in my opinion is the idea that capitals are created exclusively when elites change. Joffe suggested that on the basis of this argument we should always expect distinct changes in the archaeological horizon related to the new elites. Such an argument

can be criticized on two grounds: i) material culture does not always change with the rise of new elites, and ii) it is possible to have new capitals without a change in the ruling elites (see also Yoffee 2005).

In a recent study on Late Bronze Age capitals in Mesopotamia, Carlson briefly discussed the concept of disembedded capitals (Carlson 2017, 270-272). He suggested that none of the cases he investigated (Al Untaş-Napiriša, Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, and Dūr-Kurigalzu) fit all of the criteria of the term as proposed by Joffe. Further, Carlson suggested that all three cities were actually embedded in their respective regional systems.

I will argue that in order to explain capital creation, one has to investigate the historical circumstances within which a new capital is created. In that sense, capital cities can never be disembedded. The fact that they might be “disembedded” geographically (meaning they are constructed away from the center of a state) or used as a way to undermine specific power groups, can be explained by investigating the conditions in which the city was created.

1.3.2 REFRAMING CAPITAL CREATION IN CONTEXT

I will now address another concept related to the explanation and understanding of capital creation, which in many ways is an extension of the discussion on disembedded capitals: the role of the ruler. The concept of disembedded capitals implies that elites/rulers used capital creation as a strategy to undermine the power of competing elites. Yet, to what extent should attention be given exclusively to the elites or the ruler under whom capital creation took place? In other words, how central is the agency of the individual ruler/king/dictator in the decision to create a new capital? What other parameters or agencies could be at play when a capital is created? This question will come up repeatedly in the study of Assyrian capital cities below. Several existing explanations for the creation of new Assyrian capitals relate the conception and realization of new capitals to charismatic personalities of specific kings (see for example Dolce 1997; Carlson 2017). Each city has been defined as the city of the “king-creator” (e.g. Dur-Šarrukēn as the city of Sargon, and Nineveh as the city of Sennacherib). The attribution of a newly created capital solely to the personality or initiative of a king/ruler, is what I define as a *regal-centric* approach.

Regal-centric approaches have been commonly used to explain capital creation both in modern nation-state contexts, as well as in states and empires of the past. An example in modern history comes from Malawi and the movement of capital from Zomba to Lilongwe. In her paper on the topic, Potts (1985, 188) argues that the most important factor in the relocation of the capital was the vision of President Banda and his charismatic personality. She considers that the regional planning needs of Malawi was not the primary objective of the shift to the new capital but probably a *post-hoc* rationalization. For Potts the “unique decision-making” power of Banda makes the construction a project of personal prestige rather than a rational element to restructure the country’s space economy.

The view of the ruler as the main agent behind the creation of capitals, even in modern states, has been tacitly assumed by researchers, journalists, and popular science. Astana, which was discussed above, has often been treated as the product of Nursultan Nazarbayev, president of Kazakhstan. A recent article on the online version of *The Guardian* argued that the creation of Astana was the creation of a “*big man*” who tried to show off power and wealth (Wainwright 2017). In this article, Adil Nurmakov is quoted: “*Astana is a city in the making, but it is not making itself [...] It is not being allowed to develop itself, because everything is directed by the one and only architect of Astana*” (Wainwright 2017).

According to other scholars (Wolfel 2002; Schatz 2004), however, there are other factors at play in Kazakhstan besides the personality of Nazarbayev, such as the location of the new capital, and the need for a large labor project. Geographical and political reasons are also related to this case of capital relocation, such as the reorganization of the state and the marginalization of previous power holders. Thus, focusing exclusively on the characteristics or personality of a ruler to explain capital creation is overly simplistic. As Schatz puts it “*to focus on the idiosyncrasies of character may obscure common themes; outcomes should not be reduced to rulers’ preferences*” (Schatz 2004, 117, 137).

Regal-centric narratives have been popular in the study of ancient capital cities, which can be attributed to the bias created by the available textual evidence. Often, the only sources for the creation of ancient capitals are propagandistic texts from governments/rulers, which praise the initiative of the king under

whom the capital creation took place. This is exactly the situation for the creation of Assyrian capitals, the description of which mainly comes from the royal inscriptions of Assyrian kings.

Such interpretations, which focus on a single actor rather than the broader historical conditions, often fail to take into account other factors, such as contemporary politics, regional planning, ideology, and state development. While several examples were given above of modern capital creation, it must be stressed that this phenomenon does not only occur in authoritarian regimes. There are several examples of democratic regimes (e.g. Brazil, Canada, Australia) that chose to relocate their capitals (Minkenberg 2014b; 2014c). Within those systems of government there was no single actor who initiated or dictated the creation of a capital, although there are certainly agents that play more or less significant roles. In some of these cases there is no shift in ruling elites to justify a “disembedded” explanation in relation to governing bodies. As such, the existence of single (charismatic) rulers or governmental changes is not a necessary condition for capital creation.

I am not suggesting that agents have no role in capital creation. The approach proposed in this study follows the crucial contribution by Sewell (2005) on the role of the agent within social and, more importantly, historical structures. Sewell suggested that historical agency is not opposed to, but constituent of the historical structure. It is this particular dynamism between social relations, historical transformations, and historical actors that informs the new approach taken in this study.

Sewell concluded that there is a continuous and dynamic interaction and interdependency between human agency and the historical process that humans live within (Sewell 2005, 143). Human agents are continuously influenced by the historical conditions of their lifetime, and at the same time, historical conditions are influenced by the actions of the agents. In the present study, I take a similar approach to the role of the ruler in the study of capital creation. Rulers, together with every other contemporary agent, engage in historical processes such as capital creation. Each actor’s agency arises from the degree of knowledge and understanding of their historical conditions, and the way they apply this knowledge within their context (Sewell 2005, 143).

In my opinion, the focus and frame of research regarding capital creation should rather be on the examination of the dynamic context (political,

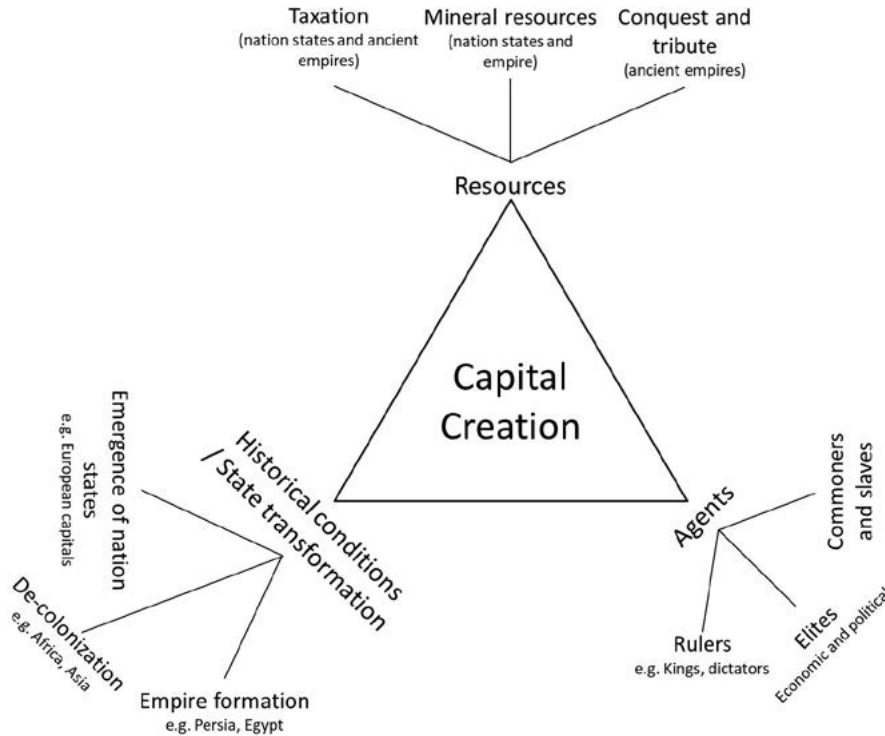


Figure 2: General model for the three main factors related to capital creation.

ideological, religious) in which the capital creation took place. This includes the ongoing changes in a given political system, the construction process of the capital, and its urban planning and subsequent fabric. The agency of important actors during those periods is part of this examination. Historical research provides the information on the actors that participated in the creation of new capitals and the actions taken during capital creation. This information is important but not sufficient to explain capital creation.

Based on the arguments and concepts presented so far, I argue for a synthetic approach to capital creation. I propose a model that sees capital creation as the result of three main factors: i) state transformation / historical conditions, ii) historical agents, and iii) means and resources. This model can be applied to multiple contexts and is illustrated in Figure 2.

The model seeks to explain capital creation by a series of criteria that have to be met for a new capital to be initiated or realized. For example, key agents are always present to initiate or drive the project of a new capital. These key agents always

act within particular historical context and their actions and ideas are shaped and influenced by it. We can only understand their initiatives by investigating the historical conditions that facilitated the creation of a new capital. Finally, new capitals are massive infrastructural projects that require a large economic investment for their realization. Investigating the source of the resources used or exploited for the creation of new capitals is crucial if we want to have a clear picture as to why and how a new capital was created.

When it comes to capital cities in antiquity, I suggest that comparative archaeological studies can help us move away from regal-centric approaches and towards a more comprehensive understanding of capital creation, as proposed in the above model. Historical research can provide us with the historical context, which mostly emerges from the perspective of the rulers. What historical research lacks is an understanding of the material manifestation of capitals that can provide answers for a number of others issues like: urban organization of a capital city, advantages of location in relation to resources or in

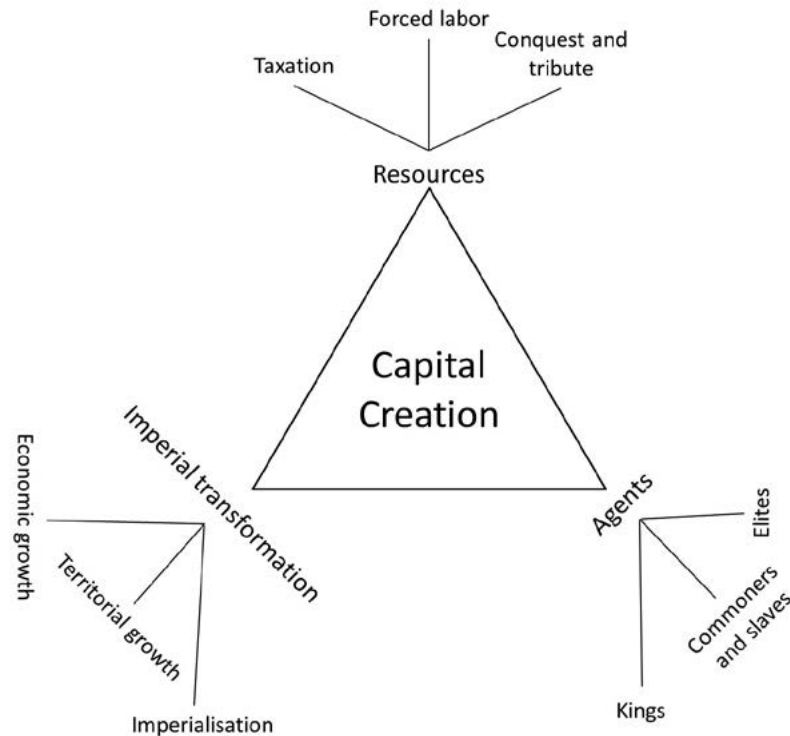


Figure 3: Capital creation in antiquity based on the model proposed in this study.

connection to trade routes, the type(s) of population living in a capital city, and the kinds of functions a capital city has (administrative, industrial etc.). These can be identified through archaeological research and, combined with the textual evidence, provide a holistic view of capital creation (Figure 3).

1.4 CAPITAL CREATION AND THE STUDY OF EMPIRES

In the previous sections I discussed the connection of capital creation to statecraft. This research focuses on the phenomenon of capital creation in empires, namely the Assyrian empire. Earlier, in the definition of state used in this dissertation (section 1.3), I suggested that an integral part of a state is the maintenance of sovereignty and the effective control over a territory and population. Empires have often been described as expansive states, which incorporate other states through some form of annexation (direct conquest, economic dependency, etc.) (Burbank and Cooper 2010).

In this study I will be using Doyle's (1986) definition of an empire as "*a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political entity. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social or cultural dependence*". As such, an empire is understood as a political entity which exercises direct or indirect control over other states. As discussed earlier, capital creation is associated with processes of transformation. A state expanding its territorial control over other states can be such a transformation. This idea will be further explored and investigated in the case studies of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta (chapter 3) and Kalḫu (chapter 4). Several of the examples presented in the previous section dealt with the creation of capitals in empires. Imperial capital cities are important for our understanding of the ideological and administrative aspects of an empire (Smith and Montiel 2001). They are often located at the core of empires, are the seat of the king/emperor, the headquarters of the army and the center of administration. They are a large complex urban center with material proclamations

of imperial ideology such as militarism and the glorification of the king or the state (Smith and Montiel 2001, 248-49; Matthews 2003, 134-142). While this perspective focuses on the size of the capitals and the manifestations of imperial ideology therein, the archaeological study of imperial capitals can also inform us on the life and living conditions of the broader population. In this comparative research of Assyrian capitals, I will investigate the process of capital creation within an imperial framework. I want to identify whether (and if so, how) the process of creating new capitals is connected with broader transformations of the Assyrian state, such as the transformation of the Assyrian state into an empire. I will also study the administrative and territorial shifts in the Neo Assyrian empire and identify possible relations with the creation of new capitals. In the following chapter I will discuss the selection of Assyrian capitals as the case study for this research. I will briefly introduce Assyria within its historical context and discuss the concept of building projects and the creation of cities in the Assyrian empire. I will also dedicate space to the historical and archaeological exploration of Aššur as the traditional capital of the Assyrian empire.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The study of capital creation in Assyria so far has been mainly textual (see e.g. Parpola 1995; Radner 2011). Archaeologists have rarely been concerned with the reasons behind the construction of the capitals they excavated. A study of capital creation that only re-examines the same regal-centric and textual dataset would, therefore, not yield any new significant results.

Archaeology can significantly contribute to a comparative analysis of capital creation and, combined with our current knowledge of textual evidence, bring the material manifestations of capital cities to the forefront of the discussion. Firstly, investigating the archaeological remains of cities allows the verification of claims made in contemporary royal inscriptions and propagandistic texts. More importantly, however, archaeological data provide insights on a more human level, such as the living quarters of cities, rarely referred to in textual evidence. Such data will allow for a much more comprehensive and holistic comparison of the newly created capitals of Assyria.

The type of datasets used in this study (Table 1) vary in their quality and quantity in each case study. For example, there are (translated) royal inscriptions for all the kings under whom a capital was made, with the exception of Sargon II. In addition, not every Assyrian capital has been excavated to the same degree. The data and different types of analyses, presented in the table below, will form the methodological toolkit of this study.

Data	Why?	How?	What?
Historical records and textual evidence	✓	✓	✓
Geographic analysis	✓	✓	✓
Excavation data		✓	✓
Architectural analysis		✓	✓
Iconographic analysis		✓	
Labor investment analysis		✓	
Satellite imagery	✓		✓
Urban zoning			✓

Table 1: Types of data and analyses used in this study.

By historical records, I mean historical accounts presented in royal inscriptions, as well as textual and historical research for the relevant period of this study (e.g. Freydank 1974; 2005; Harrak, 1987; Grayson 1987; 1991; 1992a; 1992b; 1996; Frahm 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; Jakob 2017). Historical records will be used to study and create the framework within which capital creation took place. Textual evidence will be used to investigate buildings and materials which are not archaeologically traceable and to understand the perspective of key agents during capital creation. I will discuss the published textual evidence that explicitly refer to the construction of the capitals. This includes two main categories of textual data: i) royal inscriptions and other propagandistic texts mentioning the construction of a capital, and ii) administrative correspondence and other available texts related to the construction of capitals (see for example the corpus on the construction of Dur-Šarrukēn investigated by

Parpola 1995). From the texts, I will be extracting available figures (e.g. number of workers, population numbers, types and amounts of materials, etc.), and then compare them with assessments of labor investment analysis which I will make on the basis of archaeological evidence. Textual evidence also provides information on buildings that have not been excavated or located but can thus be included in this study. Finally, through royal inscriptions we learn about the types of materials used in elite buildings that have not remained.

An important parameter of the study of capital creation is the choice of geographic location. The location of a new city could potentially be a key reason for the relocation of a capital (e.g. more favorable location, closer to resources, or closer to an important region), and heavily influence the process of construction (e.g. landscape constraints, access to materials, connection to trade routes). Firstly, I will investigate the geographical location of each capital in relation to:

1. other important centers of the empire
2. access to resources, trade routes and waterways
3. proximity to regions of interest such as borders

Further, I will use satellite imagery, and in particular the satellite images available through CORONA² and Google Earth (Goossens *et al.* 2006; Cultaro *et al.* 2007; Ur 2013), for the identification of features which are otherwise not visible or not excavated such as:

1. canal systems
2. walls
3. landscape features that influence the construction of a city (e.g. mounds)

In this study, I will make a comparison between the different aspects and features of each location in terms of proximity to water sources, available agricultural hinterland, natural defenses, and existing landscape features such as citadel mounds. Through this comparison I will be able to show differences and similarities in the choice of location and geographical characteristics of Assyrian capitals.

This study is primarily archaeological and, therefore, the excavation datasets of each capital will be central. Access to the research area during the realization of this study was not possible, making a hands-on approach to the architecture and materials unfeasible. Research of the archaeological remains of the capitals will be done through the study of all the published primary excavation data. I will discuss the history of research and the different teams that excavated each capital, with specific attention paid to the architectural remains. I will be comparing the different types of buildings found in each capital, the evolution of architecture, and the materials used for their construction.

One of the core questions of this study is how these capitals were created. For that purpose, I will first investigate textual and iconographic evidence to extrapolate any information regarding the construction process. However, such evidence is often incomplete or provide a top-down view of the construction. These evidence, therefore, will be corroborated with a labor investment taskwork analysis. On the basis of textual and archaeological evidence, I will evaluate the number of workers needed to create these capitals given the known period of construction. Assessing labor investment can provide us with insights into a number of crucial aspects of capital creation. It relates to the economic investment of the Assyrian empire since these people had to be fed and housed. Additionally, it can reveal the intensity of building processes (i.e. small number of workers over long periods or vice versa, or a large labor force over a long period of time), the managing and administrative abilities of the Assyrian state, and more.

For this research I will be following the methodology (taskwork analysis) proposed by Richardson (2015), who assessed the labor investment for the construction of the wall of Larsa. Although there have been relatively few studies regarding labor investment for mudbrick constructions (see for example Mallowan 1966; Oates 1990; Heimpel 2009), Richardson's holistic research approach includes several parameters in the process of mudbrick construction. This approach examines all the phases of creating and laying bricks for wall construction, and focuses specifically on city wall construction, which is also a focus of the present study. I have developed a modified version of his analysis, to better fit the reality of the Assyrian period.

2 <http://corona.cast.uark.edu>

The labor investment in the construction of the city wall of each city is crucial to this study. The reasons for the choice of this dataset are: i) the existence of city walls in each capital offers a good candidate for a comparative study; ii) there is sufficient information on the size and height of the walls, allowing for a study on the basis of their total materials; iii) they are relatively simple constructions constructed in a similar manner, unlike more elaborate buildings; iv) they are made with the same materials (stone and mudbrick), and the same mudbrick size was used in every construction. For all these reasons, assessing labor in the construction of walls provides at this point the most straightforward case study for architectural analysis.

The taskwork analysis will be implemented through a comparative study of published archaeological data from the city walls of Assyrian capitals. The focus will be on Kalḫu, Dur-Šarrukēn and Nineveh, as these are the only newly constructed capitals that provide sufficient data for such an analysis. The existence of a wall in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta will be problematized in the corresponding chapter.

Finally, I will be looking at the urban zoning of Assyrian capitals to determine aspects of their function. By urban zoning, I mean the spatial division of cities into zones or districts of different function. These zones could include neighborhoods, districts with specific functions (e.g. industrial, military, etc.), or open spaces. Research on the urban zoning of ancient cities has seen a rise recently (e.g. Keith 2003; Garrioch and Peel 2006; Stone 2007). Smith (2010) has provided a comprehensive review on the archaeological study of neighborhoods and districts in ancient cities. Urban zoning analysis provides useful insights into two main crucial factors for the study of cities: i) the function(s) of a city and ii) the living experience of a city. Regarding the function, the existence and size of different types of zones in a city can give important information on the type of activities taking place there. In regard to the living experience, understanding the urban zoning of a city can provide key insights into its social web, such as whether there is an upper class or mixed population, or whether there were exclusively rich or exclusively poor neighborhoods.

In Assyria in particular, there are two notable examples of the study of urban zoning: Dūr-Katlimmu (Kühne 2013) and Tušhan (Matney *et al.* 2017). The site of Dūr-Katlimmu/Tell Sheikh Hamad, located in the area of the Lower Ḥabur

valley, served as a supra-regional administrative center for the western part of the Assyrian empire already from the Middle Assyrian period (Kühne 2015, 61). Its 8th and 7th century BCE phase, known as Lower Town II, has been studied in terms of its urban layout to demonstrate the population composition of the site. A particular focus has been on the presence of large elite residences as the main type of building, and the type of activities that took place in the city during that period. The results of this study will be further explored in chapters 4 and 7.

Looking into urban zoning will help generate information on the local function and space organization of the centers of the empire. At the same time, it will help shift the perspective of Assyrian capitals as strictly elite spaces. In this study I will investigate if this model can be feasibly applied to Assyrian capital cities in terms of data availability. If not, I will investigate what kind of work is still required to create a model for the urban zoning of Assyrian cities.

Tušhan, also known as Ziyaret Tepe, is located in the upper Tigris river valley and served as a provincial capital mainly during the Neo Assyrian period. Various parts of the city have been excavated (Matney *et al.* 2017), and its urban composition presents a strikingly different case of urban zoning than at Dūr-Katlimmu. At Tušhan, in addition to the elite residences, there are production facilities, military installations, storage facilities, and agricultural processing facilities. The urban layout of Tušhan will be further explored in chapter 7 as comparative evidence for the urban zoning of Assyrian capitals.

To study the urban zoning, I will be using two main archaeological datasets. Firstly, surveys conducted in Assyrian capitals, and specifically the Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta survey (Dittmann 1990; 1997a; 1997b), the Kalḫu survey (Fiorina 2008; 2011), and the Nineveh survey (Lumsden 1991; 2000; Stronach and Lumsden 1992, 228). Further, I will be looking at satellite images that have the potential to provide us with information such as road networks within a city (see in particular Ur 2013). Despite the limited available data, I will attempt to create a framework for understanding urban zoning in Assyrian capitals and propose ways to advance this particular type of study.

The structure of this study will follow a particular order and will be formed around the three main research questions. Each capital will have a chapter

dedicated to its research and analysis, in which I will look into the history of research, published data, textual evidence, geographical location, etc. In each chapter I will work towards answering the why, how, and what for each capital's creation. The last chapter will provide the comparative analysis, in which the results of the previous chapters will be put together in a thorough examination of similarities and differences between each city, emerging patterns of capital creation, and possible research avenues for the future.