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

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## Chapter 5: Dur-Šarrukēn – A Short-lived Capital

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The creation of Dur-Šarrukēn in the last two decades of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE marks a shift in the phenomenon of capital creation in Assyria. In the previous two cases I argued in favor of associating the creation of capitals with the transition of Assyria from a state into an empire. In this case, Dur-Šarrukēn was created at a moment when the empire was already well established. However, it remains of crucial importance to understand the historical context within which the creation of the new capital took place. This requires an investigation of both the contemporary conditions of Sargon's reign, as well as the broader historical events that led the empire to the growth it experienced in those decades. In this chapter I will use the available evidence to answer the three main questions of this study: why Dur-Šarrukēn was created, how it was constructed, and what its function was.

#### 5.1.1 HISTORY OF RESEARCH AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Dur-Šarrukēn, also known today as Khorsabad, is located in the plain of Jebel Basiqa centuries (Figure 26) and has witnessed intense archaeological excavations during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>. The city is walled, has a roughly square shape and two citadel mounds, a walled main citadel mound, and a secondary citadel mound (Palace F).

The site was first investigated by Paul-Émile Botta between 1842-1844 and was mistakenly associated with Nineveh. His work was continued and expanded by Victor Place between 1852-1855 (Place 1867), with special focus given to the area of the citadel and the main palace. The Oriental Institute of Chicago worked on the site for seven years (1928-1935), focusing on one of the gates (Gate 7), the citadel, the palace and the palace's temple complex, as

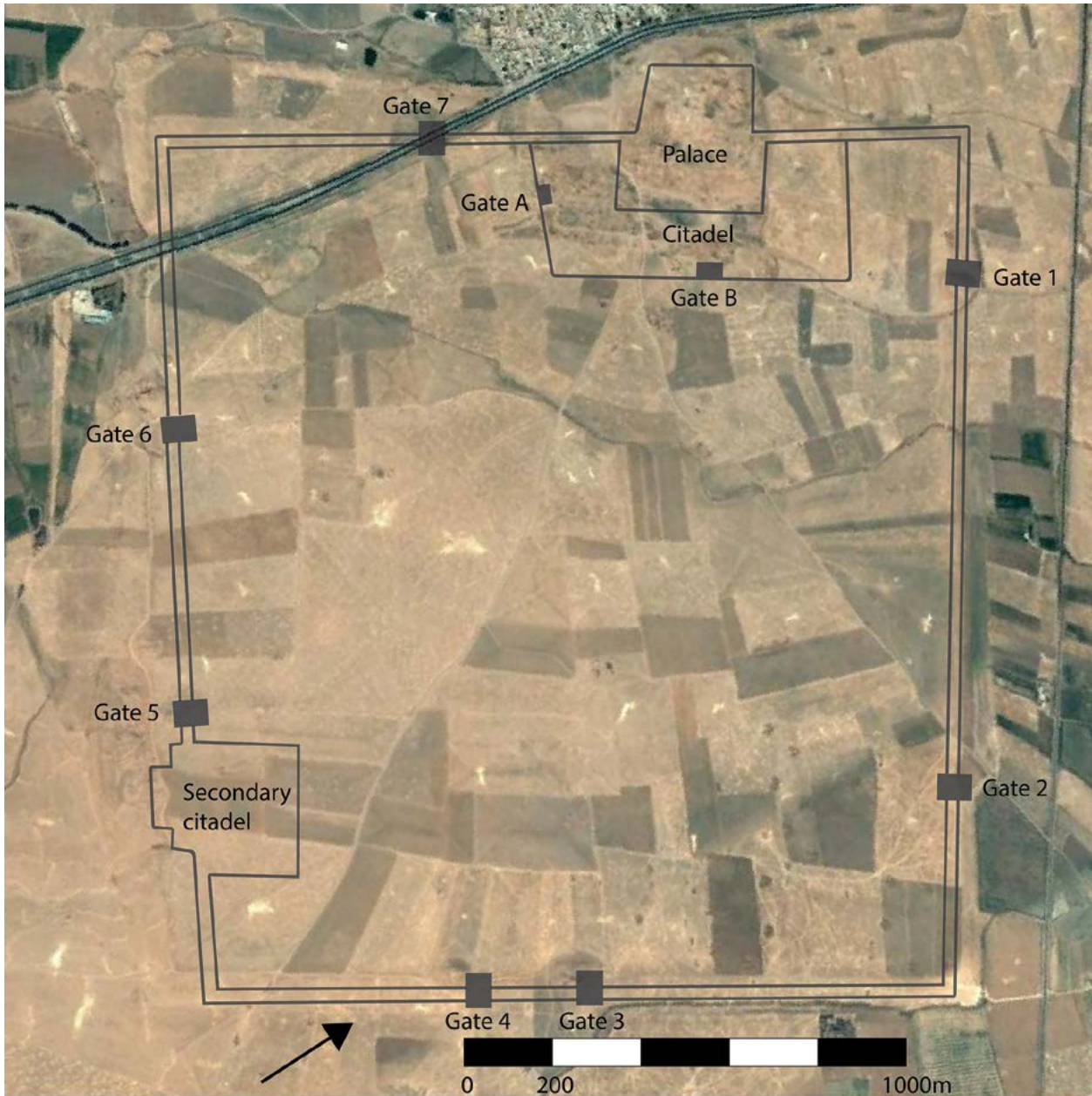
well as the secondary citadel (Loud, Frankfort and Jacobsen 1936; Loud and Altman 1938). Finally, in 1957, the Iraqi Department of Antiquities excavated the site of the Sibitti temple (Safar 1957). The focus of past archaeological research has been on the main citadel area of the city (see Figure 29 and 32), on the secondary citadel, and only one building of the lower city has been partially excavated.

The palace of Dur-Šarrukēn is the most exhaustively excavated complex in the city. Several research projects have discussed its plan in detail (Place 1867; Loud and Altman 1938, 54-56). A very comprehensive study by David Kertai recently re-evaluated these previous studies (2015, 83-120).

The secondary citadel of the city was located almost in the corner of the southern wall (see Figure 34) and probably contained only one building. Only a small part of it has been excavated, (the throneroom and its surrounding rooms), and most of its restoration is speculative (Loud and Altman 1938, 76, pl. 69).

The architectural remains of the two citadels played an important role in our wider understanding of Assyrian architecture, art, and ideology. It is, however, important to realize that the data from the excavations of Dur-Šarrukēn were produced many decades or in some cases more than a century ago. Additionally, no new excavations have been carried out recently to correct or re-evaluate the initial dataset or some of the interpretations of the original excavators. Several scholars have worked on the published material, especially focusing on the palaces and art (e.g. Russell 1999, 100-123; Albenda 2003; Kertai 2015), but research related to the archaeological remains of the city has been relatively stagnant for decades.

Furthermore, unlike Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta and Kalḫu, no comprehensive survey of the lower city of Dur-Šarrukēn has been undertaken. The absence of investigation in the lower city means that Dur-Šarrukēn's urban fabric is almost completely



**Figure 26:** Dur-Šarrukēn today (image from Google Earth, produced by the author).

unknown. This has created a decisively elitist view of the city in scholarship, even compared to Assyria's other capital cities. Dur-Šarrukēn is seen exclusively as the city of Sargon (see for example Battini 1998), since it was finished just a couple of years before his death and abandoned immediately after his 'tragic' death.

## 5.2 PAVING THE WAY – FROM DECLINE TO TIGLATH-PILESER III

While the historical context of Sargon's reign is of great importance when discussing the construction of Dur-Šarrukēn, it is also important to briefly discuss the events which led to his kingship.

As shown in the previous chapter, Assyria managed to reclaim and sustain the status of an imperial state with its massive expansion and large consolidation projects (934-824 BCE), like the construction of Kalḫu and the expansion of the empire into the Levant (Frahm 2017b, 172). However, a steady decline began at the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the reign of Adad-nirari III (810-783 BCE); Grayson (1982, 276) calls the years between 823-745 BCE an “interval” period”. Three kings reigned in those years, namely: Shalmaneser IV (782-773 BCE), Aššur-dan III (772-755 BCE), and Aššur-nirari V (754-745 BCE). The interval is characterized by the loss of territories, the increased power of surrounding states, and internal conflicts (Frahm 2017b, 173-176).

This decline ended during the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727 BCE). It is unclear in what way, or even if, he was connected to the royal family, and the royal inscriptions of the king never mention the name of his father. The exact circumstances under which Tiglath-Pileser took the throne are not known, but it was connected with the revolt that took place in Kalḫu in 746, which resulted in the death of Aššur-nirari (Zawadzki 1994).

Tiglath-Pileser III pursued a very aggressive policy of military campaigns every year on all fronts. One of the major achievements of these campaigns were multiple victories against the kingdom of Urartu (Grayson 1992a, 75-77). He also managed to re-establish control over Babylon in 729 BCE. Detailed accounts of his campaigns can be found in the published royal inscriptions (Tadmor 1994; Tadmor and Yamada 2011).

It seems that the main focus of Tiglath-Pileser III was to expand and maintain the empire. Several administrative changes were implemented during his reign, paving the way for the so-called Sargonid empire (Garelli 1991). The military transformed into a professional army, and updated its logistics, strategy and weaponry (Dubovský 2004-5). The army now also incorporated large numbers of soldiers from defeated kingdoms, such as foreign cavalry (Postgate 1974; Matilla 2000, 149f; Radner 2010).

A very important reform, which significantly impacted the way in which the Assyrian empire was ruled is the reconfiguration of provinces and the appointment of governors. In an attempt to

reduce the increasing power of magnates, several provinces were reduced in size (Garelli 1991). At the same time, governors were now anonymous eunuchs appointed by and reporting directly to the central government (Garelli 1991, 46; Lumsden 2001, 34; May 2015, 107).

The large cost of the professional army and the focus on establishing control in the new or reconquered territories left little to no time or resources for large building projects. The only known important construction at this time was the so-called Central Palace in Kalḫu (see previous chapter). Tiglath-Pileser’s reign has been described as the “*beginning of a new era*” for Assyria, which allowed his successors to maximize and sustain the empire (Grayson 1992a, 85). The extensive administrative transformations facilitated the massive expansion of Assyria that occurred afterwards.

Following the death of Tiglath-Pileser, his son, Shalmaneser V (726-722 BCE) ruled for five years. Little is known about his kingship since he did not leave any royal inscriptions (Baker 2008). It is possible that he acted as the administrative ruler of the empire while his father was campaigning (Grayson 1992a, 85). In his brief reign, only a few military campaigns took place. He also continued the policy of his father, acting as king of Babylon under the name Ululayu. In 722 BCE he was murdered, and Sargon II (722-705 BCE) became king. He was responsible for another relocation of the Assyrian capital.

### 5.3 THE HISTORY OF THE SARGONIC PERIOD

The events of Sargon’s accession to the throne are unclear. The current historical consensus suggests that Sargon was also a son of Tiglath-Pileser III and brother to Shalmaneser V (Fuchs 2009, 53). There are still a number of controversies surrounding his claim to the throne. He was perhaps not the chosen heir of Tiglath-Pileser and seemed determined to establish himself as a rightful ruler. Certain historical and philological issues hint in that direction, like the fact that his name (*Šarru-ukin*) means “the legitimate king” (Fuchs 2009, 52), although it is unclear when or whether this name was acquired. These succession issues are often brought forward in interpreting the construction of Dur-Šarrukēn.

While the royal inscriptions of Sargon remain unpublished,<sup>23</sup> his reign and campaigns have received a great deal of attention (Grayson 1992a, 85-102; Fuchs 1994; 2009; Melville 2016). The accession of Sargon to the throne was followed by turmoil both in the Assyrian heartland as well as on the borders of the empire. He did not conduct any campaigns in his first year, probably because he needed to secure his position internally. However, the king conducted extensive military expeditions in the following years to re-establish control over territories lost by his predecessors, and he extended the borders of the empire for the first time to Egypt. During the first years of the king's reign, Babylonia briefly threw off Assyrian rule under the leadership of Merodach-baladan (721-710 BCE). In 710 BCE, Assyria launched an attack against the combined forces of Babylonia and Elam, and despite fierce resistance, Sargon managed to conquer Babylon (Grayson 1992a, 97-99).

Sargon's reign, thus, was one of continuous military campaigns and control over annexed territories. But beyond the military achievements, the most crucial developments were the creation of a well consolidated foreign policy for controlling conquered territories and the changes in the administration of the empire (Lanfranchi 1997; May 2015). The reign of Sargon witnessed even more reformations of the provincial system (Lanfranchi 1997). The policy of semi-independent vassal states started to shift towards systemic annexation of conquered territories. This, however, did not happen necessarily with a fierce military policy, but rather through providing benefits or power to elites so that they would agree to be subjugated completely to Assyria (Lanfranchi 1997, 82-83). Assyria was presented as a force of stability, and the only guarantee for peace in conquered territories was through close cooperation. This shift in foreign policy allowed for the consolidation of the vast territories.

The imperial court also shows significant changes. Firstly, the immediate family of Sargon, and especially his brother Sîn-aḫu-ušur, obtained crucial political positions in the court (May 2015, 89; see also section 5.7.1). During that period, several new offices were introduced for the administration of the empire, possibly in an attempt to restructure the existing power relations in the court. For example,

<sup>23</sup> At the time of this study (2019), the completed publication of Sargon's royal inscriptions in Novotny, J. *Sargon II (721-705)* was not published.

the importance of magnates diminished significantly, while at the same time court scholars became very influential in the administration of the empire (May 2015, 91). During the Sargonic period, the empire had to manage the consolidation of the reclaimed or newly incorporated territories, while at the same time bringing about a relative internal stability.

## 5.4 WHY – AN ATTEMPT OF IMPERIAL CONSOLIDATION

The construction of Dur-Šarrukēn started early in the reign of Sargon (717 BCE). The opening festival took place in September/October 707, while the new palace was inaugurated in April/May 706 (Russell 1999, 107). The new city has been viewed in past scholarship as an exceptional case among the capital cities of Assyria (Joffe 1998; Battini 1998; 2000; Novák 1999, 143-152; Albenda 2003; Radner 2011, 325-327). The main arguments for this include: the fact that it was located on virgin soil (in contrast to Kalḫu and Nineveh); that it was constructed very carefully, with a well thought-out plan; and that it was constructed as an attempt of Sargon to disentangle himself from existing power-structures and impose his legitimacy on the throne. All these interpretations mostly derive from the idea that Sargon was the initiator and the visionary behind the creation of a new city, and that the main motive for the creation of the city was to support Sargon's claim to the throne.<sup>24</sup> However, it seems that after the first years of his reign, Sargon was securely established on the throne (Frahm 2017b, 180), undermining this argument.

In this section I would like to address this idea of exceptionality and argue that, while Dur-Šarrukēn does have its own unique features, it was not fundamentally different from the other capitals. As stated above, Dur-Šarrukēn was constructed at a historical point of growth of the Assyrian empire. It was argued in the previous chapters that capital creation occurred following the transformation of Assyria into an empire, and that capitals are created after sustained expansion and imperial transformation. Similarly, Dur-Šarrukēn was created at a high point of Assyrian expansion.

<sup>24</sup> See for example Radner (2011, 325): *"Without a doubt Sargon's decision to move the court and the central administration to a new center was in part motivated by the lack of acceptance and the active and fierce resistance his rule had met with in the Assyrian heartland"*.

The difference in this case is that Assyria already was an established empire. The historical conditions are otherwise very similar to earlier instances of capital creation: Assyria was experiencing a phase of major re-expansion, an influx of wealth and resources, as well as the transformation of its administration (Frahm 2017, 176). I suggest that the creation of Dur-Šarrukēn occurred during a profound *imperial transformation* (Figure 27). The creation of Dur-Šarrukēn occurs in a period of relative stability and with a substantial economic growth. The latter is a crucial factor to realize this large-scale project.

I argue that possibly in this context, capital creation was also used by Sargon and his court to legitimize their rule. This was, however, only part of the motivation behind capital creation, and not the sole purpose. In many ways, Dur-Šarrukēn fits Joffe's "disembedded capital" model, since it was: i) constructed on virgin soil, ii) used to distance the king from previous power centers and, iii) created a shift in regional settlement patterns (see following section).

#### 5.4.1 GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND HINTERLAND

The location of Dur-Šarrukēn is of considerable interest as it shares similarities and differences with other Assyrian capitals. Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta and Kalḫu have several geographical and agricultural advantages, while this is not the case for Dur-Šarrukēn.

Dur-Šarrukēn is located in the plain of Jebel Basiqa and close to the river Khosr, which now flows some 3 km away from the city. It is the only Assyrian capital built in an almost completely uninhabited area, although the texts mention a possible small settlement called Magganubba; no traces of this earlier settlement have been found. Considering the existence of two mounds at the site, it is possible that Magganubba could have been located on either of the citadel mounds. Sargon claims that he was the only one who realized the great benefits of that location. In a cylinder seal we read:

*"Magganubba, which lies at the foot of Mount Muṣri and towers above a spring and the surroundings of Nineveh – none of the 350 earlier regents (of Assyria) ... realized its (favourable) location, understood (the benefits of) its settlement or commanded to dig a canal there."* (Radner 2012)

The latter part of the statement is particularly interesting. Irrigation projects were a standard practice when constructing a major urban center. The text comments on the fact that no predecessor had thought to construct an irrigation system here, to reap the benefits of the fertile area. Other textual evidence also indicates the interest of the planners to create sufficient agricultural land in the hinterland of Dur-Šarrukēn (Fuchs 1994). However, other than the seal just mentioned, there is no archaeological or textual evidence of any realized irrigation project near Dur-Šarrukēn (Bagg 2000a, 314).

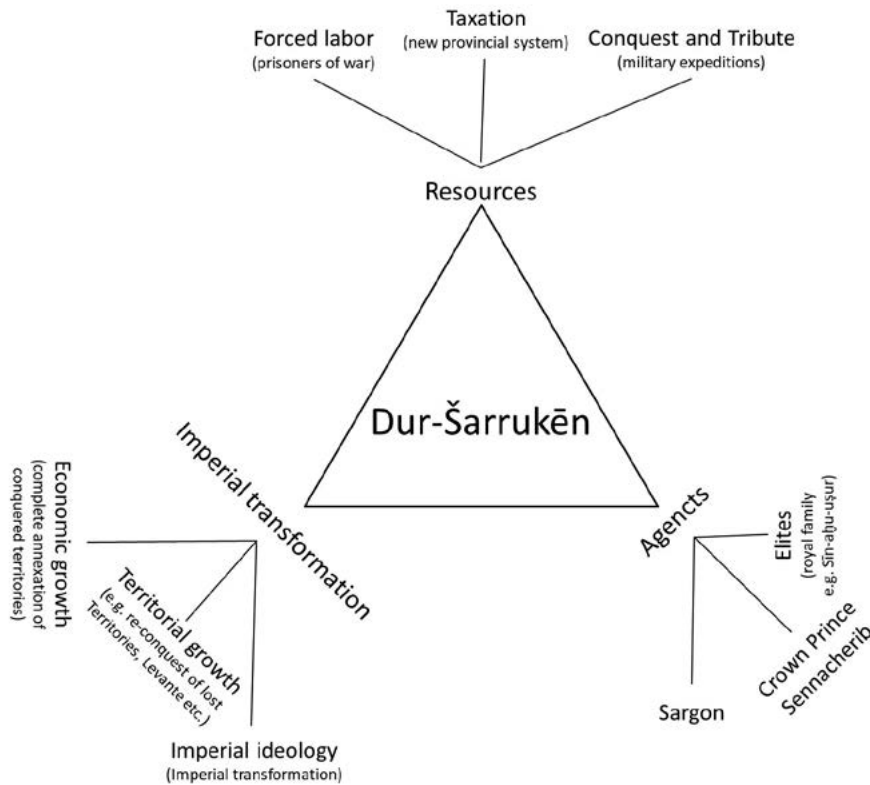
The only known irrigation project in connection with Dur-Šarrukēn is for the gardens of the city, which is attested in textual evidence and orthostats (Novák 2002). The location of the gardens themselves is unknown, as is whether they were inside or outside the city. Novák (2002, 446-447) suggests that they were outside of city along the southwest and northwest section of the walls, so that they could be seen from the citadels without, however, significant evidence to support this.

Some of the palace orthostats do depict a botanical park – known as *kirimahḫu*, which proves there was indeed such a park here (Bagg 2000a, 315; 2000b, plates 32-36). One of the slabs has a park scene, with two men on the left side of the panel, a lake with two boats in front of a two-pillared building in the middle, and several trees and birds on the right (Figure 28). Those trees seem to be located on a hill with an unidentified structure on its summit (Reade 2008, 22). Such evidence suggests that there were constructions of artificial watercourses related to the city (Bagg 2000b, 156-159).

Satellite images (Figure 29) do not show any indications of major canal systems. It is possible that some short canals coming from the mountains in the north had the same course as later canals (Cultaro *et al.* 2007). The construction of the new capital did not seem to have a discernable impact on the surrounding hinterland, although systematic surveys are still lacking. Scholars have already suggested the possible existence of canals going running through or outside of the city either for the watering of gardens or other uses and have attempted to map them (Margueron 2013; Reade 2019).

In particular, Margueron (2013, 204-208) has argued for the existence of three interconnected canals: i) one moving from the NE (below gate 1) part of the wall to the SE (above gate 6; see figure 31), ii) one parallel but further to the south, and iii) one that stems from





**Figure 27:** Model for the creation of Dur-Šarrukēn, produced by the author.

the first canal with a southeastern direction exiting the city between gates 3 and 4. Margueron argues for the existence of these canals based on topographical irregularities and erosion on these sections of the walls (Margueron 2013, 204). While compelling, such an argument can only be tested on the ground, as such erosions could potentially have happened at a later period.

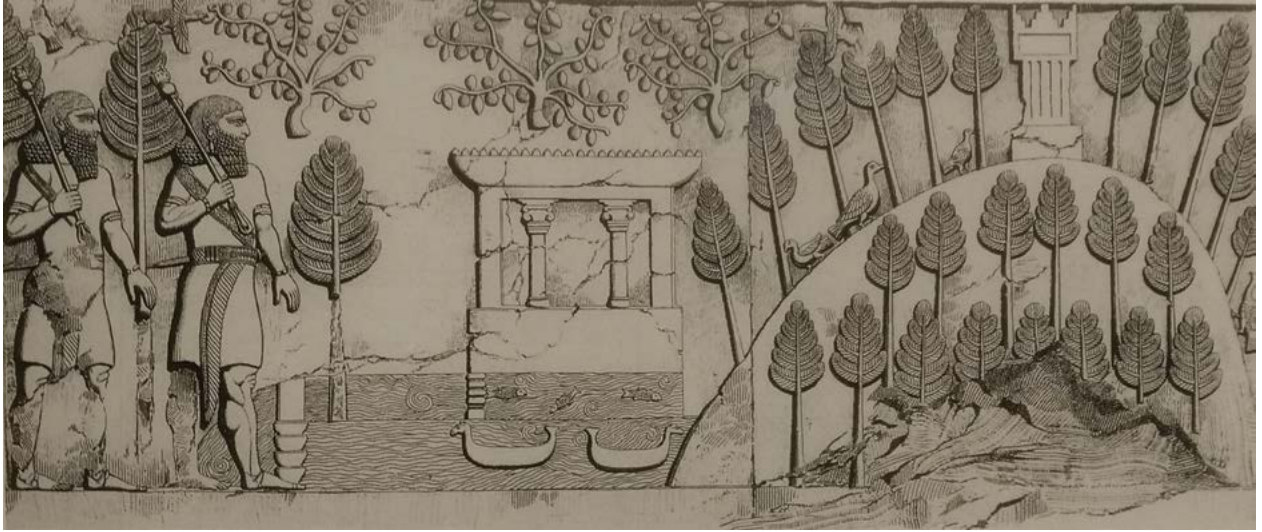
Reade has recently argued for the existence of a canal system on the NE of the city stemming from the watercourses of Mount Misri based on Sargon's royal inscriptions (Reade 2019). He locates the source of such a system close to the modern village of Barimeh, 4 km north of Dur-Šarrukēn, in relation to a waterfall mentioned by George Smith (1875, 99) and a potential archaeological mound found through Google Earth in close proximity. It is further argued that these watercourses would have been diverted with a series of dams, allowing the water to flow both above the city, close to the citadel, and below. While no archaeological evidence of such a canal system

exists, Reade suggests that it is possible to see these multiple streams in the representation of the gardens of the city in reliefs (see Figure 28; Reade 2019, 90-94).

Both propositions by Margueron and Reade reveal the potential existence of an elaborate, although seemingly relatively small, canal system created for the needs of Dur-Šarrukēn. However, they must remain as hypotheses until further archaeological work takes place in the area.

The location of the city in relation to other important centers of the Assyrian heartlands is of interest in discussing the reasons for its creation. The city is not located on the Tigris, unlike every other Assyrian capital, but on its tributary, the Khosr. The new capital was located 45 km north of Kalḫu, 75 km northwest of Arbela, and 115 km north of Aššur. The best way to reach almost all these cities would be through Nineveh, where the Tigris and Khosr rivers meet, strengthening the geopolitical importance of that city (Radner 2011, 325).





**Figure 28:** Botanical park in Dur-Šarrukēn (Botta and Flandin 1849, Taf. 113-114).

During the construction of Dur-Šarrukēn, it was decided that the new capital needed its own imperial province. To create this province a large part of the Nineveh province was re-assigned to the new province. Radner (2011, 325-326) has argued that this was done because the designers of Dur-Šarrukēn knew about the agricultural limitations of the new capital and wanted to undermine Nineveh. She argues that Sargon aimed to supplant the regional political and economic importance of Nineveh through the creation of an independent center.

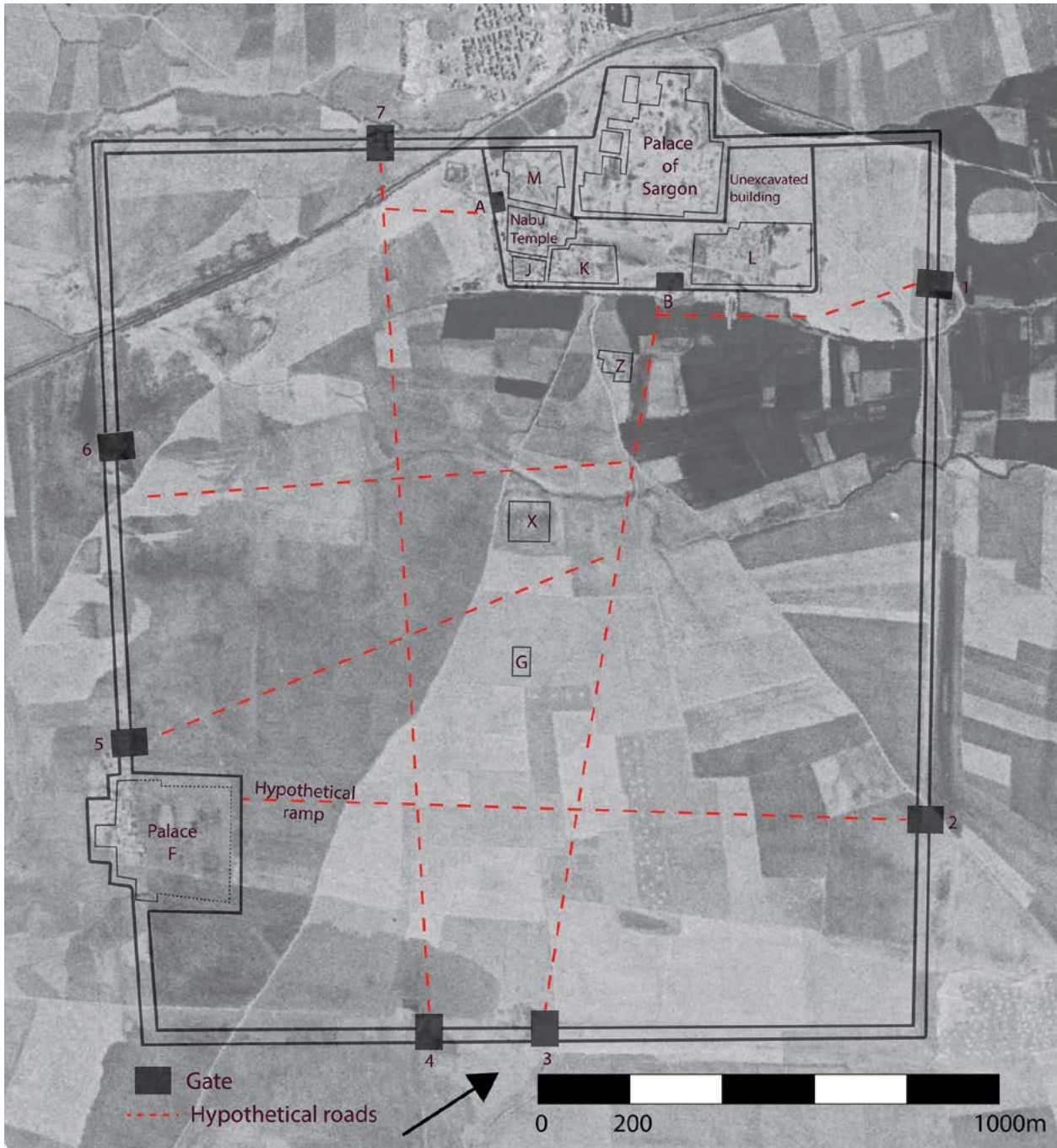
While this might have been the case, it must be noted that Sargon had already consolidated his position during the first years of his reign (Frahm 2017, 180-182; see also section 5.3). At the same time, the administration of the construction of Dur-Šarrukēn was orchestrated from Nineveh, as most of the materials had to travel through there to reach the new capital (Parpola 1995).

Therefore, the available evidence presents us, and likely the contemporary Assyrians, with few reasons for the selection of this particular site. It seems that the location itself was not the prime motivation for moving the capital. Dur-Šarrukēn offers no clear geographical advantages. However, like all other Assyrian capitals, it is located within the traditional “Land of Aššur” (if at the fringes), on a riverbank, and with available, if limited, surrounding hinterland.

## 5.5 HOW – BUILDING DUR-ŠARRUKĒN

The construction of Dur-Šarrukēn is exceptionally well documented, due to the existence of a large textual dataset. There is a total of 113 correspondence letters that deal with building and related activities in the new capital (Parpola 1995, 50, 71, note 17 for a full list). Thanks to that corpus, in conjunction with the available archaeological remains, it is possible to reconstruct the eleven years of the city’s construction. These letters name a number of officials, governors and contractors, with Tab-šar-Aššur mentioned most frequently. He was the State Treasurer and coordinated the largest part of the project. In addition, there are six letters from the king himself and one from prince Sennacherib (Parpola 1995, 51). These offer us a rare window into the large number of people from across the empire involved in the realization of the project. As Parpola puts it, “*it seems accordingly clear that practically the whole empire was, through the governors, committed to the realization of the project*” (Parpola 1995, 51). It appears that a project on the scale of an imperial capital can only be realized with the cooperation of the court and elites of the Assyrian empire.

The information in these letters (Parpola 1995) is vastly different from what is usually found in royal inscriptions, as they deal with the ‘day-to-day’ issues of the building project. Texts referring



**Figure 29:** CORONA satellite image of Dur-Šarrukēn with annotated schematic plan of Dur-Šarrukēn produced by the author (after Loud and Altman 1938, produced by the author).

to the delegation of tasks to different officials and contractors are very important, since it is impossible to establish such relations archaeologically. An interesting letter by the crown prince Sennacherib

reflects this process (SAAo 01 039). In that text, the crown prince is acting in the place of his father, possibly in the latter's absence, and gives orders to several different people.

A series of officials and contractors supervised transportation of materials and work in the city. The actual labor was undertaken by deportees brought from around the empire, as well as Assyrians who were subject to military service (Parpola 1995, 54-55). Deportees were the cheapest labor force, and their use in construction seems quite similar to what the texts describe for Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta. One of the texts informs us that the deportees were settled inside the city, and that officials were appointed to “teach them correct behavior” (Parpola 1995, 54).

The housing of the deportees at Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta happened in specific districts (see chapter 3), and it is possible that a similar policy was in place at Dur-Šarrukēn. However, there are no archaeological data to prove this. A text recording a dispute over the use of some buildings informs us of an official wanting to settle Marqasians (from an Anatolia city state conquered in 711 BCE) in a specific set of houses/district (SAAo 01 124). Although not certain, the use of ethnically distinct districts seems plausible.

Another group of people working in the construction were specialized craftsmen. Several craftsmen had to work on parallel projects at the same time, and the corpus of building texts states that there was regularly a shortage of specialized workers (Parpola 1995, 55). For example, an unassigned letter mentions master builders probably working on the city wall stating: “Perhaps the magnates will say in the Palace: ‘They have deprived us of master builders’” (SAAo 01 165). In another text, one Aššur-dur-paniya pleads with the king not to take more master builders away from his project because he has already given enough, and the task he has been assigned cannot be completed if he suffers more casualties.

These texts reveal the structural organization and a chain of command in the construction of the capital. It seems like coordination of matters seemingly was done by the king himself, but the crown prince Sennacherib and Tab-šar-Aššur, the State Treasurer, were probably more involved in the day-to-day issues. It is through the letters of these people, in addition to the letters coming directly from the king, that there is a clear desire to finish the city as soon as possible. However, the creation of the city was done in a similar time frame as the other cases of capital constructions, in ca. 10-15 years. This is perhaps less impressive considering that the city was smaller than Kalḫu, and possibly smaller than Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta.

An interesting aspect of the construction process revealed by the texts is the fact that the workers were organized in groups of moderate sizes (i.e. ca. 100-150 people; Parpola 1995, 65), and led by specific officials. A similar organization of labor was observed at Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta (see above section 3.4). This suggests that the construction process of capital cities did not change much over the centuries. Considering that Dur-Šarrukēn was the smallest of the newly created capitals (see Table 5 in section 7.2.2), it is possible to suggest that it was the “slowest” of all capital city constructions.

The reasons for this are not clear. Perhaps one reason was that the city was not as easily accessible by a major river as the other capitals. The texts do mention shortages of material, and often it was hard to navigate large objects like bull colossi through the Khosr (Parpola 1995, 62-63).

An important part of the correspondence on Dur-Šarrukēn pertains to the acquisition and management of raw materials, such as straw and reeds, limestone, saplings of fruit trees, and timber. In addition, we are informed about the places of acquisition and methods of transportation for each of these materials. Straw and reeds, for example, are essential for making mudbricks (see Table 13 in section 7.3.2) and were obtained mostly from surrounding provinces. The number of mudbricks for the construction of the city (see section 7.3.2 and Appendix 2) was so large that it caused significant shortages of straw in the provinces from which it originated (Parpola 1995, 57-8).

Several types of materials are not easily detectable archaeologically, such as seeds and timber. We are informed about the existence of exotic trees in the gardens of Dur-Šarrukēn (see section 5.4.1). The seeds and saplings required to plant these gardens had to be brought from several different regions and in abundance. A letter informs us about 2,350 bundles of apple tree saplings and 450 medlar tree saplings from the middle Euphrates (Parpola 1995, 58). Timber, like straw for mudbricks and reeds, is another type of material that is required in very large quantities for architectural purposes, such as roof beams. Once again, the amount of timber obtained for the construction of the city was so large that several locations, such as the Upper Tigris River region, were completely deforested (Parpola 1995, 61; Parker 190). Also, it was difficult to transport logs over very large distances.

Logs obtained from the Amanus mountains would be floated down the Euphrates to the point it reached





**Figure 30:** Wall relief detail from the palace of Sargon at Dur-Šarrukēn depicting the transportation of cedar from Lebanon with boats. (Albenda 1983; Musée du Louvre AO 19888-19891).

the Tigris (Parpola 1995, 59-60). Then they would be towed by boats upstream to Nineveh. In other cases, they would be brought to Aššur and stored there for some time, before being transported to Nineveh and from there to Dur-Šarrukēn. This process is likely depicted in a wall relief from the palace (Figure 30). Required amounts of stone were available more locally. Transportation was done with carts and sledges (Parpola 1995, 61), as well as perhaps on water (Morandi Bonacossi 2014). The transportation of large objects was challenging, and there is one

case in which a boat transporting a bull colossus sunk in the Khosr, and it was not possible to retrieve the statue.

This correspondence is crucial also to identify the perishable materials used in the construction of a city and which are not identified archaeologically. Since this corpus of texts is primarily organizational, it rarely gives exact figures of materials, or the final purpose of each one of them.

Despite the lack of description of some aspects of the construction process, the texts clearly show that

building a capital has many practical implications. Resources had to be obtained from the provinces and a large labor force was required to transport the material and build with it. This required strong administrative institutions which could support both the construction of the capital, as well as the continuous military campaigns. This argument will be further explored with the case study of city-wall construction in section 7.3.2.

The textual dataset for the construction of Dur-Šarrukēn provides concrete evidence for the process of construction that has been suggested for the previous capitals. The work was divided into several smaller projects that were overseen by different officials and members of the elite. Each project had various different workers and specialists and was assigned specific tasks. The planning was central and directed by members of the court of the king, in this case the crown prince Sennacherib and the imperial treasurer. The latter two often speak in the name of the king, but it is unclear to what extent the king was personally involved in the actual construction process or if he was simply informed about the status of the construction.

## 5.6 WHAT – URBAN DESIGN OF DUR-ŠARRUKĒN

Dur-Šarrukēn served as a capital for only two years, making it difficult to assess its function as an imperial capital over time. As such, regarding its function, I will only discuss its urban design and the excavated buildings in the citadels.

### 5.6.1 THE DESIGN OF THE CITY

Dur-Šarrukēn has an almost rectangular shape with two irregular exterior protuberances on its north and west sides formed by the two citadel mounds (Bunnens 1996). To date, there are no comprehensive studies of the urban aspects of the city and no recent surveys have examined its lower city (see for example Battini 1998; 2000; Novák 1999, 141-152). Therefore, I will evaluate the currently available data for the city, including a recently produced contour map (Figure 31), and the accessible satellite images (Figure 29).

### 5.6.2 WALLS

The fortification walls of the city can be separated into two categories: city walls and citadel walls. Both types rest on stone foundations, which made it much easier for the excavators to identify their location and orientation (Loud and Altman 1938, 18). The city wall encloses an almost trapezoidal area of ca. 300 ha that is approximately 1760 x 1635 m. The general shape of the wall is immediately visible from aerial and satellite imagery (Scardozzi 2011).

Assessing the width and height of the walls is a challenging task and the size estimated by Loud and Altman (1938, 18; 90-91) is followed in this study. Their assessment is based on Botta's detailed inspection of the wall along a specific stretch and their own work on the citadel wall. As such, the estimated thickness of the city wall was 14 m with three courses of foundation stones (Botta and Flandin 1850, 31). Loud and (Loud and Altman 1938, 90) estimate the height of the citadel wall at roughly 12 m. This estimation is based on the assumption that the walls had to exceed the maximum height difference between the palatial terrace and the street level which is a bit less than 12 m (between the terrace and the street level at Gate A). Although this estimation is half of Botta's original assumption, the authors argue that Botta was known for doubling the estimated dimensions of constructions.

Loud and Altman argue for the existence of a plastered inner side of the city wall and buttresses on the outside, based on the presence of these features on the citadel wall. It is possible that there would have been bastions at regular intervals, considering that they existed in the citadel wall. However, there is no archaeological evidence to support this. Based on the contour map, it is possible to suggest the existence of some higher points where tower structures existed. The landscape is rather irregular, and the height of the wall might also have varied, making such estimations difficult.

For the citadel wall, the dimensions are better known: an average of 12 m in height; 7.5 m wide at its base and roughly 6 m at its top; it was buttressed on the outside with regular bastions 11.5 m in length that projected outwards for 5.5 m, and lay 14-19 m apart from each other (Loud and Altman 1938, 18; 90). Matting was used as binder every nine courses of brick for the mudbrick portion of the wall making it rather weak, but its purpose was less defensive than the city wall.



**Figure 31:** Contour map of Dur-Šarrukēn (Loud and Altman 1938, Plate 68, annotated by the author).

The shape of the city was probably affected by the existing landscape. The northern corner of the city has a higher elevation than the rest of the city. The wall starting from the northern corner and going to the southwest gives the city its trapezoidal shape. The city also slopes downwards from the northeast to the southwest, which might have affected the alignment of this section of the wall. The rest of the walls, located on a more even terrain, followed an almost square model.

### 5.6.3 CITY GATES AND URBAN FABRIC

Dur-Šarrukēn has a total of seven city gates, and the main citadel has two gates. At this point, no proper gate has been identified for the secondary citadel. Battini (1998, 42-44) has attempted to connect the city gates with names recorded in textual evidence. Here I will use the numbering of the gates as designated by the excavators (1-7), which proceeds

clockwise starting from the gate located at the northeast side of the city.

The only fully excavated gate was Gate 7 and it provides a good blueprint of what the other gates of the city might have looked like (Loud, Frankfort and Jacobsen 1936, 1-11). The gate was arched on the inside and the outside sections, with large stone slabs placed on top of projecting stones. On the outside of the gate, a section of the mudbrick part of the arch had been preserved; pieces of mudbrick and plaster were found on the ground, possibly belonging to the top part of the arch.

One of the most interesting excavated features however was the blockage of the gate. The pivot stones which should hold the outer gate had no traces of use, indicating that the wooden door had probably never been placed (Loud, Frankfort and Jacobsen 1936, 7). The gate was probably blocked while the building was still in a good condition, possibly without it ever been used. This information is particularly useful when assessing the potential function of the seven gates of the city.

All seven gate mounds are visible on the contour map and correspond to the number of gates listed in the textual evidence (Battini 1998, 42). The number of gates exceeds that of Kalḫu, for which we know of only four gates. Dur-Šarrukēn has two gates on each of its sides, except on its northwestern side, where the main citadel is located. Given the regular shape of Dur-Šarrukēn, one would assume the gates to be regularly spaced apart. However, the position and distances between gates is quite varied. Because of the limited availability of satellite images and the absence of any survey of the lower city, it is not possible to reconstruct an urban road network, as Ur (2013) and Fiorina (2011) have done for Kalḫu.<sup>25</sup>

Gates 1 and 2, located on the northeastern side of the wall, are the farthest apart from each other. Gate 1 is located roughly 350 m away from the northern corner of the city, and Gate 2 lies about 410 m away from this corner; they are about a kilometer apart from each other. Gate 1 is almost parallel to the wall of the main citadel, and a road starting from there

would probably have to curve slightly to avoid the citadel's wall and reach the main gate of the citadel (Gate B). Starting from Gate 2, a direct line can be drawn directly to the entrance of the secondary citadel.

The southeastern side of the city has Gates 3 and 4, with the latter being closer to the secondary citadel. Strangely, these gates are only 190 m apart. Gate 4 is nearly opposite Gate 7, creating a potential straight road between them. There is no evidence that Gate 3 had any specific role, nor is there evidence of any important road beginning here. It is possible that one of these mounds is actually a large tower, similar to the mounds identified at Kalḫu (see section 4.5.1). However, the lack of excavation of these mounds leaves this as a question for future excavation.

It is unclear whether defensive strategies dictated the position of the gates, since having seven gates would make the city more vulnerable in case of a siege. It is likely that Gate 7 was the least important or had the least functional potential in relation to road networks, since it was sealed and never used (Loud, Frankfort and Jacobsen 1936). The most important gates could potentially be Gate 5 and Gate 6: a road leading directly from Nineveh to Dur-Šarrukēn would probably end on this side of the city. Also, the position of the secondary citadel gives it a view over Gate 5.

After discussing the gates, it is important to discuss the urban anatomy of the city, and to assess the usefulness of the gates and potential street systems within the city. Other than the gates, the other two large features along the wall are the two citadels, whose individual buildings are discussed in greater detail below. The main citadel is located in the northern part of the northwestern side, about 240 m away from the northern corner of the city. The secondary citadel is located, in a similar fashion, on the southern part of the southeastern side, about 270 m from the southern corner.

The contour map (Figure 31) and available satellite images provide little to no information regarding potential buildings in the city. Only one building has been securely identified archaeologically in the lower city, Residence Z. It is the only excavated building in the lower city of Dur-Šarrukēn (Loud and Altman 1938, 78-79). It is comparable in size with the smallest building on the citadel (Residence J), and the similarity of the architectural plan of both these buildings possibly signifies that Residence Z belonged to a member of the lower elite.

<sup>25</sup> Battini (1998) attempted to explain the irregularities of the position of the gates based on the existence of underlying geometric modules that governed the city's construction. Based on this, the palace is located in such a position in the city that it represents the "center of the empire". However, the measurements proposed by Battini exist only for specific gates, and any possible alignments seem to be coincidental rather than definitive.



An additional building was found but not excavated, Building G. I suggest that at least one more building can be identified by combining the satellite imagery and the contour map (Figure 31, X indicated), which I will call Building X. This suggestion is based on the size of the mound as seen on the contour map and its clear visibility on the satellite images.

Another crucial feature in the city's urban plan is the location of the secondary citadel, the so-called Military Palace (Kertai 2015, 117-120). It has been argued that the complex expanded beyond the secondary citadel to form a rough square formed by the space between Gates 4 and 5 (Heinrich 1984, 170; Kertai 2015, 118). This argument is based only on the contour map, however, re-examining those data together with satellite images does not offer concrete proof for the existence of such a complex. Firstly, there is no archaeological evidence that the area had walls. Every other major wall in the city is preserved to a certain extent and is visible in the satellite imagery. In the case of the secondary citadel, there is nothing to indicate the existence of an outward expansion of its walls. The contour map can be misleading, as it seems to show two higher elevation lines that create a square in this area: one starting from Gate 4 and another one protruding from the norther corner of the citadel. The latter could be part of the proposed ramp of the citadel. Loud and Altman (1938, 76) explain that their restoration of a ramp in this location is purely imaginative, but the existence of an entrance ramp to the palace is possible given the topography. The topographical feature extending inwards from Gate 4, which is also visible in the CORONA satellite image, is puzzling. The feature seems to lead directly to the gate, neither including nor excluding it. It follows the general sloping of the city, which is higher on the eastern side and lower on the western side.

Within the confines of the hypothesized square extension there are no ground features which would indicate the existence of buildings. If the secondary citadel had a definitively military function, it could be argued that tents would be set up for the military in this area. This could be compared to the secondary citadel of Kalḫu, even though we do not have a wall surrounding the secondary citadel there. Only survey and test trenches can verify the existence or absence of such an enclosure.

An earlier study attempted to reconstruct the city's road network, and the researchers drew straight lines from each gate for the sake of a simple reconstruction

(Cultaro *et al.* 2007). I attempted a similar exercise for a street system but incorporated the evidence from the contour map (Figure 29). The only direct connections possible are from Gate 4 to Gate 7 in a straight line and from Gate 2 to the speculative ramp of the secondary citadel. Gate 3 is the only gate leading directly into the citadel (Gate B).

It seems that the regularity of the city's wall does not exist in its internal urban features such as the gates and possibly its streets. It is possible that there is too little information to determine the function of each gate, or that the position of some of the gates were the result of an inherently flawed design, or that even most of the gates were never actually used (like Gate 7).

This initial assessment of the gates and the existing buildings of the lower city of Dur-Šarrukēn shows that future archaeological research will significantly enhance our knowledge of the city, especially because it had probably not been extensively developed yet. Unlike Kalḫu, the short lifespan of this city would not have been lived in and re-appropriated by its citizens, with all the potential changes this brings to an urban space. Thus, whatever urban features do exist here would give us an insight into the urban design of this city and other capitals.

## 5.7 WHAT – THE CITADELS

Archaeological work in Dur-Šarrukēn has focused heavily on the main citadel area (Figure 32). Thus, while very little is known of the lower city, the distribution and position of buildings within the citadel have been well established (Loud and Altman 1938, 53-72; Kertai 2015, 83-120). The citadel was a walled area of 25 ha divided into two sections, a lower one with the residential buildings and the Nabu Temple, and a raised section with the main palace. This division is unique among Assyrian capitals.

Another unique characteristic of the citadel of Dur-Šarrukēn is that it does not face a river. Aššur, Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, Kalḫu and Nineveh are all on the bank of the Tigris and they have infrastructure for bringing water up to the citadels. For Dur-Šarrukēn, it is unclear how water was brought up to the citadel to support all the bathrooms, temples, and daily needs, although the potential existence of yet unidentified canals in and around the city might had accommodate for the lack of a river in the direct vicinity of the citadel (see e.g. Reade 2019).

Although considerable work was done to level the ground of the citadel, it followed the general topography of the city, which slopes downwards from northeast to southwest (Loud and Altman 1938, 53). Entrance to the citadel was through two gates, Gates A and B: the former is a side entrance on the western side of the citadel wall, and the latter is located on the long south/southeastern side. While Gate A was preserved remarkably well (see section 5.7.1), there are almost no traces left of Gate B. The wall of the citadel has not been completely uncovered, although Botta (and Flandin 1850) conducted a detailed excavation of one stretch of it.

Gate A is not positioned along the same alignment as the citadel wall but askew. Its entrance is flanked by two differently sized towers, and its outer portal is lined with reliefs of genii, winged human-headed bulls, and winged human figures with cone and bucket (Loud and Altman 1938, Pls. 9, 10 and 77-78). The interior of the gate comprised four chambers.

There is no currently visible way to connect Gate A with any potential roads coming from within the city. Its proximity to Gate 7 means that the two were probably connected in some way (see Figure 29). Gate A highlights an overarching theme of this citadel, that of grandiose architecture combined with architectural irregularities. Although there are no data to reconstruct Gate B, it is safe to assume that it must have been equally, if not more impressive than Gate A, as it probably was the main entrance to the citadel from the city.

Finally, Reade (2019, 85) argues for the existence of another gate outside of the city but located on the protruding part of the citadel. This suggestion is based on Sargon's claim, through royal inscriptions, that there were eight gates around the city, rather than the seven described above. If such a gate existed, it would require a ramp that would allow access to the palace mound. Neither a ramp or a gate have been identified archaeologically and, while this hypothesis is tempting, since it would solve the issue of bringing water to the citadel, it must be treated with caution until further archaeological work takes place.

### 5.7.1 THE LOWER CITADEL

Starting with the lower part of the citadel, all the structures lie at the same level as the rest of the city, with the exception of the Temple of Nabu, which is placed on top of a platform and is accessible by a ramp. In total the lower citadel has the following

excavated structures: four excavated "residence" buildings (J, K, L, M), the Temple of Nabu (H), and two empty areas, one on the northern side<sup>26</sup> and one as you enter from Gate B.

Entering from Gate B, there is a large residential building to the north, Residence L (Loud and Altman 1938, 69-71). Residence L is the only building for which we can safely identify the owner based on textual evidence found within the building: it was the residence of the Grand Vizier Sīn-aḫu-uṣur, brother of Sargon II. It is also by far the largest building in the citadel. The building is structured around a series of courtyards: the forecourt, a central courtyard, and possibly another one or two courtyards in the back of the building. This construction typology is the same for all residential buildings of the citadel. To the north of Residence L is a large open space, which probably contains the remains of an unexcavated building.

To the south of Gate B there is a large open area, followed by Residence K. Although it is smaller than Residence L, they both have very similar layouts. Behind Residence K, confined to a small area on the southern corner of the citadel, is Residence J. This is an even smaller version of the residential buildings known on the citadel. While the entrances to both Residence L and Residence K are located in the front of the buildings, the entrance to Residence J is on its side.

The only known temple of the lower citadel is located above the residences (K and J) (Loud and Altman 56-64) and is dedicated to Nabu. This temple is the only building of the lower citadel that lies on top of a high terrace, which was about 3-6 m high. A ramp in the northern section of the temple functioned as the building's entrance. The temple has a similar layout as the residential buildings, with a forecourt, a central court, and a small inner temple. About half of the temple's area was occupied by priests' quarters and service rooms.

Finally, Residence M is located on the northwestern corner of the citadel. Due to its confined location on the southwestern corner it was constructed in a roughly square shape, making it more comparable to the Nabu Temple rather than the other residential buildings. Little is known about its use and actual

<sup>26</sup> There is space here for another building if it were the same size as the other known residences. Based on surface finds, Loud and Altman (1938, 10-12) suggested that there was indeed a building here, but no excavations have taken place.



the temples or the throneroom of the palaces. What is striking however, is that the principal reception suites of the residences and the thronerooms of the palaces do not vary considerably, but have a standardized architectural expression, based on the size of each building. The palaces and large buildings K, L, M have three portals with one central portal, while the small buildings J and Z have only one portal. Little is known about the occupants of the residences, with the exception for Residence L which belonged to Sīn-aḫu-ušur.

### 5.7.2 THE PALACE TERRACE

The palace, located on top of a natural mound, was the most prominent building of the entire city. While Kertai (2015, 83-120) recently discussed the construction of the palace extensively, there are some important features which need to be addressed here regarding its construction, its organization as well as some of its functional aspects. This is crucial to identify some of the reasons behind the relocation of the capital.

The palace platform was created on top of the existing mound but was expanded and reinforced with courses of mudbrick to create the area needed for the complex (Loud and Altman 1938, 54). It also has a slight downward slope from the northeast to southwest, with a difference of almost 3 meters. The terrace was, as discussed before, an integral part of the city wall, protruding to the outside as well as inwards towards the city. The outer face of the wall was probably in mudbrick like the city wall, while on the inside of the platform it was faced with limestone blocks.

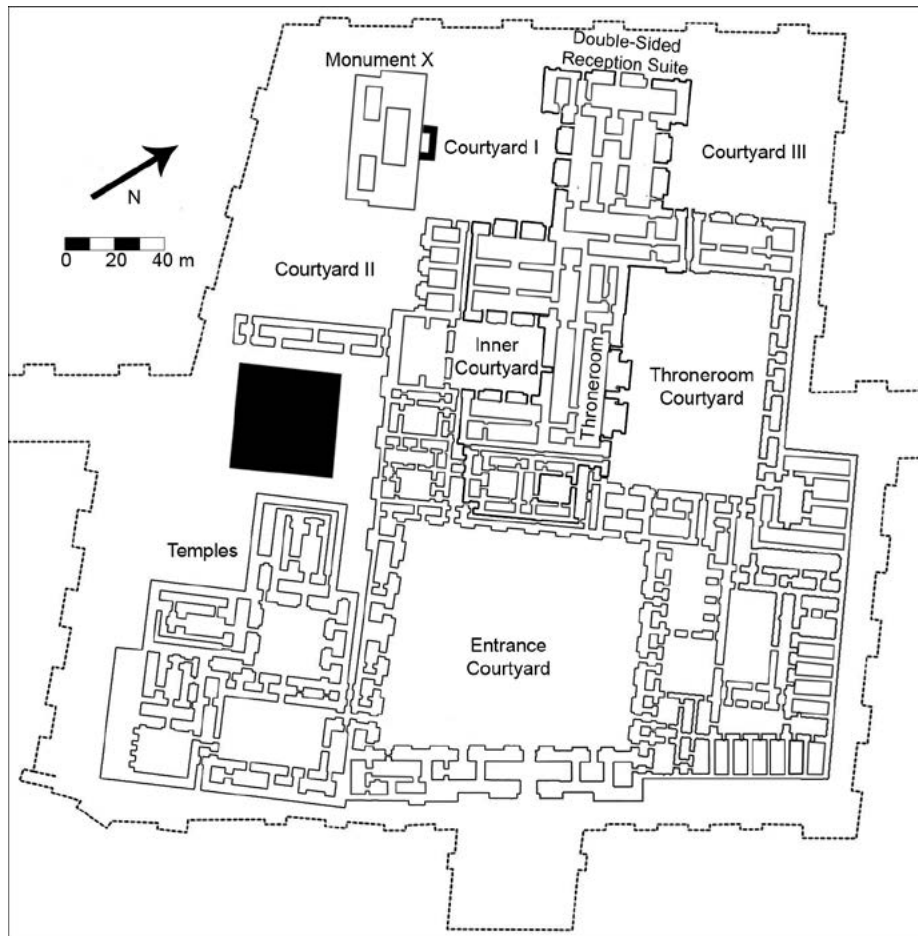
Access to the terrace was possible by two ramps (Loud and Altman 1938, 29). The main ramp lead from Gate B and the open space of the citadel to the bull-flanked entrance of the palace. Interestingly, the ramp is not located on the axis of the gate, but slightly to the left. There does not seem to be any functional reason for this asymmetrical position. On the contrary, it would be much more impressive, both visually as well as practically (i.e. for processions) if the gate and the ramp were aligned.

This ramp has impressive dimensions; it is 25 m wide, rises up to a height of 7.5 m at the entrance of the palace, and has a length of about 20 m. It is likely that a limestone pavement covered the ramp, and that limestone blocks covered the vertical sides, similar to the terrace wall.

The second ramp, while not monumental, is even more interesting. It is located in the southern corner of the palatial terrace and faces Gate A. Unlike the main ramp, the street starting from Gate A leads almost directly to the secondary ramp. It is not freestanding, but rather is attached to the southern wall of the terrace. In terms of size, it is 4 m wide and only 7.5 m of its total length remains. Its surface has been washed away but it is likely that it was also paved with flagstones like the main ramp (Loud and Altman 1938, 29). This ramp acted as a non-monumental “back door” to the palace. The street leading to it lies between the residential building M and the Nabu Temple.

An arched bridge connected the Nabu Temple with the southern corner of the palatial terrace where the secondary ramp is located (Loud and Altman 1938, 56). While the existence of this bridge could explain the unusual proximity between the Nabu Temple and the southern corner of the terrace, Loud and Altman were clearly puzzled about the awkward choice of the positioning, role, and usefulness of the bridge: *“A more awkward handling of bridge and ramp can scarcely be conceived. Granting such difficulties as the oblique angle and the difference in level between the palace terrace and Nabu temple ramp, one cannot refrain from wonder at such clumsy treatment in the hands of architects capable of the town and citadel gates”* (Loud and Altman 1938, 56).

The palace terrace contained a number of buildings: the main palace, the temples, and monument X (Figure 33). The main palace dominated the terrace in terms of size and differs significantly from all the other buildings. Sargon’s palace, in fact, differs from nearly every other Assyrian palace in terms of its layout. According to Kertai (2015, 94-95), the organization of the palace can be divided into four main quadrants, a unique feature among Assyrian palaces, only comparable to the Military Palace of Kalḫu. Entrance to the palace was through the southern quadrant and the Entrance Courtyard. A monumental gate was located at the top of the ramp, which consisted of three adjacent rooms (Kertai 2015, 95). Remarkably, the gate to the courtyard was not centered either on the courtyard itself or on the palace. The same goes for every other access point to the rest of the palace in the Entrance Courtyard. All of the gates, although they were less monumental than the main one, were not centered but placed closer to the corners. The courtyard provided entrance to every other main area of the palace, all three other quadrants, and the temples.



**Figure 33:** The Palace of Sargon at Dur-Šarrukēn (after Place 1867; Loud, Frankfort and Jacobsen 1936; Kertai 2015, produced by the author).

To the north was the throneroom courtyard. One had to pass through the northern corner of the entrance courtyard to access the throneroom courtyard. As at Kalḫu, the main feature of the main courtyard was the monumental entrance to the throneroom itself, and the combination of apotropaic figures and tribute bearers (Kertai 2015, 103). The façade of the throneroom had three doors decorated with five pairs of human-headed bull colossi: one at each door and two placed on the buttresses between the doors. Those buttresses also carried colossal human figures (Russell 1999, 103). The southwestern and northwestern walls of the courtyard were decorated with carved courtiers and tribute bearers moving towards the king, who stood closest to the throneroom.

While there are significant similarities in sculptures and decoration in the throneroom courtyard between Kalḫu and Dur-Šarrukēn, the text inscribed on the bull colossi differ in each place (Russell 1999, 106). Aššurnāṣirpal II devoted an extensive part of his text to his campaigns and military achievements, and barely a sixth of the inscription mentioned the construction of Kalḫu. On the contrary, Sargon's text gives only a brief titulary, names a few Assyrian and Babylonian cities to which he gave tax exemptions, and has a brief summary of his conquests, which are arranged geographically rather than chronologically. The remaining two-thirds of the text is devoted to the construction of the new capital and ends with a concluding blessing for Sargon's hands (Fuchs 1994, 61-66). This focus on the construction of the capital is significant and unique.

The throneroom itself was similar to Kalḫu but unfortunately its decoration is mostly unknown. The American excavators managed to recover pieces of painting from the walls and the roof, together with some inscribed relief fragments (Loud, Frankfort and Jacobsen 1936, 56-68). The lack of decoration in some parts of the throneroom (e.g. niches opposite to the central door and at the end of the room), as well as some unfinished features (e.g. tram-rails without grooves) might indicate that even one of the most important locations of the palace, while functional, was left unfinished (Kertai 2015, 104).

A novel inclusion is the terrace courtyard that expands at the northwestern side of the palace, where the citadel protrudes from the city wall. The terrace itself incorporated a double-sided reception suite, two courtyards (I and III), and its southern side has Monument X.

### 5.7.3 THE SECONDARY CITADEL (PALACE F)

The area surrounding the secondary citadel, where Palace F was located, has already been discussed (section 5.6). The existence of such a secondary citadel closely resembles the two citadels of Kalḫu. Based on that city, Palace F has been interpreted as the Military Palace, the *ekal māšarti*. Unfortunately, this palace has been poorly excavated, and the published results heavily exaggerate the actual excavated area (highlighted with black on Figure 34).

In terms of size, Palace F is only slightly smaller than the main palace but they both have comparably thick walls (Loud and Altman 1938, 75). The terrace of Palace F is also comparable to the main Palace, having a trapezoidal shape and constructed on top of a mound. No ramp has been identified, but the height of the terrace would require one to access the palace.

The plan of the building follows the ‘blueprint’ of every other building in the citadels of the city, with a forecourt and a throneroom court. The two other courts indicated on the plan by Loud and Altman are admittedly “*imaginative*” (1938, 76, pl. 69). Excavation focused on the back of the palace, where the mound protrudes beyond the city wall. It revealed a throneroom, which was even larger than its counterpart in the Royal palace, although the decoration in the throneroom of Palace F was significantly simpler. The entrances here were decorated with large bull colossi (Loud and Altman 1938, 76; Kertai 2015, 118).

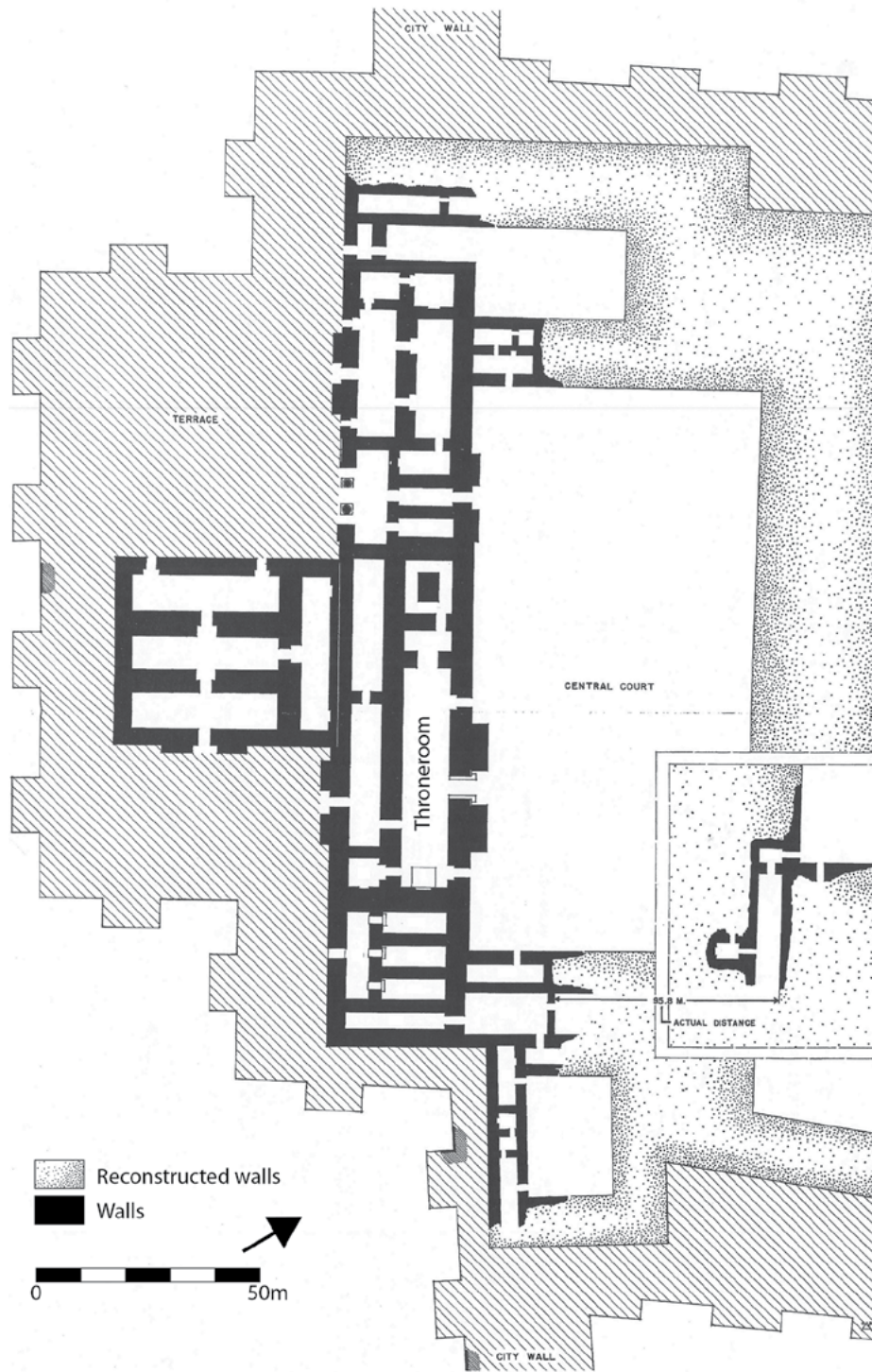
A double-sided reception suite was located, once again, behind the throneroom, dividing the back part of the terrace into two spaces. It has been suggested that this suite was where the principle resident of the complex spent his private hours (Loud and Altman 1938, 77). However, the lack of a bathroom, the lack of a direct connection to the throneroom, and the unequal configuration of doors makes the use and function of the suite unclear.

No further excavation has taken place in the rest of this palace. Additionally, no areas related to military activities have been found here comparable to Fort Shalamaneser, the military palace of Kalḫu. The latter had evidence for workshops related to the maintenance of the army, and, at least in the early periods of its function, its function was primarily related to the military (see section 4.5.4). Such archaeological evidence does not exist for Palace F, although it needs to be considered that the city, and as such the secondary citadel as well, was not used for more than two years.

Although this mound and its structure closely resemble the Royal Palace, there does not seem to be any form of enclosure like that in the main citadel. Furthermore, there are no textual data known at present that refer to the military palace of the city. The only exception might be text SAAo 01 039: r 7’, a letter from the crown prince Sennacherib, in which he gives orders regarding construction at the new capital. The relevant passage reads: “...] *in the presence of the ki[ng, my lord .....]. He and his brothers had become very scared, so I gave them new [orders]: ‘This will do for this (neglected) king’s [work] of [la]st years.’ Now they are present and do their work in the Review Palace.*” (SAAo 01 039: r 2’-8’). Even in this passage however, it is not clear to which secondary citadel the crown prince refers.

Textual evidence regarding the construction of the city seems to refer to the “review palace” of Kalḫu quite often, giving it a more complex status from its assumed explicitly military purposes (i.e. SAAo 05 206, r 1’-3’). It is possible that the secondary palace was used more for other administrative purposes and less for direct military organization. Kertai (2011) discussed the need for an Assyrian king to have two palaces, one for war and one for peace. I would suggest however, that this was possibly not the case at Dur-Šarrukēn. It is possible that the role of the secondary citadel had evolved by this time to accommodate other administrative functions in





**Figure 34:** Plan of Palace F (Loud and Altman 1938, Plate 75).



addition to the military administration, as is the case at the secondary citadel of Nineveh (see section 6.8.2).

It is possible that the planners of the city would have accounted for the existence of a secondary citadel on the basis of the “customary” layout of major Assyrian centers. The similarities to Kalḫu are apparent, and perhaps the construction of a secondary citadel was planned to outsource some of the other administrative matters, like local administration.

## 5.8 WHAT – CONCLUSIONS

I would like to conclude with addressing the three main questions of the study: why was Dur-Šarrukēn constructed; how the construction was realized; what the function of the city was, or in this case, why was it abandoned so soon.

In the previous case studies, I discussed extensively the relation between the creation of a capital and the changing nature of Assyria from a territorial state into an empire. In the case of Dur-Šarrukēn, there is a similar change: the empire witnessed significant territorial expansion and experienced a series of changes in its administrative and military structure. In addition to accommodating these structural changes, the creation of Dur-Šarrukēn formed a new center of administration. The new system of a more centralized administration is reflected in the citadel’s construction, which differs from that of other Assyrian capitals.

The issues of the legitimacy of Sargon as the king of Assyria have often been foregrounded to explain the creation of Dur-Šarrukēn. It is, in my opinion, valid to say that Dur-Šarrukēn is the Assyrian capital that more closely fits the model of disembedded capitals proposed by Joffe. The distancing from existing elites and the creation of new political power structures was definitely a factor for the creation of the new capital.

This creation, however, could only have been realized within the phase of expansion and restructuring of Assyria. At the same time, Sargon’s position on the throne had already been secured after the first years of his reign (see section 5.3). As such, while the creation of a new power center away from older elites might have played a role, it is unlikely that issues of legitimacy were at play. Rather, Dur-Šarrukēn fits within the general model of Assyrian

capital creation, following a period of continuous growth.

The construction of Dur-Šarrukēn was, in the end, realized for the most part: the city was constructed and functional. Its location away from the main roads, however, meant that building materials could not be brought directly to the construction site but had to first go through Nineveh. The textual evidence gives great insights into miscommunications, material shortages, and labor problems.

Finally, I would like to address the abandonment of the city, a topic which is tied to the reasons for the construction of Nineveh, discussed further in the next chapter. Above (section 5.4.1) I discussed the location of Dur-Šarrukēn. Indeed, as analyzed at the end of this study, there are certain characteristics that fit with the general blueprint of capital creation in Assyria. The city was built next to a river, with access to Tigris, at a new location, had two citadel mounds, a certain degree of natural defenses, and access to hinterland.

However, of all the newly created capitals of Assyria, the location of Dur-Šarrukēn offered the least advantages. Its hinterland had to be “created” at the expense of Nineveh, access to the Tigris was only possible via the Khosr, and the major route for accessing major trade routes and resources was through the city of Nineveh. The core region of Assyria had to be re-crafted in order to incorporate Dur-Šarrukēn within the existing river and road networks. The new capital was thus created in relatively isolated location, which was more difficult to access than other capitals.

Despite these irregularities, Dur-Šarrukēn was not an exceptional capital. On the contrary, it fits well within the general framework of Assyrian capital creation. However, it seems like Dur-Šarrukēn failed to live up to the desired aims of its planners, as did Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta. In the end, the court decided to relocate the capital to Nineveh, and the possible reasons behind this choice will be explored in the next chapter.