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

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Propositions belonging to the PhD thesis

**Creating Capitals:
The Rationale, Construction, and Function of the Imperial Capitals of
Assyria**

by Aris Politopoulos

1. The Assyrian empire relocated its capital city no less than four times. The sheer magnitude of these projects, combined with a research focus on royal inscriptions and elite spaces by experts, has given rise to a dominant but mistaken narrative that the creation of new capitals in Assyria was an act primarily undertaken by charismatic kings.
2. The creation of new capitals in Assyria does not happen at random points in history, but rather during or after periods of imperial transformations comprised of: territorial growth; economic growth; and changes in the imperial administration and ideology.
3. The creation of Assyrian capitals is a complex and multifaceted process. It should be studied both from its technical perspective, i.e. the practice of construction, the materials used/exploited, and the labor required, as well as from its social perspective, i.e. the interplay between the king, the elites involved in the construction, and the labor force that actually realized the construction.
4. The study of the Assyrian empire requires a shift of focus from the elite to the understanding of the lives of the broader population. While studies on the periphery of the empire are already moving in that direction, there is still a lot that needs to be done to understand how people lived in the various regions of Assyria.
5. While there are significant differences between capital creation in antiquity and today, understanding the reasons and techniques that allowed for capital creation to emerge in the past can help us understand the way capitals are created today.
6. The model proposed in this study, asking *why* a capital was created, *how* it was built, and *what* its function was, can be applied to the investigation of both ancient and modern cases of capital creation. Such analyses need to consider the historical conditions under which a new capital is created, the agents involved, and the resources used.
7. The multiple facets of ancient capital creation require interdisciplinary research. For that reason, capital creation research should be done jointly by historians, archaeologists, philologists, and geographers.
8. If archaeology and the humanities more broadly are to survive, we need to get out of the ivory tower of academia and engage with the public.
9. In the words of Paul Feyerabend “*science is essentially an anarchic enterprise*”. Anarchism is defined by social solidarity, consensual collaboration, and freedom. Anarchism offers the tools to include society in scientific change, rather than creating scientific beliefs from enlightened ‘*intellectuals*’.
10. Play is a learning process. For that reason, play can be used in education, but it can also be used in research. Incorporating play in our academic endeavors will not only yield fruitful results, but it will also put back the much-needed fun in research.