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PROGRAMMATIK IM MESOPOTAMISCHEN RESIDENZSTADTBAU VON AGADE BIS SURRA MAN RA'Ā

von

Mirko Novák

SUMMARY

The subject of the present study is the programme of town planning from the Akkadian to the Early Abbasid period, i.e. from the 3rd millennium BC to the 1st millennium AD. The architectonic ways of transposing a semiotic massage of a political programme into the physical layout of a city are analysed.

In the introductory Chapter I (pp. 1-8) the aim of the study is presented, as well as its geographical and chronological limits. The cities investigated lie in Mesopotamia, the most fertile area of the Near East. Here, the most extensive political units existed and the largest capitals were constructed. Mesopotamia is divided into three regions, Babylonia, Assyria and Upper Mesopotamia (the so-called *Jazira*), of which Babylonia was economically the most important. The special characteristics of the three regions led to different forms of urbanisation.

The chronological limits are fixed by two foundations, beginning with Agade, the capital of the first Mesopotamian empire in the second half of the 3rd millennium BC, and ending with Surra man ra'ā, the large military camp of the Abbasid caliphs in the 9th century AD.

The methodology is discussed in the succeeding Chapter II (pp. 9-24). Firstly, a number of studies concerning »city planning« and their various methods are briefly considered. For a long time there was debate as to whether the Near Eastern town was a real »city« at all, and, in that case, if it was a specifically »Islamic« or, rather, a »Near Eastern« city that was not substantially influenced by the ruling religion. In 1975, an article by E. Wirth led to the opinion, still valid, that the so-called »Oriental city«, i.e. the Islamic Near Eastern city, stood, in the first instance, in the tradition of the pre-Islamic ancient Near Eastern city. Nearly all following studies presume the existence of *the* Near Eastern and *the* ancient Near Eastern city as general features. On the contrary, however, each city belongs to a special »type« which is determined by its primary functions. Different factors create specific forms. Every city, indeed, must be seen as a unique case and it is impossible to make generalisations.

In the present study a modified »hypothetical deductive method« is applied. By a quasi-inductive process – based on modern art history concerning European cities – a hypothesis is proposed: the form and structure of a Mesopotamian city depend on the ideological pro-

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gramme of the ruling system. Based on this proposition, the available material is analysed to prove whether the hypothesis is correct, and to reach a synthesis.

Here, the theoretical concept of »semiotics« underlies the method. This philosophical concept follows the idea that »culture« is a kind of communication and each phenomenon – including art and architecture – is a »system of signs« which is intended to transmit a message.

In the case of ancient Near Eastern cities as well as of Islamic Near Eastern cities, the message is articulated by the internal structure and external form of a city, and the sender of the message was the ruling political system. The architect was the medium that created the »language«. The receivers of the message were, on the one hand, the gods (or the one God in the case of Islam), to whom the king had to justify himself, and, on the other hand, the human dependants who would thereby recognise the legitimate reign of the king (see Chapter II.3, pp. 19-24). A psychological means of transmission took place: through the common perception of the urban milieu in daily life, the inhabitants or visitors of a city reflected the design of its structure. Special axes, presented by the alignment of the streets, and important buildings symbolised the cosmological order. Significant urban elements were, due to the underlying concept and ideological programme, emphasised or hidden.

In Chapter III (pp. 25-38), the different ideological concepts of Mesopotamian kingship are summarised. Because of the complexity of the subject only special features can be highlighted.

The predominant principle of Babylonian kingship ideology from the end of the 3rd millennium BC onwards was the »charismatic king«. This signifies that the king is qualified primarily by his peculiar capabilities, his personal charisma, more than by genealogy, to fulfil his god-given mandate to rule.

His two pre-eminent, and mythologically based duties were, first, to ensure successful agriculture – mostly by taking care of the channels – and, second, to protect the herds of animals against wild beasts and enemies. Based on this, the type of the »royal gardener and hunter« was developed in literature and art. Furthermore, the ruler was responsible for building activities, especially of »public« buildings such as temples, palaces and ramparts. He had to guarantee the social order as well as the security of the whole community against foreign enemies.

The Akkadian dynasty began the practice of deification of the king. Naram-Sin based his divine position on his personal success as »ruler of the world«. Later, from the Third Dynasty

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of Ur on, deification was used to create a centralised state. At the end of the Old Babylonian period the concept was abandoned.

In Babylonia a strong class of more or less independent priests was part of the ideology. Especially during the 1st millennium BC the priests were an important political factor which restricted the power of the king.

In Assyria a different concept was created. Based on his role as the governor and high priest of the god Aššur, the ruler of Assyria became a kind of »priest-king« of the empire. He supervised the property of the national god, the »true king« of the city. Furthermore, he was the intercessor between humans and gods. In contrast to the Babylonian ruler, he unified spiritual and secular power. Most of his duties were comparable to those of the Babylonian king. Indeed, the traditional type of the »royal gardener and hunter« was adopted. In addition to that, the god Aššur obliged him to wage a kind of »sacred war« against all enemies of the god, city and state of Aššur. War became an instrument of legitimisation. As shown by the royal inscriptions, genealogy had more importance for the Assyrian monarchy than for the Babylonian.

The founder of the Seleucid dynasty, Seleucus I Nicator, founded his power on personal military performances. Under his successors, Macedonian, Iranian and Mesopotamian elements formed an ideology, which was to a great extent based on genealogy.

The Iranian concepts of the Achaemenids, Parthians and Sasanians show some striking similarities, though several differences are also clear. It is remarkable that all the Iranian ideologies were very similar to the Assyrian. They were focused on the figure of the »charismatic king« as the earthly representative of the main god. The type of the »royal gardener and hunter« was adapted in visual art and literature. Furthermore, the Iranians gave more attention to genealogy; only membership of the ruling family permitted an aspirant to obtain the crown.

In the time of the immediate followers (»caliphs«) of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, the idea of the »caliphate« was developed. It was based on the concept that the best Muslim of the community should be its leader. A true »kingship« on the dynastic principle should be avoided. But the fifth caliph Mu'awiya, from the house of the Umayyads, founded the first Islamic dynasty, which started to take over several aspects of ancient Near Eastern kingship. After some time, the dynastic principle became dominant in the ruling system of the families

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of the Umayyads and Abbasids as well as in the most important Islamic opposition, the family of the Alids that was supported by the Shia.

During the Islamic »Golden Age« of the early Abbasid empire, the ideology of the Caliphate was fundamentally transformed. Moving towards the original concept of a human *imam* »principal« of the Islamic *umma* »community« and that of the *ḫalīfatu rasūl'allāh* »representative of the prophet of God«, the caliph became a ruler in the tradition of the ancient Near Eastern »charismatic king«. Even his title suggests this by its new form *ḫalīfatu'allāh* »representative of God«. With this new title and the adoption of the Sasanian court ceremonial the transformation became visible. In art and literature the type of the »royal gardener and hunter« was taken over from Iran.

In spite of the many differences in the various kingship ideologies of Mesopotamia, some striking similarities can be seen. A few aspects may have passed from dynasty to dynasty as a symbolic act of tradition. Others were taken over unconsciously, and prove thereby their vivid and fundamental reality in Mesopotamian or Near Eastern consciousness. The idea of the »royal gardener and hunter«, for example, is based on the agricultural and pastoral origins of Mesopotamian society and kingship. Even if its adoption by Iranian and Islamic leaders was a conscious procedure as part of their ideological programmes, the mythological and historical background was surely no longer understood. The »charisma« of the ruler, that emphasises his special relationship to the god or the one God, is one of the most persistent features of Near Eastern kingship ideologies until modern times.

In Chapter IV (pp. 39-63) the »city« as a social and physical phenomenon is analysed. Firstly, the definition of a city is discussed. The historical terminology in cuneiform, classical or medieval Arabic sources does not lead to a satisfactory solution of the problem from a modern point of view. Therefore, various modern sociological and geographical definitions are cited. Based on them, a new complex definition is suggested. In this volume »city« is defined as a large settlement with a relatively high density of population. The subsistence of its inhabitants is based on a division of labour and is dominated by the secondary, tertiary and even the quartary sectors of the economy. The population is socially stratified. Beside its function as economic location and traffic junction, the city serves as a centre of administration, culture and religion, not only for its own inhabitants but also for the surrounding population. These functions give the city the position as a »central place«.

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The bases of each classification of urban settlements are their functions. Although every city fulfils many purposes, only the primary functions are used to define a special type of a city. Theoretically this is a so-called »pure typology« because absolute representatives of these types never existed in reality. If it comes to that, even the so-called »residence-city« is a subjective construction, since the distinguishing features between it and the »capital city« are fluent. Its main characteristic is that the palace forms the economic basis of nearly all of its inhabitants. Autonomous structures do not exist on any large scale. That means that »residence-cities« can only result from the strong ideological and economic position of the king as an institution.

In general, the arrangement of an urban settlement depends on socio-ecological factors, climatic conditions, geomorphological assumptions about the site and local building traditions. Furthermore, political concepts influence the external shape and internal structure of a city. This last factor is mostly present in the formation of a »residence-city« because of its special economic background and its function as a symbol of the ruling system. Even the construction of a new »residence-city« can be seen as an expression of the ideologically based and economically manifested power of the king.

The architect has the duty to transmit a message that is determined by the ruling system. By doing so he has to consider all the other important factors to create a »working« city. The external shape and the internal structure of the city may symbolise the ideological concept. The architect is immersed in the existing system through his own cultural context. Information about the political or ideological situation may be a part of his work, even when he is not conscious of it.

In Chapter V (pp. 64-269) all empirical data from archaeological excavations, literary descriptions or visual reproduction on monuments of art are put together to reconstruct the external shape and internal structure of the Mesopotamian »residence-cities«. In each case the socio-ecological processes, building traditions, climatic conditions and geomorphological assumptions are considered, so that the ideological programme and its role in the formation of the city can be isolated. The results provide the material basis for further investigations.

Chapter VI (pp. 270-351) deals with the urban elements. They were used to articulate an ideological message to differing extents, depending on region and period. Especially, extramural »paradise gardens«, city walls, gates, streets, sacral buildings and palaces had a role beyond their primary functions for special symbolic purposes.

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The Assyrian kings were the first to create huge artificial »universal gardens« that consisted of botanical granaries, landscape parks and »zoos«. Plants and animals from all known countries were kept inside to illustrate the world dominance of the Assyrian king and the fertility of the lands he ruled. Here, wild animals were killed during the ceremonial royal hunt. These paradise gardens served to symbolise aspects of the »royal gardener and hunter«. Throughout the periods of the Iranian dynasties until the early Abbasid Caliphate the paradise gardens were part of programmatic city building activities in the Near East. They are one of the best examples of an ideological tradition from Neo-Assyrian to Abbasid times.

In ancient Mesopotamia, city walls were seen as synonyms for the boundary between the wild steppe and the secure city, between wilderness and civilisation. As such they could help to symbolise the layout not only of the city itself but also of the whole civilised world. The gates, as important points of transmission, were richly decorated and strongly accentuated. Especially in northern Mesopotamia and Syria the decoration of gates was very important. In later periods, walls and gates seem to have lost part of their former ideological significance. But even at Abbasid Madinat as-Salaam similar concepts to those of pre-Hellenistic times were evident.

The internal structure of a city depends on the alignment of the streets. In this regard, the street system could easily be used to stress an ideological message. Straight axes leading from the gates to the city centre drew attention to the temples that were lying in the middle of the city at the main traffic junctions. This principle can be observed in nearly all the capitals or »residence-cities« of Mesopotamia. Only in Assyrian and Hellenistic cities were other solutions found. In Assyria the important public buildings were not concentrated at the city centre. In Hellenistic cities the Hippodamic layout gave importance to a grid of streets of equal importance without main junctions. Even public buildings had to submit to this system.

The citadel was a symbol of an urban society with an absolutist government. From the Middle Assyrian period, citadels were a significant feature at Assyrian cities, located on their peripheries. The royal palaces, as well as the main temples, were placed close to each other on top of the citadels, far away from the domestic quarters of the common people. This situation highlighted the position of the Assyrian king as the representative of the gods. Although citadels were constructed also at other northern Mesopotamian cities, as well as in Babylon in the Late Babylonian period and in cities of Hellenistic times, they were never used as instru-

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ments of ideology or propaganda in the same way. Except in Assyria the main sacral buildings of the city were never situated on the citadel.

The palaces were not only the residences of the kings and buildings of the administration but also symbols of kingship itself. Because of their special architectural form in all periods, the palaces were set apart by their size and decoration, and thereby raised above the level of ordinary domestic architecture.

Irrespective of the religion, all sacral buildings, such as temples, churches or mosques, were gathering points of the communities. Ceremonies and processions supported this unity. Sacral buildings normally lay in the centre of the cities and were visible and accessible for all the inhabitants. Only in Assyrian capitals were the main temples situated at the periphery, on top of the citadel.

The locations of the »residence-cities« are discussed in Chapter VII (pp. 352-367). The setting was chosen according to differing factors, economic, political or strategic. The government sometimes improved the natural conditions of a location artificially. This could be achieved by the diversion of traffic routes or the digging of new canals. Our analysis of the choice of locations shows that only those »residence-cities« could develop which had sufficient economic potential, independent of the court. The failure of cities like Dūr-Šarrukēn or Surra man ra'ā resulted from their dependence on the palace, which they never overcame.

In the Near East several forms of cities were created based on special ideological concepts (Chapter VIII, pp. 368-380). In addition to those with irregular shapes, settlements with rectangular or circular forms were constructed. The literary sources suggest that appropriate city forms were chosen according to pre-existing images concerning the spatial structure of the universe. This was the case in all societies that defined their capitals as an *axis mundi*. In pre-Hellenistic Mesopotamia rectangular shapes were preferred, in Iran circular ones. In the first case the image of the »four corners of the world« stood behind the layout, in the second the »Kašvar-circle«. The Abbasid caliphs adopted the Iranian traditions when they created the Madinat as-Salaam.

The inclusion of toponyms into the programme took place during the Sasanian period (Chapter IX, pp. 381-384). The name of the Abbasid capital Madinat as-Salaam, the »City of Peace«, was modelled on the Qur'an image of the Dar as-Salaam, the »House of Peace« (i.e., the part of the world that is ruled by Islam).

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During the time between the 15th century BC and the 10th century AD, the foundation of monumental »residence-cities« helped to express the claim of an absolute and universal rule. Differing ideological concepts and building traditions of the various empires led to differing city forms. The external shapes and spatial organisation of the internal structure transmitted different programmatic messages of the ruling systems. Each state found its own architectural solutions (Chapter X, pp., 385-398).

The Assyrian »residence-city« had a rectangular shape and was surrounded by artificial, huge »paradise-gardens« with a universal character. A citadel at its periphery, where the royal palaces as well as the main temples were situated, dominated the city. The distance between the dwelling quarters of the common people and the public buildings stressed the nearly supernatural position of the king. He, as the main priest and representative of the god Aššur, lived high above the city itself, close to the houses of the gods. The public buildings were visible from outside the city, so that everybody could appreciate the message. The city was a symbol of the charismatic king, the creator of the city and of the artificial paradise gardens. While the old capital Aššur was seen as the vertical axis of the world, connecting heaven, earth and underworld, the »residence-city« was the horizontal axis and the »seat of power«.

Late Babylonian Babylon demonstrated a synthesis between traditional Babylonian and adopted Assyrian building principles. In accordance with the Babylonian concept of the »temple city«, the main temple of the city-god Marduk lay at the centre of the capital. The main axis of the street system connected the gates with the central temple, which was thus set at the main junction. The shape of the city was rectangular, and, as the *axis mundi*, symbolised the world with its »four corners«. The »navel of the world« on its vertical and horizontal axis ෫ the temple of the city and national god Marduk ෫ dominated the city and therefore the whole universe. Each inhabitant or visitor to Babylon could recognise this order from the outside and the inside. The temple Esangil and the ziqqurat Etemenanki were visible from all main streets of the city and served in daily life as the most important points of orientation within the city. The Assyrian influence led to the creation of a »paradise garden« – the so-called »Hanging Gardens« – and to an artificial citadel on the periphery, where the palaces were situated. This citadel gave the city for the first time in Babylonia a bipolar structure with two prominent heights. This symbolised the Babylonian ideology of twin powers: god and king.

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Although Hellenisation caused several innovations, such as the Hippodamic alignment of the streets or the loss of the rectangular shape, Seleucia copied in many points the system of Babylon. The temple was situated at the centre, and the palaces, so far as is known, on the periphery, probably on top of the citadel. This shows a relationship between the Seleucid and the Babylonian ideologies.

During the Parthian period the principle of the »circular city« with a central palace or temple spread over many parts of the Near East. The Sasanians adopted it and surrounded the cities with huge extramural paradise gardens in the Assyrian and Achaemenid tradition. The universal gardens and their royal palaces symbolised the fertility in the lands ruled by the Iranian »king of kings«. The city itself was seen as an image of the world, which in Iranian ideology was circular. Four streets connecting the four gates, with the public buildings in the centre, created four equal segments, the four quarters of the world. The palace at the centre emphasised the position of the charismatic king as the representative of Ahuramazda (Ohrmuzd).

The final climax of the Mesopotamian »residence-city« was early Abbasid Madinat as-Salaam, the »City of Peace«, in Baghdad. Here, Sasanian principles were combined with Early Islamic ones. The circular layout symbolised the civilised and Islamised universe. In its centre the palace with the »Green Dome« emphasised the position of the caliph. The city's four gates, one facing each wind direction, and four streets represented the four quarters of the world. The residential quarters were divided into equal sectors. The inhabitants of the city were drawn from all people living in the Dar as-Salaam, the Islamic »House of Peace«. In this way, the city represented a microcosm for the Islamic world. The close connection of palace and main mosque emphasised the function of the caliph as *imam* of the *umma*, the community of Islam. The name and structure of the capital symbolised the Abbasid concept of a charismatic ruler, on the one hand, and the human leader of the religious community, on the other. Even if his attempts to attain a greater religious power failed – the main authorities remained the Qur'an and the Sunna of the prophet Muhammad –, the caliph was the representative of God and his prophet on earth. As such, his duty was to guarantee the order of Islam.

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CONTENTS

http://homepages.uni-tuebingen.de/mirko.novak/

http://homepages.uni-tuebingen.de/mirko.novak/

http://homepages.uni-tuebingen.de/mirko.novak/

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