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*Private and State
in the Ancient Near East*

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*Private and State in the Second Millennium B.C.
from an Archaeological Perspective*

Adelheid Otto

MUNICH

The theme of this Leiden Rencontre seems straightforward, but it is a real challenge for an archaeologist to correlate the abstract concept of the state with material culture and visual images.¹ The historical background in the second millennium B.C. is the formation of regional states with a considerable impact from ethnic groups such as the Amorites and the Hurrians, which went along with the growing power of royal households. On the other hand, the diversity of different forms of state organisation increased at the same time. We observe a growing adherence to successful regional models of government: for example, the Mittani overlord coped with the palatial systems in the west and east of his empire, as well as with the limited kingship model with strong collective governance along the Euphrates.²

The concept of state as applied to the Ancient Near East has recently been defined by Selz as a heuristic model of domination cycles, where the legislative and executive power was united in the person of the ruler.³ This touches the fundamental question of whether we can distinguish between the state and the king. Clearly, the state is an apparatus and not a person, but the king forms part of an institution that would not exist without him. From the time of French absolutism we know the dictum, allegedly spoken by Louis XIV, “L’état c’est moi!”. In his classic study, *The King’s Two Bodies*, Ernst Kantorowicz described medieval Kings as consisting of two bodies: a body natural, and a body politic (Kantorowicz 1957). The body natural was his mortal body, subject to all the weaknesses of a mortal human being, while the body politic was a spiritual body, impervious to mortal infirmities such as disease and old age. These two bodies form one indivisible unit, with the body politic superior to the body natural. I shall come back to this in the final part of my presentation, when I shall ask if royal images were intended to promote the king representing the state (in the Ancient Near East, unlike in modern states, that meant being the representative of the supreme god) or to promote him as an individual.

1. I offer my sincere thanks to the organizers of this Rencontre, especially to Wilfred van Soldt, Dina Katz and Jan Gerrit Dercksen, for inviting me to deliver what is a not altogether easy topic for a keynote presentation. I also thank Michael Roaf for his very helpful critical remarks.

2. For the Old Babylonian historical background, see Charpin 2004; for the Mittani period see Cancik-Kirschbaum, Brisch and Eidem 2014; for the limited kingship model see Fleming 1992 and 2004.

3. Selz 2011: 24.

The dichotomy of state versus private and more often that of public versus private has been defined by historians as the relationship between the institutional and the non-institutional,⁴ or between bureaucratic administration and individual life,⁵ and sometimes as the relationship between a patrimonial system and membership of households.⁶ Here I shall explore the relationship between state and private in the archaeological record of the second millennium B.C. by focusing on three topics, which are deliberately distinct from one another: 1) the concept of town planning; 2) the use of private and official seals; 3) the intended purpose of royal sculpture.

1. Town Planning as an Indicator of State?

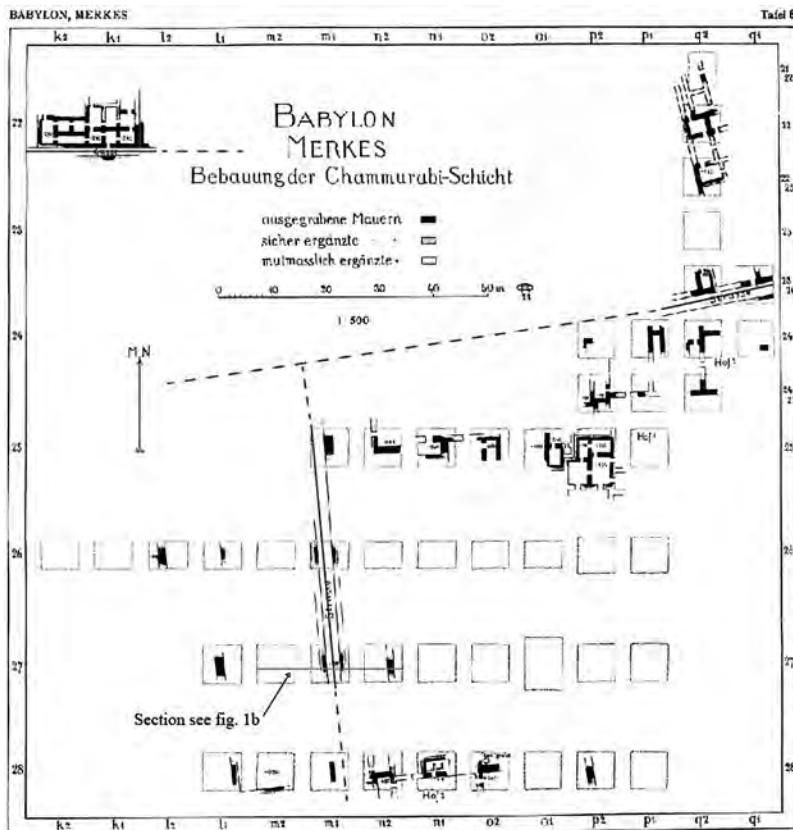
Let us first investigate whether town planning can be taken as an indicator of state activities. Generally, extensive building activities are considered to be indicative of a strict organisation by the state. V. G. Childe (1950) was among the first to propose that the large-scale irrigation system in Southern Mesopotamia required extensive centralised power and thus contributed considerably to the formation of states. Karl Wittfogel (1957) even concluded that the so-called “hydraulic regimes” of China, Egypt and Mesopotamia – centralised forms of states based on despotism – came into existence because their large-scale irrigation systems demanded centrally organised regulation. Especially in Neo-Assyrian times, but also visible on an archaeological level elsewhere, the founding of a new city was a royal deed par excellence (Huot 1988). Neo-Assyrian kings boasted in their inscriptions about the elaborate layouts, shining streets, invincible fortifications and the sensational size and significance of the new buildings they erected.

In the second millennium, the kings of the Old Babylonian dynasty embellished the capital of their new state on the Euphrates. However, we know hardly anything archaeologically of the Old Babylonian occupation levels of Babylon because they are today buried 10–30 m below the surface and beneath the water table. Between 1907 and 1912, the one time when the water table sank due to a broken dam, Robert Koldewey was able to investigate the early second millennium levels by limited soundings. Although he uncovered only fragments of private houses, streets and the city wall they suggest that the city had a regular plan and was orthogonally laid out (fig. 1a). His results were carefully recorded and published with detailed drawings of sections. They show that many of the streets and alleyways remained at exactly the same location for millennia. The walls bordering the streets were constructed one above the other from the Old Babylonian (“Ch”) to the Seleucid (“Pe-S.”) levels (fig. 1b). This is a strong argument for the proposal that the same orthogonal town plan persisted over two millennia. Thus, the orthogonal layout of the Old Babylonian capital city can be inferred from the regular layout of much later levels. Since Babylon was one of the major capitals in the Ancient Near East, it is tempting to conclude on the one hand that the planned and orthogonal conception of a city is an indication of the regulatory nature of the state. On the other hand it may be a manifestation of royal privilege, in that the commissioning of major building projects was the prerogative of the king and one that was favoured in cities where the ruler resided.

4. Van Driel 2000; Dercksen 2000.

5. Garfinkle 2005.

6. Schloen 2001.



Veröff. 1926: 44. Reuther.

Fig. 1a. Remains of the orthogonally laid out city of Babylon in Old Babylonian times (Reuther 1926: Taf. 8).

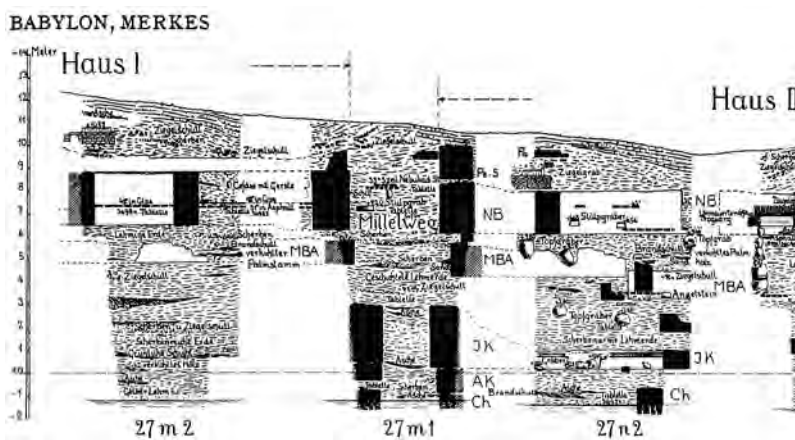


Fig. 1b. Part of a section through Houses I and II and the street in between. The positions of the “Mittelweg” and of the walls of the buildings beside it remain in the same place from the Old Babylonian (Ch) until the Seleucid (Pe-S) period (Reuther 1926: Taf. 4).

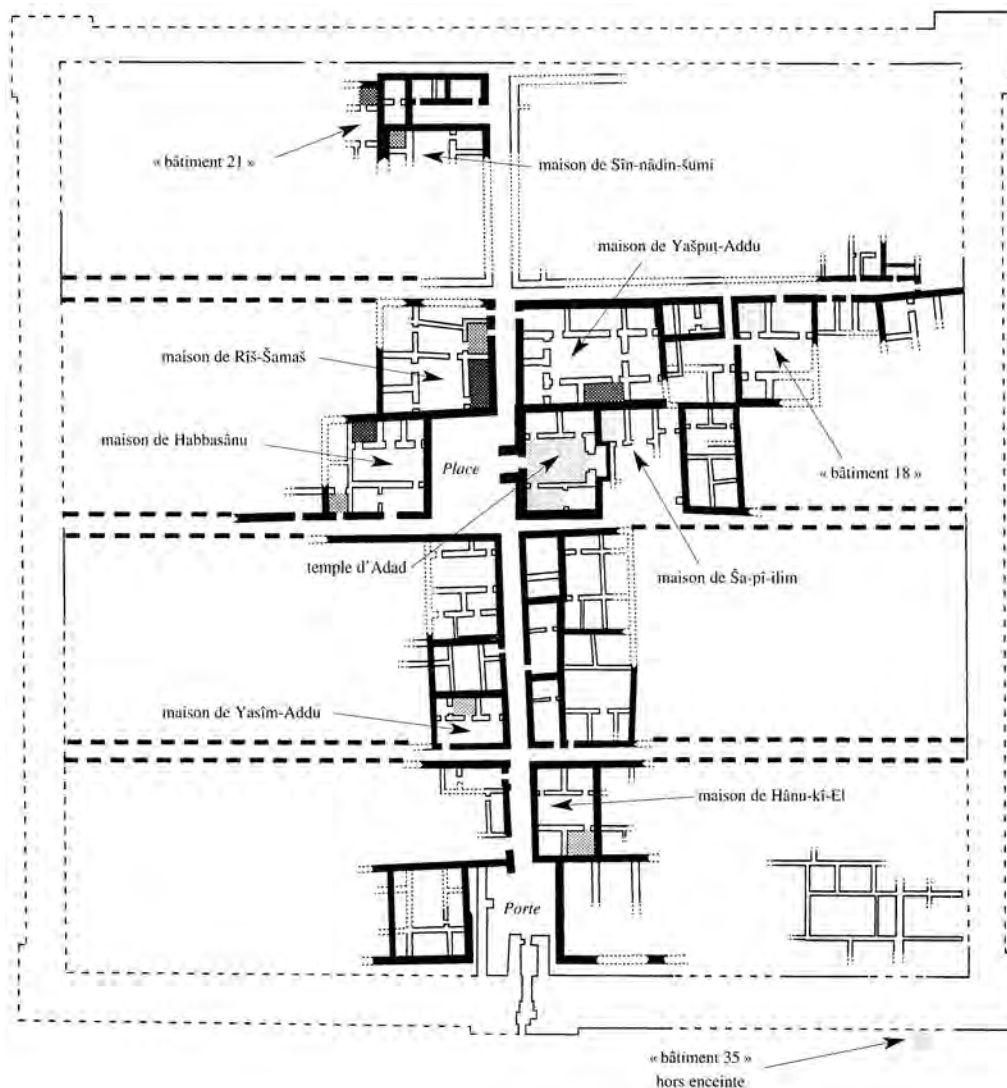


Fig. 2. Harradum (Khirbet ed-Diniye) at the time of Ammi-šaduqa: a planned settlement, which was governed by a mayor and the elders (Joannès 2006: 8).

Regularly planned settlements may have been the result of projects undertaken by the state, but then there is the question of whether such settlements could have been constructed independently of the state. In short, can town planning be considered as a visible sign of the presence of a state?

The small town of Harradum, modern Khirbet ed-Diniye, on the Euphrates about 340 km upstream of Babylon and 90 km downstream of Mari, was clearly carefully planned (fig. 2).⁷ This tiny settlement of only 1 ha was founded by Ešnunna

7. Kepinski-Lecomte 1992; Joannès 2006. The best known settlement dates from the period between Samsu-iluna and Ammi-šaduqa.

as a strategic stronghold against Mari in the 18th century B.C. It has a nearly perfect square plan and was protected by a city wall with a single gate to the south. The street network consisted of one main road crossed by three roads at right angles, dividing the settlement into eight insulae. The houses of wealthy merchants, whose names are known from several private archives, were aligned along the main road. Storage facilities and handicraft areas were further attested in the settlement. The plots varied little in size, and the houses were attached to one another. The regular grid system was only interrupted by an open public space in the city centre. Interestingly, the mayor Habbasanu and his sons lived in a house on the west side of this central space and there was a modest temple on the east side. This temple was not free-standing but integrated into the urban fabric. Furthermore, the plot on which the temple was built was no larger than the plots of the houses. Cuneiform documents found in some of the houses show that the city was managed by the elders of Harradum, including the mayor (*rabiānum*) and the heads of the local families (Joannès 2006: 28). The similar sizes of the building plots seem to show an equitable distribution of residential space. The only exceptions are the plots for houses of the mayor and the god in the centre, which mirror the dominant collective-governance polities in the northern part of the Euphrates valley during the second millennium. Nevertheless, it is certainly possible that the regular layout was determined by the authorities of the state of Eshnunna when Harradum was founded. Were there no planned settlements without a dominant central power in the background?

A slightly earlier site, also from the Middle Bronze Age, is Tall Halawa, also beside the Euphrates but some 350 km further upstream. There excavations brought to light regular, orthogonally arranged housing quarters (Meyer 1989) (fig. 3),⁸ with slight deviations from the orthogonal system caused by the natural terrain. No fortifications or public buildings were uncovered and none seem to have existed. Within the insulae, the houses were directly attached to each other. The standard house consisted of one main room, from which two small secondary rooms were accessible. All houses had approximately the same size, layout and furnishing. Meyer interpreted this uniformity as evidence that these houses had been built to accommodate dependent workmen and their families, who were subject to the central authority based elsewhere, presumably in nearby Emar.⁹ Unfortunately, there is no information about who founded the town. However, in recent years several comparable settlements have come to light in the same region, which seem to lead us to a different interpretation. In the urban settlement of Tall Munbaqa (ancient Yakaltum during the Middle Bronze Age and Ekalte during the Late Bronze Age) the structures are almost completely known through excavation or magnetic prospection. Apart from a dense collection of quite similar houses, the only other buildings were four temples, three of which were situated at the most prominent point bordering the Euphrates valley, and the fourth on the road leading to the other three. There are no traces of palatial or administrative buildings. The planned layout of this densely built town with highly uniform individual houses suggests strong collective governance and corporate political structures for the society with a low degree of hierarchy. This mirrors what is well attested in texts that were found in the houses

8. The estimated number of houses is 200, assuming a total surface area of approximately 5000 sq. m and a building density as consistent as in the excavated insulae.

9. Meyer 1989: 32; Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: 308.

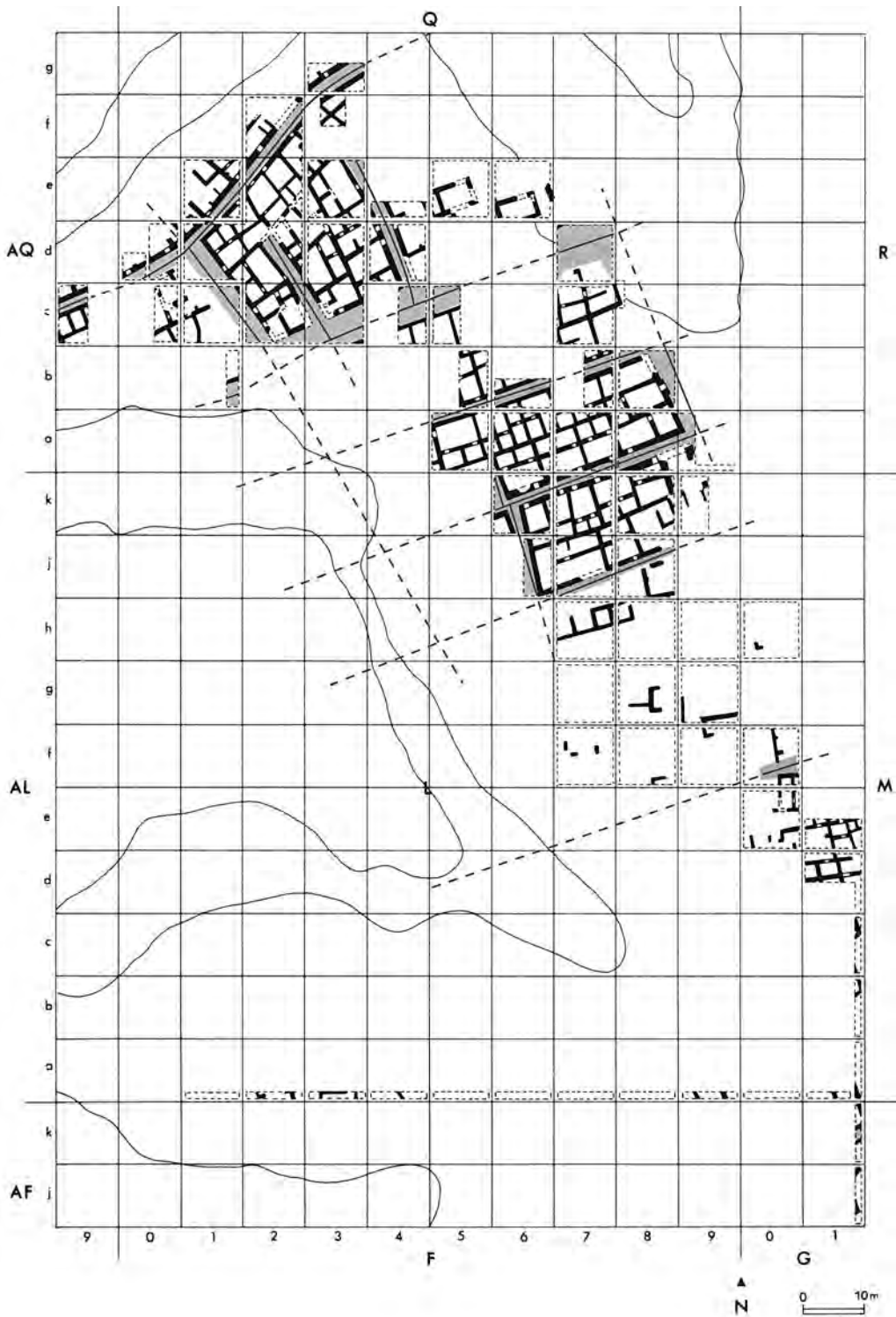


Fig. 3. Tell Halawa A, level 2 (MB I): orthogonal settlement layout of the housing area (Meyer 1989: fig. 6).

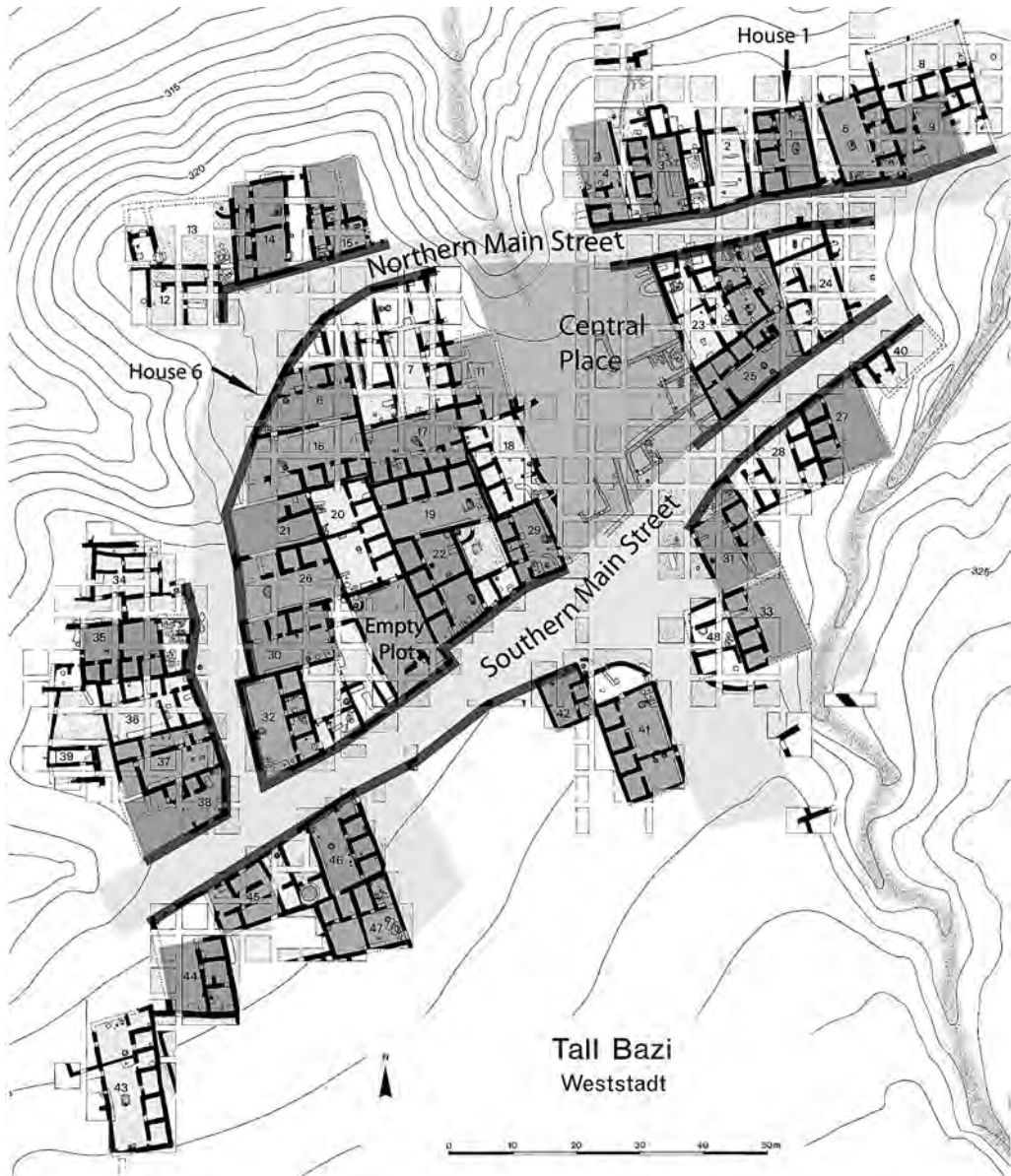


Fig. 4. Tall Bazi, the lower town area “Weststadt”. The walls bordering the planned streets were laid out first (marked in bold).

of Munbaqa. So now we may infer that the Middle Bronze Age settlement of Halawa was similar to that of Tall Munbaqa, planned, designed and settled by members of a specific society.¹⁰

At Tell Bazi, a site 38 km upstream of Halawa and 26 km upstream of Munbaqa, we find the the same planning of the street grid and the same type of house

10. Otto 2014: 52–54.

as in Halawa, only slightly larger.¹¹ In fact, the western lower town (the so-called *Weststadt*) was a planned enlargement of the settlement, built on a virgin gravel terrace to the west of the old city during the Late Bronze Age IB (Otto 2006).

The *Weststadt* of Bazi enables us to follow successive stages in the founding and planning of a town, or at least of a new suburb of an existing town. First the two main streets, 6–10 m wide, were laid out. They both led from the old city, which was situated to the northeast, towards the central place and continued further southwestwards. The southern main street led straight through the insulae to the southwestern slope and continued down the terrace into the valley. The northern main street first led to the west and then turned to the south. The curve follows the natural outline of the semi-circular gravel terrace on which it was built. The streets, paved with pebbles and sherds, were not a negative space left after the construction of the houses, but were clearly built first with walls bordering them on both sides (fig. 4). These walls were constructed from large ashlar blocks measuring 0.60–1.00 m. When a house was constructed later next to a street, its mudbrick walls were simply set on top of this already existing stone socle.

After the streets had been laid and their bordering walls erected, plots were laid out inside the walled, empty insulae. Apparently they were measured along the street wall, because some measure exactly 16 and 18 cubits (taking a cubit to be half a metre).¹² On the plots, which show little variation in size,¹³ houses were built in succession. Most conform to a standard plan (a large main room flanked by a row of smaller rooms), but some are different because they were built against the already existing street wall which dictated the plan of the house. For example, the western wall of House 6, which is otherwise a standard house, is curved. Not all the plots had houses, but even empty plots bordered a wall on the side facing the street (see the plot south of House 20 and north of the Southern Main Street on fig. 4).

Some additional discussion about the term for “plot” is required. After “houses” it is the term that occurs most often in real estate contracts. Originally, it was transcribed as *kiršitu* and later translated by D. Arnaud as “cabanon” to mean a kind of hut, but as “estate building” by Mayer (2001). Wilcke (1990), in contrast, transliterated it as the logogram KI with a phonetic complement *eršetu* and interpreted it as a “plot without any (intact) building”. The fact that Emar texts mention collapsed stone-walls in connection with this term was the main reason why others had thought it designated a building.¹⁴ But since in the *Weststadt* at Bazi empty plots were bordered by stone walls before a house was built there, with mudbrick walls set on top of the stone socle, Wilcke’s reading as KI^{eršetu} and his interpretation seems to be fully corroborated.

11. The standard house in the Late Bronze Age lower town at Tall Bazi consists of a main room, which is flanked on one side by small secondary rooms, usually between four and five and rarely three or six. This type of house is not new, but a larger variant of the type of house at Middle Bronze Age Halawa where the main room is flanked by two secondary rooms.

12. The plots of Houses 36 and 37 measure 16 cubits, and the plot of House 35 measures 18 cubits along the main road.

13. 90% of the original plots measured between 100 and 200 sq. m in the first phase, the standard size of the 50 known plots was between 110 and 170 sq. m, and about 60% varied only about 20% in size (128–159 sq. m); see Otto 2006a: 254–58; Otto 2014: 46–48.

14. For a summary of the discussion, see Adamthwaite 2001: 115–131. The average value is about two-thirds of that of a house.

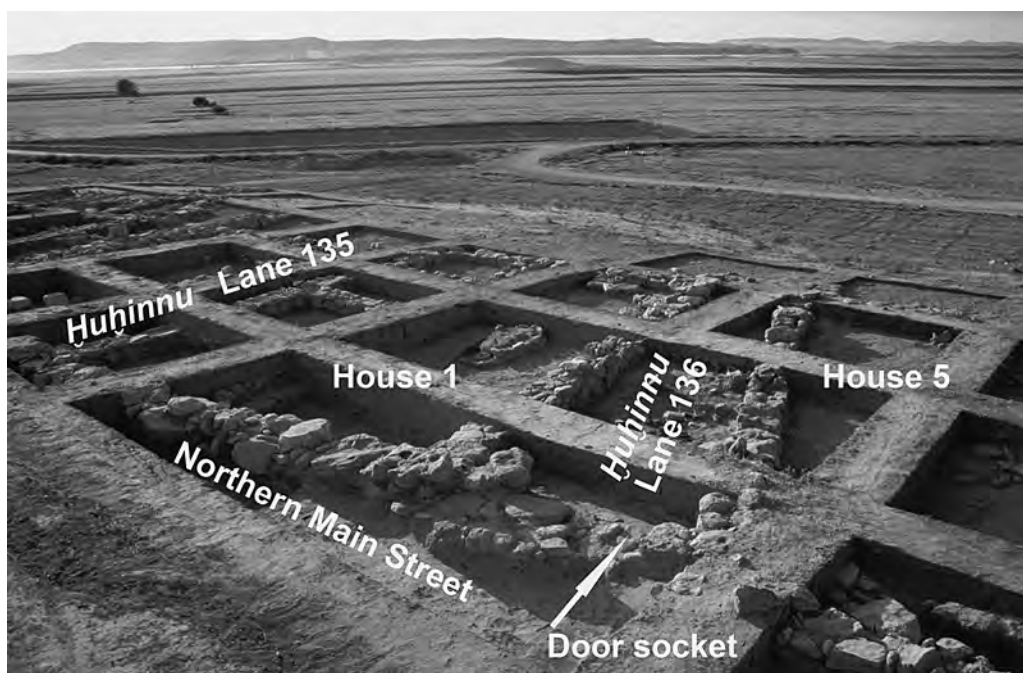


Fig. 5. House 1 of the Weststadt of Tall Bazi with a private lane (*huhinnu*) on each side. The lanes were closed by doors, as indicated by the door sockets.

While the main streets seem to have been public property, designed and constructed through “public” planning, the small lanes between the houses clearly were private. A good example is House 1, situated north of the Northern Main Street. It is flanked on the western and the eastern sides by lanes, which are accessible from the main street. Stone steps lead down from the street into the lane. A door socket at each entrance shows that the lanes could be closed off (fig. 5). Real estate documents from Emar and Ekalte mention that a *huhinnu*, “lane”, could be sold together with a house, making the house and the lanes private property. Obviously this private property existed within a publicly planned and centrally laid out street grid with central place(s) which had to be respected by the private house owners. But who did the planning?

Two tablets, which were found in Temple 1 on the Citadel of Tall Bazi, show that at the time of the Mittanian kings Saushtatar and Artatama the town was governed by the elders, presumably representatives of the leading families in the community (Sallaberger, Einwag, and Otto 2006). As is well known, in the societies of the Syrian Euphrates area a communal system operated where the elders together with the city god governed the city and the local king was no more than the *primus inter pares*. The system was dubbed “the limited kingship model” by Fleming (1992). Some 200 km to the northeast of Bazi, far up in the Jazira, the Mittani overlord had his main residence in Waššukanni (perhaps Tall Fakhariyah) from where he directed the affairs of state. It is highly improbable that the Mittani state was involved in the detailed town planning of distant settlements along the Euphrates.

These four examples from along the Euphrates, dating from the Middle and Late Bronze Age, lead to the conclusion that town planning was a public enterprise, but not necessarily a state affair, at least in the second millennium B.C.

2. *Official Seals and Private Seals*

Our knowledge about the relations between private and state in the second millennium derives to a considerable extent from various palatial buildings in which cuneiform archives and sealings were found. The official state administration used writing and sealing extensively in order to authorize administrative processes. Seals were used to register incoming and outgoing goods, to authorize contracts and to guarantee that the contents of the rooms within the palaces were intact.

The best-known area for such seals is the Upper Mesopotamian kingdom of Samsi-Addu and the succeeding city-states during the 18th century. During the reigns of Yasmah-Addu and Zimri-Lim the seals of state officials of high rank were usually decorated with an inscription designating the seal owner and a standardized scene often the victorious king standing opposite the suppliant goddess Lama. But in all the palaces, at Tall Leilan (Šubat-Enlil), Tall Rimah (Karana), Tall Hariri (Mari) and Tall Bi'a (Tuttul), lumps of clay decorated with completely different seals without inscriptions were also found. Who would have used these seals?

Especially relevant is evidence from the palace at ancient Tuttul, which had been in use over a long period until its final occupation during the reign of Samsi-Addu and his son Yasmah-Addu.¹⁵ All the administrative documents there were sealed by functionaries, who identified themselves on their seals as official servants of the king. Their seals depicted the official motif and they were inscribed with the name of the seal owner, his father, and his lord, identifying the seal owner as a servant (*wardum*) either of Samsi-Addu or of Yasmah-Addu (figs. 6a–d). By contrast, rooms or containers (jars, boxes, sacks etc.) were sealed with very different seals and a great variety of different motifs were used (figs. 6e–j). The simplest seals were made from clay and decorated with rows of extremely crude, stick-like figures, the heads of which were made up of a circle with a large nose (figs. 6e–f). Other seals were geometric (fig. 6g), archaic by then (fig. 6h), Old Assyrian (fig. 6i) or ‘private style seals’ from the Euphrates valley (fig. 6j). Evidently, servants of lower rank who were on duty in the palaces and were responsible for certain goods and rooms were allowed to use their private seals with other motifs.¹⁶ Also all goods imported into the palace were sealed with cylinder seals with various motifs, but not with the official motif.¹⁷

15. Miglus and Strommenger 2007. Palace A was erected during the time of the Šakkanakku and reused several times. Hundreds of fragile seal impressions, dated by seal inscriptions to Yasmah-Addu and his father Samsi-Addu, and dozens of tablets dated to the same reigns, lay on the uppermost floor. This is one of several reasons why we know that the palace was not still being used by Zimrilim (see Otto 2004: 162). But Zimrilim seems to have systematically inventorized and emptied the palace of its contents, as Hammurapi would do at Mari some years later.

16. See extensively Otto 2004: 144–146.

17. Otto 2004: 149–155. The only exceptions are the cow hides, which were sent from Šubat-Šamaš to Tuttul. Since many cows of the Tuttul herds, which had been grazing in the region of Šubat-Šamaš upstream the Balikh valley, had died, three functionaries of Samsi-Addu seem to have been sent to investigate the reasons for their untimely deaths. They sealed all the cow hides, the sealings of which were stored in the palace of Tuttul (Krebernik and Otto 2002; Otto 2004: 153).

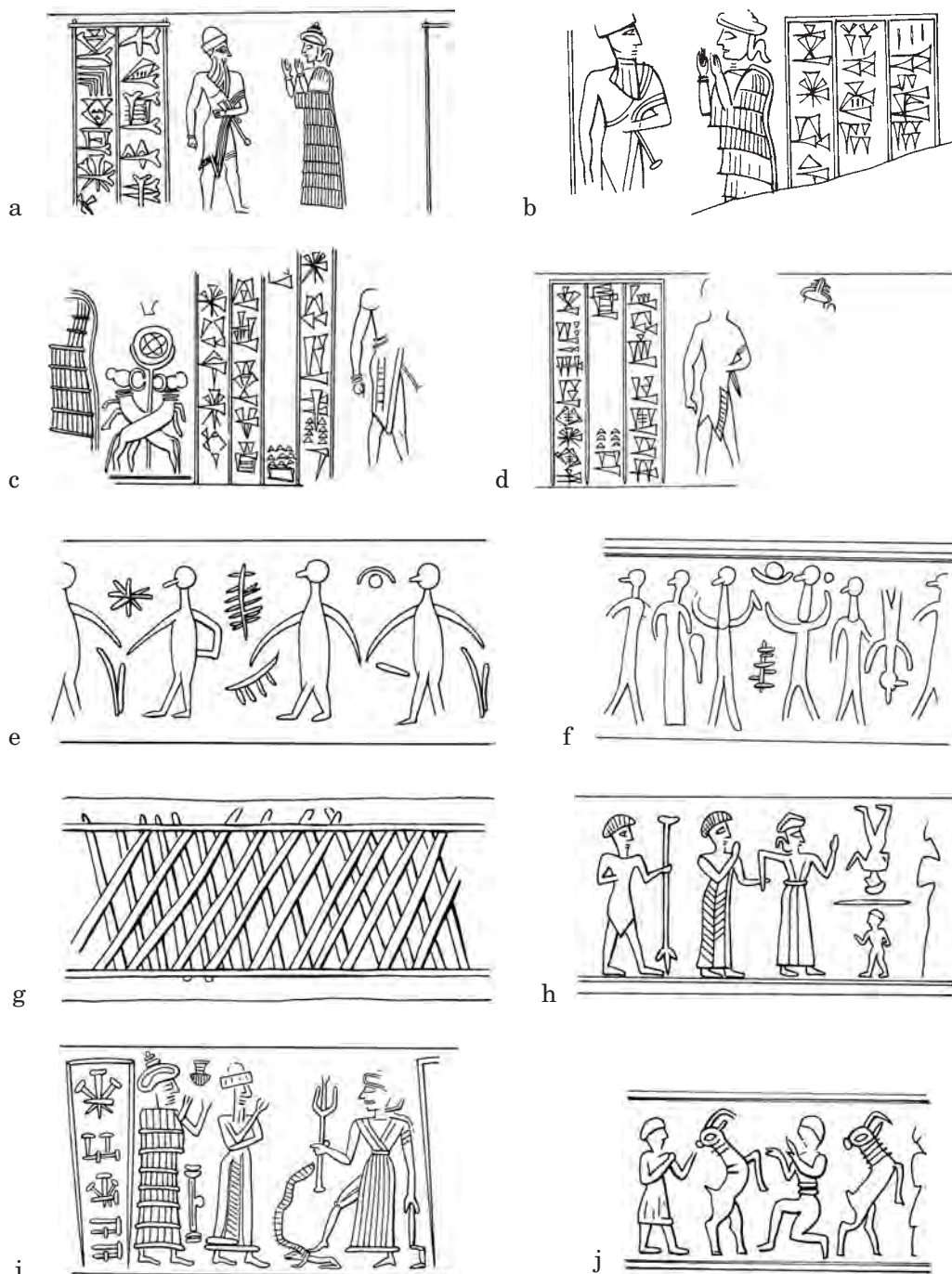


Fig. 6. Seal impressions from the palace of Samsi-Addu at Tuttul. a-d: official seals of high functionaries (servants of Samsi-Addu or Yasmah-Addu), who sealed administrative tablets; their seals invariably depict the official motif of the victorious king opposite the goddess Lama; e-j: "private seals" of other functionaries on duty in the palace, who were responsible for the sealing of doors; they show a wide range of motifs, including simple images in clay seals.

The cylinder seals of the ‘state officials’ repeat the image of the king’s seal. King Zimri-Lim of Mari owned several, at least five, cylinder seals, all of which depict the same motif of the king opposite the suppliant goddess Lama. The same, standard image of the victorious king opposite the suppliant goddess Lama also decorated the seals of his wife Šibtu, his mother Addu-duri and dozens of his servants. It seems that the royal seal was much less the private seal of the king than the official seal, which was used in different offices. This leads to the conclusion that certain motifs became the insignia or badge of office of the state and that the royal seal served as the model for this insignia. When official documents were sealed with the seal of the king, we get the impression that the king is synonymous with the state. These seals were usually adorned with precious metal caps, which was always a privilege of the royal family and high-ranking people.

This idea continued into the first millennium, when the Neo-Assyrian royal seal was in use from the 9th to the 7th century. 104 variations of it are attested on documents from Nineveh alone (Herbordt 1992). This indicates that it was not the private seal of the king but the official emblem of the Neo-Assyrian state, and a seal that was used by various individuals in numerous offices. K. Radner has called these seals “Neo-Assyrian bureau seals”, and was able to show that not only the bureau of the king, but also those of the queen, the crown prince and other high officials, such as the governor of Kalhu, held bureau seals.¹⁸ As we have seen before, seals for royal offices had existed long before. Many kings and queens from the third and second millennia possessed more than one seal, which often hardly differed from each other (Otto 2013). I prefer to call them office seals for the third and second millennia, since this describes better the general personal responsibility of the seal user and stresses less his assignment to a specific bureau.

In fact, not only members of the royal families, but also certain functionaries possessed more than one seal inscribed with their name. Plausible explanations would be either that a functionary replaced a seal that had been lost or damaged, or that he used several seals simultaneously, perhaps for different purposes. Seal impressions from the palace of Tuttul clearly prove that a servant of Yasmah-Addu named Mutu-Dagan possessed two seals that were used on his behalf by several persons: his two seals (seal M 24 and seal M 31) were used on different wall-pegs, around which a string was tied, then covered with clay and sealed to prevent unauthorised access. The pegs obviously belonged to two different doors in one and the same room.¹⁹ That different seals were used can only be explained by assuming that for this room two individuals controlled over the entrance and exit of incoming and outgoing goods on behalf of Mutu-Dagan.

To put it in a nutshell: the seal of the king was much less his private seal than the royal office seal, which sometimes continued to be in use for generations. The motif depicted on it became the official motif for the seals of higher members of the royal apparatus. It was not the same as the motifs on private seals, and became the emblem of the state.

Not only members of the royal family, but also high officials were obviously authorised to use several seals with their names. These however, have to be under-

18. Radner 2008. I would like to add to her interesting article that bureau seals were not an Assyrian innovation.

19. Otto 2004: 45–46, 48–49, 141.

stood as “bureau seals” or office seals and were used by various persons. Private seals, by contrast, depicted completely different motifs. It seems as if private citizens were not even allowed to possess a seal with the official motif of a kingdom.

3. Royal Images as an Illustration of State Power?

Let us now investigate if other royal images, apart from the royal seal, were created to represent the state. The most obvious representative of a state is its leader, who in the second millennium in the Near East is most often called a king. The king as the focal point of the state organization became “visible” through his palace (more precisely the palace building) and also through visual representations of him.

Numerous studies have been devoted to royal images. This is understandable, since depictions of the king are among the most common pictorial motifs in major and minor arts from the later third millennium onwards, and especially from the Ur III period. Many fragments of royal statues have been discovered, although their attribution to a certain king is sometimes difficult. More statues or stelae or other images of the ruler are known from year-names or from copies of inscriptions on them made by Old Babylonian and later scribes.

It has often been stated that royal statues and steles were publicly displayed, and often remained on display for centuries.²⁰ Claudia Suter, who collected all the available evidence for images of Ur III kings, stated that “Mesopotamian statues were traditionally dedicated to a deity and set up in his or her temple. . . that from the Ur III period onwards. . . the temple’s courtyard, where they could be seen by the general public, was their preferred location” (Suter 2010: 321). But even if the royal images were on display, were they intended to be on public display? All of them were set up inside a segregated area, more precisely in a sacred space, where access was restricted, so that the label “public” should be used with caution.

Ancient Near Eastern royal statues and steles were sometimes positioned in obvious public places, such as city gates. To mention only two examples: the stele of Esarhaddon in Zincirli was placed in the main gate to the citadel so that everyone had to pass by the image of the king. He was shown holding an Egyptian prince and the governor of Sidon on leashes, a clear message for the inhabitants not to fall out with the Assyrian state. A stele was set up in the Tabira Gate at Assur. There are more examples from the first millennium, but as far as I know there is no earlier example of a royal statue certainly located in a city gate.²¹

In order to understand the purpose of ancient monuments it is crucial to identify the audience being addressed. The examples of publicly displayed royal figures I have mentioned seem to point to a programmatic purpose of the images. This view is certainly also influenced by the conception of royal representations in later times, for example in the Roman Empire. The statues of the Emperor Augustus were set up in public places such as markets, and in buildings such as theatres, basilicae and

20. E.g., Braun-Holzinger and Frahm 1999: 135: “That the ‘monuments’ of emperors were presented visibly for a long time and that their inscriptions were read also centuries after their formulation, is well-known.”

21. There is a basalt statue of a seated royal figure from Ebla (TM.65.A.234), which was found close to the southwestern city gate, but without context (Matthiae 1977: 187: “fuori strato presso la Porta sud-ouest”). Since recent excavations at Ebla prove that temples existed close to city gates, it seems more probable that the statue had originally been set up in a temple close to the southwestern city gate.

libraries, which were accessible by everyone. The omnipresence of the emperor was a permanently visible claim for the authority and programme of the state and its supreme representative.²² So I wish to address the question of whether royal images of the second millennium B.C. were also primarily created and set up to illustrate the power of the state.

We do not know where many of the surviving Babylonian royal images had been erected originally, because the majority of them were excavated in Susa, where they had been taken as booty. Those that have been discovered in their original hometowns were often found in a temple. For example, an early Old Babylonian or late Ur III headless statue of a bearded sitting man, most probably the king, was found in the large courtyard of the E-babbar temple at Larsa in a Kassite level,²³ and the sitting statue of Irišum, *ensi* of Assur, was found in the Aššur temple at Assur.²⁴ Several texts also mention royal statues in temples. For example, a Babylonian scribe described the statue of the Old Babylonian king Sin-eribam of Larsa as standing next to the statue of the Akkadian king Naram-Sîn in the courtyard of the temple of the moon god in Ur.²⁵ Royal statues in temples were ritually consecrated and were the objects of veneration and offerings (Winter 1992). But are these examples representative or just due to the fact that a disproportionately large number of temples have been excavated so far? I shall try to answer this question by a survey of some second millennium settlements which have been investigated on a large scale. Only those towns in which a palace, temples, private houses and the fortifications with city gates have been excavated, provide evidence about where royal statues and steles had been erected.

At second millennium Ebla several palaces, temple districts, parts of the fortifications and house quarters have been uncovered. Royal images were found only in the temple compounds: the statue of king Ibbit-Lim must have stood in the area of Temple D, and an impressive number of male and female royal statues must originally have been set up in the temenos area of Sanctuary P, where they were found buried in a pit in front of Temple P2.²⁶ Similarly at Alalakh, a fair amount of the area with large buildings, the palaces, the so-called castle and the temple has been excavated, as well as some houses, and the statue of king Idrimi was found in the temple compound, also buried in a pit.

The few royal statues that have been found in second millennium palaces were associated with funerary contexts. For example, at Qatna the statues of seated kings in front of the subterranean tombs of the palace, and the statues of the former *Šakkanakku* kings in the *Grand Palais* of Mari were venerated during the *kispum* ceremony. In both places, the royal images were part of the ancestor cult.²⁷

The only second millennium royal statues which were actually exposed in a public area are the three statues of the *Šakkanakku* Puzur-Eštar of Mari and his broth-

22. See, for example, Zanker 1987.

23. Orthmann 1975: 291, pl. 157; Orthmann dates it to the Old Babylonian period, while Suter (2010: 326) favours a late Ur III date.

24. Braun-Holzinger 2007: 166.

25. Buccellati 1993.

26. Matthiae 2010: 283–286.

27. Apparently some images of deified Ur III kings were set up in private houses of high officials (Sallaberger 1993: 105–106), but in this case the deified king is no different from any other deity, whose image could be set up in a private house, as the chapels in Ur demonstrate.

ers., which were all erected beside the main processional street in Babylon. But, as Felix Blocher (1999) argued convincingly, they were venerated there in the first millennium, as divine beings and not as kings, far away from their hometown and long after being looted from Mari. The royal cap had been altered to a strange horned headdress. Clearly, these statues were no longer representing kings but genies.²⁸

The idea that steles were displayed publicly is even more widespread. Suter claims that “In contrast to statues, stelae were exclusively royal monuments. Providing space for extensive visual narratives and long texts, they served as ideal vehicles for royal propaganda” (Suter 2010: 332).²⁹ I wonder, however, whether the main purpose of setting up statues and steles of the king really was for “royal propaganda”. During the third and second millennia these statues and steles were placed exclusively – as far as I am aware – in temples, where they remained for centuries, long after the end of the dynasty of the ruler associated with them, and they received food offerings and ritual libations, as is extensively recorded in texts from the third to the first millennia.

There may be some difference between the positioning of royal statues and royal steles. The latter were in some instances set up in the open-air temenos area of the sanctuary and not inside the temple building proper. But the idea that they were accessible to everyone is partly due to the best-known stele from Mesopotamia, the Codex Hammurapi. But was that really a state monument for royal propaganda? The stele, which is today in the Louvre museum, had originally been erected in a temple complex in Sippar. Copies of it were placed in many major sanctuaries of Babylonia.³⁰ Many scholars are inclined to think that the object was a public monument, which was set up to commemorate Hammurapi as a king of justice. In the epilogue it says, “Let anyone who was mistreated come to the image depicting me as king of justice!”, with the clearly defined aim, that this person should commemorate the king and worship his name.

Let us now have a look at those steles, which are clearly “royal victory monuments”, and consider whether they were indeed set up for propaganda reasons. The 1.8 m high stele of king Daduša was found in 1983, when a well was drilled near Tell Asmar (ancient Ešnunna).³¹ The depictions in four registers are accompanied by a long inscription, which documents the campaigns that king Daduša of Ešnunna conducted with king Samsi-Addu against Qabra and other cities in the Eastern Tigris region around 1780 B.C. The stele seems to be a highly political document. King Daduša is shown as a warrior which is explicitly labelled “the image of my warlike aspect” (*šalam qarradutiya*) in the accompanying inscription. He stands on the walls of the conquered city of Qabra, triumphant over the defeated king.³² But the stele, according to its inscription, had been erected by Daduša, king of Ešnunna, in the temple E-temen-ursag of the storm-god for particular reasons: “that Adad

28. A reference to this can be found in *Tintir* V 14: “Pedestal: the twin of his brothers”, see George 1992: 64f. When celebrating New Year’s Day, specific prayers were said there.

29. Suter continues: “Like statues, stelae were public monuments usually dedicated to a deity and installed in the courtyard of this deity’s temple, though copies could also be placed at newly designated boundaries after a war, or in various cities of the realm in the case of a law stela.” (Suter 2010: 332).

30. B. André-Salvini (2003: 52–53) reconstructed from fragments at least four more steles of Hammurapi. They had all been transported to Susa, and must have been set up in temples at various sites.

31. Ismail 2003; Miglus 2003.

32. Opinions diverge on whether the triumphant being stomping on its enemies is a deity or a king; see Miglus 2003. In my opinion, there are various arguments in favour of a king.



Fig. 7. The position of the Shaikhan Rock relief: the tiny white spot (latex cover) within the circle (Postgate and Roaf 1997: pl. 1d).

may allot him a long life, and that the country in the future, from generation to generation, may praise him, and that his name shall endure.” There is no mentioning of the state: king Daduša seems to have been concerned only about his personal fate and name, a fundamental concern not only of the kings but also of the people of the Ancient Near East in general, as K. Radner has shown (Radner 2005).

We have to conclude that it is difficult to prove that such statues and steles were intended for state propaganda. But rock reliefs are another class of pictorial representation. They were certainly set up publicly and close to the area where a king and his army had been victorious in battle.

Rock reliefs of the period between 2100 and 1700 B.C. are known from at least five places on the flanks of the Zagros Mountains: one at Darband-i Gawr, one at Bitwata, one at Shaikhan, one near Shemshara, and four at Sar-i Pol.³³ The king is always depicted as a victorious warrior, having successfully defeated his enemies. The general interpretation is that they were carved on the rock near the place of the victory, and were intended to intimidate the enemies and to serve as state propaganda. Börker-Klähn suggested that ever since the Old Akkadian period, steles and rock reliefs were left behind in conquered territories to intimidate the locals and to function as a marker of imperial control. She thinks that rock reliefs were deliberately used as a political tool and instrument for propaganda.³⁴ But is this so evident? Are they indeed manifestations of the power of the state?

33. Börker-Klähn 1982: nos. 29–33; Seidl 1993.

34. Börker-Klähn 1982: 44: “Schon durch seine äußeren Dimensionen. . . stellt das Felsrelief ein vorzügliches Demonstrationsobjekt dar und ist auch gezielt eingesetztes Propagandainstrument zwei-

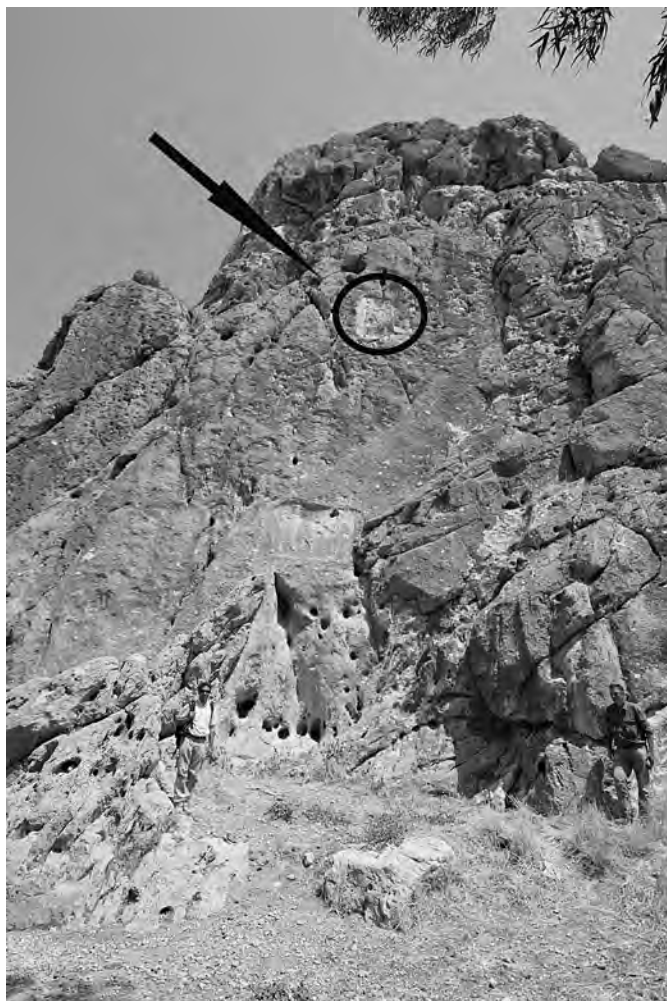


Fig. 8. The position of the relief of ANnubanini at Sar-e Pol-e Zohab (Relief II), approximately 10 m above the ground (photo by the author).

The relief at Shaikhan is situated in a deep gorge, which opens towards a tributary of the Diyala (Postgate and Roaf 1997). It measures about 83 x 90 cm and was carved high up on a precipitous cliff at the dead end of the ravine. It appears on photos as a tiny white spot, the after effects of making a latex copy (fig. 7). If one did not know it was there, one would not notice it. Also the other rock reliefs which were mentioned are fairly small and easy to miss, except for the large relief at Darband-i Gawr. Even the four reliefs at Sar-i pol, one of which is inscribed with the name of King ANnubanini, are set up high above ground level (fig. 8). If one does not know they are there, and if the light conditions are not exactly right, the small relief panels will escape the attention of everyone passing by, even directly by the reliefs.

I argue that rock reliefs do not primarily demonstrate a claim to political control, but mark locations as permanent memorials for the king. For the carving of

stromländischer Politik. . . [Sie] wenden sich in warnender Absicht an die benachbarten Bewohner des feindlichen Berglandes. Sie erhalten damit gleichzeitig den Charakter einer Grenzmarkierung.”

the first relief, a numinous location was created, and other royal images were added there over time. This would explain why four reliefs were carved on the rock at Sar-i pol. Also, it is very unlikely that their purpose was to intimidate the defeated local population, since these locals never tried to damage the reliefs. Moreover, there is often a platform in front of the image or a small cave, which suggests that they were sites for ceremonial offerings such as was still the case with the Neo-Assyrian rock reliefs. The reliefs seem to have been carved for the memory of the king's name. Gilgamesh expresses such an aspiration in the Akkadian Epic of Gilgamesh: "O Enkidu, no man can avoid life's end. I would enter the mountain land and set up my name" (Foster 2001: 104). This is quite the opposite of royal propaganda, if understood as state propaganda. Clearly the purpose of the rock reliefs was not to propagate the state and to intimidate the conquered, but to perpetuate the memory of the king.

4. Conclusions

I am afraid that I have raised more questions than I have answered. It is difficult to trace the impact of the state on private individuals or the relation between them by using archaeological material alone. The following results arise from my investigations of the state in the archaeological record of the second millennium, but they may not be valid for earlier or later periods:

- Planned building construction including town planning was clearly public, but not necessarily a state enterprise.
- One of the few types of material objects through which the function of the state becomes apparent are the cylinder seals used by members of the royal family and state officials. But these tiny little emblems are not the visible demonstration of state power that might have been expected from the self-confident states of the second millennium B.C.
- It is highly questionable whether the most obvious representations of state power, namely images of the king, were intended for state propaganda. The facts that statues and steles were set up in sacred areas and not in public places, palaces or state offices and that the barely visible rock reliefs were carved in sites with a numinous atmosphere, indicate that these monuments were not intended to embody the territorial claims of the state. On the one hand the image of the king remained an object of veneration for centuries, and on the other hand it was intended to perpetuate the memory of the king's name as great and unforgettable.

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