

Movement

An event that models: the Ebla coronation ritual¹

The day before her wedding to her cousin Išar-Damu, Tabur-Damu, the queen-elect, spent the night camping outside of Ebla's fortifications (Biga 1998: 83–4). Early the following morning, she dressed according to precise instructions and donated a sheep for sacrifice to the sun goddess. With these preparations out of the way, a priest ceremonially anointed Tabur-Damu's head with oil. This was one of the fundamental ritual acts at Ebla, performed at weddings, funerals, and other ceremonies. It was performative, enacting a change of state (Viganò 2000). Here it was probably the first step of the transformation of Tabur-Damu into the maliktum or queen, the title that she will bear instead of her personal name in later Ebla texts. Following this act, she took part in another purification ritual, the ni-gu ceremony, before entering one of the city's many gates. Once in Ebla's lower town, she proceeded to the ma-ra-sum where she was clothed in new, royal garments (Fronzaroli 1993: 23) and then entered the Kura temple, where she dedicated sheep for sacrifice to several of the gods of Ebla. In addition, she gave Kura and Barama, the gods of royalty, delicate jewelry to adorn their statues, and rare boxwood and silver vases to ornament their temples. The royal wedding was a lavish occasion, celebrated by the entire Eblaite court. Scribes recorded the vast quantities of precious metals and luxurious fabrics that were taken from the treasury for the affair and given to members of Ebla's court, the city's client kings, and their allies.²

The bride's literal passage into Ebla echoes the rite de passage at the heart of this text, her transformation from a young girl, chosen on the basis of a favorable omen (Biga 1999: 104, TM.75.G.2417 rev. VIII: 6–18), into Ebla's rightful queen. The extensive ruins from the early second millennium

BC at Ebla have prevented the recovery of much of the city's third millennium ground-plan, except in a few limited areas (Matthiae 2008: fig. 2.5). Nonetheless, it is possible roughly to reconstruct the queen's journey from the city wall to Kura's temple. It is likely that she entered the city through the southeastern gate, perhaps the gate of Kura mentioned in the ritual (Matthiae 2008: 35, 2007, 2009). Her next stop may have been an open space around the "Temple of the Rock," possibly the ma-ra-sum of the ritual (Matthiae 2006b: 490–2; 2007: 522; 2009). Alternatively, the temple of Kura where the ritual ends may have been located in the city's public district, the SA.ZA^{ki}, palace G on the acropolis (Porter 2012: 206; Matthiae 2006b: 489–90).³ In this case, the bride would have crossed the Lower Town in order to reach the porticoed entrance of the SA.ZA^{ki}, and would then have climbed the monumental stairs to the audience hall, traversing the ritual space of the plaza.

The royal bride's procession through the city provided the populace with a chance to see their new queen. Traveling this highly controlled path and performing rituals in the city's plaza imparted valuable lessons about the nature of political power as expressed through architecture. Moreover, this journey from the city walls to the palace via the plaza reverses the ritual procession she will perform later as queen; when she will leave the palace for the plaza in order to supervise rituals such as the feeding of the gods (Porter 2012: 203–6; see section 4 of this chapter).

Following the wedding, Išar-Damu, Tabur-Damu, several high officials, and the statues of the city's chief gods, Kura and Barama, left Ebla for the cult center of Binaš.⁴ Servants oversaw the preparations, outfitting the wagons that carried the gods, packing the offerings and other supplies necessary for the journey, and arranging the elaborate garments of the king and the queen. They traveled for four days, stopping at six towns where they offered sacrifices to different gods and many of the dead kings of Ebla.⁵ When the travelers reached Binaš, the king, queen, and the divine statues entered the é ma-dim, the house of the dead or the royal mausoleum. The two full ritual texts, ARET XI 1 and 2, provide nearly identical accounts of what the royal couple did when they arrived there:

The king and the queen enter the house of the dead . . .

The divine couple, Kura and Barama, comes to the house of the dead and enters the chamber.

And they remain there.

And the king enters his chamber.

And then the queen enters her chamber.

After the king and the queen arrive, Amazu offers one ancestor bull, two sheep, and one silver bird, to the deified Ibbini-Li'm; two sheep, one silver bird to the deified Šagiš; two sheep, one silver bird to the deified Išrut-Damu.⁶

When those of the cloth arise, the king and the queen depart and sit on the thrones of their fathers.

And await the presence of the sun god.

When the sun (god) rises, the invocation priests invoke and the lamentation priests intone the laments of when the birth goddess Nintu was angered.

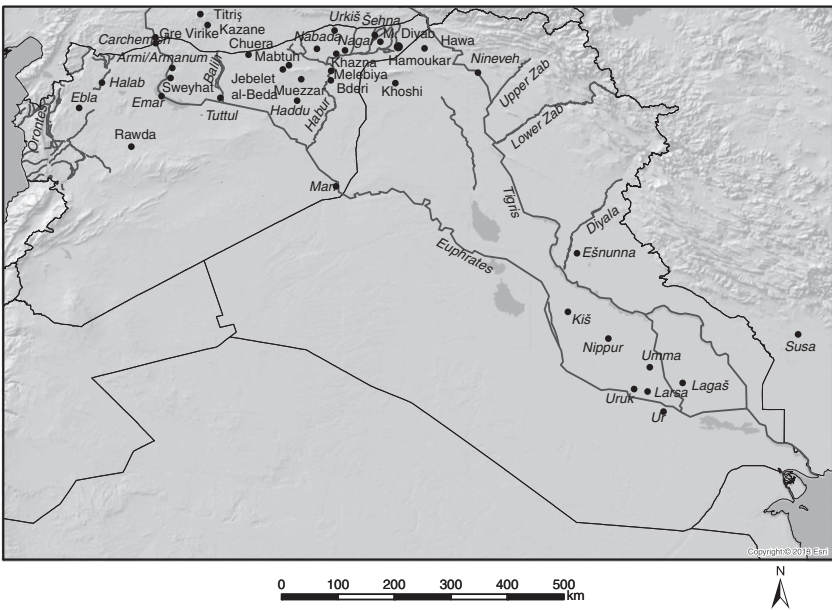
And those that it illuminates ask to be illuminated.

And the birth goddess Nintu illuminates the new Kura, the new Barama, the new king, and the new queen.⁷

This sojourn in the é ma-dim transformed both the human royal couple and the divine royal couple. The texts describe three, seven-day ritual periods following this initial rite, during which the king and queen held vigil in the mausoleum at night, and returned to their thrones during the day to perform sacrifices and offer libations to the gods and the dead kings. Only after this month, when they were ritually remade in the image of their ancestors, could Išar-Damu and Tabur-Damu truly ascend to power (Fronzaroli 1992: 184). On their return to Ebla, they entered the temple of Kura in the palace district and enjoyed a royal banquet, consuming gifts of food and drink that had been provided for their first celebration of one of the major rituals of the Ebla court (ARET XI, 2 V XVIII 15–21). They had thus officially become the rulers, the en and maliktum.

Movement and perception

The rise of political complexity in northern Mesopotamia, from 2600 to 2300 BC, encompassed changing relationships between power and place on many scales, from the rise of palaces and temples, to the development of cities and the creation of a new political landscape in the countryside (Fig. 9). Each of these changes had social consequences, including the institution of a hierarchical administrative system based on writing that sought to oversee agricultural labor and the production of goods, the transformation of social interaction as populations grew and cities ceased to be face-to-face communities, and the emergence of new economic opportunities. The cultural consequences of these changes were profound and included the appearance of a new symbolic system expressed in ritual, art, architecture, and the landscape itself. Here we will examine that



9 Map of northern Mesopotamia 2600–2300 BC (Base map by author, using ESRI Topographic Data [Creative Commons]: World Shaded Relief, World Linear Water, and World Countries)

transformation through the lens of space, focusing particularly on how movement through a series of landscapes naturalized these innovations. In northern Mesopotamia, controlling movement was one method used to display power and unite the countryside. In this schema, the journey served as a ritual act, political metaphor, and everyday experience. Movement through newly created political landscapes was thus critical to the development of a cognitive schema that made sense of these polities, and indeed helped to constitute them from discrete villages and towns with their own complicated histories.

All social processes have an important spatial component. People create particular spaces by acting and moving in them, thinking about them, and connecting them to symbols and their daily lives. The unique space of each society is produced through a combination of daily routine, concepts held by officials, and religious or cosmological understandings (Lefebvre 1991: 191). For geographers and historians, movement or control thereof is critical to the creation of spatial regimes. Henri Lefebvre writes that the production of space begins with action; Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that human understandings of space develop out of movement (Tuan 1977: 35); Michel de Certeau describes walking as one of the everyday practices

that creates the lived space of the city (Certeau 1984: 98). Similarly, philosophers have celebrated walking – Thoreau strolling through the Massachusetts countryside; Heidegger rambling down a country path near Messkirch; Benjamin and Baudelaire playing the *flâneur* in the Parisian arcades – as a process that provides unique insights (Macauley 2000). This interest has emerged as a response to a modernity in which walking is no longer the default means of locomotion. In third-millennium Mesopotamia, despite the recent domestication of draft animals including donkeys, horses, and even donkey-onager hybrids (the famous *kunga*, Weber 2008), walking remained the way most people experienced space, how they apprehended their surroundings and understood their place in the world.

Walking in a city involves different constraints than travel in the open countryside or in an unplanned village. This would have been particularly noticeable in the Early Bronze Age in a world where cities, monumental architecture, and narrow streets were all rare. For those who ruled early cities, channeling or limiting movement was a clear way to demonstrate, and indeed create, political authority (Dovey 2008; Dovey and Dovey 2010). The construction of walls, gates, streets, and monumental buildings not only expressed a regime's political power, but as architecture became part of the urban fabric, it continued to affect each citizen “in an unconscious, habitual, corporeal way” (Hastorf 2009: 53), naturalizing a particular form of political authority. Movement beyond the city can also be connected to delineating territory. Cross-culturally, travel and the acquisition of exotic knowledge are often politically valuable (Helms 1988) and have been linked to the rise of political complexity (Mann 1986). The embodied nature of ritual and practical travel makes this method of establishing authority particularly effective (Connerton 1989; Bourdieu 1990, 1977).

Territorial expressions of sovereignty have an obvious materiality that can be investigated archaeologically. Indeed, archaeology with its emphasis on small-scale excavation and extensive survey may be the discipline best suited to engage with such questions (Smith 2003: 21–2). As Matthew Johnson has recently noted, sensory issues, including movement, are far more readily accessible to archaeologists than processes such as social stratification (Johnson 2012). In Mesopotamia – as elsewhere – the relationship between space and power on a regional scale has been most often addressed through the lens of landscape archaeology. Since Robert Adams'

pioneering surveys beginning in the 1950s (Adams 1966, 1981; Adams and Nissen 1972), scholars have explored the rise of political complexity by analyzing regional dynamics, especially connections between settlements in probable state systems (Wilkinson et al. 2007; Ur 2010b). These studies have grown more numerous as new information such as satellite imagery has allowed the reconstruction of ancient landscapes even in areas off-limits to most archaeologists, such as southern Iraq (Hritz 2010; Hritz and Wilkinson 2006; Pournelle 2007). Approaches have focused on ancient agriculture, the establishment of administrative hierarchies, the layout of urban centers, and more recently roads (Raccidi 2012; Ur 2003, 2009, 2010b). In general, there has been much less attention to questions of perception or ideology in Mesopotamia, with some notable exceptions (Harmansah 2007, 2013; McCorriston 2011).⁸

Here, I will develop a methodology that supplements mainstream ecological and economic approaches to ancient landscape by considering the perception of built and natural landscapes and its connection to political change. Symbolic studies of ancient landscapes have often relied upon a loose understanding of phenomenology, grounded in Heidegger's work on dwelling (Heidegger 1971: 150–1). These analyses usually focus on the bodily experience of a particular space and how that process generates a certain set of meanings. As Christopher Tilley explains, “[A]t their simplest and most abstract conceptualization, human, and humanized, landscapes consist of two elements; place and their properties and paths or routes of movement between these places and their properties . . . The concern is with both stasis and movement” (Tilley 2012: 27). Phenomenological approaches to landscape have examined the relationship between different places and these places and the natural landscape by looking at intervisibility, location, and access (Bender et al. 2007; Tilley 1994, 2010; Tilley and Bennett 2008; Llobera 2007).

Recent criticisms of phenomenological landscape approaches have emphasized their ambiguity and lack of repeatability, problematic elision between modern and ancient experiences and understandings (Barrett and Ko 2009: 279), and lack of attention to power relations and social domains besides the symbolic (Fleming 2006: 278). The main problem with phenomenological approaches in such cases remains the difficulties of “decoding” emic perceptions of landscape and understanding their connection to power relations, particularly in the absence of texts, iconography, and indeed (for the most part) settlements.

The rich textual, iconographic, and archaeological record of northern Mesopotamia in the mid-third millennium, however, provides a specific context in which to study the symbolic aspect of a range of landscapes and analyze how they intersected with power dynamics. Archives from Ebla and Beydar dating to the twenty-fourth century BC contain somewhere between 2,000 and 7,000 documents.⁹ The majority of the texts are administrative records, especially accounts of textiles and metals, although there are also literary, pedagogic, diplomatic, and ritual texts (Pettinato and Alberti 1979; Ismail et al. 1996). Contemporary with these documents is a rich iconographic tradition, particularly expressed in varied glyptic styles attested across northern Mesopotamia, from Nineveh to the Mediterranean (Marchetti 1998; Matthews 1997; McCarthy 2011), as well as in elite statuary and clay figurines (Pruss 2011; Marchesi et al. 2011). Finally, thirty years of intense archaeological investigation in and around a number of third-millennium sites in Syria has produced extensive information on these settlements and the changes they experienced coincident with urbanism. This material will allow me to develop a hermeneutic approach to investigate the traces of movement writ broadly (Ricoeur 1987, 1990, 2004), rather than relying on the ahistoric, phenomenological approach that has characterized so much work on landscape. By this, I mean that I will consider movement in northern Mesopotamia, not simply from the perspective of the body, but as part of a broader cultural system of meaning, a web of symbols (Geertz 1973: 5).

The first section of this chapter outlines evidence for the rise of political complexity in the mid-third millennium BC, as seen in urbanization, economic specialization, and the appearance of administrative hierarchies. The second section focuses specifically on how the transformation of space within the city and countryside was both part of and underlay many of these other processes. It considers how building programs in northern Mesopotamia created specific political spaces that both expressed and established domination and alternatively allowed for the exercise of authority by many actors. This section also addresses how urbanism created new economic and administrative ties between communities that were actualized through the movement of people and goods. The third section moves away from everyday movement in the city and countryside to investigate the collective representations of ritual and travel that the Ebla coronation drew upon. The next section analyzes specific performances, investigating how actors manipulated materialized symbols and how

audiences may have responded, through the analysis of material from several cultic sites. The final section reconsiders the rise of complexity in northern Mesopotamia in light of this discussion.

Kingdoms, cities, artisans, and officials

Following the collapse of a handful of powerful centers – most notably Tell Brak, Hamoukar, and Nineveh – and the abandonment of the southern Mesopotamian Uruk colonies at the end of the fourth millennium, northern Mesopotamia experienced a period of regionalization and ruralization, out of which developed a new urban society.¹⁰ From ca. 2700 to 2300 BC, cities and kingdoms were established across the region. These early complex societies had a number of structural properties that have been correlated with the emergence of economic and political hierarchies and differentiation. First, several cities between 40 and 100 ha in size – including Nineveh, Hawa, Khoshi, Hamoukar, Mohammed Diyab, Leilan (ancient Šeḫna), Farfara, Brak (ancient Nagar), Mozan (ancient Urkiš), Chuera (ancient Abarsal?), Banat-Bazi, Kazane, Titriş, and Ebla – appeared across the North Mesopotamian plains (Meyer 2011). Unlike the smaller centers that they replaced, these cities were characterized by official buildings – palaces, council houses, temples, and granaries – arranged in administrative quarters, as well as neighborhoods of houses and workshops (Pfälzner 2011). Although smaller than contemporary urban centers in southern Mesopotamia (Stone 2007), such a concentration of large settlements had never before existed in this area.¹¹ These cities were located within a landscape that had previously been dominated by smaller centers, about 15 to 20 ha. Their rise entailed the transformation of a settlement system that had been divided into villages and towns and now contained a number of settlements distinguished by size and possibly function (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003; cf. Stone 1991). Hence, changes in urban and rural landscapes were critical and interconnected phenomena during this period.

The largest cities in northern Mesopotamia probably had a maximum population somewhere between 6,000 and 25,000 people.¹² Most northern Mesopotamian cities consisted of a single high mound, surrounded by a lower town that was separated from the surrounding countryside by a city wall with multiple gates. Although some cities, such as Mari and Rawda, were new foundations, many others, including Leilan, Hamoukar, Titriş,

Kazane, and Mozan, grew to urban size when a lower town was built around an older high mound (Meyer 2011). These cities usually had administrative quarters located on their central mounds, with neighborhoods, open spaces, and sometimes, special purpose buildings within their lower towns.

These formal quarters housed monumental buildings, especially palaces and sometimes associated temples. Small soundings under the later-third-millennium palaces at Ebla and Leilan have revealed earlier administrative buildings dating to between 2600 and 2500 BC. At Ebla, excavations beneath palace G have exposed its mid-third-millennium predecessor, building G2, a storage facility (Dolce 2010: 246–7), perhaps linked to temple D (Porter 2012: 206). At Tell Leilan, excavations on the acropolis northwest have revealed a series of storage rooms, covering at least 300 m², which are associated with a 150 m² platform dating to 2600 BC (Calderone and Weiss 2003; Ristvet and Weiss 2012: 230). These two activity areas probably comprised the southwestern quarter of an early palace-temple complex, an antecedent of the later Akkadian administrative building (Weiss et al. 2012). In both of these cities, the first palaces have an essentially ritual component. This pattern accords nicely with the nature of public architecture during the first quarter of the third millennium BC, when the only public buildings were probably temples and possibly storehouses (Matthews 2002; Ristvet 2005; Porter 2012: 178–88). These earlier towns, however, did not possess extensive administrative quarters; rather temples and storehouses were located in domestic neighborhoods.

By 2500–2300 BC, there is evidence for palaces that combined several elements found in earlier “public architecture” according to a semi-standardized ground plan (Bretschneider and Jans 1997). Palaces at Beydar, Chuera, Bi’a, Mozan, Leilan, Ebla, and Mari included storerooms, reception suites, and cultic areas (Pfälzner 2011: 170–6). At both Mozan and Leilan, for example, palaces abut platforms containing burnt altars, with associated mortuary structures and water installations. At Mozan, a stone platform was constructed along with a keyhole-shaped structure that enclosed a deep shaft where offerings had been deposited. Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati interprets this construction as an *abi*, a Hurrian “passage to the netherworld” (Kelly-Buccellati 2002). At Leilan, an ossuary is located in a similar position southeast of a mudbrick platform (Weiss 1997b). The *Palais Présargonique* at Mari also includes cultic installations south of the palace (Margueron 2004: 197–204). Freestanding temples of this period

have also been excavated at Mari, Beydar, Brak, Chuera, and Mozan. They are usually located on the high mound alongside the palaces and may have comprised one public district (Pfälzner 2011). The relationship between temples and palaces in the mid-third millennium in northern Mesopotamia thus differs from that in southern Mesopotamia, where they were spatially segregated (Postgate 1994a: 137–41).

Beyond these administrative quarters, third-millennium cities had dense neighborhoods of houses and manufacturing areas. Urban housing from 2600 to 2400 BC was generally constructed on regular plots, with the frontages of most houses falling into standard dimensions, based on the Sumerian nindan measurement (equivalent to about 5 m or 16.4 feet). Houses with frontages of 1, 1.25, 2, and 3 nindan have been identified at Chuera, Bderi, Abu Hafur, Melebiya, and Leilan (Pfälzner 2001b, 1997: 249, abb. 8). At Titriş, houses were also built on regular-sized plots, either 7×12 m or 11×11 m (Matney 2000: 27). The standardization of houses and their incorporation of innovative building techniques such as arches and platforms may attest to the increasing professionalization of construction and perhaps the presence of master builders (Kolinski 1996). By contrast, houses from 3000 to 2600 BC tended to have only one or two rooms and were usually arranged haphazardly, with few clear signs of planned roads, as excavation has shown at Mohammed Arab and Kutan (Pfälzner 2011: 145–52; Roaf 2003: 318–20).

Workshops in urban neighborhoods provide evidence of increasingly specialized craft production, and houses and administrative buildings have yielded grain and animal bones attesting to changes in agricultural practices. Typological examination of pottery at Leilan has documented increasing standardization, as well as the development of more efficient techniques, perhaps resulting from expanding production to meet growing demand (Senior 1998). Analysis of the production process shows that despite their uniform appearance, many ceramics were made in different workshops at Tell Leilan and at surrounding sites (Blackman et al. 1993). Metals, lithics, and cylinder seals also show evidence for specialized production.¹³ Excavations at Ebla and Brak have yielded finely carved statuary, often decorated with gold and semiprecious stones, the products of elite workshops (Matthiae 2009; Matthiae and Marchetti 2013). Some workshops specializing in luxury goods were attached to third-millennium palaces. The discovery of more than 40 kg of lapis lazuli in the administrative quarter of palace G at Ebla demonstrates the presence of

stoneworking here (Pinnock 1986; Matthiae 2008), while the evidence for metal production in the palace in field P at Beydar also indicates administrative control over artisans (Pruss 2012: 125–7). Other manufactories, such as building P4 at Ebla, were located in these city's lower towns. This building included a goldsmith's workshop, but was otherwise devoted to storing food, grinding grain, butchering meat, and preserving produce (Marchetti and Nigro 1995: 19–20). Moreover, administrative dockets from Ebla and Beydar list rations for a wide variety of professionals, including cartwrights, fullers, millers, shepherds, basket weavers, domestics, scribes, messengers, and overseers, testifying to growing economic differentiation (Sallaberger 1996: 95–8; Milano 1987, 1990, 1995).

The evidence for increasing craft specialization mirrors the traces left in the faunal and archaeobotanical records for the intensification of agricultural and pastoral production. Settlements in northern Mesopotamia extensified their agricultural base, incorporating more land into subsistence strategies. Archaeobotanical analysis indicates that cities expanded their fields into the previously unexploited steppe as a method of increasing production. At Leilan and Brak, a dramatic fall in the ratio of moist to dry indicator weeds occurred as people moved into the more arid parts of the plain (Wetterstrom 2003: 391–2; Colledge 2003: 411). Agriculture during this period focused increasingly on barley cultivation, much of which may have served as animal fodder. Barley is also more drought tolerant and could have been grown in areas not suited to wheat cultivation (Deckers and Riehl 2008).

Urbanization implies ruralization, and the appearance of cities and settlement hierarchies changed the nature of smaller settlements as much as it did larger ones (Schwartz and Falconer 1994). Unlike in southern Mesopotamia during the fourth millennium, the urbanization of cities did not mean the decimation of the countryside. Instead, population increased overall. From 2650 to 2300 BC, between 58 percent and 68 percent of people in the Leilan survey area lived in towns or cities larger than 10 ha (Ristvet 2005: fig. 6.9). A well-developed network of cities, towns, and villages probably reduced transport costs and streamlined the administration of agricultural production. Other surveys in the East Jezirah indicate similar trajectories of population growth as well as the centralization of the population in towns and cities. To the south, west of the middle Habur, settlement expanded into the steppe (Hole 2002–2003). Along the middle Euphrates, the foundation of several settlements and cemeteries in the

steppe accompanied the urbanization of Mari. Finally, in western Syria and along the upper Euphrates, there are similar patterns of escalating site numbers and increasingly larger sites throughout the third millennium, although the timing of these events differed across the region (Cooper 2006).

These changes would have had important implications for pastoralism as well. An analysis of available forage in the 12 km around ancient Nabada indicates that expanding fields would have limited the amount of locally available pasture. The area's residents would not have been able to rely on local grasses alone for their herd animals. Instead, it is likely that villages and towns turned increasingly to mobility, by either taking village herds to distant pastures or relying on nomadic pastoralists to supply them with sheep and goats and these animals' products (Lau 2010). People probably kept very few animals within the village, perhaps only five or six sheep or goats per household.

Other archaeological data also document changes in pastoralist practices. In drier areas, faunal analysis shows a new emphasis on the exploitation of domestic animals and the evolution of specialized sheep and goat pastoralism (Zeder 1994, 1995, 1998). Percentages of wild animals dropped precipitously in faunal assemblages across northern Mesopotamia, while ratios of sheep and goats grew. The increasing importance of mobile pastoralism is nicely demonstrated by the fact that the capitals of five kingdoms of the mid- to late-third millennium in northern Mesopotamia in the Ebla texts – Ebla (Mardikh), Mari (Hariri), Nagar (Brak), Abarsal (Chuera), and Hadda (Tell Malhat ed-Deru) (Archi and Biga 2003: 14, fn. 44) – were all gateway cities, located in areas marginal for agriculture, where pastoral resources were critical. Moreover, there is increasing differential access to animal species within cities. In neighborhoods at Brak and Leilan, people kept pigsties in their courtyards, slaughtering the pigs when young to maximize meat production (Weiss et al. 1993: fn. 30). People consuming meat at official quarters in these cities, however, eschewed pork and ate mutton and goat instead, suggesting that these animals were associated with special occasions or limited to the elite (Ristvet 2012a: 253).

The increasing importance of pastoralism in the mid-third millennium does not necessarily entail the emergence of tribes as political actors, nor does it necessarily mean that all pastoralists were as mobile as later groups. It is important to recognize that nomadic pastoralism does not comprise an

ahistorical category or an ideal form that exists apart, and is unaffected by, social and political transformations.¹⁴ The excavation of small village communities along the middle Habur and urban settlements (*Kranzhügeln*) in the steppe indicates a different relationship between pastoralism and settlement in the Early Bronze Age in this region than in later periods. In the third millennium, the remains of substantial mudbrick architecture indicate that these pastoral communities were probably less nomadic than later communities who left no evidence of architecture (Ristvet 2012b: 33; Kouchoukos 1998). Administrative texts from Beydar indicate that some shepherds were subservient to urban authorities (Sallaberger and Ur 2004) – peasant pastoralists (Salzman 2004) – rather than independent tribesmen. And of course urban and sedentary populations were also involved in herd management (Archi 2006). The archaeological evidence indicates that pastoralists were increasingly important across northern Mesopotamia, but we have no evidence for their social organization and no reason to believe that pastoralists comprised politically powerful tribes similar to those known in later periods.¹⁵ Within Ebla itself, the political correspondence and treaties provide little evidence of a specific tribal identity; nor is there any clear sign of the sort of tribal confederacies that will later span Greater Mesopotamia (Ristvet 2012b: 43–4; see Chapter 3). In the Ebla and Beydar archives, tribes simply do not seem to have the same function that they later acquire, despite the fact that pastoral production (and the resulting textile industry) are important economic activities in both cities (Gelb 1986; Ismail et al. 1996).

I have suggested elsewhere that the transformation of egalitarian early-third-millennium societies into increasingly urbanized, hierarchical, and specialized societies may have occurred as part of the development of competitive feasting economies (Ristvet n.d.-a). In this scenario, kings or groups of “elders” may have initially harnessed labor and wealth by mobilizing resources for feasting associated with funerals and religious institutions. The gathering of foodstuffs and the mobilization of personnel for feasts in the early- to mid-third millennium probably was later transformed into institutionalized staple collection and redistribution. As we have already seen, these feasting economies emerged during a period when pastoral mobility was increasing and both the pastoral and agricultural segments of the population were becoming more interdependent. The preferential consumption of sheep and goats in religious/administrative districts in early cities may have been one way of ritually uniting

these groups, which had to increasingly contend with the effects of distanciation.¹⁶

The growing wealth of the region probably encouraged greater competition and external aggression. Three inscriptions of Eannatum (ca. 2450–2425 BC) mention the armies of Lagash battling those of Mari and Subartu, an area located somewhere in northern or northeastern Mesopotamia.¹⁷ We know that Mari campaigned across northern Mesopotamia in the twenty-fourth century; it seems likely that this city was also active earlier. Glyptic designs, sculpture, and city planning also provide indirect evidence of increased conflict. Combat scenes and other warlike imagery are popular in the early seals from Brak, Chuera, Mari, and Leilan, perhaps because of the increasing importance of warfare to these new polities (Matthews 1997; Ristvet 2007). At Ebla, the “Victory Standard” probably dates to around 2500 BC and illustrates triumphant soldiers humiliating defeated or dead enemies and presenting spoils of war to the king (Matthiae 2010).

For about forty years, during the twenty-fourth century BC, the Ebla archives provide information about the political geography of northern Mesopotamia. Nagar, Ebla, Mari, Abarsal, and Kish constituted an international sphere, marked by warfare, diplomatic alliances, and a shared written language. Cities from Adab to Ebla (a distance of more than 900 km) worshipped many of the same gods and shared a writing system, calendar, and measurements (Gelb 1992). Ebla’s political influence extended east to the upper Euphrates and west to the Orontes Valley, although the limits of this kingdom shifted constantly. At various periods, this city also controlled villages and farmland located further east, between the Euphrates and the Balikh. Mari ruled over much of the middle and perhaps upper Euphrates; Abarsal probably dominated the Balikh and western Jezirah; Nagar held sway over much of the Habur Plains; and Hadda controlled the steppe between the middle Habur and the Euphrates.¹⁸

Initially, Mari was the most powerful kingdom in northern Mesopotamia. A famous letter from a king of Mari, Enna-Dagan, to an unknown king at Ebla lists Mari’s conquests, describing how conquered cities became heaps of corpses. During Enna-Dagan’s reign, Ebla paid huge quantities of tribute in gold and silver (more than 500 kg of silver and more than 40 kg of gold) to Mari, but later, Ebla became Mari’s equal and no longer contributed to its coffers. The two city-states continued to

compete, however, particularly for access to the upper Euphrates and areas further north and east. Although Ebla won an important victory over Mari, the tables turned dramatically just three years later. Sometime shortly before 2300 BC, the imposing palace G on Ebla's citadel was burned, preserving the city's archives, and much of the acropolis was abandoned. The attackers probably came from Mari, and this catastrophe, which destroyed Ebla's preeminence in northern Syria, was simply the final stage in a longer military contest between the two cities (Archi and Biga 2003). A few years later, Sargon of Akkad arrived in Mari and began the slow process of conquering this territory and incorporating it into his empire (Ristvet 2012a).

Borders, city walls, and open spaces

Increasing warfare and military aggression between mid-third-millennium kingdoms provides one context for the anxiety over the control of movement that emerges from the historical and archaeological record. Increasing mobility among pastoralists may have provided another. In northern Mesopotamia, controlling movement became an important political goal for several polities. Treaties from Ebla indicate that authorities were eager to limit passage through their territory and sought to regulate the activities of merchants, messengers, and other visitors. Similarly, archaeological evidence for ancient roads emphasizes that there was no free movement through the countryside. Instead, passage was constrained by the presence of a dense social network. Within newly founded cities, multiple fortification walls channeled people through gates and checkpoints, limiting access to political districts like palaces and underscoring their authority. At the same time, certain urban plans emphasized free access to open spaces, such as town squares that may have been meeting places for assemblies. These different spatial strategies of control probably both reflected and allowed for political negotiation among city councils, kings, and other political actors in these emergent polities.

LIMITING ACCESS

A nearly complete treaty found at Ebla, ARET XIII 5, contracted between that kingdom and Abarsal, documents Ebla's interest in controlling its borders.¹⁹ There are explicit rules about how caravans, messengers, cattle herders, and other travelers should conduct themselves outside of their

home territory, as well as discussions of extradition, legal domain over foreign citizens, and property rights. Indeed, only one statute in the entire treaty is not concerned with travel and its consequences. Section 37 succinctly expresses the treaty's main theme: "without my permission, no one can travel through my country, if you travel, you will not fulfill your oath, only when I say so, may they travel," (ARET XIII, 5, section 37). The Ebla and Abarsal treaty is not alone in its focus on borders and movement; a fragmentary treaty between Ebla and Burman is also concerned with regulating caravans (ARET XIII 5: III, 1'–3'). The diplomatic insistence on strong borders probably did not correspond to reality. Most premodern states had permeable frontiers; outside the confines of the city and a small hinterland, political control may have meant little (Scott 2009: 7). Politics such as Ebla have always had to contend with unwelcome visitors and loss of population, with the ease that people could enter and leave a territory, like the later *ḥabīru* and *ḥabbātū*, "brigands," who refused to accept urban authority.²⁰ Moreover, premodern polities, unlike their modern counterparts, were often noncontiguous, and rarely overlapped completely with a given territory (Ristvet 2008). But the insistence in Ebla's treaty on maintaining absolute control over territory, despite its practical impossibilities, highlights an important emic political understanding. The Abarsal treaty equates sovereignty – the exercise of effective political power – with territorial control over a kingdom and its subjects.²¹

Data from excavations within third-millennium cities have revealed a similar emphasis on obstruction and highly controlled access to certain political districts within the city. Evidence for this can be seen in the construction of walled cities, perhaps the defining archaeological site-type of this period (Fig. 10). The *Kranzhügeln* in the arid southern Jezirah are even named after their distinctive double walls. During the course of the third millennium BC, fortifications were constructed – often coincident with urbanism – at nearly every site in the region, including Mari (Margueron 2004: 85–8), Beydar (Bluard et al. 1997), Mozan (Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 1988), Arbid (Bielínski 1997), Leilan (Ristvet 2007), Hamoukar (Clemens Reichel, personal communication), Nineveh (Stronach 1994: 93), Taya (Reade 1973), Chuera (Novak 1995), Bderi (Pfälzner 1988), Titriş (Matney and Algaze 1995: 42–3), Kazane (Gates 1996: 292), Banat/Bazi (Otto 2006: 11–13), Swayhat (Zettler 1997: 48–50), and Ebla (Matthiae 1998).²² These fortification systems were complex and could include an outer city wall, often with a moat, and a



10 Tell Leilan (ancient Šehna), the modern road runs through the ruins of the northern city gate in the outer city wall; the walled acropolis is visible in the background. (Photograph by author)

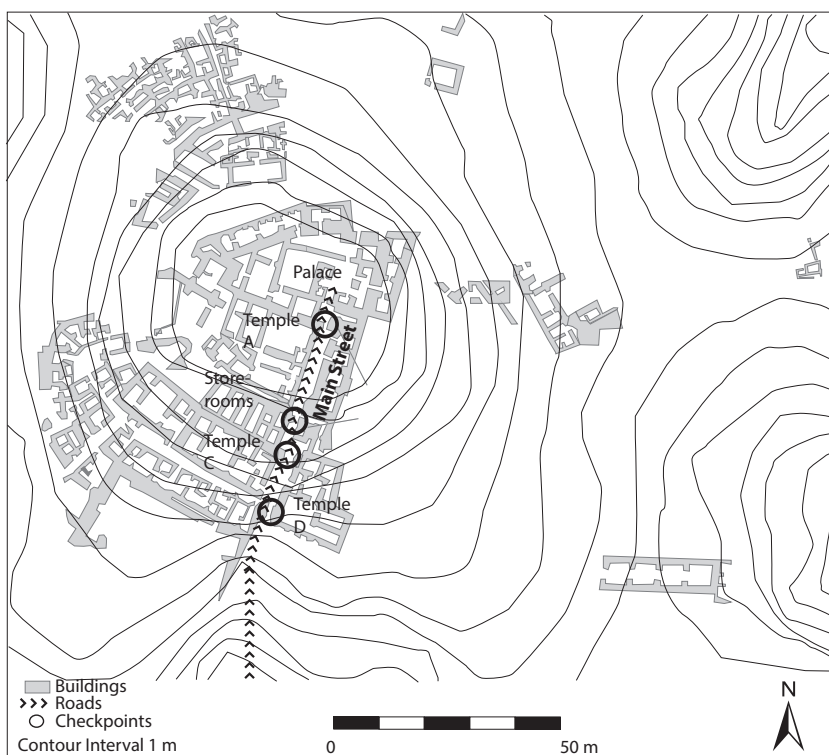
separate inner city wall. Both outer and inner city walls were built of mudbrick, sometimes above stone foundations. Many of these walls were connected to earthen ramparts or glacis and could also be fortified with towers (Cooper 2006: 70). At several sites, including Mari, Leilan, and Beydar, the inner and outer fortification walls date to the same period and may have been built at the same time, perhaps attesting to a holistic plan to limit movement within the city. At others, such as Chuera, the two sets of fortifications were not used contemporaneously (Meyer 2007: 137). The elaboration of excavated city gates at Bazi and Beydar, and the associated seal impressions at Leilan, indicate the importance of controlling movement into the city and between the inner and outer cities (Ristvet 2007: 203). Within the city, the inner wall enclosed the citadel, usually comprising the palace and associated public areas. Often the height of the tell itself was incorporated into these fortifications. In some cases, such as building 2 at Bazi, a monumental gate complex, and the Leilan Akkadian administrative building, these fortifications were the administrative area (Otto 2006: 11; Weiss et al. 2012). Even if the upper city was not fortified, the only ingress was via narrow staircases, further limiting access to these public quarters.²³ At Taya, where the foundations of mid-third-millennium structures are visible on the surface, survey has revealed noncontiguous walls that blocked the roads in the suburban area outside the fortification walls,

indicating that even beyond the city proper control of access was of concern (Reade 1973: 158).

City walls mark the separation between city and countryside. In Mesopotamia as elsewhere they were part of the very definition of a city (Parker Pearson and Richards 1994: 24; Van de Mieroop 1999: 73). These walls served to keep citizens in as much as they kept invaders out (Burke 2008; Ristvet 2007; Weiss et al. 1993). Moreover, gates not only controlled access to the city and the countryside, they also defined the populace in other ways. In the Ebla and Beydar texts, some citizens were divided into work teams depending on their *KÁ*, a Sumerian term that literally meant city gate, although it also designated the neighborhood under that gate's surveillance (Ismail et al. 1996: texts 28–9). Thus the significance of the city wall and gate depended on the audience.

Magnetometry survey, traditional survey, and limited excavations at Mozan, Chuera, Taya, Kazane, and Leilan have illustrated that the main urban roads radiated from the citadel to the city gates and were probably planned before the lower towns in these cities were built (Creekmore 2008; Meyer 2007; Pfälzner and Wissing 2004; Weiss 1990b). At Leilan, Kazane, Titriş, and Chuera large sections of these roads were separated from urban quarters by blank walls (Nishimura 2008: 143). Access to most domestic structures was from narrow alleyways, although entrances could also be directly from the road (Reade 1973: 160; Matney 2000: 25). In general, the streets channeled traffic to the citadel, connecting the two administrative spaces of the gate and the palace.

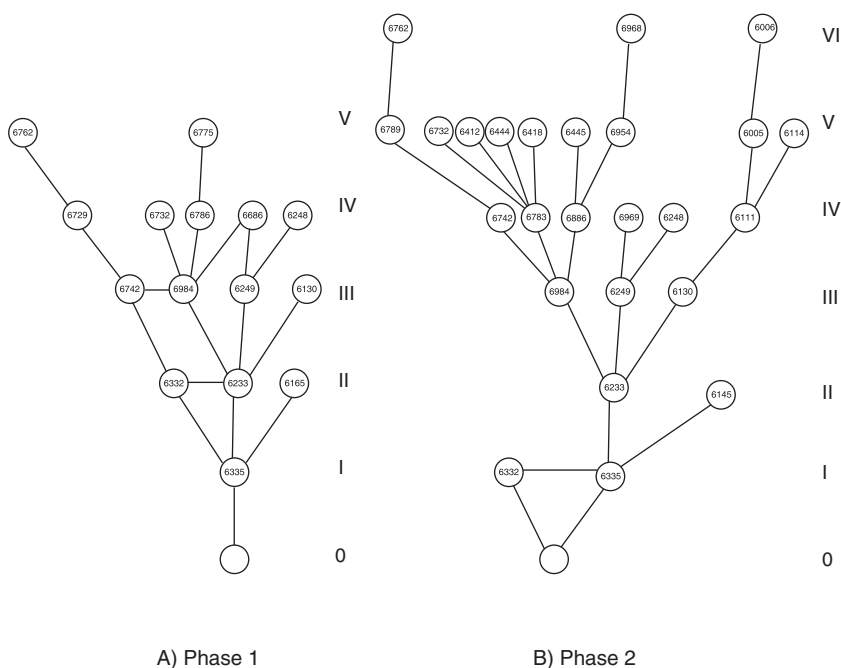
The extensive excavations at Beydar provide an example of how the gates and straight radial streets created a specific sort of passage into the city and the palace, one that emphasized political control (Fig. 11).²⁴ Such a journey could have begun at the circular city's southern gate, one of seven such gates. A traveler would have followed the straight course of "Main Street," which probably traversed the outer city, and then passed through another elaborate gate in the interior city wall, before coming to the south gate of the upper city. Beydar's upper city was set on a series of stepped platforms, creating a discontinuous monumental stairway that led to the palace. Temples lined this processional space, channeling visitors into the political heart of the city. As a visitor traveled across the upper city from the south gate to the main palace entrance, he or she had to cross four checkpoints, corresponding to each terrace and the palace itself. At one of these checkpoints, located just east of Main Street



11 “Main Street,” the main entryway to the palace at Beydar (ancient Nabada) is visible on the southeast side of the citadel. Each checkpoint where access can be controlled is marked. (After Lebeau and Suleiman 2006, courtesy Marc Lebeau)

and north of temple D, a massive square tower was excavated. The tower clearly controlled access to the official block – the city’s palace – and contained a small upper room, perhaps for a guard. The road narrowed before approaching each checkpoint, only widening slightly just before the visitor reached the palace.

An analysis of the ground plan of the Beydar palace in area F provides evidence of a growing concern to regulate access to spaces within the palace (Fig. 12). Spatial syntax analysis provides one way to investigate these processes by evaluating changes in the distribution and symmetry of this space. Distribution is a measure of how many paths lead to a specific space, while symmetry measures depth, how many spaces one must traverse to reach a certain room.²⁵ The more distributed and asymmetric a building is, the easier it is to limit access to certain areas and control movement through the building. Analysis of the Beydar palace indicates that it became more asymmetric and more distributed over time. In



13 Spatial graph of Beydar, area F, palace.

was probably typical of administrative buildings in northern Mesopotamia. Indeed, the contemporary palace F at Tell Chuera has a real relative asymmetry that is twice that of the Beydar palace, attesting to complicated circulation patterns and stringent control.²⁷

Beydar's narrow streets, the high walls of its temples and palaces, and its numerous checkpoints may have been designed to produce a sense of claustrophobia and powerlessness in visitors. The architecture emphasized the authority of those who monitored these spaces, the king or council. This urban plan projected messages of domination, messages that were naturalized by the enduring nature of the architecture. The limited visibility in most areas, where houses were hidden behind blank walls, contrasted with the high visibility of the administrative area on top of the acropolis, which towered over the city. Its highly noticeable and yet inaccessible nature may have reinforced its message of power (Dovey 2008: 10). The palace was a difficult place to enter and to escape, both literally and metaphorically. As a Sumerian proverb preserved in several copies from the early-second millennium BC has it, "the palace is a slippery place, where one slips. Watch your step when you decide to go home!" (Alster 1997: ETCSL 6, 25–6; Richardson 2012: 25–6).

The emphasis on controlling access within the urban plan and built environment echoes attempts to establish control in other domains, such as administration. The proliferation of door sealings and the complex circulation patterns within palaces mirror similar concerns with regulating the admission of people to particular spaces. In the Beydar palace, a limited number of cylinder seals were used to secure doors, indicating that these rooms were under the control of specific administrators (Jans and Bretschneider 2011: 151 and pl. 200). The administrative system in Ebla, which sought to record the entry and disbursement of a wide range of goods, represents another attempt by these emergent kingdoms to demonstrate control over people and things (Archi 2003: 21). The elaboration of this system attests to an increasing concern with regulation. This is particularly true of the documentation of annual accounts of metals and monthly accounts of textiles that Eblaite officials probably developed after the adoption of writing (Archi 2003, 2006; Biga 2003). There is little evidence that these documents were ever consulted after they were written; simply drawing them up may have been an end in itself (Archi 2003: 32, fn. 17). This provides a neat parallel to the emphasis on monitoring borders in the Ebla treaty, despite the impossibility of this endeavor. Even if such control was rarely established in practice, its performance, documented in these dockets with their attention to minutiae, was critical to the cultural construction of this kingdom.

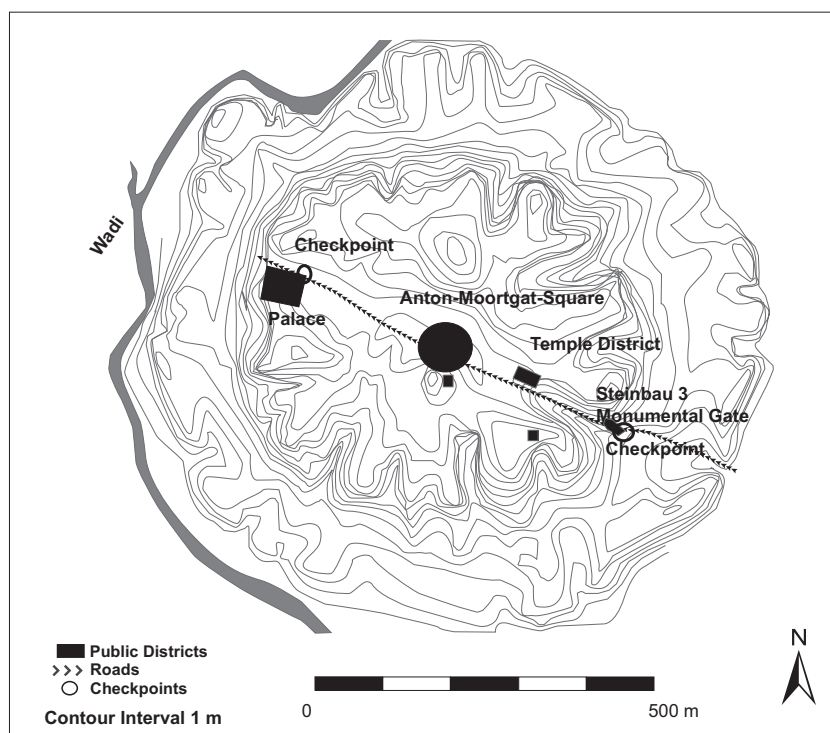
INCLUSIVE SPACES

Yet curtailing admittance to palaces, cities, and states is only part of the story. These barriers existed alongside a focus on free entry to large communal areas, often located near the palace. Such open spaces, particularly when linked to city gates or temples, may have been loci for civic institutions. Recently both historians and archaeologists have emphasized the heterarchical nature of Mesopotamian political power, with actors including elders, witnesses, “the city,” tribal leaders, and individual citizens.²⁸ Texts from Beydar and Ebla attest to the operation of collective authority during this period. At Beydar, for instance, a council of elders (UKKEN EN EN) probably governed the town, under the aegis of the king of Nagar (Ismail et al. 1996: Beydar 86, 106). At Ebla, the first entries in the palace ration lists alternate between provisions for the king and for the king and the elders (ABXÁŠ), perhaps indicating the collective nature of kingship in this city (Milano 1987: 522; Porter 2012). These texts also testify to the presence of other

political institutions in northern Mesopotamia. A group of elders ruled the kingdom of Lu'atum, situated somewhere along the upper Euphrates, before it was incorporated into Ebla (Milano and Rova 2000: 722–3). *Badalum* officials governed another group of city-states located in the Balikh valley and the foothills of the Taurus (Milano and Rova 2000: 731; Archi 2011: 6), while a plurality of kings presided over the important cities of Armi, Azu, Ibal, and Manuwat (Archi 1987: 42). Below the level of the executive in these and other cities, there were probably councils, elders, and other civic authorities who regulated much of daily life.

Except for a few references to city gates and perhaps squares, Mesopotamian texts provide few topographical references to places where communal or civil authority – as opposed to religious and royal – was enacted. The city gate and attached squares were probably the primary site of exchange and the meeting place for citizen councils, rather like the Greek *agora* (Stone 2007: 227). Such a town square in front of a city gate has been identified through magnetometry survey and excavation at Titriş (Nishimura 2008: 151), and the excavations at the city gate at Leilan have possibly uncovered a similar space (Ristvet 2007). Temple courtyards may have also served as gathering places, providing a place for courts to assemble to judge cases brought by ordinary citizens (Postgate 1994a: 277, fn. 79), and possible archaeological examples of these may exist at Leilan and Chuera. Finally, although the evidence is mixed, *rebītū*, “town squares” or “wide streets,” may have been other loci for trade and civic affairs. Such public spaces are so intertwined with civic identity that in the Old Babylonian Gilgamesh epic, *rebītum* serves as an epithet for the city as a whole (George 1999).²⁹ What all of these spaces have in common is their inclusiveness. Unlike the temple or the palace, many – perhaps most – citizens could enter and participate in affairs at the gate, temple courtyard, or town square.

At Chuera, where decades of excavation and a complete magnetometry survey have revealed the ground plan of much of this ancient city, large open expanses are present in several places (Fig. 14).³⁰ As at Beydar, the main access road from ca. 2500 to 2300 BC would have begun at a gate in the outer city wall and led straight to the upper city. Once it crossed into the upper city, it passed along the *temenos* wall of a large temple district. Monumental gates controlled entry into this space. The road then led into the Anton-Moortgat Platz, the central square where all the streets of the city met. A temple was located on the eastern side of the square, enclosed by another *temenos* wall. To the west of the central place, the road

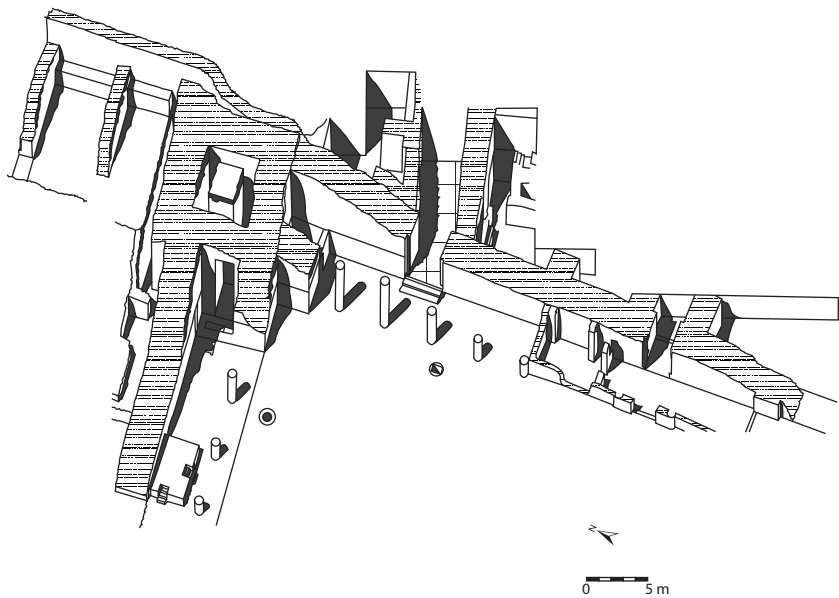


14 Chuera (ancient Abarsal?) citadel plan with the main ceremonial street marked (After Meyer 2007: fig. 2 and fig. 9)

continued to the northeast, leading to another open square in front of the palace (Meyer 2007: 137–9).

Although there are still walls and checkpoints at Chuera, they are much less frequent than at Beydar. Additionally, the physical separation of the public buildings and the many large open plazas bordering each district create a very different public space than at Beydar. Most cities probably possessed town squares, large open areas located at the center of the site. Magnetometry indicates as much at Mozan, while excavation shows the same pattern at Leilan (Dohmann-Pfälzner and Pfälzner 1999; Weiss 1997a). The relationship between the temple and the open space at Mozan suggests that this plaza was a focal point for the settlement, despite (or rather, because of) its lack of architecture (Dohmann-Pfälzner and Pfälzner 1999: 39).

Perhaps the most famous of these open spaces is the city square immediately in front of palace G at Ebla (Fig. 15). This area, originally called the Court of Audience, is at least 60 m long and 42 m wide (Matthiae and



15 Axonometric reconstruction of the plaza and palace G (After Matthiae 1981, Fig. 12)

Marchetti 2013: 51). The monumental façade of palace G formed the north and west limits of this plaza, and houses in the lower city lay to its south and east. Palace G itself was built on a series of terraces on the flanks of the acropolis (Matthiae 2008: 34–5). Hence, the plaza is situated as a meeting place between the town and the palace, a critical liminal zone for political performance. Anne Porter has proposed that the plaza was the location of the regular ritual of providing food to the gods. The water features in the plaza may have been used for ceremonial lustration, while the kitchen quarters of the palace are situated conveniently nearby and could have supplied sacramental meals (Porter 2012: 204–6). The recovery of a stone headdress that originally belonged to a cultic statue may indicate that a statue of an Eblaite god stood on a dais here, while large limestone eyes found scattered in the ruins of the plaza suggest that other cultic statues may have lined the eastern portico (Porter 2012: 212). Alternatively, Paolo Matthiae, Ebla’s excavator, has proposed that the dais may have held a throne (Matthiae 1981: 69). In either scenario, the plaza was a critical ceremonial space for both the palace and the city as a whole. Performances on the plaza may have united the palace and city, perhaps by honoring gods who were “intimately connected not only to the en’s incumbency but also the identity of the polity” (Porter 2012: 206).

These town squares could have accommodated large numbers of people. The Anton-Moortgat Platz at Chuera occupied an area of at least 5,000 m², a figure that has been estimated based on the site's topography and evidence from a machine-dug trench through this central place (Hempelmann 2010: 36). The plaza at Ebla is smaller, but comprises at least 2,520 m². Both open spaces could have held large numbers of people – more than 5,000 people could have stood in the Court of Audiences and 12,000 people could have gathered in the Anton-Moortgat Platz. In both cases, this probably represented a substantial percentage of the population of both cities. Somewhere between 3,360 and 20,000 people probably lived within the city walls at Ebla, whereas Chuera may have had a slightly larger population, corresponding to its larger size.³¹ In any case, these plazas represented spaces that were clearly distinct from the tightly controlled areas within third-millennium administrative complexes.

Of course, it is too simplistic to associate all highly regulated spaces with exclusive political authorities such as kings and all inclusive spaces with civic forms of government. Not all plazas are *agorai*. In Mayan archaeology, plazas are almost never interpreted in this way, but are instead seen as stages for ceremonies that reinforced elite dominance (Inomata and Coben 2006). It is certainly possible to understand northern Mesopotamian spaces similarly. The presence of middens at Leilan and Brak could indicate that feasting took place here (Ristvet n.d.-a). Such ceremonies can be used to emphasize or to erase differences between participants (Dietler and Hayden 2001). The same caveats hold for exclusive space. A one-room structure uncovered at Tell es-Sweyhat, with wide, buttressed walls decorated with paintings, has been identified by the excavators as a possible meeting place for the city's elders (Danti and Zettler 2007: 179–80).

At Beydar, the complicated relationship between architecture and political change shows how one space could house both inclusive and exclusive political authorities. Although this city was governed by a king and then probably by a council of elders, the changes made to palace architecture over these two centuries were minimal. When the palace was constructed, a podium was built in a central room, perhaps making this space into a throne room. When this area was rebuilt, however, no new podium was erected. The lack of a proper throne room in the final phase at Beydar is the only archaeological attestation that this building now served a council rather than a king (Sallaberger 2004: 66). Recent excavations at

Beydar have uncovered another palace in the city's lower town (the "palais oriental" in field P) with a similar reception suite, and probably throne room (Pruss 2007, 2012). Material within this palace suggests that it was occupied simultaneously with the acropolis palace, providing further evidence for divided authority (Pruss 2012: 119–20). The coexistence of these administrative spaces may result from Nabada's incorporation into the kingdom of Nagar, or it may represent a type of heterarchy, characterized by the contemporaneous presence of multiple political authorities (Lebeau and Suleiman 2011). Such examples should remind us that architecture and urban plans are long-lived, and their significance can change over time. What is important at Beydar is the coexistence of inclusive and exclusive forms of authority and space throughout this period and their continued manipulation by a range of actors.

BEYOND THE CITY

Beyond the city wall, cultivated fields surrounded ancient cities, constraining movement. The hollow ways that radiate from many third-millennium sites have been interpreted as the remains of Early Bronze Age routes formed by animals leaving settlements (Wilkinson 1993), although the identification of these features as roads and their date is contested (McClellan et al. 2000; Weiss 1997a; Casana 2013).³² More than 6,000 km of hollow ways have been mapped from Corona satellite imagery in northern Mesopotamia. They range in length from a few hundred meters to more than 5 km (Ur 2009: 192). Unlike the streets in cities, which were intentionally constructed, they were formed through decades or centuries of use and represent the trodden paths of messengers, merchants, farmers, pastoralists, and livestock traveling to other cities, fields, and pasture (Ur 2012). Although most traffic would have been on foot, the increasing number of cart models in settlements, the popularity of carts and equids in iconography, the appearance of elaborate equid graves, and the presence of cartwrights in the Ebla and Beydar texts indicate the growing importance of wheeled transport (Ur 2009: 193; Raccidi 2012; Weber 2012).

Even if hollow ways do not represent ancient roads, it is clear that patterns of land tenure would have constrained movement through the immediate countryside (Wilkinson 1994). Indeed, patterns of land use and settlement longevity would have combined to restrict movement more intensively than during earlier or later periods when there is less

settlement continuity and more evidence for shifting cultivation. The large average size of settlements and the high degree of centralization both suggest that most farmers had noncontiguous fields. Settlement continuity would also have encouraged the formation of a strong corporate identity. Administrative records from Ebla that document land tenure show that the holdings of large property owners were fragmented and could be distributed across the kingdom (Archi 1986b; Lafont 1998; Milano 1996; Renger 1987). The texts suggest that land holdings were probably also discontinuous within villages, with some land belonging to palace or absentee owners and the rest divided among villagers (Milano 1996: 142; cf. Porter 2012: 234). The dense landscape of villages, towns, and cities in most third-millennium polities would also have acted to control movement, as the Ebla-Abarsal treaty indicates (Wattenmaker 2009: 118–22). Beyond this zone, the intensification of pastoralism, and perhaps of mobility, may have led to clear demarcations of pasture associated with different herding units, cities, or kingdoms. Social and political landscapes were thus sources of friction. Well beyond the built environment of the city, the political and social relationships that made up these polities limited free movement.

Collective representations: pilgrimages and political power

The construction of new urban spaces and concomitant changes in the economic and political landscape did not just transform quotidian journeys. The rise of political complexity coincided with the creation of an intricate religious landscape, where multiple pilgrimage routes arose that probably corresponded to and sometimes crosscut the territories of specific polities. At Ebla, we have textual evidence indicating that elites participated in these pilgrimages and used them to gain and maintain influence. Seal impressions from official contexts across northern Mesopotamia suggest that this was a widespread elite practice. Archaeological evidence from several sites that were probably part of such pilgrimage networks may document nonelite participation in these ceremonies as well. As a result, pilgrimages and the sacred landscape they enacted would have provided a powerful symbolic space in which to affirm or to question the larger polity. These practices also provide a new context for the Ebla coronation ritual.

PILGRIMAGES AND SACRED JOURNEYS AT EBLA

Combining the textual and archaeological evidence from Ebla allows us to reconstruct a series of pilgrimage routes and analyze how they intersected with political and economic circuits. As we have seen, the Ebla coronation ritual included ceremonies performed within the city of Ebla and a pilgrimage to cult centers in the countryside upon the occasion of the king's marriage. This pilgrimage was one means to unite the palace district (SA.ZA^{ki}), the city of Ebla, and the area beyond the city (uru.bar) through ritual. This pilgrimage may have cemented the identity of Ebla's kingdom as a whole, in the same way that the daily ceremonies in Ebla's plaza sought to unify different parts of the city.

Ritual journeys are potent reminders of the power of a ruler (McCorriston 2011: 22; Geertz 1985; Morinis 1992; Kertzer 1988). Cross-culturally, kings have resorted to such royal processions particularly at times of transition or in states with weak political infrastructures. In late Medieval and early Modern France, the rite of royal entry was often part of the coronation ceremony in the capital and replaced it in provincial cities. These performances were a chance for the monarch to display his or her power and for various groups within the city – particularly guilds – to illustrate (and gain) influence (Giesey 1985: 53–5). Similarly, in Majapahit Java, royal entry was a major ceremony that symbolized the power and stability of the realm (see Chapter 1). In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Morocco, where kingship was based on *baraka* – god-given power to rule – the processions of warrior monarchs through their fragile kingdoms could last half the year, “demonstrating sovereignty to skeptics” (Geertz 1985: 25). Similarly, at Ebla, the royal procession to cult centers in the countryside was part of the construction of a new form of political landscape, one of kingdoms, not isolated villages.

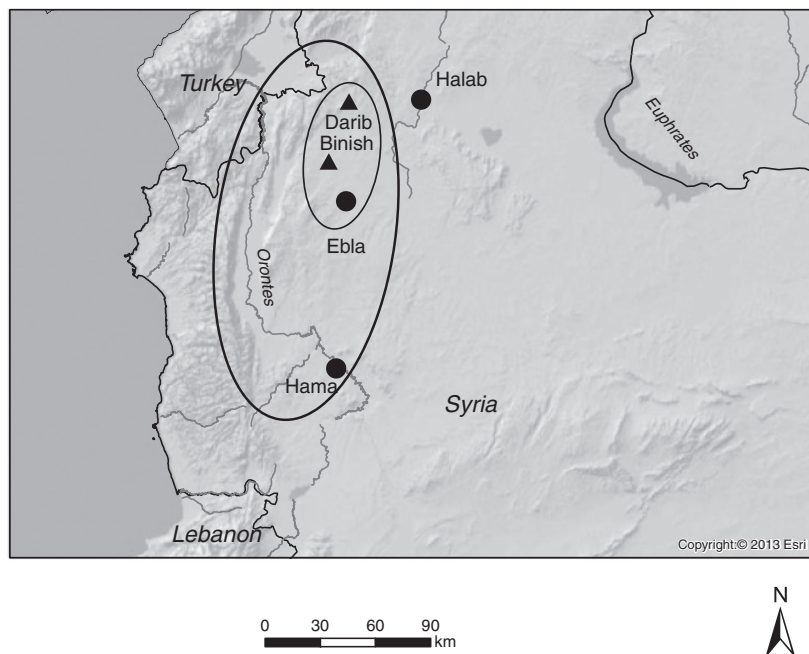
The Ebla coronation ceremony was a once-in-a-lifetime event, but other ritual journeys occurred more often. Ebla's kings made regular offerings to their ancestors in different cities of the kingdom, including Darib and Ebla itself (Archi 1986a, 1988: ARET VII 150, ARET III 178). A woman from Binaš took part in one of these ceremonies – linking these regular offerings to the ritual texts ARET XI (Fronzaroli, 1988). Other offerings to these deceased monarchs were probably made in most of the small towns and villages near Ebla. Recent analysis suggests that the Eblaite phrase AN.EN.KI, usually interpreted as the god Enki (Archi 2010), probably

designates ancestor veneration practices instead (Biga 2012: 12–14; Pasquali 2009). Like the coronation ceremony, offerings to the divinities of the dead kings would have made kingship visible to people in the Ebla countryside.

Religious celebrations in honor of the god ‘Adabal also took the form of a pilgrimage through the Ebla countryside. ‘Adabal was a storm god who was widely venerated in the countryside around Ebla, especially in the Orontes valley (Archi 2005: 98). In this, he differs from Kura and Barama, the gods who are celebrated in the coronation ritual, but rarely attested outside of Ebla. Unlike those deities, ‘Adabal’s main cult center was not Ebla, but the three cities of Arugadu, Amadu, and Luban. Two itineraries document an annual cultic journey in his honor that visited sacred places throughout Ebla’s kingdom.³³ Each year, between five and fourteen members of a religious confraternity, the *šeš-II-ib*, which was centered on the Ebla palace and often included the king, began their pilgrimage at Luban and visited Ebla and thirty-five other towns. In some years, other members of this confraternity also participated in a pilgrimage to ‘Adabal’s secondary center of Arugadu (Archi 2002: 29). Like the coronation ceremony, these yearly pilgrimages served to knit the land together, underscoring the shared religious experience of diverse places. The major political figures of the kingdom including the king, queen, and chief minister celebrated another ceremony, ‘Adabal’s opening festival, simultaneously in Arugadu and at the palace. Like the regular pilgrimage, the synchronous enactment of these ceremonies across western Syria also connected Ebla with its larger countryside, underscoring the important relationship between the palace, the city of Ebla, and the larger polity (Archi 2002).

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF PILGRIMAGE AT EBLA

In the absence of intensive archaeological survey and more excavation of third-millennium sites, reconstructing the historical geography of the kingdom of Ebla is difficult. A new archaeological survey, the Ebla Chora Project, has assembled information from several preliminary surveys and remote sensing data, but has been unable to ground truth most of these sites.³⁴ Nevertheless, it is possible to compare the coronation journey with ‘Adabal’s cultic circuit and to consider how these pilgrimages may have intersected with Eblaite politics (Fig. 16). First, there is no overlap in the destinations of the two pilgrimages; only Darib and Ebla are associated with both the rituals of kingship and ‘Adabal’s cult. Second,



16 Ritual journeys in the kingdom of Ebla, ca. 2350 BC

the two circuits cover different total territories. The destination of the coronation journey, Binash, has been identified with the modern village of Binish, ca. 20 km northwest of Ebla (Bonechi 1993: 78; Archi et al. 1993: 179). If this identification is correct, then it is likely that the other places mentioned in the coronation ritual also lie between Binish and Ebla.³⁵ Other places associated with the cult of the dead kings are also located nearby, such as Darib, which has been identified with modern Atarib, about 30 km to the north, or places where offerings are made for the AN.EN.KI such as Harzanu and Amisadu, probably small villages close to Ebla (Biga 2012: 13). This suggests that the rituals of kingship took place in Ebla's immediate vicinity. In contrast, the pilgrimage in honor of 'Adabal visited a number of cities that were located along the Orontes, perhaps as far south as Hama (ancient 'Amadu, one of 'Adabal's main cult centers) and as far north as the plain of Antioch, where Arugadu was probably located. The Orontes is 40 km from Ebla, the plain of Antioch is 60 km, and Hama is 75 km, indicating that this journey covered a wider territory, well beyond Ebla's hinterland.

The two journeys worked to construct political authority in the kingdom of Ebla differently. The rituals of kingship – the coronation ceremony

and the offerings to the dead kings – clearly demonstrated the power of the king and the dynasty to the city and the countryside immediately around it. ‘Adabal’s cultic journey, on the other hand, allowed Ebla’s political elites to introduce themselves into a preexisting ritual, to legitimize the city’s control over this more distant area. The differences between these rituals reflect a critical aspect of third-millennium kingdoms: the difficulty of establishing and maintaining direct control in areas beyond a few days’ journey from a city. Within a radius of one or two days’ travel – corresponding to the area defined by the coronation journey and the cult of the dead kings – frequent royal visits and state ceremonial reinforced a sense of belonging. This probably coincided with real economic and other ties between these settlements and Ebla, since this is also the area in which it is profitable to deliver agricultural products using animal transport (Wilkinson 1994: 502; Chisholm 1962: 80–3). Beyond this radius, links to Ebla were more tenuous, reflected in the higher degree of independence and different ritual systems, one in which the Ebla contingent did not have a leading role.

THE SYRIAN RITUAL

The Ebla texts provide unique insight into political ritual in western Syria. Although no other religious texts are known from northern Mesopotamia, iconography and archaeological remains attest to a more extensive political use of ritual journeys. A cylinder seal motif, referred to as “the Syrian ritual,” appears to illustrate cultic processions and link them in multiple ways to the construction of political authority. This scene portrays a religious procession, depicting devotees lifting one or both arms in praise of a deity. This god faces front, unlike the other figures who are rendered in profile (Amiet 1980: 167–8; Matthews 1997: 113–14). Most impressions identified as Syrian ritual scenes bring together supplicants, towers (presumably temples), and wagons, perhaps emphasizing the importance of travel to the ritual. Although we have many fewer examples of the Syrian ritual scene than of banquet or contest scenes, which are the most common imagery from this period, their proveniences and patterns of use attest to their importance in Syrian and North Mesopotamian courts.

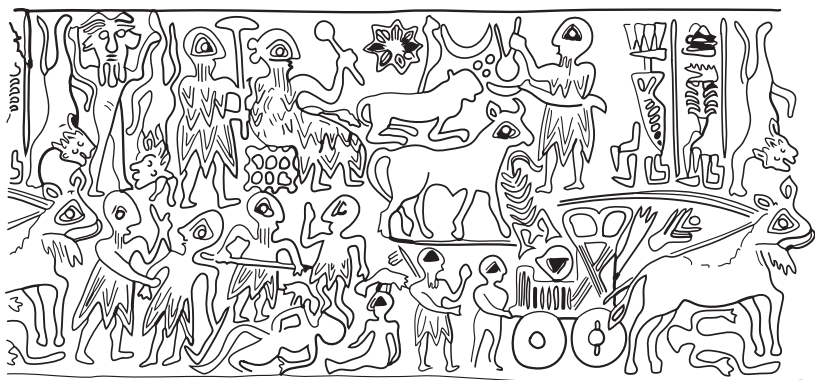
At Tell Beydar, for example, the best attested sealing is a variation on this theme. The Beydar Master Seal is in two registers, although the scenes are not easy to separate and tend to overlap. At the center of the lower register stands a high tower, made of two almost man-sized rectangles,

each bearing a quadripartite motif. Three figures with one or both arms raised emerge from this structure. One individual kneels before the left side of this tower with his arm raised in greeting. Other people, also depicted with raised arms, approach the tower from both sides. Some of them walk, while others ride in two different types of carts. The upper register depicts a man driving an equid-drawn cart into battle. The people before him include foot soldiers wielding weapons or shields, and a fallen man. A robed figure walks behind his cart. Each of the three carts is distinct and rendered with attention to detail, unlike the individual figures, all of whom seem to be wearing the same, possibly flounced, skirts (Fig. 17a).³⁶ This tower may resemble both the actual sanctuaries on high terraces known from excavations at Hazna from the first half of the third millennium and perhaps Gre Virike, and a model, three-storied tower found at Brak that was decorated with goat heads and small birds (Emberling 2003: fig. 52–3). Approximately fifty impressions of this scene have been recovered from Beydar. They all come from the large public complex in the center of Beydar's acropolis (Rova and Devecchi 2008: 64). Several of these impressions are door sealings, indicating that this seal was wielded by a high official at Nabada who had authority over goods within this monumental building. It seems likely that the iconography of the scene was also important to this official's exercise of authority. At least one other scene from Beydar (Rova and Devecchi 2008: type 2, 65–6) illustrates a similar ritual; it depicts a two-storied wheeled tower, wagon and driver, and possible worshippers. Two door sealings bearing this scene were recovered from the courtyard in front of temple B. Once again, the fact that the seal's owner was responsible for goods stored in this temple indicates that he was an official associated with Beydar's Official Block.³⁷

Outside of Beydar, other imagery connected to the Syrian ritual scene comes from Mari, while related iconography is known from seals or sealings found at Ebla, Brak, and in unprovenanced collections.³⁸ Two recently published Mari royal sealings are the most elaborate known renditions of this scene (Fig. 17b and c). The owner of these seals is identified as Išqi-Mari, king of Mari, in inscriptions (Beyer 2007: fig. 17–8, 249; Beyer and Lecompte 2014). Both of these scenes combine Syrian and southern Mesopotamian motifs, including the master of animals, a presentation scene, and a battle scene. The scenes have two registers, which as in the Beydar seal, tend to overlap. The top register shows the master of animals in full face, like the Syrian god. He stands behind the king, who is seated in a chair and holding a mace. In front of the king are two animals, perhaps a



A



B



C

17 Wagon sealings from northern Mesopotamia: A) Beydar seal 4 (scene 60; Jans and Bretschneider 2011: 76–82), B) Išqi-Mari royal seal 1 (after Beyer and Lecompte 2014: fig. 3b), C) Išqi-Mari royal seal 2 (after Beyer 2007: fig. 18)

deer and a lion. The bottom register illustrates a battle scene of soldiers stabbing enemies with knives and spears. Equid-drawn chariots, which resemble those depicted on the standard of Ur, trample fallen bodies. In scene B, vultures peck at the heads of two of the corpses. The fact that these

wagon scenes are royal seals emphasizes the connection between religion and political power.

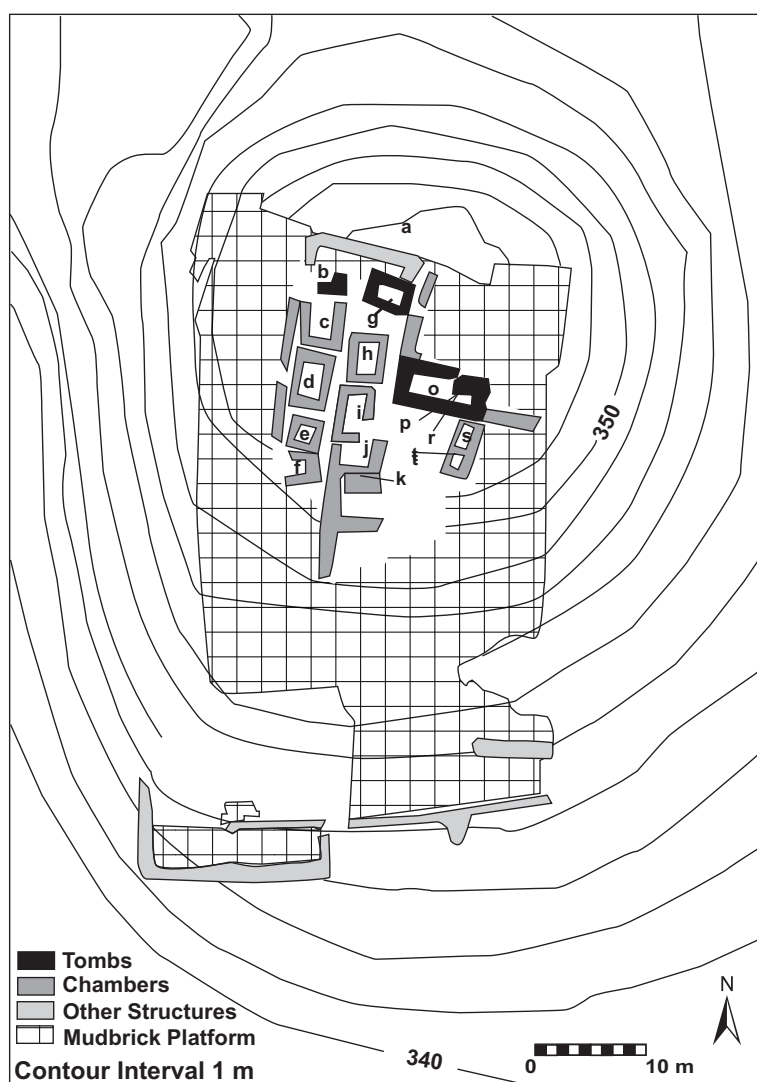
In a recent analysis of the Beydar and Mari scenes, Joachim Bretschneider and colleagues have drawn attention to the juxtaposition of the battle and ritual scenes on each seal. The Mari seal features a banquet scene, perhaps depicting ritual offerings following victory. The Beydar seal, in contrast, portrays a ritual procession, possibly another scene of thanksgiving. The figure in the wagon could be a king or important political figure, or it may be the statue of a god or goddess on a journey like the one described in the Ebla rituals (Bretschneider et al. 2009: 12). Other seals at Beydar depict boats, probably illustrating yet another ritual journey, of a type that is well known from this period in southern Mesopotamia, and is often referred to as the boat god motif (Jans and Bretschneider 2011: 42–6). The imagery on the seals exemplifies the two sources of political power and sovereignty in northern Mesopotamia: military conquest and religious rituals. Their combination on royal seals shows the importance of both sources of authority in these early kingdoms. These large seals illustrate, in an abbreviated form, the ideological underpinnings of these polities.

Materialized symbols: cult centers in the countryside

Ritual texts and the iconography of the Syrian ritual scene provide a new context for unusual third-millennium cultic/funerary monuments. Certain sites with a religious function may be understood as pilgrimage centers, the equivalent of places such as Binash that would have served the larger community of the polity. Archaeological data from four of these sites – Gre Virike, Hazna, Jebelet al-Beda, and Banat – allow us to reconstruct how different polities may have used religious journeys to construct different political identities in the middle of the third millennium BC.

GRE VIRIKE

Gre Virike, a religious and mortuary center on the banks of the Euphrates, lies 10 km north of the major center of Carchemish. Sometime near the beginning of the third millennium BC, a 50 × 35 m mudbrick platform was built on top of a natural pebble hill here (Fig. 18). The first structures constructed on this platform (phase I, early third millennium) were ritual installations, including stone-lined pits, plaster-lined pools, a small clay platform, and a basalt stairway leading to an underground spring (Ökse



18 Tombs and offering chambers at Gre Virike, period IIa (After Ökse 2005: fig. 3)

2006b: 1–5). During the following phase (IIa, mid-third millennium), a series of limestone chamber tombs were placed on the summit of the mound along with offering chambers (Ökse 2005: 21–7). Satellite graves from this phase and the following one (IIb, late third millennium) were dug into the platform, clustered around the initial chamber tombs (Ökse 2006a: 4–20).

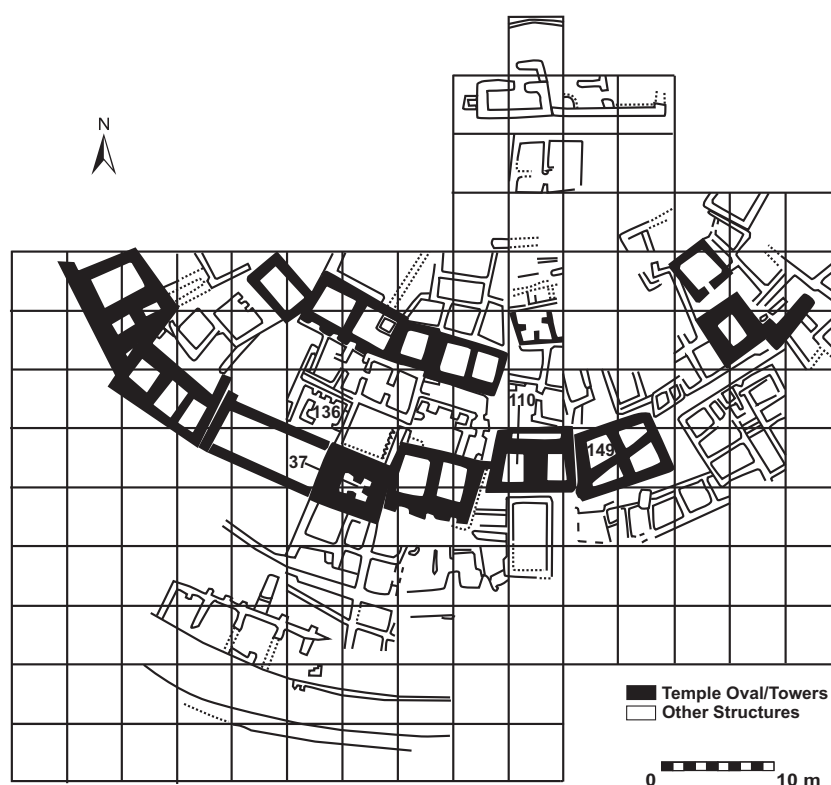
During each phase, there is archaeological evidence for offerings of agricultural goods and figurines. Offering pits and chambers contained

barley with a few grains of bread/macaroni wheat (Dönmez 2006), animal bones, unbaked clay animal figurines, and the remains of vessels. Initially, the association of these materials with the underground spring implies that they were donated to deities associated with water, fertility, or the underworld, whereas later offerings may have been part of funerary and post-funerary feasts or sacrifices (Ökse 2004, 2007). In addition to these pits, kitchen installations were present on the site during the phases associated with the graves, perhaps for the preparation of food offerings. The ritual and mortuary installations of Gre Virike are associated with no domestic architecture on the site itself. Throughout the third millennium, architecture only occupied about one-third of the 1,800 m² platform (Peltenbug 2007–2008: 221–2). The remainder of the space could have accommodated an audience of anywhere between 500 and 4,000 people.³⁹

HAZNA

In the Habur triangle, another small site, Hazna, located 14 km west of modern Tell Brak (ancient Nagar), may have served as a place of pilgrimage in the very early days of this kingdom, although there is evidence that, like Gre Virike, it was a cultic place long before we have texts documenting politics at Nagar.⁴⁰ Hazna provides intriguing evidence for control of access to ritual space and for popular participation at a possible pilgrimage site from ca. 3000 to 2500 BC.⁴¹ The excavators suggest that during the mid-third millennium BC, Hazna was a temple complex that included multilevel platforms, towers, and attached rooms (Fig. 19; Munchaev et al. 2004: 477). These rooms were arrayed on three or possibly four terraces, each of which was connected to an enclosure wall. In the center of this settlement was an 8 m high tower with its own fortification. Although it is possible to interpret Tell Hazna as a densely occupied village site, and its cultic towers as storage facilities (Pfälzner 2002, 2011), the unusual nature of the deposits here, the buttressing on these towers, and the site's later use as a cemetery supports the excavators' interpretation. The circular construction of this site may resemble temple ovals discovered at Tell Ubaid and Khafaje in Iraq (Delougaz 1940; Hall and Woolley 1927).

Excavations in room 37 within the main tower have unearthed striated ash layers containing grain, animal bones, and clay animal figurines, which the excavators have interpreted as offerings (Amirov 2006; Munchaev et al. 2004: 25–6). In addition, seventeen unused sickle blades were placed in a niche in the tower along with a stamp seal (Merpert and



19 Ritual buildings at Hazna (after Munchaev, Merpert, and Amirov 2004: tabl. 3)

Munchaev 1999: 121). Another cultic tower (room 110) was located on a different level of the site. In a room (149) adjoining this tower, the excavators found a cache of beads made of crystal, carnelian, jet, turquoise, bone, and shell, as well as silver pendants (Munchaev et al. 2004: 23). Some of the rooms in the complex connected to this tower were filled with large quantities of animal bones, while two small chambers contained a cache of more than forty clay animal figurines (Munchaev and Merpert 1994: fig. 31). Other cultic chambers, another tower, and industrial installations occupied Hazna's other terraces. As at Gre Virike, following its use as a temple, Hazna was converted into a necropolis, with twenty-five individual graves placed in different rooms of the compound (Munchaev et al. 2001: 483).

JEBELET AL-BEDA

Southwest of Hazna, in the Syrian desert, at the western edge of the Jebel Abd-'al-Aziz mountain range, lies another unusual cultic site. The site consists of a 20 × 15 m platform of limestone blocks at the highest point



20 A) Statue from Jebel al-Beda (Oppenheim 1933, pl. 62a) and B) stela from Jebel al-Beda (Oppenheim 1933, pl. 63a) (Both photographs courtesy Hausarchiv Sal. Oppenheim, Cologne, Max Freiherr von Oppenheim-Stiftung).

of a hill called Ras et-Tell (Moortgat-Correns 1972: 54). In the western half of this platform, eight square trenches were cut into the bedrock in a cruciform pattern. Four of these trenches were widened to create graves, although skeletons were only found in the two graves in the middle of the platform. Very little material was recorded from the graves, trenches, or platform, with the exception of rough, handmade pottery sherds and basalt fragments. Lying on the slopes of the hill were the remains of at least three basalt sculptures (Moortgat-Correns 1972: 53–4), which the excavator hypothesized were originally erected on the platform (Oppenheim 1933: 226–30).

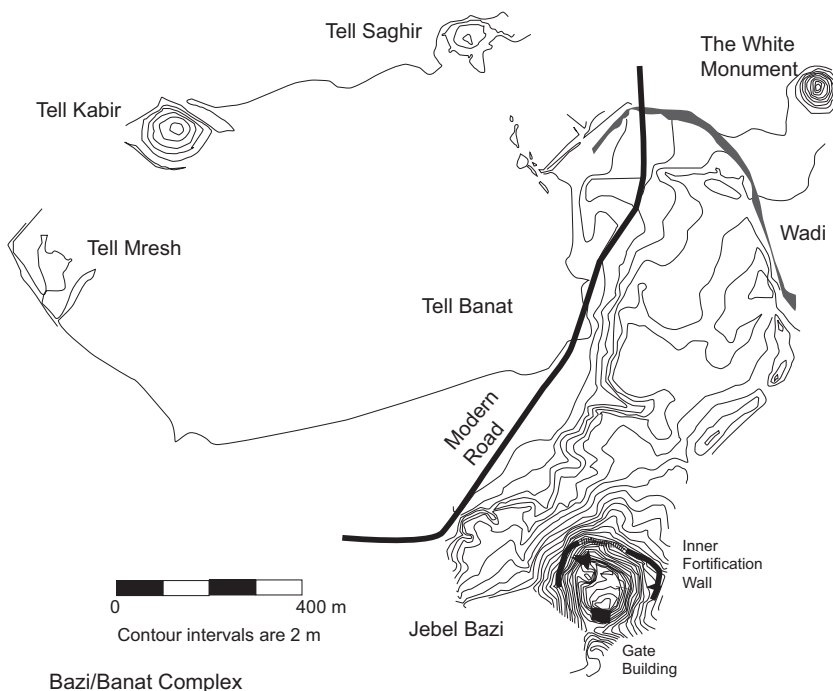
The best-preserved sculptures are a stela and a statue in the round. The statue, which may have originally been 2.5 to 3 m high, depicts a bearded man wearing a flounced skirt and holding a mace (Fig. 20a). The double-sided stela has the same image on both sides and may portray the same bearded man (Fig. 20b). On the stela, he stands atop a litter borne by two smaller men, who appear to be running, a motif also found on the

Ur-Nanše plaque from Telloh (Moortgat-Correns 1972: 15). The statue can be linked stylistically to the figure of Išqi-Mari, known from the Mari royal sealings and a statuette found at Mari (Parrot 1953: 8–9). This probably indicates that the figure depicted was a northern Mesopotamian monarch. Joachim Bretschneider and colleagues suggest that the tableau formed by the man with the mace facing the stela is related to the scene on the lower register of the Beydar master sealing (Bretschneider et al. 2009: 17). The seal and the sculpture may both illustrate aspects of the Syrian ritual. Memorializing this ceremony through monumental architecture transformed this desolate hill into an everlasting reminder of this ceremony. Additionally, the use of this imagery on seals incorporated this ritual into quotidian administration. Hence, this ritual worked both as spectacle and as daily practice, amplifying the effective influence of this symbolism.

South and west of Ras et-Tell lie two other hills where Oppenheim excavated Early Bronze Age cist graves, including one with an enclosure wall (Oppenheim 1933: 229–30; Moortgat-Correns 1972: 55). In total, Ursula Moortgat-Correns estimates that twenty graves can be found in the hills near Ras et-Tell (Moortgat-Correns 1972: 56). Although these burials are difficult to date, they may be related to the tableau of the statue and the stelae. Certainly, they would have provided this ritual of kingship with a timeless audience.

TELL BANAT

Unlike the other cultic sites considered thus far, which are small and isolated, the site of Tell Banat, together with neighboring Tell Bazi, may have constituted the city of Armi/Armanum (Fig. 21; Otto 2006; cf. Porter 2012: 237, fn. 73), although it is possible that this city lay further north, at Samsat (Archi 2011). Myriad different monuments are attested at Banat and may have provided the settings for ceremonies like the Ebla coronation ritual. The 20 m high White Monument at Banat (Tell Banat North), located 200 m north of the main settlement, was a complex burial mound used for at least half a millennium (from ca. 2800 to 2300 BC). Anne Porter and Thomas McClellan, Banat's excavators, believe that the White Monument was a giant ossuary, the final resting place for certain ancestral remains, interred there following their defleshing (Porter 2002: 21; McClellan 1998). Although excavations never penetrated to the heart of this mound, they did reveal three construction stages for the



21 Plan of Bazi/Banat (ancient Armanum?) with the location of the fortified gate building on Jebel Bazi and the lower citadel wall (After Porter 2002: fig. 2, courtesy of A. Porter)

monument. The first version of the structure (White Monument C, ca. 2600 BC) was a white pyramid built of gravel that incorporated human bone and fragments of pottery, including the possible ritual deposition of a deliberately broken vessel (Porter 2002: 14). Stone tumuli and earthen cairns containing a few disarticulated human bones and whole vessels were cut into this mound. Skeletal material and pots had also been scattered around the tumuli (Porter 2002: 15). During the second construction phase (2550–2400 BC), a single large mound, White Monument B, was built to incorporate these disparate mounds. In the final construction phase (2400–2300 BC), this mound was enlarged to create White Monument A. Unlike the previous mortuary monuments, White Monument A was built at one time, as a single construction event. It was made in even horizontal layers, each of which contained discrete deposits of the disarticulated remains of two or more individuals, equid bones, ceramics, and small offerings such as beads and clay balls (Porter 2002: 16). The excavators note the careful patterning of this mound; human bones were not placed randomly, and the gravel and white gypsum used in

the construction were deliberately chosen and brought some kilometers (Porter 2007–2008: 202).

The White Monument is not the only locus for mortuary rituals at Banat. Indeed, the oldest structure at the site – mortuary mound II – is also a conical mound built of layers of gravel and white pisé that may have enclosed a stone cairn (Porter 2002: 16). A 2 m tall gravel platform overlay this burial mound. The monumental building 7, probably either a palace or temple and a contemporary to White Monument B, was built atop this platform. Another monumental building, building 6, replaced it and was still standing when White Monument A was built. The buildings may have been placed in this area to erase the previous mortuary monument or to appropriate its authority (Peltenburg 2007–2008: 228).

Just south of building 7 lay a series of burials, including tomb 7, a five-chambered tomb made of carefully dressed stone and used during the life spans of the public buildings 6 and 7. The tomb's stone architecture and baked brick and bitumen floor parallel the architecture of the public buildings. When the buildings were in use, the stone roof of this tomb would have been visible and accessible, located in a courtyard connected to them. Tomb 7 contained a wealthy primary burial; an articulated skeleton was found in the remains of a wooden coffin, with nearly 1,000 gold beads, alabaster vessels, and objects with lapis lazuli inlay. The impressions of objects that had been removed from the tomb in antiquity could still be seen in its bitumen-coated floor. Clearly, this tomb was entered multiple times, probably as part of complex mortuary and post-mortuary rituals. Two other articulated skeletons lay above tomb 7, while a third articulated skeleton was found near its entrance shaft, directly on top of the tomb's stone roof (Porter 2002: 18–21). Three other burials – tombs 4, 5, and 6 – were also located in this courtyard and contained the fragmentary remains of multiple individuals. They are probably equivalent to the ancillary burials found within the White Monument (Porter 2002: 17–18).

Actors, audience, and *mise-en-scène*: pilgrimage centers

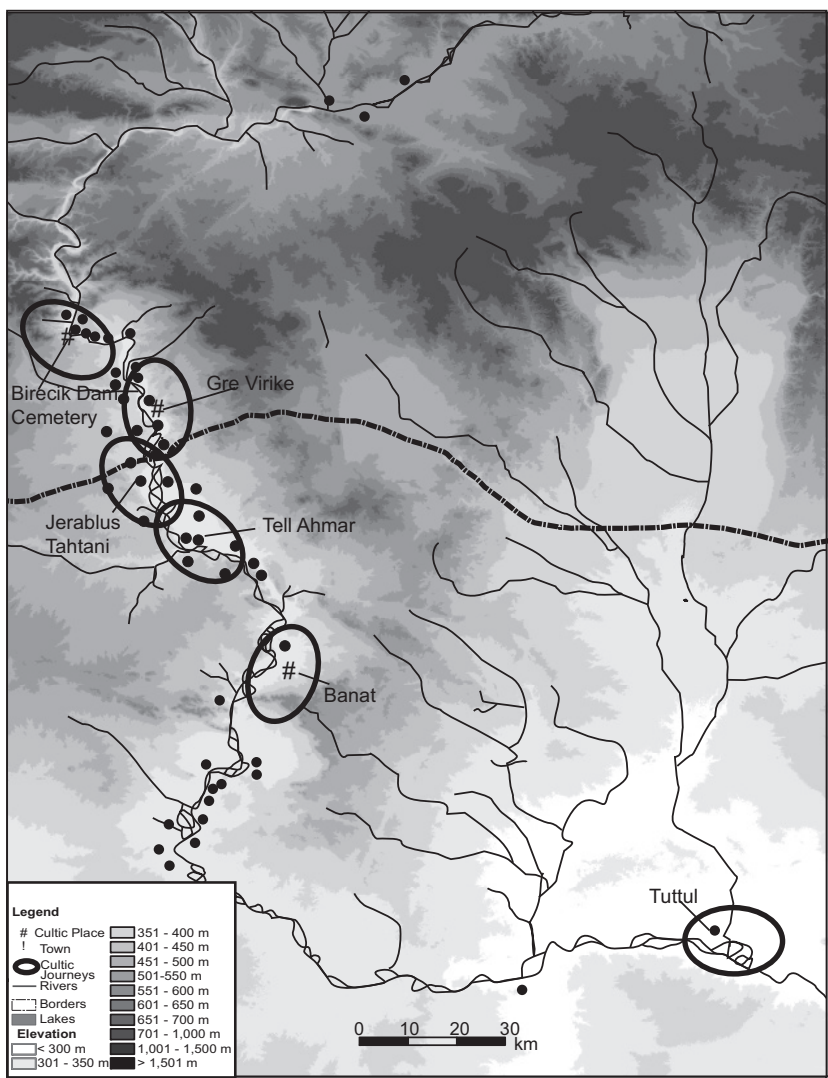
Architectural analysis of Gre Virike, Hazna, Jebelet al-Beda, and Tell Banat provides information on the setting for rituals, while depositions from these sites illustrate the nature of these activities. These locales also provide an opportunity for us to reflect upon the actors, audiences, and *mise-en-scène*

of these particular ceremonies, as well as the different ways they were embedded into political negotiation.

Despite the unique nature of each of these places, these four ritual locales share many similarities. Each monument uses height and monumentality, often incorporating a mound or a hill into its construction. Gre Virike, Hazna, and Jebelet al-Beda also used platforms to segregate cultic installations, in the process perhaps creating stages for the performance of special rites. The presence of funerary monuments is also common to all of these sites. None of them seems to have been inhabited; even Banat has no clear evidence of a domestic population. But they did not exist in a vacuum. In order to understand the various roles they could have played, it is necessary to look beyond the individual places and consider their wider landscape. The Ebla tablets indicate that in the twenty-fourth century BC, northern Mesopotamia was divided into a large number of small kingdoms or city-states – at least twenty such polities are known. The cultic sites probably belonged to three or four different polities. Gre Virike may have been located in the kingdom of Carchemish; Hazna was probably part of Nagar; Jebelet al-Beda may have been part of Hadda or Abaarsal; and Banat was probably the capital of Armi/Armanum.

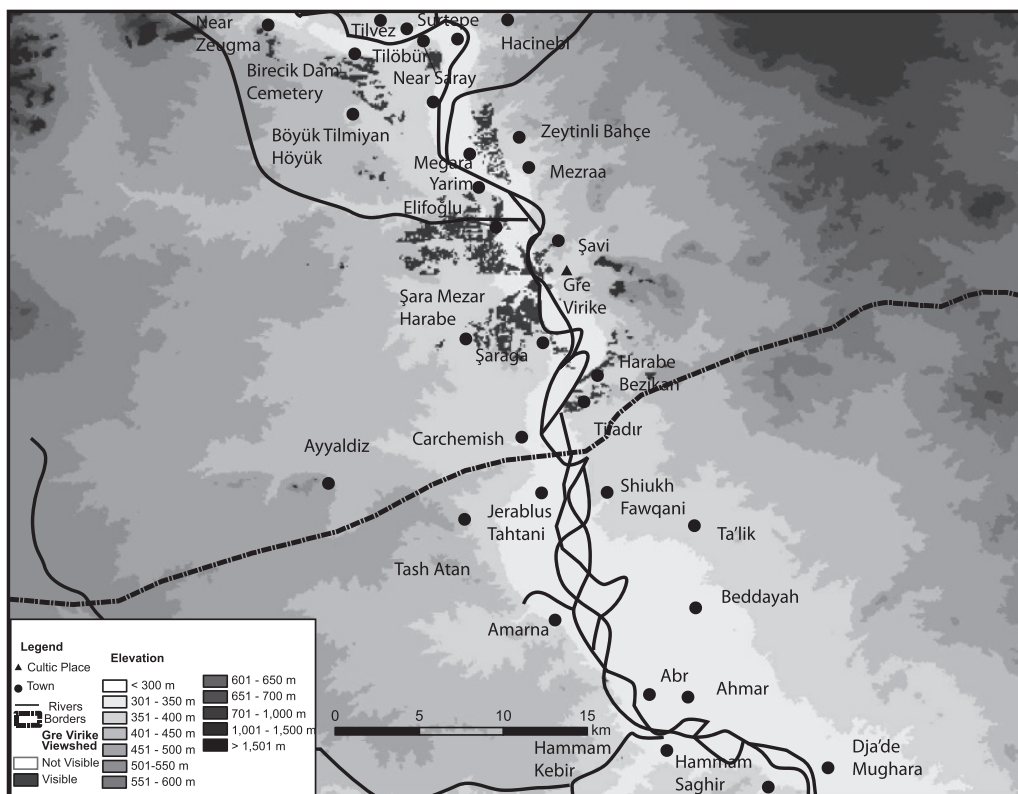
CONSTRUCTING KINGDOMS

Gre Virike belongs to the *badalum*-cities region, an area along the upper Euphrates and Balikh where the main political authorities were *badalum* officials, not kings. The lack of domestic settlement here suggests that the site was a place of pilgrimage that was incorporated into a larger cultural landscape along the Euphrates (Fig. 22). Survey evidence from the area within a day's walk of Gre Virike indicates that other sites along the river, with the possible exception of Carchemish, were small villages with a population of perhaps 4,000 during the life span of this cultic center (Ökse 2007).⁴² Rather fittingly, 4,000 is also the upper limit for the number of people who could attend ceremonies at this center, based on analysis of the open space surrounding the funerary installations.⁴³ Since other cultic sites are located 15–30 km apart on the Euphrates, Gre Virike was probably only used by people living within this radius, including the local elites at Carchemish. This would have made the Gre Virike pilgrimage circuit similar in size to the Ebla kingship ritual circuit. Unlike some of the other cultic sites, Gre Virike was not placed behind a wall, nor was it located on a particularly high terrace, perhaps emphasizing its connection



22 Possible pilgrimage networks on the upper Euphrates

to its wider community. Yet Gre Virike’s position along the river means that its visibility is limited. The site can be seen from very few of the contemporary third millennium settlements that have been identified from survey in this region (fig. 23).⁴⁴ This hidden aspect of Gre Virike may have contributed to a sense of exclusivity; this cultic place could be used only by those in the know. The kitchens and other installations around its burial chambers attest to repeated ceremonies, perhaps ancestor rituals performed for an audience in the lower viewing area (Peltenburg



23 Intervisibility and viewshed analysis at Gre Virike

2007–2008: 222–3). Gre Virike's lack of monumentality and the dearth of high status objects in these chamber graves may correspond to the political situation of Carchemish, where there are no attested kings during this period. Perhaps political power in the Carchemish region was founded on inclusive policies or ritual authority – and not on the display of wealth or an architecture of domination.

The situation at Nagar is quite different. As we have seen, this kingdom with its eponymous capital at Brak was equal in status to Ebla, Mari, and Kish during the 24th century BC. We know that Nagar's king traveled between the centers under his control in a royal progress that may have contributed to his authority.⁴⁵ Although we have no record for a specifically ritual journey like the Ebla coronation ceremony, the evidence from the Beydar seals and the tower model from Brak provide indirect evidence for such activities. The early- to mid-third-millennium tower temples excavated at Hazna, located 15 km from Brak and 20 km from Beydar,

resemble the ritual structures depicted on the later Beydar seals, despite the approximately 150-year gap between the two. Architectural elements at Hazna call to mind exclusive political strategies, limiting access to this sacred district to all but a chosen few. This emphasis on multiple fortification walls controlling access to the cultic spaces at Hazna distinguishes it from Gre Virike. Such evidence parallels the presence of extensive fortification walls and control points at the city of Beydar, indicating the importance of controlling territory for Nagar's king. Similarly, the presence of separate locations for elite and nonelite offerings at Hazna may have constituted a part of Nagar's different hegemonic strategy. At Hazna, everyday objects – probably brought as offerings – such as grain, animals, agricultural implements, and animal figurines, were segregated from unusual, high-status donations such as the semiprecious beads in room 149. Moreover, there is no obvious space for an audience to watch the ritual performances, indicating that the relationship between actor and audience was different here. It is likely that all visitors to the complex were understood as participants, perhaps stressing the egalitarian nature of many of these rites. However, although most of the evidence at the site results from similar ritual offerings, perhaps made by a wide spectrum of the populace, the use of at least part of the site may have been co-opted by an elite that emphasized exclusion, not inclusion. Once again, its position with respect to Nagar may indicate that most of its pilgrims only traveled a day or so to reach this sanctuary.

Jebelet al-Beda also attests to the ritual establishment of a political strategy. These unusual ruins have been interpreted as a site of worship, a victory monument, or a place of ancestor veneration (Oppenheim 1933; Meyer 1997; Moortgat-Correns 1972; Pfälzner 2001a). It seems most likely that this site was built and used by the inhabitants of the *Kranzhügeln*, the majority of which lie between the Jebel 'abd-al-Aziz and the Habur river. The 33 ha site of Tell Mabtuh lies only about 10 km northeast of this monument and is the closest third-millennium settlement. Jebelet al-Beda may have been part of a pilgrimage network belonging to the kingdom of Abarsal, centered on Chuera, ca. 55 km northwest, or to the kingdom of Haddu, an important center that bordered Mari on the west and whose capital has been identified as Tell Malhat ed-Deru, ca. 55 km southeast.⁴⁶ The monument at Jebelet al-Beda seems to have more in common with Gre Virike than Hazna. Unlike the latter site, the use of circumvallation is limited to one of the "Grave Hills." Moreover, the

simple cist graves set on a platform, built on a natural hill, recall the emplacement of platforms along the Euphrates. But the stelae and statue of Jebelet al-Beda appear more overtly political than the other monuments discussed so far. And although the platform provides a space for ritual; it is much smaller than the one at Gre Virike and could have accommodated at most perhaps 500 people, perhaps limiting attendance to a certain segment of society.⁴⁷ Although it is possible that the preserved stela and the statue depict a god, it is more likely that this figure was a man, perhaps a king (Moortgat-Correns 1972: 21–2). The “king’s” power may have been grounded in the relationship of this image to the dead, its connection to the bodies of his followers, enemies, and/or ancestors who were interred in the surrounding graves, and perhaps its significance for the living who witnessed this monumentalized ceremony. The construction of the monument in the barren hills also expressed royal power, demonstrating this nameless king’s ability to monopolize skilled and unskilled labor.

Finally, evidence from Banat, possibly Armi/Armanum, indicates another set of political strategies. Unlike the other places discussed, Banat was a major center; at 40 ha, this complex may have been the largest city on the upper Euphrates, perhaps larger than Carchemish. In the Ebla documentation, Armi/Armanum is a city-state ruled by an en and his elders (Fronzaroli 2003: texts 16 and 17; Otto 2006: 18). The importance of both an exclusive leader and a corporate entity here, as at Ebla, corresponds nicely to the complex ritual installations. For centuries tomb 7 and the White Monument stood together, representing two political strategies, usually understood to be in conflict, but here coexisting. White Monuments A and B were probably both built and used at the same time as tomb 7 and the associated public building in area C, but the different monuments may have represented different forms of political authority.

Located outside of the settlement complex at Banat, across the modern wadi from the main site, the White Monument may be approached from any direction. Excavation and geophysical surveys revealed no enclosure walls, nor are any visible in the topographic plan. Instead, there seems to have been entirely open access to this place. The inclusive nature of this access parallels the inclusive nature of the monument itself. Even if there is an undiscovered elite burial within the heart of this mound, the many other discrete deposits of human bone, animal bone, and other ritual materials (such as beads and clay balls) from each stage of its construction emphasize

its communal nature. Prior to the emergence of craft-production areas and public buildings at Bazi-Banat, the site was probably characterized by a field of such tumuli – as resistivity survey has located other likely burial mounds in the area. Most scholars have assumed that these mounds were the burial places of a probably generally mobile population (Peltenburg 2007–2008; Porter 2002). The White Monument may have served as a testament to these nameless dead, maintaining a vital link between farmers, pastoralists, city dwellers, and their ancestors. Its size and setting meant that it was visible for a long way, particularly for travelers coming from the north and west, broadcasting a powerful argument about political authority to the other populations that comprised this polity (Porter 2007: 203).⁴⁸

Unlike the White Monument, the later tomb 7 was built in a large public area. Although initially access to this area was unrestricted, the construction of a thick perimeter wall that enclosed building 6 transformed its relationship with the community, isolating it from the rest of the site (Porter 2002: 27). The tomb itself, of course, is a semi-subterranean structure that is largely hidden from view, while its small size limits the number of people who could participate in rituals (Porter 2007: 208). The courtyard surrounding the buried tomb 7, however, could have held more spectators.⁴⁹ The luxurious contents of the tomb and the small numbers of people buried here and in surrounding graves emphasize another type of exclusivity. Tomb 7 may well have been the actual location for the celebration of exclusive rituals like the Ebla coronation ceremony (Porter 2007: 205–7). The arcane nature of such ceremonies would also have been powerful, both for their immediate participants and for others in the community. In the final analysis, both monuments and their associated rituals emphasize the construction of a shared community. Like the performances in the Mesoamerican cities of K'axob and La Corona that brought into being ancestors and patron deities, these rituals were performative, creating an entirely new political system.

DEATH, ANCESTORS, AND POWER

Beyond these four “pilgrimage sites,” the mid-third millennium witnessed the emergence of complex ritual and mortuary practices inscribed on the landscape, cities, and palaces, providing another context for these four centers.⁵⁰ The aboveground tombs at Gre Virike, the stelae and statues at Jebelet al-Beda, and the White Monument at Banat find parallels in

the construction of other hypogea in cities such as Umm el-Marra in the Jabbul Plain, Bi'a, where the Balikh meets the Euphrates, and Jerablus Tahtani, just south of Carchemish.

An elaborate mortuary complex, dating from between 2550 and 2200 BC, crowns the acropolis of the site of Umm el-Marra, perhaps ancient Dub/Tuba. This complex consists of ten elite human tombs, and ten installations devoted to equid burials that were at least partially above-ground, and hence visible to residents and visitors to the city (Schwartz 2007a, 2012, 2014; Schwartz et al. 2003; Schwartz et al. 2000b; Schwartz et al. 2006, 2012). The tombs were built with a limestone substructure and a brick superstructure and usually had one or two rooms. Within these chambers, human bodies lay in coffins, accompanied by jewelry, weaponry, pottery, and cuts of meat. Each tomb yielded between one and eight individuals, including men, women, children, and infants. A line of subterranean "installations" containing the articulated skeletons of more than thirty equids bisected the center of the complex. Jill Weber, the project zooarchaeologist, argues on the basis of morphological considerations that these skeletons are the remains of the *kunga*, an onager-donkey hybrid that was associated with royalty in the Ebla texts (Weber 2008, 2012). Only adult-male *kunga* were found, animals that could have been harnessed to "cultic and war vehicles that conveyed kings and gods" (Weber 2012: 169). Some of the *kunga* died naturally, while others were sacrificed, perhaps to display the power of the city's rulers over the lives of these valuable animals. Moreover, these animals also received offerings; human infants, puppies, and pottery were placed alongside them in these installations. At Umm el-Marra, the association between processional animals, royal tombs, and spatially constructed authority provides additional insights into the Syrian ritual.

Other aboveground mortuary complexes that have been excavated at Bi'a (ancient Tuttul) and Jerablus Tahtani illustrate similar relationships. Six tripartite structures containing several interments were built near the center of Tuttul in the mid-third millennium. These structures were much larger than the Umm el-Marra tombs and were entirely aboveground (Strommenger and Kohlmeyer 1998, 2000). Their placement, communal character, and wealth testify to a similar focus on visibility and the construction of status. Moreover, like mortuary monument II at Banat, which was incorporated into the possibly palatial building 7, the late-third-millennium palace B lies atop this complex, perhaps appropriating its

authority. At Jerablus Tahtani, T. 302, a corbel, two-chambered, above-ground burial mound was placed adjacent to the road between the city gate and the fort on the upper terrace. The tomb contained between twenty and thirty people and was accessible through a doorway from the road, integrating it “into a passage suitable for processions,” again attesting to the ideological importance of such rituals within third-millennium cities (Peltenburg 2007–2008: 230).

Conclusion: urban spaces, pilgrimage networks, and the rise of political complexity

How should we understand the appearance of cities and territorial kingdoms throughout northern Mesopotamia, ca. 2600 BC? I have argued that the rise of political complexity in northern Mesopotamia entailed the refashioning of a familiar landscape. Not only did the growth of cities and the emergence of administrative elites who sought to establish oversight over a larger populace transform the economic relationship between agriculturalists, pastoralists, and artisans, it also transformed how they understood the world and their place within it. This latter step was crucial to the success of these early polities. If northern Mesopotamian pilgrimage routes were intimately connected with other networks – such as tribute or gift circulation, as seems likely given the archaeological and epigraphic data – they would have provided important justification for such economic processes.

Analysis of the textual, iconographic, and settlement evidence from around Ebla suggests that at least two pilgrimage networks operated here. The first, documented in the coronation rituals and the texts of offerings to dead kings appears to have been confined to Ebla’s immediate hinterland, an area within a few days’ travel of the capital. Most likely the places that made up such routes were located up to 40 km from the city. The rituals that took place within this circuit emphasized the power and legitimacy of the kings of Ebla. The “natural links” between Ebla’s kings and its hinterland would have been strengthened by the presence of royal funerary monuments outside of the city, at places like Darib, Binash, and the other centers where AN.EN.KI offerings were made. This network probably coincided with an area that had intensive economic contact with Ebla, where many of the fields belonging to its dependents were located, which supplied much of the city’s grain (Matthiae and Marchetti

2013).⁵¹ In contrast, the second network embraced a larger geographical area including much of the Orontes valley. The rituals that were performed here, in honor of 'Adabal, the region's god, probably sought to insert Ebla and its elite into a preexisting ritual system. The different nature of these ceremonies – where royal power was underplayed rather than overstated – might well correspond to the different nature of political and economic contacts in this larger region. Although Ebla texts document the exchange of livestock, textiles, and metal objects, this is probably part of a less-intensive prestige goods system. In this scenario, the pilgrimage circuits at Ebla used different strategies to integrate various regions into the kingdom with respect to their divergent political statuses. Archaeological and iconographic evidence from other sites in Syria indicate that Ebla was not alone in employing such strategies. Gre Virike may have been part of a local pilgrimage network – within a day's journey from Carchemish, while Hazna may have played a similar role for Nagar. Banat and Jebelet al-Beda probably maintained local significance, resisting incorporation into more expansive networks, such as Ebla's 'Adabal pilgrimage route.

The Ebla texts also help us connect urban topography with these ritual journeys. The royal bride's slow procession to the palace is central to her ritual transformation into Ebla's queen, as the royal couple's pilgrimage is to political transition within the kingdom as a whole. The coronation ritual is an event that models and as such serves as a metaphor for the transformation of political systems across northern Mesopotamia. Similarly, the highly controlled passages to and in northern Mesopotamian cities may have instructed the populace in proper urban behavior and attitudes toward authority, creating a new type of citizen. Ritual and habitual movement through these newly created landscapes – from multi-day pilgrimage routes to the construction of walls and urban grids – was thus critical to the establishment of these traditions.

Social transformation often works through ritual and changing bodily practices, which have the power to naturalize a certain way of being (Connerton 1989; Bourdieu 1977, 1990). These two processes are rarely separate. Rituals do not exist as words alone. It is the bodies performing them that give them their meaning and power. Posture, dress, and repetitive action literally incorporate social norms; they take advantage of habitual memory and construct new identities. As we saw in the example of the French Revolution, moments of rupture or social transformation justify themselves by changing both commemorative ceremonies and

bodily practices, initiating new styles of dress, calendars, and festivals to instantiate this change.⁵² The establishment of new ritual circuits that coincided with other changes in landscapes of movement, including the construction of city walls and urban grids, inaugurated new ways of being in northern Mesopotamia. A similar process may have taken place several hundred years later on Crete, when a ritual landscape marked by peak sanctuaries (resembling sites like Gre Virike) was appropriated by a nascent elite.⁵³

The reconstruction of these North Mesopotamian ritual systems has relied heavily upon analysis of the Ebla ritual texts and sealings produced and used only in elite contexts, clearly skewing our understanding of ritual life and political negotiation among all members of the community. When it comes to understanding possible pilgrimage sites, however, the archaeological finds at Hazna, Gre Virike, and Banat's White Monument suggest that these religious landscapes were not entirely under elite control. Ethnographers and historians have long recognized the ambiguous quality of rituals, which can serve the interests of both authority and resistance (Kertzer 1988; Mather 2003). This can be particularly true of pilgrimage (McCorriston 2011: 27–8; cf. Turner 1979). The celebration of official rituals in newly built, asymmetric palaces or temples may have enacted one particular vision of the way things should be, while the more popular rituals that were performed at Banat's White Monument or the meager offerings left at Gre Virike may have enacted another. In the end, each polity was the site of constant political struggle between a range of actors. Political authority was not set in stone at the moment that the city was built, but was instead continuously negotiated, through ritual as well as more quotidian means.