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# Travel and the Making of North Mesopotamian Polities

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# Travel and the Making of North Mesopotamian Polities

## **Abstract**

The emergence of political complexity in northern Mesopotamia ca. 2600 b.c. constituted an important cultural revolution which transformed how people within nascent states understood their communities. This study explores the relationship between inclusive and exclusive political strategies and free and limited access to a range of political and ritual spaces in cities and the countryside. First, it considers how the spatial organization of new cities constructed a particular type of political authority. Second, it reanalyzes several cultic monuments in light of the Ebla texts and Syrian ritual scenes and suggests that they formed pilgrimage networks that were interconnected with the economic and political systems of emerging states. Movement through newly created political landscapes was thus critical to the development of a cognitive schema that made sense of these polities.

## **Disciplines**

Anthropology | Archaeological Anthropology | Social and Behavioral Sciences

# Travel and the Making of North Mesopotamian Polities

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*The emergence of political complexity in northern Mesopotamia ca. 2600 b.c. constituted an important cultural revolution which transformed how people within nascent states understood their communities. This study explores the relationship between inclusive and exclusive political strategies and free and limited access to a range of political and ritual spaces in cities and the countryside. First, it considers how the spatial organization of new cities constructed a particular type of political authority. Second, it reanalyzes several cultic monuments in light of the Ebla texts and Syrian ritual scenes and suggests that they formed pilgrimage networks that were interconnected with the economic and political systems of emerging states. Movement through newly created political landscapes was thus critical to the development of a cognitive schema that made sense of these polities.*

## INTRODUCTION

The rise of political complexity in northern Mesopotamia from 2600 to 2300 B.C. encompassed changing relationships between power and place on many different scales, from the creation of monumental palace and temple complexes, to new urban forms and a new political landscape beyond the city (fig. 1). The making of polities from discrete villages and towns with their own complicated histories changed both real and perceptual landscapes. In northern Mesopotamia, controlling movement was one method used to demonstrate authority and unite the countryside. The journey served as an important political metaphor as well as an actual quotidian experience. 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 other symbols (Lefebvre 1991: 191). Moving through a landscape—walking, running, or riding—is the main way that people experience it. For geographers and social theorists, movement or

control thereof is critical to the creation of spatial regimes. Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that human understandings of space develop out of movement (Tuan 1977: 35); similarly, Michel de Certeau describes walking as one of the everyday practices that creates the lived space of the city (Certeau 1984: 98). Cross-culturally, travel and the acquisition of exotic knowledge are often politically valuable (Helms 1988) and have been linked to state formation (Mann 1986). The embodied nature of ritual and practical travel makes this method of establishing authority particularly effective (Connerton 1989). Channeling or limiting movement is a clear way to demonstrate—and indeed create—political authority (Dovey 2008; 2010). The construction of walls, gates, streets, and monumental buildings expresses a regime's political power, and the architecture becomes part of the urban fabric, affecting each citizen “in an unconscious, habitual, corporeal way” (Hastorf 2009: 53) and making a particular form of political authority seem natural. The space of the state and its architectonic expression has an obvious materiality that can be investigated archaeologically.

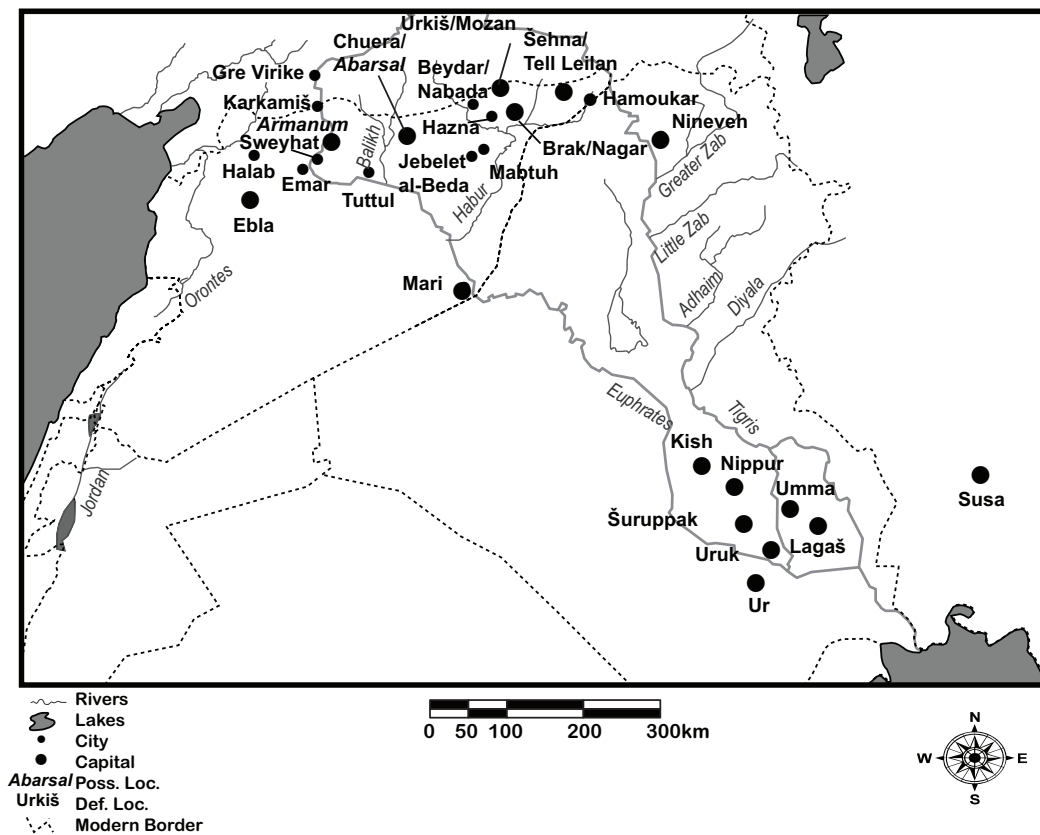


Fig. 1. Mesopotamia, 2600–2300 B.C.

Indeed, archaeology, with its emphasis on both small-scale excavation and extensive survey, may be the discipline best suited to engage with such questions (Smith 2003: 21–22).

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 McCormick Adams's pioneering surveys beginning in the early 1960s (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 2010). These studies have grown more numerous as new information, such as data from satellite imagery, allows the reconstruction of ancient landscapes even in areas off-limits to most archaeologists, such as Iraq (Hritz and Wilkinson 2006; Pournelle 2007). Approaches have focused on ancient agriculture, the establishment of administrative hierarchies, and the layout of urban centers, but unlike landscape

archaeology elsewhere in the world (particularly Mesoamerica, North America, and Europe), there has been little attention paid to ritual landscapes, ancestral geographies, and sites of memory (cf. Kouchoukos and Wilkinson 2007: 13–16). One of the major themes of the 2010 International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East (ICAANE) was entitled, "Landscape, Transport and Communication," yet of the 37 papers presented, only 2 considered the symbolic dimensions of landscape, and both of them analyzed first-millennium art.

Here, I hope to develop an approach that will supplement mainstream ecological and economic approaches to ancient landscape by considering the perception of landscape and its connections to political change. Symbolic studies of ancient landscapes have often relied upon a phenomenological approach, which focuses on how human bodies experience a particular space and how that process generates a certain set of meanings. Such approaches have considered the relationship between different sites, and between

these sites and the natural landscape, by looking at intervisibility, location, and access (Tilley 1994; Tilley and Bennett 2008; Thomas 1999). Phenomenological investigations usually begin with the experience of moving through the landscape and consider how people would see, approach, and otherwise interact with a specific place. Recent criticisms of phenomenological landscape approaches have emphasized their problematic elision between modern and ancient experiences and understandings (Barrett and Ko 2009: 279) and their lack of attention to power relations and social domains besides the symbolic (A. Fleming 2006: 278). The main problem of phenomenological approaches in such cases remains the difficulties of “decoding” emic perceptions of landscape and understanding how they relate to power, 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 during the 24th century B.C. contain somewhere between 2,000 and 7,000 documents.<sup>1</sup> The majority of the texts are administrative records, particularly accounts of textiles and metals, although there are some literary, pedagogic, diplomatic, and ritual texts (Pettinato 1979; Ismail et al. 1996). Contemporary with these documents are several iconographic works, particularly a complex glyptic tradition attested across northern Mesopotamia, from Nineveh to the Mediterranean (Marchetti 1998; Matthews 1997). Finally, 30 years of intense archaeological investigation in and around a number of third-millennium sites in Syria have produced extensive information on these settlements and the changes they experienced coincident with urban-

ism. Studying these three lines of data allows us to investigate how controlling movement helped define early states in northern Mesopotamia. The first section of this paper focuses on 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 a wide range of actors, beyond the traditional elites. The second section moves away from quotidian movement in the city and the countryside to consider instead ritual travel—pilgrimage—and its importance to negotiating political authority in early states. The final section reconsiders the rise of complexity in northern Mesopotamia in light of this discussion.

### BORDERS, WALLS, AND OPEN SPACES

In northern Mesopotamia, controlling movement was an important political strategy for cities and states. On the level of the state, 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. On the level of the city, multiple fortification walls channeled people through gates and checkpoints, limiting access to political spaces like palaces and underscoring their authority. At the same time, certain urban plans emphasized free access to open spaces, such as unwallled courtyards or town squares that may have been meeting places for assemblies. These different spatial strategies of control probably both reflected and allowed for political negotiation between city councils, kings, and other political actors in these newly emergent polities.

#### *Limiting Access*

A nearly complete treaty found at Ebla, ARET XIII 5, contracted between that state and Abarsal, emphasizes the desire of these polities to control their borders.<sup>2</sup> Only one statute in the entire treaty is not concerned with travel and its consequences. There are explicit rules about how caravans, messengers, cattle herders, and other travelers should conduct themselves

<sup>1</sup> Recent estimates place the number of documents in the Ebla archive between 2,000 and 7,000 (Archi 1986a; Milano 1995: 1223). At Beydar, ca. 250 tablets have been excavated (Ismail et al. 1996; Milano et al. 2004). In addition to these archives, there are a small number of contemporary (i.e., Early Dynastic [ED]) texts from Mari (Charpin 1987), including some from excavations in the 1990s and 2000s, which have not yet been published (Cavigneaux and Colonna d'Istria 2009: 51). There is also an ED text from Brak (Michalowski 2003), although most Brak texts come from the following Akkadian period (Eidem, Finkel, and Bonechi 2001). There are no other tablets before the Akkadian period from dry-farming, northern Mesopotamia. For recent historical studies of this period in the north, see Sallaberger 2007; and for the south, see Bauer, Englund, and Krebernik 1998.

<sup>2</sup> This treaty is one of the most famous texts found at Ebla. The most recent translation/commentary is that of Fronzaroli (2003), but there are several important earlier treatments as well (Sollberger 1980; Pettinato 1986; Lambert 1987; Kienast 1988; Edzard 1992).



**Fig. 2.** 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 (photo by author).

outside of their home territory, and discussions of matters such as extradition, legal domain over foreign citizens, and property rights. 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'). Of course, most premodern states had notoriously weak borders. Outside the confines of the city and a small hinterland, political control may have meant little. Polities like Ebla have always had to contend with unwelcome visitors and loss of population, given the ease with which people could enter and leave the space of the state—such as the later, stateless *habīru* and *habbātu* (Scott 2009:7). Moreover, premodern polities, unlike their modern counterparts, were often noncontiguous, and rarely overlapped completely with a given territory (Ristvet 2008). Yet the insistence in Ebla's treaty on maintaining absolute control over territory, despite its practical impossibilities, highlights an im-

portant emic understanding of the state. The Abarsal treaty equates sovereignty—the exercise of effective state power—with tight control over a kingdom and its subjects.

Data from excavations within third-millennium cities has revealed a similar emphasis on obstruction and highly controlled access to certain political spaces 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. 2). The *Kranzhügeln*, sites located in the arid area of the southern Jezirah, are even named after their distinctive double walls. During the course of the third millennium B.C., fortifications were constructed—often coincident with urbanism—at nearly every site in the region, including Mari (Margueron 2004: 85–88), Beydar (Lebeau 1997), Mozan (Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 1988), Arbid (Bielínski 1997), Leilan (Ristvet 2007), Hamoukar (Reichel personal communication), Nineveh (Stronach 1994: 93), Taya (Reade 1973), Chuera (Novák 1995), Bderi (Pfälzner 1988), Tiriṣ (Matney and Algaze 1995: 42–43), Kazane (Gates 1996: 292), Bazi/Banat (Otto 2006: 11–13), Tell es-Sweyhat (Zettler 1997: 48–50), and Ebla (Matthiae



1998).<sup>3</sup> These fortification systems were complex and could include an outer city wall, often with a moat, and a separate inner city wall. Both outer and inner city walls were usually 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 (Margueron 2004: 87). At others, like 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. The height of the tell itself was often incorporated into these fortifications. In some cases, such as the Bazi gate building and the Leilan Akkadian Administrative Building, these fortifications were the administrative space (Otto 2006: 11). Even if the upper city was not fortified, the only ingress was via narrow staircases, further limiting access to these public quarters. Survey at Taya, where the foundations of mid-third-millennium structures are visible on the surface, has revealed noncontiguous walls that blocked the roads in the suburban area outside the fortification walls proper, 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 Mierop 1997: 73). City walls served to keep citizens in as much as they kept invaders out (Burke 2008). Moreover, gates not only controlled access to the city and the countryside, they were also used to define 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 means “city gate,” although it also designates the neighborhood under that gate’s surveillance (Ismail et al. 1996: texts 28–29). The city wall

<sup>3</sup> The most notable exception to this list of fortified settlements is Brak, ancient Nagar, the most important site in the Habur Plains during this period. The lack of identified fortifications at Brak is puzzling, and two separate surveys have failed to locate it (Emberling et al. 1999: 23; Jason Ur personal communication).

and gate thus had a different significance for different audiences.

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 2010; Meyer 2007; Pfälzner and Wissing 2004; Weiss 1990). At Leilan, Kazane, and Chuera, large sections of these roads were separated from urban quarters by blank walls, and the entrance to most domestic structures was from narrow alleyways. A similar pattern obtains for some of the surveyed houses at Taya, although entrances could also be directly from the road (Reade 1973: 160), as they are at Titrîş (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 straight radial streets and a series of gates and staircases created a specific sort of journey into the city and the palace, one that emphasized political control (fig. 3).<sup>4</sup> Such a journey would have begun at the circular city’s southern gate, one of seven such gates. Travelers 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 visitors traveled across the upper city from the south gate to the main palace entrance, they had to cross four checkpoints, corresponding to each terrace and the palace itself. At one of these checkpoints located just east of Main Street 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 visitors arrived at the palace.

<sup>4</sup> This is a description of access to the acropolis based on material from field F dating to Phase 3a/b (Beydar Phase IIb, ca. 2450–2300 B.C.), based on Bretschneider 2003; Lebeau 2003; and Lebeau and Suleiman 2007. It is also probably valid for the earlier Phase 2 palace (Debruyne 2003). The presence of elaborate inner city gates and gatehouses is known from the Italian excavations at Beydar (Milano and Rova 2003: 375).

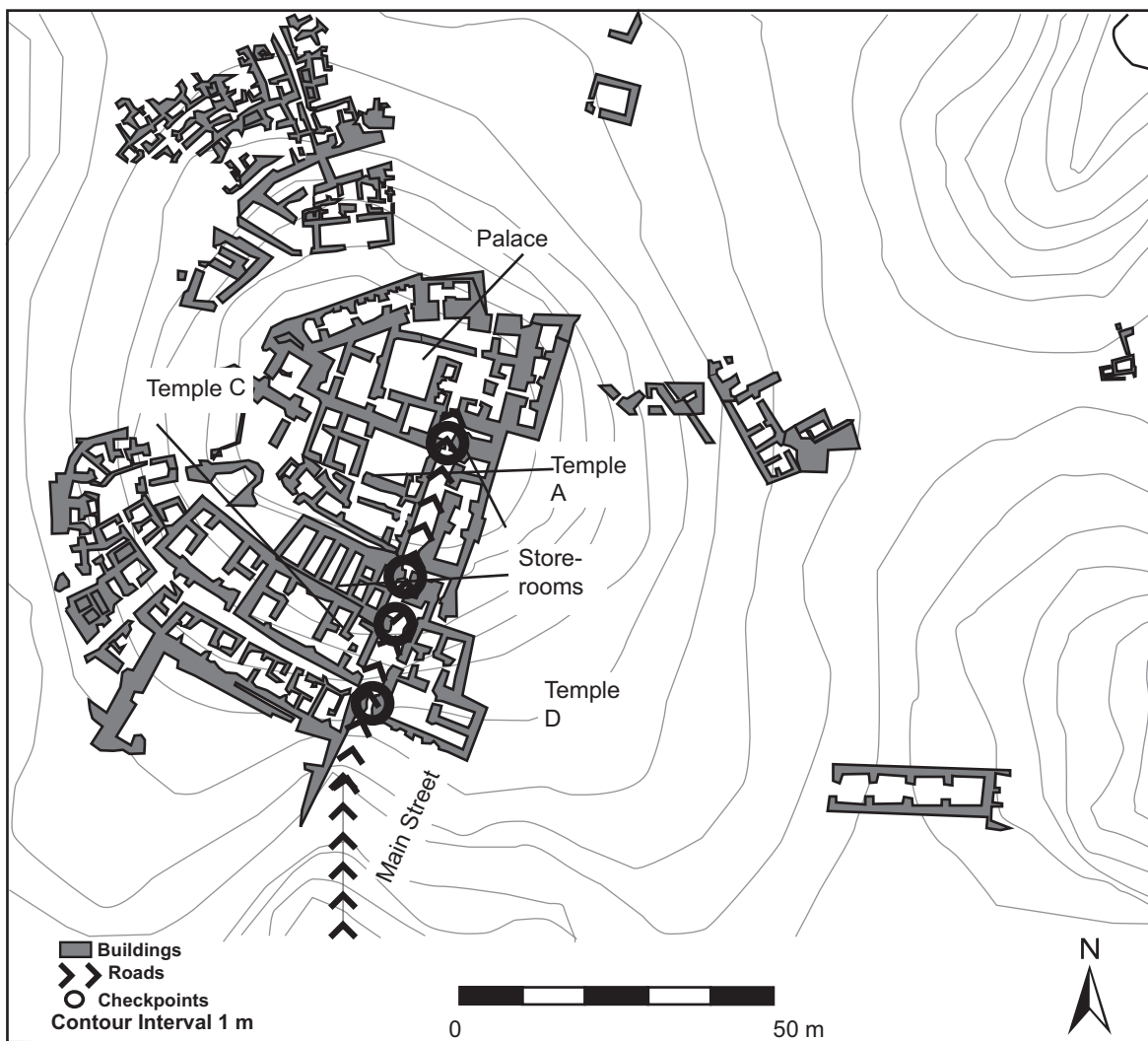


Fig. 3. “Main Street,” the main entryway to the palace at Beydar (ancient Nabada), is visible on the southeast side of the citadel. Each checkpoint where access can be controlled is marked (after Lebeau and Suleiman 2006; courtesy of M. Lebeau).

Beydar’s narrow streets, the tall walls of the temples and palaces lining them, and the numerous checkpoints may have been designed to produce a sense of claustrophobia and powerlessness in visitors. The architecture emphasizes the authority of those who controlled 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 of the city, where blank walls blocked the view into houses and other spaces, contrasted with the high visibility of the administrative area on top of the acropolis, which towered over everything. Its highly visible and yet

inaccessible nature may have reinforced its message of power (Dovey 2008). The palace was also a difficult place to enter and to escape from, both literally and metaphorically. As a Sumerian proverb preserved in several copies from the early second millennium B.C. has it, “The palace is a slippery place, where one slips. Watch your step when you decide to go home!” (ETCSL 6: 25–26; Alster 1997: 25.7).

Beyond the fortifications, cultivated fields surrounded ancient cities, constraining movement between cities. The hollow ways that radiate from many third-millennium cities have been interpreted as the remains of routes formed by animals leaving the city for



pasture (Wilkinson 1993). Although this interpretation is debated, it is clear that patterns of land tenure would have constrained movement through the immediate countryside. 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). 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 the state limited free movement.

### *Inclusive Spaces*

Yet curtailing access to palaces, cities, and states is only part of the story. These barriers existed alongside a focus on free access to large communal spaces, often located near the palace. Such open spaces, particularly when linked to city gates or temples, may have been loci for civic institutions. Recent work by both historians and archaeologists has emphasized the heterarchical nature of Mesopotamian political power, with actors including elders, witnesses, “the city,” tribal leaders, and individual citizens (Seri 2005; Fleming 2004; Peltenburg 2007–2008; Porter 2002). Texts from Beydar and Ebla attest to the operation of collective authority during this period. At Beydar, for instance, a council of elders probably governed the town, under the aegis of the king of Nagar (Ismail et al. 1996: Beydar 86). At Ebla, the first entries in the palace ration lists alternate between provisions for the king and for the king and the elders, perhaps indicating the collective nature of kingship in this city (Milano 1987: 522). The Ebla texts also testify to the presence of other political institutions in northern Mesopotamia. The kingdom of Lu’atum, located along the Upper Euphrates, was ruled by a group of elders before it was incorporated into Ebla (Milano and Rova 2000: 722–23). Another group of city-states located in the Upper Euphrates and Balikh Valley and in the foothills of the Taurus were ruled by *badalum*-officials, not kings (Milano and Rova 2000: 731), while a plurality of kings ruled Armi, Azu, Ibal, and Manuwat (Archi 1987: 42). Below the level of executive authority, civil government may also have operated.

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 power—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). Temple courtyards may have served a similar function, providing a place for courts to assemble to judge cases brought by ordinary citizens (Postgate 1994: 277, n. 79). 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 (George 2003).<sup>5</sup> 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. 4). As at Beydar, the main access road (ca. 2500–2300 B.C.) 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 access 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 continued to the northeast, leading to another open square in front of the palace (Meyer 2007: 137–39).

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

Of course, it is too simplistic to associate all highly controlled spaces with exclusive political authorities

<sup>5</sup> But see the contradictory interpretation and translation of this term in CAD R: 317–21.

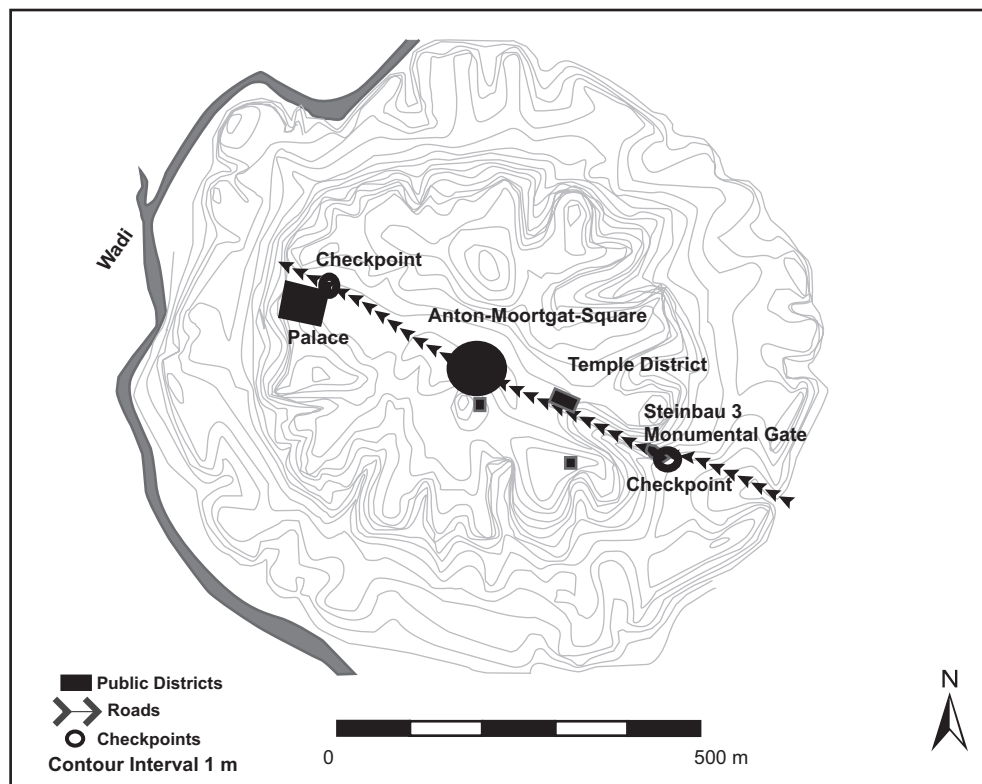


Fig. 4. Chuera (ancient Abarsal?) citadel plan, with the main ceremonial street marked (after Meyer 2007: figs. 2, 9, courtesy of J.-W. Meyer).

like 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 state ceremonies that reinforce elite dominance (Inomata 2006). It is, of course, possible to interpret these northern Mesopotamian spaces similarly. The presence of middens at Leilan and Brak could indicate that feasting took place here (Ristvet 2005). Such ceremonies could be used to emphasize or to erase differences among participants (Dietler 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 relationship between architecture and political strategies is also complicated. Although this city was governed by a king and then probably by a council of leaders, 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 and Ur 2004: 66). Such examples should remind us that architecture and urban plans are long-lived and their significance can change over time. What is important is the coexistence of inclusive and exclusive forms of authority and space throughout this period and their continued manipulation by a range of actors.

#### PILGRIMAGES AND POLITICAL POWER

Nascent cities and states did not just change daily journeys through the construction of new urban spaces. The rise of the state coincided with the creation of a complex religious landscape, where multiple pilgrimage routes arose which probably coincided with, and sometimes cross-cut, the territories of specific polities. At Ebla, we have textual evidence indicating that elites participated in these pilgrimages and used them as a

means to establish their authority. Glyptic from official contexts across northern Mesopotamia suggests that this was a widespread elite practice. Yet archaeological evidence from a range of sites that were probably part of such pilgrimage networks may indicate non-elite participation in these ceremonies. As a result, ritual landscapes would have provided a powerful symbolic space in which to affirm and to question the larger polity.

### *The Ebla Coronation Rituals*

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. The ritual texts published in ARET XI describe ceremonies performed within the city of Ebla and a pilgrimage to cult centers in the countryside upon the occasion of the king's marriage and his ascension to the throne.<sup>6</sup> The texts begin by describing the rites that the royal bride, as a stranger to Ebla, had to undergo in order to enter the city before she could celebrate her marriage. These ritual actions unfold in three different locations. On the first day, after leaving her father's house, the bride spent the night outside of Ebla's city walls. The next morning she entered the city and proceeded to the *ma-ra-sum*—perhaps a cultivated field near the temple of the royal god, Kura—where she was clothed in her wedding garments (Fronzaroli 1993: 23). Finally, the royal bride entered the temple of Kura and there presented offerings to several gods of Ebla (ARET XI 2: 1–18; ARET XI 1: 2–19).

The bride's literal passage into Ebla echoes the *rite de passage* which is at the heart of this text, her transformation into Ebla's rightful queen. Yet it also mirrors the highly controlled path that led to public buildings at many northern Mesopotamian cities. The extensive ruins from the early second millennium B.C. at Ebla have prevented the recovery of much of the city's third-millennium ground-plan, except in a few limited areas (Matthiae 2009: fig. 2.5). Nonetheless, it is possible to reconstruct roughly the queen's journey from the city wall to the palace (fig. 5). It seems likely that the third-millennium gates were in the same place

<sup>6</sup> ARET XI includes three ritual texts: two long texts, A and B, and a shorter précis, C. The description of the ritual in the following section is drawn from A and B. Evidence from the administrative texts now suggests that ARET XI refers to rituals celebrated at the coronation of each new king (Biga 2007–2008; Fronzaroli 1992; cf. Viganò 1995; 2000), and not to annual celebrations.

as the later city gates. Given this, the queen's journey into the city may have begun at the gate in the south-east part of the lower town, perhaps the Gate of Kura mentioned in the ritual (Matthiae 2007; 2009: 35). Her next stop may have been the "Temple of the Rock," possibly Kura's temple, just northwest of the gate (Matthiae 2006: 490–92). The temple appears to have been set in an open space in the third millennium B.C., maybe the *ma-ra-sum* in the ritual (Matthiae 2007: 522). Alternatively, the temple of Kura mentioned in the texts may have been located in the Saza, the city's public district comprising the palaces and temples on the acropolis (Matthiae 2006: 489–90). Soundings in 1968 underneath the second-millennium Ishtar temple may have revealed part of the third-millennium Kura temple here (Matthiae 2009: 34). In this case, the bride would have crossed the lower town to the porticoed entrance to the Saza, where she would have climbed the monumental stairs to the audience hall. The royal bride's slow ritual entrance would have introduced her to the city. Traveling this highly controlled path may have imparted important lessons about the nature of political power as expressed through architecture.

The second part of the text describes the pilgrimage that followed the royal wedding, when the king and the queen, several high officials, and the statues of the city's chief gods, Kura and Barama, left Ebla for Binaš.<sup>7</sup> Their journey lasted four days and included stops at six towns, where they made offerings to deities and some of the dead kings of Ebla. Many of these settlements are only known from this ritual, where they are associated with major Mesopotamian gods, including the sun god Utu (Irad and Uduhudu) and the storm god Adad (Lub).<sup>8</sup> When the travelers reached Binaš, the king, queen, and the divine statues

<sup>7</sup> It is unclear how to read NE, the first sign of this toponym. Archi and Bonechi both read Binaš—and it is under this form in most toponym lists outside of ARET XI—while Fronzaroli uses the form Nenaš in the official publication and is followed in this by Biga. I follow Archi and Bonechi here. Binaš was probably the site of the tombs of three kings of Ebla, and otherwise of little importance. Although the Ebla texts mention deliveries of textiles for an assembly (UNKEN-ak NE-*na-āš*<sup>K1</sup>; ARET III 277: II, 5) and a lady of Binaš (dam /Ne-*na-āš*<sup>K1</sup>; ARET III 878: r. III, 3), few personal names from this town are known, and most of the references are cultic (ARET IV 1: r. XII, 21), where Binaš is associated with Kura, the god of royalty (Archi, Piacentini, and Pomponio 1993; Bonechi 1993; Biga 2007–2008).

<sup>8</sup> The only exceptions to these offerings are the events that transpire the day after they leave Ebla, when the king and queen sit on the thrones of their ancestors at a place called the waters of Mašad of Nirar (ARET XI 1 21; ARET XI 2 21). The exceptional nature of these activities foreshadows the ritual that occurs in Binaš.

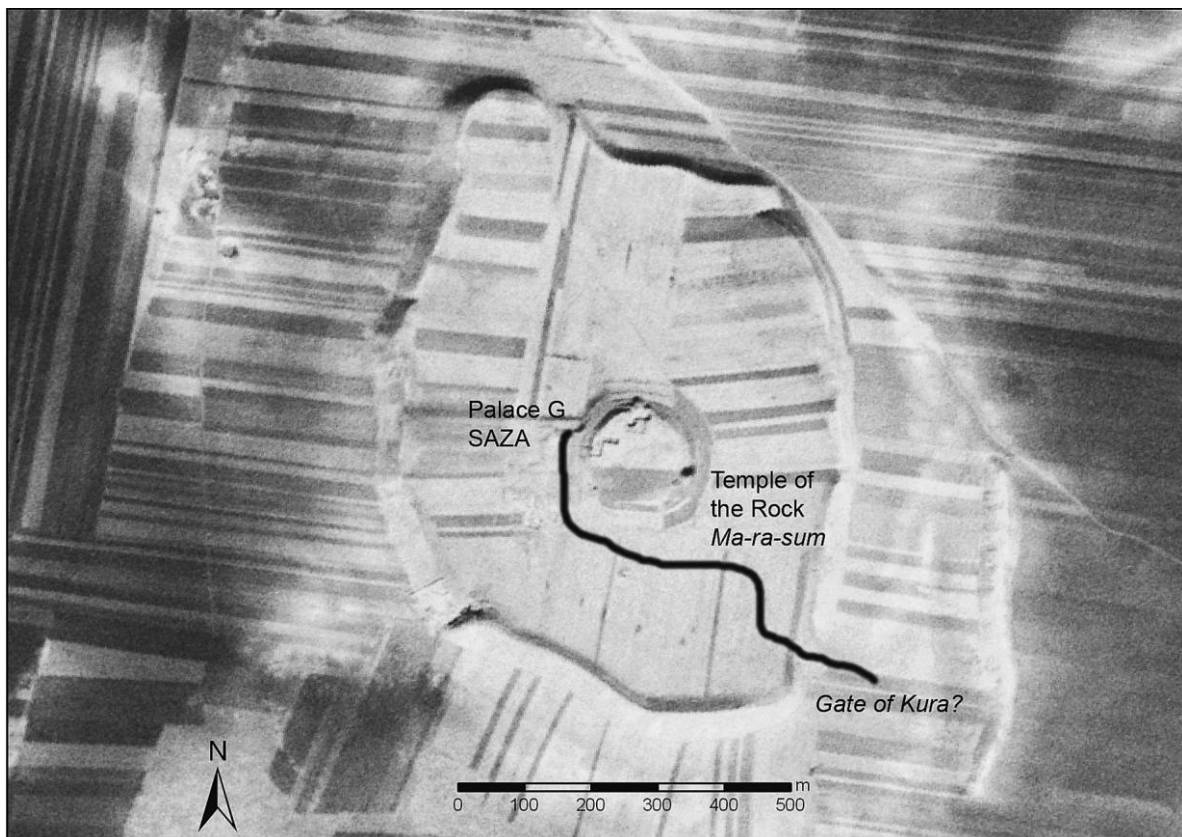


Fig. 5. November 1968 Corona photograph (DS1105-2267DA020) of Tell Mardikh (Ebla), with the queen's journey through the city for the coronation ritual (courtesy of the U.S. Geological Survey).

entered the *é ma-dim*—the house of the dead, or the royal mausoleum. The mausoleum was purified and the priest Amazau made an offering similar to those already performed during their journey. The two full ritual texts, ARET XI 1 and 2, provide nearly identical accounts of what the king and queen did when they arrived at the *é ma-dim*:

The king and the queen enter the house of the dead . . .  
The divine couple, Kura and Barama, come to the house of the dead and enter 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, Enna-II offers one “ancient” bull, two sheep, and one silver bird, to the deified Ibbini-Li<sup>9</sup>m; two sheep, one silver bird to the deified Šagiš; two sheep, one silver bird to the deified Išrut-Damu.<sup>9</sup>

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.

<sup>9</sup> King of Ebla, written with the dingir sign.

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.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> This English translation follows Fronzaroli's Italian translation of ARET XI 1: 55–65 and ARET XI 2: 58–68. It differs only in the treatment of *gu*<sup>4</sup> *ABXÁŠ*, which I render as “ancestor bull.”

58. [mu-DU]/ [en]/ [wa]/ *ma-li[k]-[um]*/ *si-i[n]*/ *é ma-tim*. . .  
59. *ba<sub>4</sub>-ti*/ [dKu]-*ra*<sup>7</sup>/ [wa]/<sup>d</sup>*Ba-ra-ma/si-in*<sup>7</sup>/*é*<sup>1</sup> [*ma-tim*]/ [wa]/  
*mu-DU*/ <sup>d</sup>*Ku-ra*/ *wal* <sup>d</sup>*Ba-ra-mal si-in*/ 1 *é-duru*<sup>5</sup><sup>KI</sup>  
60. *wal* <sup>r</sup>*al<sub>6</sub>-tuš*<sup>7</sup>  
61. *wal* *mu-DU*/ *en*/ *si-in*/ *é-duru*<sup>5</sup><sup>KI</sup>-*sù*  
62. *ap*/ *ma-lik-tum*/ *si-in*/ *é-duru*<sup>5</sup><sup>KI</sup>-*sù*  
63. *ù-lu*/ *ba<sub>4</sub>-ti*/ *en*/ *wal* *ma-lik-tum*/ 1 *gu<sub>4</sub> ABXÁŠ* 2 *udu* 1 *kù-sal*  
1 *buru<sub>4</sub>*- *MUŠEN* *bar<sub>6</sub>:kù*/ *dingir* *I-bí- NI-Li-im*/ 2 *udu* 1 *kù-sal*  
1 *bu[ru<sub>4</sub>]*- *MUŠEN* *bar<sub>6</sub>:kù* *dingir*/*Sa-gi-su* 2 *udu* 1 *kù-sal*  
1 *buru<sub>4</sub>*- *MUŠEN* <sup>r</sup>*bar<sub>6</sub>:kù*<sup>7</sup>/*dingir* *Iš<sub>11</sub>-ru<sub>12</sub>-ud-Da-mu*/*Enna- NI* <sup>r</sup>*nídba*<sup>7</sup>  
64. *zi-ga*/ *tí-TÚG*/ *en*/ *wal* *ma-lik-tum*/ *è-mal* *wal* *al<sub>6</sub>-tuš*/ *al<sub>6</sub>*/  
*GIŠ- <<ušt(n)>>*/ *a-mu* *a-mu-sù*  
65. *wal* *en-nun-ak*/ *u<sub>4</sub>* *è*/ <sup>d</sup>*Utu*



Their sojourn in the *é ma-dim* transformed both the human royal couple and the divine royal couple. The texts describe three separate 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 deified kings. Only after this month, when they were ritually remade in the image of their ancestors, could the king and queen ascend to power (Fronzaroli 1992: 184). On their return to Ebla, they entered the temple and ate the offerings that had been provided to the palace (ARET XI 2: 117). They had thus officially become representatives of the palace and could now receive the same sorts of ritual meals as their ancestors.

Such ritual journeys throughout the countryside are potent reminders of the power of the ruler. Cross-culturally, rulers 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 king or queen to display his/her power, and for various groups within the city—particularly guilds—to display (and gain) influence (Giesey 1985: 53–55). In the Indonesian Negara, similarly, royal entry was a major ceremony. In 14th-century Java, Hayam Wuruk's tour of his kingdom took two-and-a-half months and visited more than 200 places, including sacred ponds, ancestral shrines, and temples. The very order of the participants in the march was arranged to mirror the cosmos, so that the vast ceremony served to remake the social order in the divine image. Finally, in 18th- and 19th-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). At Ebla as well, this royal procession to cult centers outside of cities constructed 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 regularly. In addition to the kingship ceremony, Ebla's

kings made regular offerings to their ancestors in different cities of the kingdom, including Darib and Ebla itself (Archi 1986b; 1988; ARET VII 150; ARET III 178). In one of these ceremonies, a woman from Binaš took part—linking these regular offerings to the ritual texts in ARET XI (Fronzaroli 1988: 29–30). Like the coronation ceremony, the offerings to the divinities of the dead kings would have made kingship visible to people in Ebla and Darib.

Religious celebrations in honor of the god ʿAdabal also took the form of a pilgrimage through the Ebla countryside. Unlike Kura or Barama, Ebla's city god and his spouse, who are rarely attested outside of the city, ʿAdabal was probably the main agricultural god of the countryside around Ebla, especially the Orontes Valley (Archi 2005: 98). ʿAdabal's main cult center was not Ebla, but the three cities of Arugadu, Amadu, and Luban. Two itineraries document an annual cultic journey in honor of ʿAdabal which visited sacred places throughout Ebla's kingdom.<sup>11</sup> Each year, between 5 and 14 members of a religious confraternity (Sum.: šeš-II-ib) centered on the Ebla palace—and often including the king—began their pilgrimage at Luban and visited 36 other towns, including the palace at Ebla. In some years, other members of this confraternity also participated in another journey in honor of ʿAdabal, to his secondary center of Arugadu (Archi 2002: 29). Like the coronation ceremony, ʿAdabal's yearly pilgrimage would have served to knit the land together, underscoring the shared religious experience of diverse places.<sup>12</sup>

### *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. Despite an archaeological survey around Tell Afis that has supplied some settlement data for 21 sites (Ciafardini 1992), and other surveys in the plain of Antioch that supplement these data (Casana and Wilkinson 2005), this area remains

<sup>11</sup> The texts TM.75.G.2377 and TM.75.G.2379 document this cultic journey and are published in Archi 1979. Other published and unpublished Ebla texts that refer to this event are published in Archi 2002: 26–29.

<sup>12</sup> Another festival in honor of ʿAdabal, his “opening festival,” was celebrated simultaneously in the cult center of Arugadu and at the palace by the major political figures of the kingdom, including the king, queen, and chief minister. This simultaneity also connected Ebla with its larger countryside, underscoring the important relationship between the palace, the city of Ebla, and the larger polity (Archi 2002).

66. <sup>d</sup>Utu-ma/ è/ KA.DI/ KA.DI/ balag-di [bal]ag-<sup>r</sup>di/ balag-di/ ša-ti/ <sup>d</sup>TU/ sur-ak

67. wa [du<sub>11</sub>]-<sup>r</sup>ga/ [níg-mul<sup>1</sup>-mul (AN.AN:AN.AN)]/ [níg-mul<sup>1</sup>]-<sup>r</sup>mul<sup>1</sup> ([AN.AN]:<sup>r</sup>AN<sup>1</sup>, <sup>r</sup>AN<sup>1</sup>)

68. wa/ níg-mul<sup>1</sup>-mul<sup>1</sup> (AN.AN: AN.AN)/ <sup>d</sup>TU/ <sup>d</sup>Ku-ra gibil/ <sup>d</sup>Ba-ra-ma gibil/ en gibil/ ma-lik-tum gibil



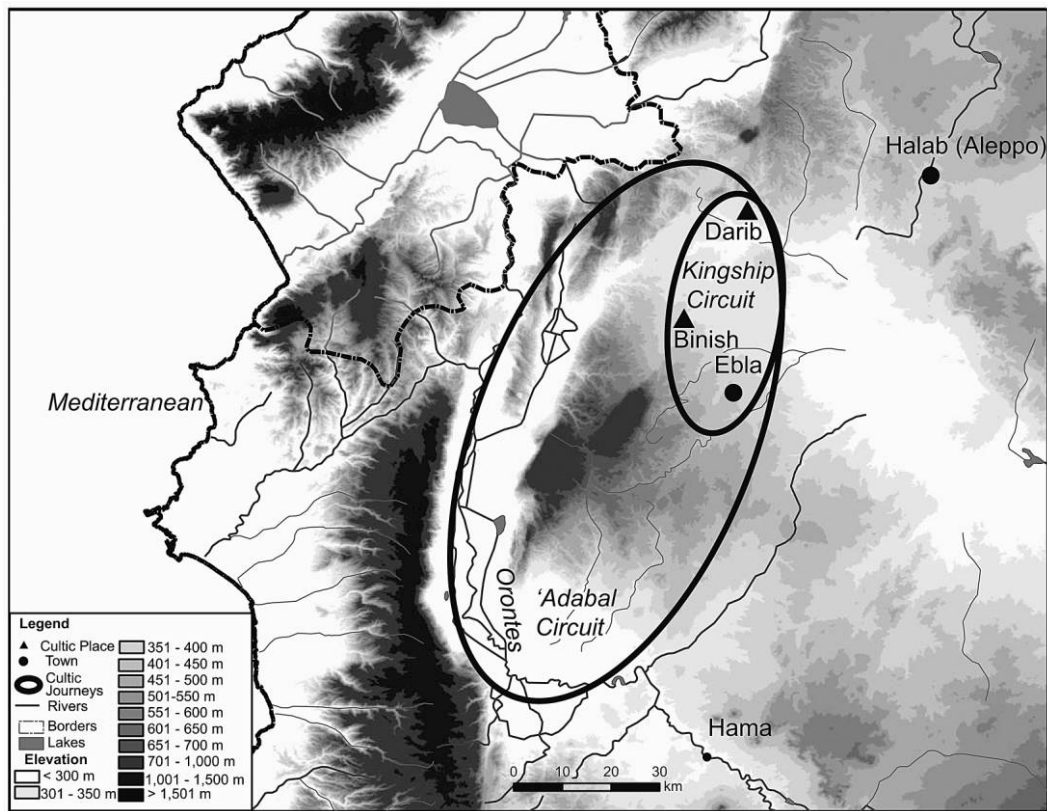


Fig. 6. Ritual journeys in the kingdom of Ebla, ca. 2350 B.C.

largely unsurveyed. 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. 6). First of all, 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, the two circuits cover different total territories. The destination of the coronation journey, Binaš, has been identified with the modern village of Binish, ca. 20 km northwest of Ebla (Bonechi 1993: 78; Archi, Piacentini, and Pomponio 1993: 179). If this identification is correct, then it is likely that the other places mentioned in the coronation ritual are also situated between Binish and Ebla, not far from the city.<sup>13</sup> Other places associated with the cult of the dead kings are also located near Ebla; Darib, for example, which has been identi-

<sup>13</sup> Of course, in light of the fact that the coronation journey takes four days between Ebla and Binaš, it is certainly possible that Binaš is located farther from Ebla, perhaps up to 60 km away.

fied with modern Atarib, is about 30 km north of the city. In contrast, 'Adabal's cultic journey involves a number of cities that are probably located along the Orontes, perhaps almost as far south as Hama, ancient 'Amadu, one of 'Adabal's main cult centers, and as far north as the Amuq. The Orontes is 40 km from Ebla, the Amuq is 60 km, and Hama is 75 km, indicating that this journey covered a much wider territory, well beyond Ebla's immediate 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 in 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 one to three days' journey from a city. Within this radius—defined by the coronation journey and the cult of the dead kings—frequent royal visits and state ceremonial events reinforced a sense of belonging. This probably coincided with real economic and other ties between these villages and Ebla, since a distance of 15–30 km defines the area in which it is profitable to deliver agricultural products using animal transport (Wilkinson 1994: 502; Chisholm 1962: 80–83). Outside of this area, links to Ebla were more tenuous, reflected in the higher degree of independence and different ritual systems, in which the Ebla contingent did not take a leading role.

### *The Syrian Ritual*

The Ebla texts provide a unique insight into political ritual in western Syria. Although no other religious texts are known from northern Mesopotamia, iconography and archaeological remains may attest to a more extensive political use of ritual journeys throughout the dry-farming plains. A third-millennium cylinder seal motif, referred to as “the Syrian ritual,” appears to illustrate such cultic processions and links them in multiple ways to the construction of political authority. This scene portrays a religious procession, where devotees lift one or both arms in recognition of a deity, depicted from the front rather than in profile (Amiet 1980: 167–68; 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, their proveniences and patterns of use attest to their importance in Syrian and north Mesopotamian courts.

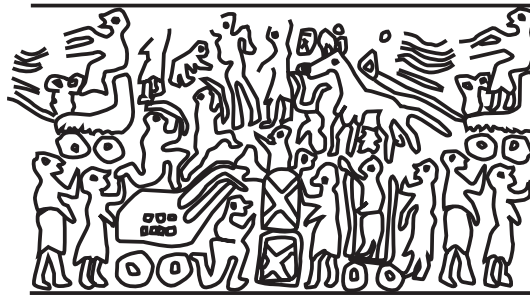
At Tell Beydar, for example, the best-attested sealing is a variation on this theme. Beydar Seal 1 shows several people with their arms raised in worship, with three wagons approaching a tower that has people peering out of it (fig. 7a; Jans and Bretschneider 1998: 158, 170, Bey 1; Jans 2004: scene 60). This tower resembles both the actual sanctuaries on high terraces known from excavations at Hazna and perhaps Gre Virike (see below) and a model, three-story tower found at Tell Brak that was decorated with goat heads and small birds (Emberling and McDonald 2003: figs. 52–53). Approximately 50 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 im-

pressions are door sealings, indicating that the seal that produced this sealing was wielded by a high official at Nabada. 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, 65–66) can also be classified as a Syrian ritual scene; it depicts a two-story wheeled tower, wagon, and driver and possible worshippers. Two sealings—perhaps on a peg—bearing this scene were recovered from the courtyard in front of Temple B. Once again, the nature of the item sealed and the sealings' contexts suggest that the seal's owner was probably an official associated with Beydar's official block.

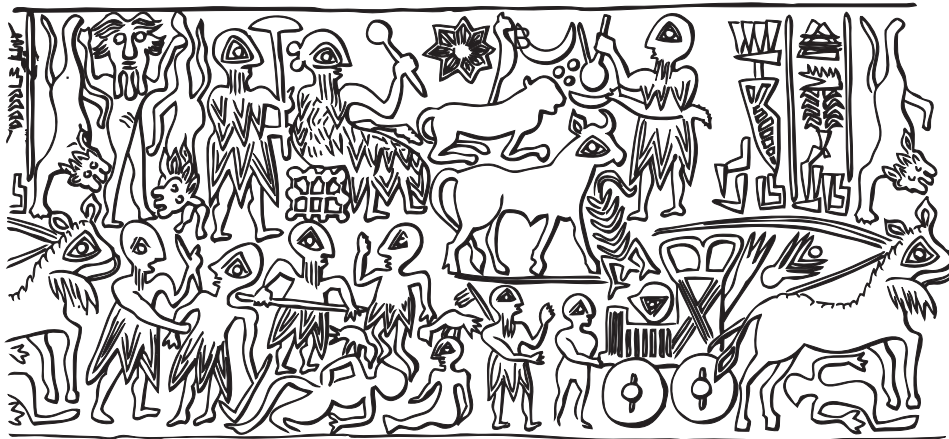
Outside of Beydar, other sealings or seals connected to Syrian ritual scenes come from Mari, while related scenes are known at Ebla, Brak, and from unprovenient collections.<sup>14</sup> Two recently published Mari royal sealings are the most elaborate known renditions of this scene (fig. 7b–c). The owner of these seals is identified as Išqi-Mari, king of Mari, in inscriptions (Beyer 2007: 249). 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; 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, holding a mace. In front of the king are two animals, perhaps a deer and a lion. The bottom register illustrates a battle scene, with soldiers stabbing enemies with knives and spears. Equid-drawn chariots, very similar to 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, while indicating the importance of the Syrian ritual elements in the expression of local authority.

In a recent analysis of the Beydar and Mari scenes, Joachim Bretschneider and Greta Jans have drawn attention to the juxtaposition of the battle and ritual scenes on each seal. The Mari seal appears to feature a banquet scene, perhaps depicting ritual offerings

<sup>14</sup> This scene is also found among unprovenient seals in the Marcopoli collection in Aleppo and the British Museum (Amiet 1980: pls. 103, 1351, 1354). At Ebla, although no classic Syrian ritual scenes have been found, Donald Matthews interprets the court style as one that has fused the Syrian ritual scene with the ED IIIb contest scene, presumably drawing on the associations of both indigenous religious understandings of kingship and certain imported ideas of the king as hero (Matthews 1997: 121).



A



B



C

**Fig. 7.** Wagon sealings from northern Mesopotamia: (a) Beydar Seal 1 (after Jans and Bretschneider 1998: pl. 1, Bey. 1; courtesy of G. Jans and J. Bretschneider); (b) Išqi-Mari Royal Seal 1 (after Beyer 2007: fig. 17; courtesy of D. Beyer); (c) Išqi-Mari Royal Seal 2 (after Beyer 2007: fig. 18; courtesy of D. Beyer).



following victory. The Beydar seal, in contrast, depicts a ritual procession, possibly another scene of thanksgiving. The figure in the wagon could be a king or important political figure, or may represent the statue of a god or goddess, on a journey like that depicted in the Ebla rituals (Bretschneider, Vyve, and Jans 2009: 12). The seals illustrate the two sources of political power and sovereignty in northern Mesopotamia: military conquest and religious rituals. Their combination on these royal seals emphasizes the importance of both strands in these early kingdoms. These large seals depict, in an abbreviated form, the ideological underpinnings of these polities.

### *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 like Binaš that would have served the larger community of the polity. Archaeological evidence from four of these possible sites—Gre Virike, Hazna, Jebelet al-Beda, and Banat—allows us to reconstruct how different polities may have used religious journeys to create different political identities in the middle of the third millennium B.C.

**Gre Virike.** Some 10 km north of the major center of Carchemish lies Gre Virike, a religious and mortuary site on the banks of the Euphrates. Sometime near the beginning of the third-millennium B.C., a 50 × 35 m mudbrick platform was built on top of a natural pebble hill. The first structures built on this platform (Period I, early third millennium) were ritual installations, including stone-lined pits with an associated channel, plaster-lined pools, a small clay platform, and a basalt stairway leading to an underground spring (Ökse 2006b: 1–5). During the following phase (IIa, mid-third millennium), a series of limestone chamber tombs was built on the mound summit, along with offering chambers (Ökse 2005: 21–27; see here fig. 8). Satellite graves from this period 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 period, 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 (Oybak Dönmez 2006), animal bones, unbaked clay animal figurines,

and the remains of vessels. Initially, the association of these materials with the underground spring suggests that they were offerings to deities associated with water, fertility, or the underworld, while later offerings may have been part of a series of funerary and post-funerary feasts or sacrifices. In addition to these offering pits, kitchen installations were present on the site during the phases associated with the graves, perhaps for the preparation of such offerings. Throughout the third millennium, architecture occupied only a small part of the platform, leaving the rest of the space open for ritual performances (Peltenbug 2007–2008: 221–22). The ritual and mortuary installations of Gre Virike are associated with no domestic architecture on the site itself.

**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 for this kingdom. Hazna provides intriguing evidence both for careful control of access to ritual space and for popular participation at a possible pilgrimage site. The excavators suggest that during the mid-third millennium B.C., Hazna was a temple complex that included multilevel platforms, towers, and attached rooms (Munchaev, Merpert, and Amirov 2004: 477; see here fig. 9). 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 enclosure wall. Although it is possible to interpret Tell Khazna as a densely occupied village site, and its cultic towers as storage facilities, the unusual nature of the deposits here, the use of buttressing, and the site's later use as a cemetery support the excavators' interpretation. The circular construction of this site may resemble temple ovals discovered at Tell Ubaid and Khafaje in Iraq (Delougaz and Jacobsen 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). Seventeen unused sickle blades were placed in a niche in the tower along with a stamp seal (Merpert and Munchaev 1999: 121). Another cultic tower (Room 110) was located at 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. Some of the rooms in the complex connected to this

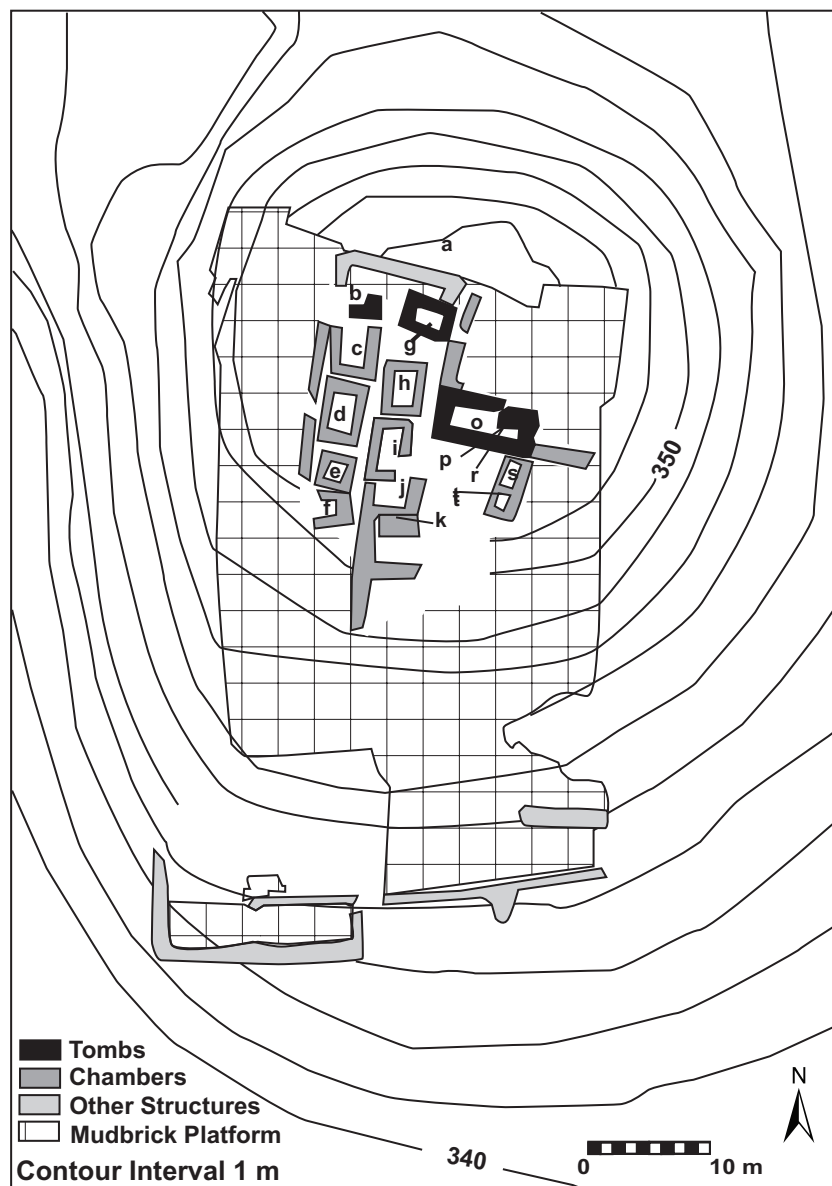


Fig. 8. Tombs and offering chambers at Gre Virike, Period IIa (after Ökse 2005: fig. 3; courtesy of A. T. Ökse).

tower were filled with great numbers of animal bones, while two small chambers contained a cache of more than 40 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 25 individual graves placed in different rooms of the compound (Munchaev, Merpert, and Amirov 2004: 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 of a hill called Ras et-Tell. In the western half of this platform, eight square trenches were cut out of the stone in a cruciform pattern. Four of these trenches were widened to create graves, although skeletons were found in only the two



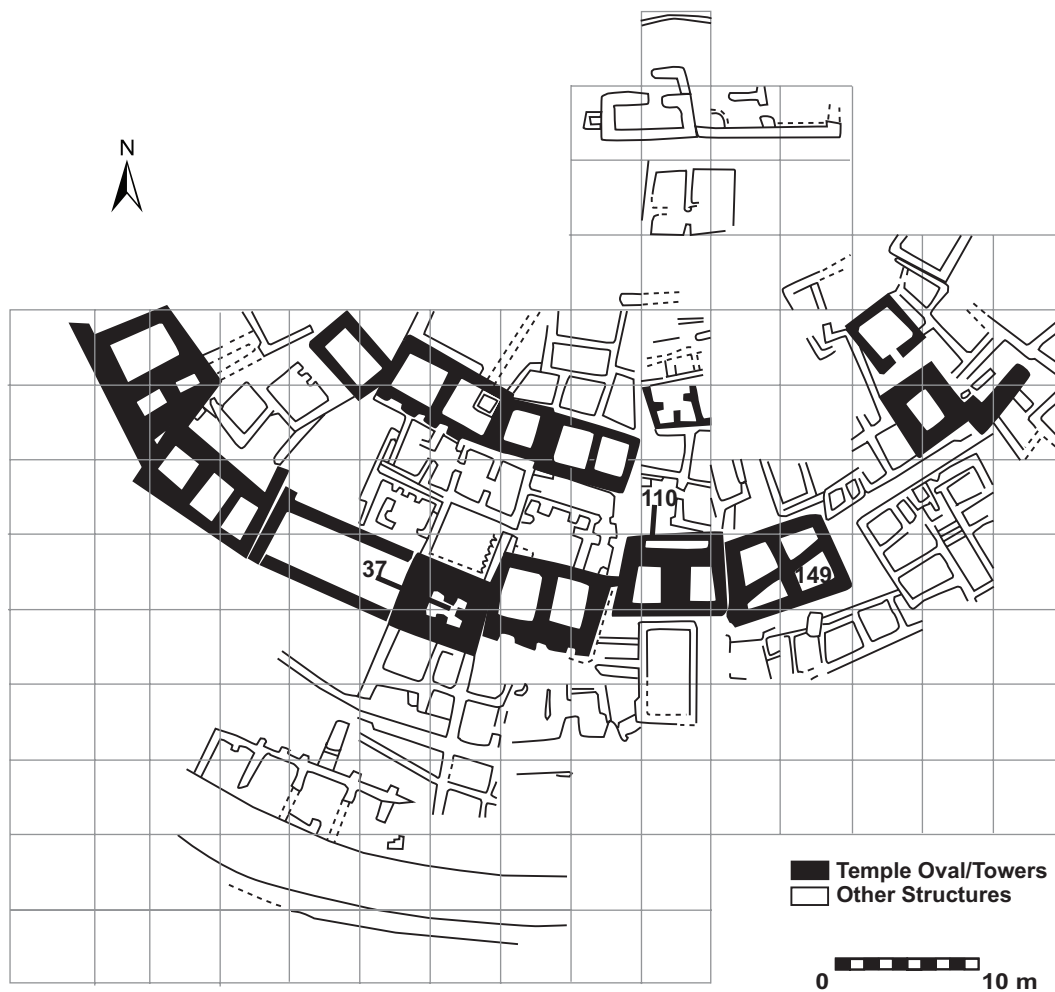


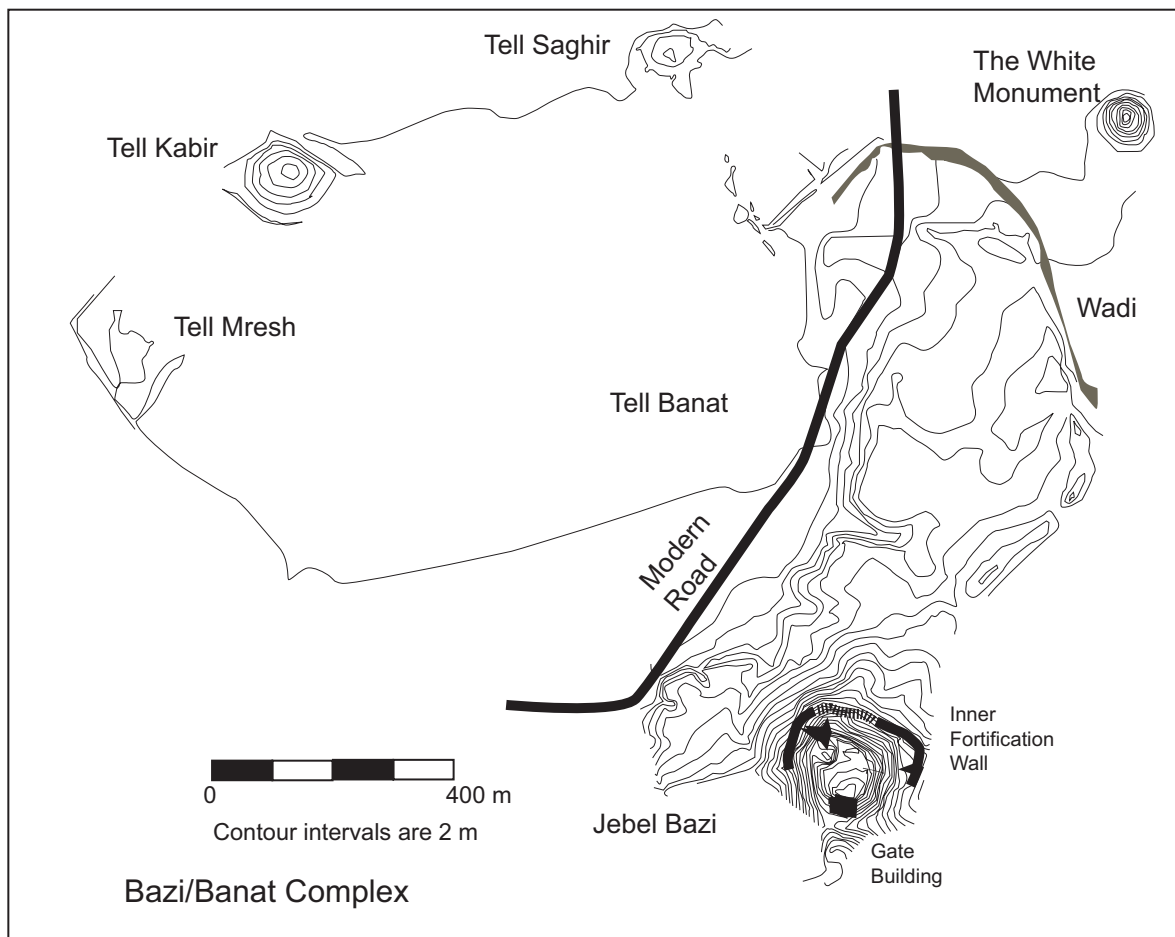
Fig. 9. Ritual buildings at Hazna (after Munchaev, Merpert, and Amirov 2004: tabl. 3; courtesy of R. Munchaev).

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: 53–54), which the excavator hypothesized were originally erected on the platform (Oppenheim 1933: 226–30).

The best-preserved of these sculptures are a stela and a statue in the round. The statue, which may have originally been 2.5–3 m high, depicts a bearded man wearing a flounced skirt and holding a mace. The double-sided stela has the same image on both sides and may depict the same bearded man as the statue. On the stela he is standing 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). This motif may also be echoed on *Beydar Seal 1* (Bretschneider, Vyve, and Jans 2009: 13). South and west of Ras et-Tell lie two other hills where Oppenheim excavated other cist graves, including one with an enclosure wall (Oppenheim 1933: 229–30; Moortgat-Correns 1972: 55). In total, Ursula Moortgat-Correns estimates that 20 graves can be found in the hills near Ras et-Tell (Moortgat-Correns 1972: 56).

**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. 10; Otto 2006). A range of monuments are well attested at Banat and could have been the settings for



**Fig. 10.** Plan of Bazi/Banat (probably ancient Armanum), with the location of the fortified gate building on Jebel Bazi and the lower citadel wall (after Otto 2006: fig. 6; Porter 2002: fig. 2; courtesy of A. Otto and A. Porter).

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 (ca. 2800–2300 B.C.). Ann 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 have never penetrated the heart of this mound, they did reveal three construction stages for the monument. The first version of the structure (White Monument C) 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, while bones and pots were also scattered around the tumuli (Porter 2002: 15). During the second construction phase, dated to 2700/2600–2400 B.C., a single large mound, White Monument B, incorporated these disparate mounds. In the final construction stage, 2400–2300 B.C., this mound was enlarged to create White Monument A. Unlike the previous mortuary monuments, White Monument A was built at one time. 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 emphasize 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 transported some kilometers (Porter 2007: 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 which probably encloses 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, was built atop this platform and is contemporary with White Monument B. It was replaced by another monumental building, Building 6, which is contemporary with White Monument A. The buildings may have been placed in this area to erase the previous mortuary monument or to appropriate it (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 Buildings 6 and 7. The tomb's stone architecture and baked brick and bitumen floor parallel the architecture of the public buildings. When the public 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 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, attesting to its continued use. Above Tomb 7, near its entrance shaft, were two other articulated skeletons, while a third articulated skeleton directly overlay Tomb 7's stone roof (Porter 2002: 18–21). Three other tombs—Tombs 4–6—were also located in this courtyard and contained fragmentary remains of multiple individuals; they are probably the functional equivalent of the ancillary burials found in the White Monument (Porter 2002: 17–18).

**Pilgrimage Centers?** 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 these sites seems to have been inhabited; even Banat

has no clear evidence for a domestic population. But they did not exist in a vacuum. To understand these sites, it is necessary to look beyond the individual places and consider their wider landscape. The Ebla tablets indicate that northern Mesopotamia in the mid-third millennium B.C. was divided into a large number of small kingdoms or city-states—at least 20 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 Nagar or a polity centered on one of the *Kranzhügeln* in its vicinity, and Banat was probably the capital of Armi/Armanum.

Gre Virike belongs to the *badalum*-cities region, an area along the Upper Euphrates and Balikh, where *badalum*-officials as rulers are attested in the Ebla texts. The lack of domestic settlement at the site suggests that this was a place of pilgrimage that was incorporated into a larger cultural landscape along the Euphrates (fig. 11). Survey evidence from the area within a day's walk of Gre Virike indicates that the other sites in the area, with the possible exception of Carchemish, were only small villages, with a population of perhaps 4,000 during the life-span of Gre Virike (Ökse 2007).<sup>15</sup> Since other cultic sites are located 15–30 km apart on the Euphrates, Gre Virike was probably used only by people living within this radius, perhaps including the local elites at Carchemish. This would have made the Gre Virike pilgrimage circuit similar in size to the Ebla kingship ritual circuit, which also encompassed about 20 km. 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 to its wider community. Yet Gre Virike's position along the river means that its visibility was limited. The site can be seen from very few of the contemporary third-millennium sites that have been identified from survey in this

<sup>15</sup> Recent analyses of Early Bronze Age occupation at Carchemish have reached diametrically opposed conclusions on the size and importance of the city. Working from the material retrieved in the British excavations before World War I, Falsone and Sconzo have argued that these excavations identified late third-millennium domestic architecture in Carchemish's lower town and that it is likely that its earth rampart and gates were constructed during this period, making it a town of some 40 ha (Falsone and Sconzo 2007). In contrast, Guy Bunnens estimates that only Carchemish's main tell was occupied, making it only 4 ha in size, much smaller than several other nearby mounds (Bunnens 2007). If Carchemish was 40 ha, it would have dominated this region; otherwise the area would have been defined by small settlements.

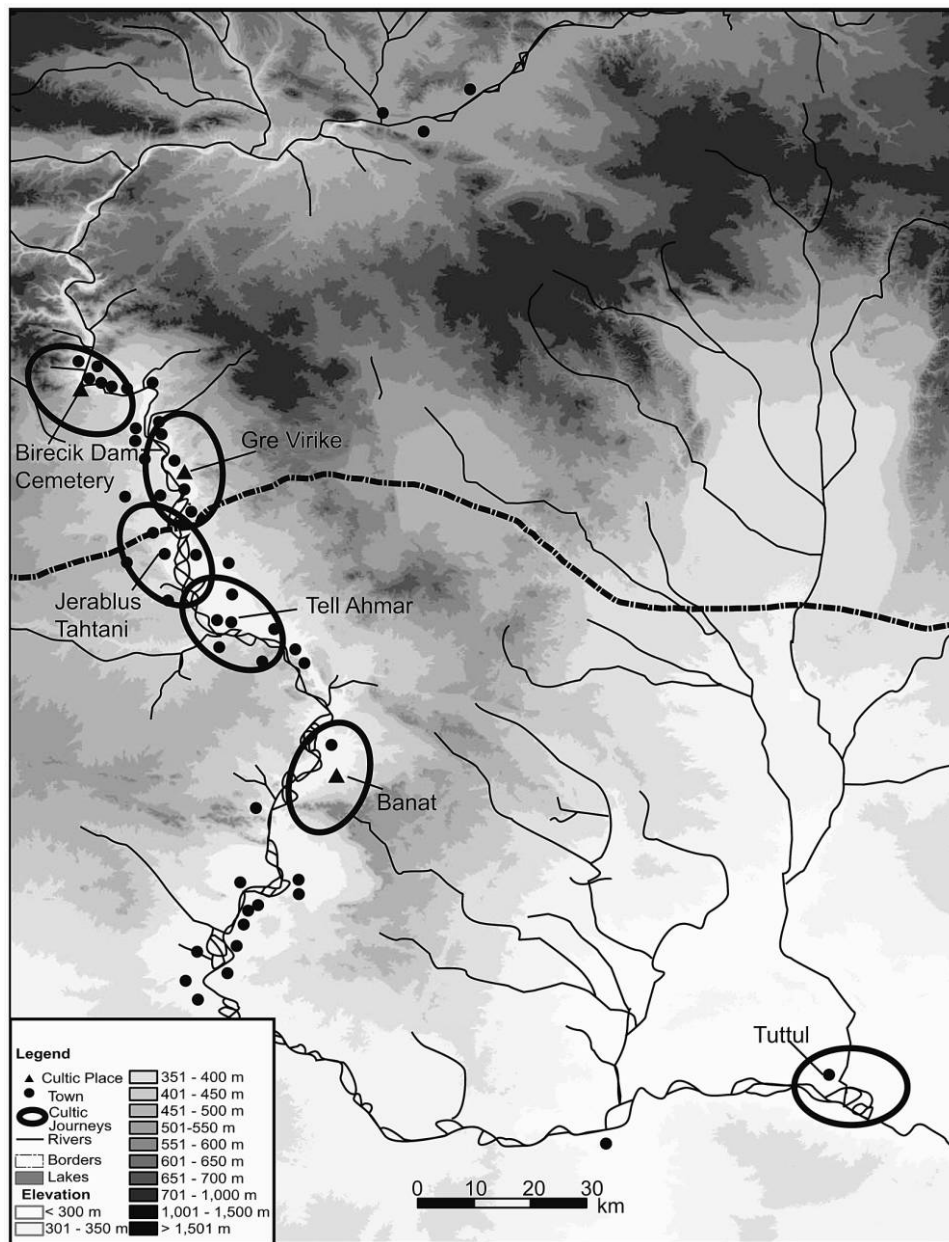


Fig. 11. Possible pilgrimage networks on the Upper Euphrates.

region (fig. 12).<sup>16</sup> This hidden aspect of the site may have contributed to a sense of exclusivity: this cultic place was used only by those in the know. The kitchen-

<sup>16</sup> This is based on line-of-sight and viewshed analysis conducted using ArcGIS. Elevation data for this analysis came from NASA's SRTM (Shuttle Radar Topography Mission) and Aster GDEM missions, which have a 90-m and 30-m resolution, respectively, supplemented with information on the height of each site.

ens and other installations around the burial chambers attest to repeated ceremonies, perhaps ancestor rituals performed for an audience in the lower viewing area (Peltenburg 2007–2008: 222–23). 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



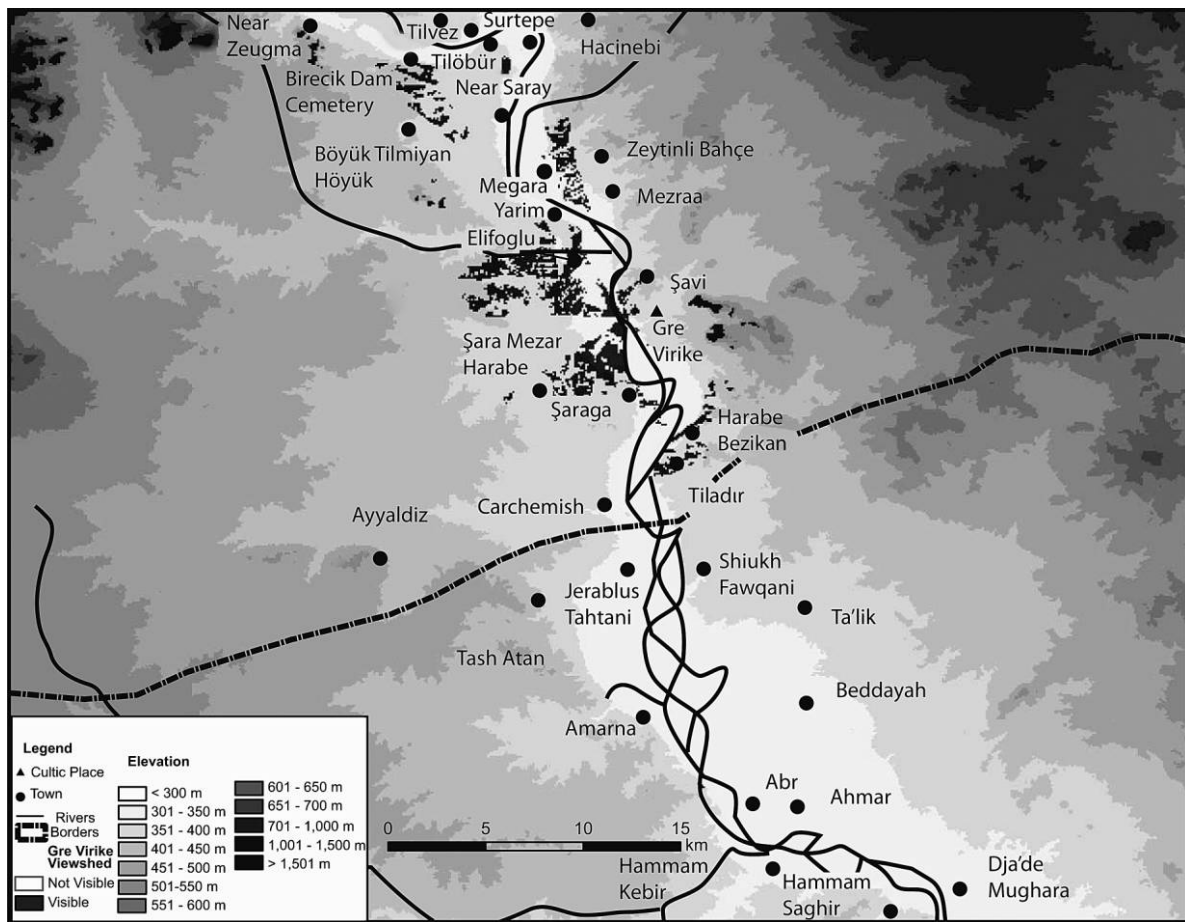


Fig. 12. Intervisibility and viewshed analysis at Gre Virike.

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. This kingdom, with its eponymous capital at the site of Tell Brak, was equal in status to Ebla, Mari, and Kish during the 24th century B.C. We know that Nagar's king traveled between the centers under his control (Wilkinson 2009: 158). 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 tower temples of Hazna, located 14 km from Brak and 20 km from Beydar, may be the models for the rites depicted on the Beydar seals. 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 control of space for Nagar's king. Similarly, the presence of separate locations for elite and non-elite offerings at Hazna may have constituted part of Nagar's different hegemonic strategy. At Hazna, everyday objects, probably brought as offerings, like grain, animals, agricultural implements and animal figurines, were segregated from unusual, high-status offerings such as the semiprecious beads in Room 149. Hazna thus seems to be a different type of center than Gre Virike. Although most of the evidence at the site probably comes from similar ritual offerings, perhaps made by a wide variety 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 suggest that most of its pilgrims traveled a day or so to reach this sanctuary.

Jebelet al-Beda also attests to the ritual establishment of a political strategy; its remains have been differently interpreted as a site of worship, a victory monument, or a place of ancestor veneration (Oppenheim 1933; Moortgat-Correns 1972; Meyer 1997; Pfälzner 2001). 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 Tell Mabtuh lies only about 10 km northeast of this monument and is the closest third-millennium settlement. Like Nabada, Tell Mabtuh may have been subject to the king of Nagar, although it is also possible that it was independent.<sup>17</sup> 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, recalls the emplacement of platforms along the Euphrates. But the stelae and statues of Jebelet al-Beda appear more overtly political than the other monuments discussed so far. Although it is possible that the best-preserved stela and the statue depict a god, it is more likely that this figure was a man, perhaps a king (Moortgat-Correns 1972: 21–22). The "king's" power may be grounded in the relationship of this image to the living and dead bodies of his followers, enemies, and/or ancestors in the surrounding graves. The construction of the monument in the barren hills also expresses royal power, demonstrating this nameless king's ability to monopolize skilled and unskilled labor.

Finally, evidence from Banat, probably 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 known on the Upper Euphrates, perhaps larger than Carchemish. In the Ebla documentation, Armi/Armanum is a city-state ruled by a king and his elders (Fronzaroli 2003: texts 16–17; 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 these 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 main settlement complex at Banat, across the modern wadi from the main site, the White Monument may be approached from any direction. Excavation and geophysical survey revealed no enclosure walls; nor are any visible in the topographic plan of the site. Instead, there seems to have been entirely open access to this monument. 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 construction 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 among farmers, pastoralists, citizens, and their ancestors. Its size and setting meant that this monument was visible for a long way, particularly for travelers coming from the north and west, broadcasting its powerful argument about the state to the other populations that comprised Armi/Armanum (Porter 2007: 203).<sup>18</sup>

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 enclosing Building 6 transformed the relationship that this tomb had with the community, isolating it from the rest of the site (Porter 2002: 27). The tomb itself, of course, is a semi-subterranean structure and is largely hidden from view, while its

<sup>17</sup> It is difficult to correlate the remains of settlements in the West Jezirah with the toponyms in the Ebla texts. From the viewpoint of Ebla, the preeminent power in the east was Nagar; other polities to the east and south are not mentioned (Milano and Rova 2000).

<sup>18</sup> This is based on line-of-sight analysis conducted using ArcGIS, which indicated that the White Monument could be seen from up to 40 km to the south and 30 km to the west. The parameters are the same as for the analysis around Gre Virike (see n. 16).

small size limits the number of people who could participate in rituals here. Even the courtyard surrounding the buried Tomb 7 could have held only a very few spectators (Porter 2007: 208). The luxurious contents of the tomb and the small numbers of people interred 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.

#### URBAN SPACES, PILGRIMAGE NETWORKS, AND STATE FORMATION

How should we understand the appearance of cities and territorial kingdoms throughout northern Mesopotamia, ca. 2600 B.C.? I have argued that the rise of the state in northern Mesopotamia entailed the refashioning of a familiar landscape. Not only did the growth of cities and administrative elites who sought greater economic control over a more distant populace transform the economic relationships among 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. Like other polities in transitional periods, they sought to ground these changes in (often invented) tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). The usual program of constructing political spaces, including palaces and town squares, in the ancient citadels rather than in the newly built lower towns may have taken advantage of one aspect of tradition. The foundation of ritual centers and monumental tombs in the countryside may have sought to manipulate another tradition, that of powerful ancestors or sacred places. The scenario proposed here is admittedly speculative, but if northern Mesopotamian pilgrimage routes were intimately connected with other networks—such as tribute or gift circulation, as seems likely—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 one to

four days' travel of the capital. Most likely, the places that made up such routes were located up to 30 km or so 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 and Binaš. 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 and which supplied much of the city's grain. Although real estate documents attest to elite ownership of far-flung land—from the Amuq to Carchemish—these estates seem to be the exception rather than the rule (Milano 1996: 140). In contrast, the second network embraces a larger geographical area, including much of the Orontes Valley. The rituals that we see here, in honor of 'Adabal, the region's god, probably seek to insert Ebla and its elite into a preexisting ceremony. The different nature of these ceremonies—where royal power is underplayed rather than overstated—might well correspond to the different nature of political and economic contacts here. Although Ebla texts document traffic in livestock 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 was probably 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 may also have had local significance or could have been incorporated 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 *rite de passage* into the palace is central to her ritual transformation into Ebla's queen, as the royal couple's pilgrimage is to political transition within the larger kingdom. The highly controlled passages of other visitors to northern Mesopotamian cities may have instructed them similarly in proper urban behavior and attitudes toward authority. 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 literal incorporation of these traditions.

In his study of social memory, Paul Connerton (1989) emphasizes the importance of rituals and incorporating practices for social persistence. Societies remember through commemoration ceremonies, but what fixes this memory, what makes it powerful, unquestioned, and habitual, is its performativity. Rituals do not exist as words alone; rather, it is the activity of the bodies who perform them that give them their meaning and power. Posture, dress, and especially repetitive action incorporate social norms; they take advantage of habitual memory and reinforce a specific way of being. Moments of rupture or social transformation justify themselves by changing both commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices, initiating new forms of dress, time, and activities to emphasize this change. The establishment of new ritual circuits that coincided with other changes in landscapes of movement, including the construction of city walls and urban grids, was another means of inaugurating a new way 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.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The literature on peak sanctuaries and their relationship with Minoan political institutions is vast. For a recent summary of the evidence, see Kyriakidis 2005: 124–27.

The reconstruction of these north Mesopotamian ritual systems has relied heavily on analysis of the Ebla ritual texts and sealings which were produced and used only in elite contexts—thus, clearly skewing our understanding. When it comes to understanding possible pilgrimage sites, however, the non-elite archaeological finds at Hazna, Gre Virike, and Banat's White Monument suggest that these religious landscapes were not purely under the control of the elite. Ethnographers and historians have long recognized the ambiguous quality of rituals, which can serve the interests of both political authority and political resistance (Kertzer 1988; Mather 2003). The celebration of state rituals in newly built, carefully controlled 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.

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