

Divine Foundations: Religion and Assyrian Capital Cities

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BEFORE THE FALL OF THE NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE in 612 BCE, Assyria's royal capital had moved between at least five different cities. The last three of these cities were made capitals within a relatively short time frame that spanned about two hundred years. These massive capital cities were the seats of Assyria's imperial power as the main residence of the reigning king, as well as the centers of an expanding empire. Unlike Babylonia, whose royal capital was consistently located at Babylon, at least after the second millennium BCE,¹ Assyria is unusual for the very fact that the kings moved the imperial center so frequently during a relatively short period of time, particularly during the Neo-Assyrian phase: from Assyria's longstanding center at Assur, the capital moved to Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta (in the Middle Assyrian period), back to Assur, to Calah, to Dūr-Šarrukīn, and finally to Nineveh.² While these cities have been studied individually, little attention has been paid to the ideological implications of moving capital cities

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1. Babylon was made the capital during the reign of Ḥammurabi in the mid-second millennium BCE, but it might not have been consistently the capital after the Old Babylonian period because of the capital at Dūr-Kurigalzu under the Kassites. On the rise of Babylon as a royal capital, see Stefan Maul, "Die altorientalische Hauptstadt: Nabel und Abbild der Welt," in *Die orientalische Stadt: Kontinuität, Wandel, Bruch*, ed. G. Wilhelm, Colloquien der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 1 (Saarbrücken: Harrassowitz, 1997), 119–20.

2. An outline of these cities is presented in table 4.1, below. Mirko Novák provides a succinct overview of the layouts of the cities discussed in this essay ("From Ashur to Nineveh: The Assyrian Town-Planning Programme," *Iraq* 66 [2004]: 177–85). There are a few other candidates for Assyrian capital cities. For instance, one last move occurred during the final stages of the Assyrian Empire, when a beleaguered Aššur-uballit II relocated the capital to Ḥarrān, but that is excluded from this study because the circumstances are extreme and the pressures fully external. Tiglath-pileser III also founded a city called Kār-Aššur atop the ruins of a city called Ḥumut, where he claims to have built *ēkal mūšab šarrūtiya* ("a palace for my royal residence") and placed a "weapon of Aššur" (RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III 5: 1–3), although other inscriptions suggest that it was a provincial capital (RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III 39: 6–7 mentions that a eunuch was placed in power there, presumably as a governor). As an interesting contrast, Tiglath-pileser III uses the term *āl šarrūti* ("city of kingship") only in reference to major cities of his enemies, especially while he is destroying them (for instance, RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III 39: 8–9). Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal

and what the commonalities or differences are in how each move was described in Assyrian sources. The relocation of the royal capital was a public act that changed the political environment and organization of the growing empire, creating a new central location. Not only did the move affect the king and royal family, but the royal court, elites, temple personnel, and general citizenry were also moved into the new capital. Resources coming into the empire from its periphery, such as tribute, raw materials, and precious goods, were redirected to the capital city to both build and sustain it.

This phenomenon highlights several intriguing questions about Assyrian imperial ideology: why did capital cities change, and how did the kings justify these movements as part of their royal program? What was the intended ideological effect of choosing a different capital? The kings who relocated the empire's capital clearly considered this act significant, as the moves are described frequently and in great detail in the royal inscriptions of the respective kings. In addition, two of the aforementioned capital cities were *ex novo* foundations, while another two were reconstructions of cities that were not previously capitals but had a long settlement history within Assyria.³ Why did two kings choose to establish their palaces in previously unsettled areas, and why did the other two kings instead move to existing cities? Founding, renovating, moving, abandonment—all of these changes have implications for Assyrian royal ideology. The four kings who moved to new capitals apparently did so of their own volition, rather than out of necessity, and the relocation did not occur at the commencement of their reigns in most cases, further suggesting that these moves were carefully planned in advance.⁴ At the heart of the problem in understanding this phenomenon is the fact that the kings did not give the reasons why a previous capital was found wanting, and so scholars have been left to speculate as to why these changes occurred in the first place. After all, the selection of a new capital necessarily means that the previous capital city was stripped of its elevated status. Moreover, in the cases of the two capitals that were newly founded, these cities were almost entirely abandoned after the deaths of their founders. Relocation has often been attributed to economic reasons, largely due to the agricultural situation of the north, which did not have reliable rainfall or adequate hinterland to sustain large populations,⁵ as well as to

also use this terminology in the same way (see, for example, RINAP 3/1, 3: 32, 56; RINAP 5/1, 4: iii 32; and RINAP 5/1, 9: iii 64).

3. For Nineveh, “ample building records of many kings, most notably Tiglath-pileser I, for both temple and palaces, testify to its status as the second city of Assyria until the foundation of Kalḫu in 879–878, and to its prominence thereafter” (Julien E. Reade, “Ninive [Nineveh],” *RIA* 9:396).

4. Construction on Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta seems to have started before the conquest of Babylonia, but Ömür Harmanşah argues that the two may have been connected ideologically in texts (*Cities and the Shaping of Memory in the Ancient Near East* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013], 88). Building in Calah began in 879 BCE, during Ashurnasirpal II's fifth year. Construction of Dūr-Šarrukīn began in Sargon II's fifth regnal year (717 BCE) and was not finished until around 706 BCE (Simo Parpola, “The Construction of Dur-Šarrukin in the Assyrian Royal Correspondence,” in *Khorsabad, le palais de Sargon II, roi d'Assyrie*, ed. A. Caubet [Paris: Documentation Française, 1995], 50). Only Nineveh appears to have been rebuilt toward the beginning of Sennacherib's reign, after 704 BCE (Reade, “Nineveh,” 397).

5. According to Harmanşah, starting in the Middle Assyrian period, the “Assyrians continuously searched for alternatives to Aššur. The city and its arid Middle Tigris steppe hinterland lies well outside the margins of the reliable rainfall zone, and could not support a growing population with its limited agricultural hinterland” (*Cities*, 81). For the agricultural challenges facing cities in northern Iraq and the emphasis on nonagricultural characteristics of the cities in royal inscriptions, see Marc Van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 40.

political and militaristic motivations, as kings established cities in strategic locations to better conduct their campaigns.⁶ All of the capital cities, however, were located within a relatively limited territorial region in the core of Assyria, and military strategy, while significant, does not appear to be the driving force behind the move in the king's own inscriptions.

In their descriptions of relocating the capital of the empire, the Assyrian kings consistently include two important elements, often in combination: the actual renovation/building of the city and the use of religious language, such as the inclusion of the gods in their narratives. The latter is not surprising when one considers that Assyrian political ideology was inextricably linked to religious ideology. Above all else, the Assyrian king was simultaneously not only the highest-ranking political figure in the empire but also the highest priest of Assyria's tutelary god, Aššur.⁷ In the corpus of Assyrian royal inscriptions, the Assyrian gods are credited with all aspects of successful kingship, from the king's appointment as ruler, to his victories during the annual campaigns, to the prosperity of the Assyrian heartland. In return, the king portrays himself as acting on behalf of the gods, and all of his deeds are conceptualized as undertaken for the gods' greater glory. Thus, while the tendency in secondary literature is to view capital cities as political, economic, or military entities, they should be viewed through a religious lens as well. After all, the Assyrian empire had its origins at its eponymous capital Assur, which was considered the residence of Assyria's patron god, Aššur. Indeed, the name of the empire, the city, and the god are all written *aššur* in Akkadian, underscoring how closely these three concepts were associated in Assyrian thought.⁸ The

6. See, for instance, Ashurnasirpal II's inscriptions, in which he "moved from Calah" at the beginning of several campaigns (e.g., RIMA 2, A.0.101.1). Political reasons have also been cited as the impetus for Sargon II to relocate to a new foundation—namely, that the elites in Calah had become too powerful and the king hoped to undermine their influence by moving to a new settlement that had no established elite families; see Karen Radner, "The Assur-Nineveh-Arbela Triangle: Central Assyria in the Neo-Assyrian Period," in *Between the Cultures: The Central Tigris Region in Mesopotamia from the 3rd to the 1st Millennium BC*, ed. P. Miglus and S. Mühl, Heidelberg Studien zum Alten Orient 14 (Heidelberg: Heidelberg Orientverlag, 2011), 325–26. On the concept of "disembedded capitals" as a means to disrupt authority structures, see also Alexander Joffe, "Disembedded Capitals in Western Asian Perspective," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40 (1998): 549–80.

7. For conceptions of Assyrian kingship, see Stefan Maul, "Der assyrische König als Hüter der Weltordnung," in *Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East: Papers of the Second Colloquium on the Ancient Near East: The City and Its Life, Held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan, March 22–24, 1996*, ed. K. Watanabe (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Press, 1999), 201–14; Karen Radner, "Assyrian and Non-Assyrian Kingship in the First Millennium BC," in *Concepts of Kingship in Antiquity: Proceedings of the European Science Foundation Exploratory Workshop, Held in Padova, November 28th–December 1st, 2007*, History of the Ancient Near East Monographs 11, ed. G. B. Lanfranchi and R. Rollinger (Padova: S.A.R.G.O.N. Editrice e Libreria, 2010), 15–24; Bradley Parker, "The Construction and Performance of Kingship in the Neo-Assyrian Empire," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 67 (2011): 357–86.

8. Assur was the uncontested capital from Assyria's inception until the Middle Assyrian period, when Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta was built. Even after the capital moved, Assur remained the religious and symbolic capital and the main cult center of Aššur, the tutelary god of the Assyrian pantheon, for the remainder of the empire's duration. Aššur was fairly resistant against moving, although there is evidence for other shrines to him, e.g., in the trading colony of Kārum Kaneš in the Old Assyrian period (see Elisabeth von der Osten-Sacken, "Aššur, großer Berg, König von Himmel und Erde," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 42 [2010]: 731–822), in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, and in Nineveh (SAA 20, no. 38). The writings for Assur, Aššur, and Assyria are sometimes distinguished by determinatives, designating "city," "land," or "god," but these determinatives are often combined or omitted, resulting in ambiguity in some contexts. To further complicate matters, the writing of *aššur* varies widely by period and king. For a study of this orthography in the Old Assyrian

TABLE 4.I. Overview of Assyrian Capitals

Capital	Modern Location	King Responsible for Move	King's Regnal Years	Type of Foundation	Patron God
Assur	Qal'at Sherqat, Iraq	N/A, original capital	N/A	N/A	Aššur
Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta	Tulul al-Aqar, Iraq	Tukultī-Ninurta I	ca. 1243–1207 BCE	New	Uncertain, probably Aššur
Calah	Nimrud, Iraq	Ashurnasirpal II	883–859 BCE	Reconstructed	Ninurta
Dūr-Šarrukīn	Khorsabad, Iraq	Sargon II	721–705 BCE	New	Unknown, possibly Nabû
Nineveh	Nineveh (near Mosul, Iraq)	Sennacherib	704–681 BCE	Reconstructed	Ištar ^a

^aIštar of Nineveh was increasingly identified with Mullissu by the late Neo-Assyrian period and inscriptions sometimes switch between the two names; see, for instance, the description of Nineveh *ālu šīru narām Mullissu* “the exalted city loved by the goddess Mullissu” (RINAP 5/1, Ashurbanipal 9: vi 23).

theological perspective was not restricted to Assur, however, as all cities had patron gods and all of the capitals contained several temples in which certain gods resided.

The religious perspective of relocating capital cities is critical for attempting to answer the questions posed above and for understanding the phenomenon of moving capitals beyond political or economic reasons. Using primarily the corpus of Assyrian royal inscriptions, this paper discusses several significant examples of how the kings invoked religious ideology concerning the building and movement of the aforementioned royal capitals in their text corpora, with particular attention to how the religious language changes when it comes to the creation, rebuilding, relocation, or abandonment of Assyrian capital cities and the possible implications for religious and ideological change or continuity.

Assyrian Conceptions of Cities and Capitals

Cities are a central component of Assyrian ideology, both within and outside of the Assyrian core. In the Assyrian periphery, cities were a visible part of Assyrian expansionary techniques. As part of their campaign narratives in the royal inscriptions, kings enumerate their conquests in long lists of cities.⁹ Some reliefs depict conquered peoples bringing models of their cities to the Assyrian king, symbolically ceding their independence to Assyrian hegemony.¹⁰ Religion was at the heart of imperialism,

period, see Hannes Galter “Gott, König, Vaterland: Orthographisches zu Aššur in altassyrischer Zeit,” *WZKM* 86 (1996): 127–41. The city is referred to in this essay as “Assur,” while the god is “Aššur” and the empire “Assyria.” For the associations between Aššur and Assur, and the cult of Aššur in general, see Wilfred Lambert, “The God Aššur,” *Iraq* 45 (1983): 82–86; Stefan Maul, “Altorientalische Hauptstadt”; Gombert van Driel, *The Cult of Aššur* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1969); von der Osten-Sacken “Aššur.”

9. For the divine imperative to conquer, see Parker, “Construction and Performance,” 365. Rural areas were marked symbolically as well in the form of rock reliefs and stelae; see Ömür Harmanşah, “New Cities and the Assyrian Politics of Landscape,” *BASOR* 365 (February 2012): 53–77; Harmanşah, *Cities*, 47–55, 93–99.

10. Van de Mieroop, *Ancient Mesopotamian City*, 52–53.

as the expansion of territory was seen as a divine imperative that was, consequently, essential to Assyrian kingship.¹¹ In turn, Assyria's outward expansion put into focus the importance of cities in the heartland, especially the capital cities. The resources derived from the periphery were channeled into the Assyrian core, which supported state programs such as public rituals and the king's building and renovation projects.¹² People from conquered territories were often deported into Assyrian cities, even capitals, to boost population and the labor force.¹³ A crown worn by Assyrian queens from the ninth century onward was moreover shaped to look like a city wall, highlighting the centrality of cities in Assyrian political ideology.¹⁴

In his survey of Mesopotamian cities, Marc Van de Mieroop calls attention to how rarely newly founded cities and capitals are attested in textual sources, and, even when they are, the inscriptions are peculiarly silent regarding specific details.¹⁵ He claims that, given the high cost of resources and effort required for a new city, one would expect that Assyrian royal inscriptions would highlight the kings' achievements or at least explain their motivations for creating a new city.¹⁶ Pointing to a stark contrast with the extensive construction reports concerning individual buildings, Van de Mieroop argues that records of new capitals generally omit critical information such as work completed, rituals or omens taken to determine the most propitious site or time for construction, foundation layouts, or resources used.¹⁷ While Van de Mieroop's argument that one should consider how city building is spoken of and why it may be different from other construction accounts is valid, newly created cities *are* recorded in Assyrian inscriptions, cities that were generally named using constructions such as Dūr- ("fortress of" or "wall of") or Kār- ("quay of" or "port of") plus a divine

11. According to the royal inscriptions, the gods would command the king to go on campaign and would then assist him in securing victory in battle. For Assyrian imperialism more generally, see Steven Holloway, *Aššur Is King! Aššur Is King! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Bustenay Oded, *War, Peace and Empire: Justifications for War in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1992).

12. For studies of the Assyrian core and capital cities, see Radner, "Assur-Nineveh-Arbela Triangle," 321–29; Harmanşah "New Cities," 53–57.

13. See Bustenay Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1979), among others. The forced movement of people also reduced the risk that they would rebel and reclaim their territory from Assyrian hegemony.

14. Frances Pinnock, "A City of Gold for the Queen: Some Thoughts About the Mural Crown of Assyrian Queens," in *Multa per Aequora*, ed. M. Cavalieri and C. Boschetti (Leuven: University Press of Leuven, 2018), 2:731–50; Van de Mieroop, *Ancient Mesopotamian City*, 51–52.

15. Van de Mieroop writes, "Throughout the millennia of Mesopotamian history, new cities were founded as well. Some of these were royal foundations, and we might expect that kings were proud of their work. Yet in the ancient Mesopotamian sources we notice an ambivalence toward the value of those endeavors and an apparent lack of pride among the founders of new cities. Mesopotamian kings are not known for their false modesty, thus the reasons for this restrained attitude deserve to be investigated. The inscriptional record on the foundation of new cities is surprisingly limited. Only a handful of Mesopotamian kings are known to have founded a city" (*Ancient Mesopotamian City*, 52–53).

16. *Ibid.*, 55–56. The cities were quite large: Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta was 240 hectares, Dūr-Šarrukīn was 300 hectares, Calah was 360 hectares, and Nineveh was a stunning 750 hectares (*ibid.*, 95).

17. *Ibid.*, 56–59. Much of the logistical information regarding, for instance, Dūr-Šarrukīn is found in letters, but correspondence concerning the other cities is not available. Central to this problem is the fact that Sennacherib's correspondence is essentially absent from the record, other than some letters from when he was crown prince; it would be in this corpus that we would expect details about the logistics around the Nineveh project.

or royal name, including names of officials.¹⁸ Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta and Dūr-Šarrukīn certainly conform to this convention, named after the kings that founded them.¹⁹ It is true that most cities founded *ex novo* were not capitals, even if they were named after the reigning king, and these are generally listed in inscriptions without further discussion.²⁰ New capitals, however, are described in Assyrian inscriptions, whether they are claimed as new or reconstructed from existing cities. In addition, although remarks regarding the general renovation of cities are relatively brief when compared to descriptions of palace, wall, and temple building, this should not be interpreted as a hesitancy to record city building. The detailing of the construction of the essential parts of the city should be seen as *pars pro toto* for the city itself, suggesting that Assyrian conceptualizations of cities comprised not simply an abstract unit “city” but also its critical parts, including walls, gates, temples, and other buildings. Because capitals are royal residences, much of the focus of construction is on the palace.

The idea of a capital city in Assyria was not necessarily the same as how one would view capitals in the modern period. Assyrian capitals were the location of the king’s main palace, which designated the city as the seat of royal power.²¹ At the same time, the terminology surrounding capital cities demonstrates that these were not considered ordinary cities. While most cities are simply called *ālu* (“city”) or designated with the city determinatives (URU before their names or KI after them), royal capitals are explicitly qualified as the king’s residence.²² The capital is not only the seat of the king but also that of the gods, and the political and religious characterizations of capital cities are often linked: Tukultī-Ninurta I refers to his new capital at Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta primarily as a cult center but also describes it as *šubat šarrūtiya* (“the seat of my kingship”) and *māhāz bēlūtiya* (“cult center of my lordship”).²³ The city is once

18. For the prefixes Dūr- and Kār- as characteristic for *ex novo* cities, see Harmanşah, “New Cities,” 61. For cities of this type as part of the Assyrian expansionary strategy, see Beate Pongratz-Leisten, “Toponyme als Ausdruck assyrischen Herrschaftsanspruchs,” in *Ana šadī Labnāni lū allik: Beiträge zu altorientalischen und mittelmeerischen Kulturen; Festschrift für Wolfgang Röllig*, ed. B. Pongratz-Leisten, H. Kühne, and P. Xella, AOAT 247 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997), 325–43. For a list of city names that begin with Dūr-, see *RIA* 2:241–55. The term *dūru* is specifically the inner wall of a city, while the outer wall is called *šalhū*.

19. Sargon II’s name is Šarru-ukīn in Akkadian; for the debate about the reading of Sargon II’s name, see Eckart Frahm, “Observations on the Name and Age of Sargon II and on Some Patterns of Assyrian Royal Onomastics,” *NABU* 2005.2 (2005): 46–50; Andreas Fuchs, “Sargon II,” *RIA* 12:51–53.

20. For example, Tiglath-pileser III rebuilt Ḫumut in Babylonia and called it Kār-Aššur (“I built a city on top of a heaped-up ruin mound called Ḫumut (and) named it Kār-Aššur. I brought the people of (foreign) lands conquered by me therein,” RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III 47: 10–11) and Sennacherib changed Elenzaš in the Ellipi territory to Kār-Sennacherib (“I took the city Elenzaš as a royal city and a fortress for that district, then I changed its former name and called it Kār-Sennacherib,” RINAP 3/1, 3: 32). See Van de Mieroop, *Ancient Mesopotamian City*, 54: “We know of other settlements named after rulers, but there are no inscriptions commemorating their foundation.” This is also true of cities that were conquered and subsequently renamed.

21. Kings did reside in other cities as well, but a capital was depicted as the king’s most important residence. For palaces and their visual programs, see Irene Winter, “‘Seat of Kingship’ / ‘A Wonder to Behold’: The Palace as Construct in the Ancient Near East,” *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 27–55.

22. Royal capitals should also be distinguished from provincial capitals, where Assyrian governors were installed or local rulers acted as vassals. For an overview of the provincial system, see Karen Radner, “Provinz. C. Assyrien,” *RIA* 11:42–68.

23. RIMA 1, A.o.78.22: 41, 61, translated as “my royal dwelling” and “capital,” respectively. Tilman Eickhoff suggests that the king did not live in the palace full-time but rather only during festivals and rituals

called “my (i.e., the king’s) city, Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, the cult center (*māhāzu*) that I had constructed.”²⁴ Both *šubat šarrūtiya* and *māhāz bēlūtiya* are found as descriptions of Calah as well, although it is quite rare that this capital is not simply called “the city Calah” in Ashurnasirpal II’s renovation reports.²⁵ Dūr-Šarrukīn deviates from this pattern, as it is generally referred to as “the city” or by name without qualification. The *Assyrian Eponym Chronicles*, however, attest to the movement of Sargon II’s royal court to Dūr-Šarrukīn, and a royal inscription describes the construction of the city as a residence for the gods as well as for the king, recording that the king’s thoughts and desires were fixated day and night on settling the city and building a *paramāhhi atman ilānī rabūti u ekallāti šubat bēlūtiya*, a “sanctuary as the cultic seat of the great gods as well as a palace as the seat of [his] sovereignty.”²⁶ Sennacherib draws attention to his renovation and expansion of the palace in Nineveh, which he calls the *kummu rimīti bēlūti* (“seat of lordly dwelling”),²⁷ while the city itself is called *māhāzu šīru* (“the exalted cult center”). In addition, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal often call Nineveh the *āl bēlūtiya* (“city of my lordship”).²⁸ Thus, the Assyrian kings differentiate their capital cities from other cities in Assyria not only by establishing their palace in the city but also by describing the city’s religious character as a cultic center. Religious ideology extends beyond this particular qualifier as well and includes attention to building portions of the city that were connected to religious cult and the divine presence in the city itself, which is in line with the Assyrian king’s representation of his deeds as being accomplished for the exaltation of the gods.

Patron Gods and the Divine Endorsement of Cities

As was standard in Mesopotamian culture, each city was associated with a patron deity, one god that was seen as the city’s main resident and protector.²⁹ The rise of a god’s regional popularity and status often correlated with the increase in a city’s political

(*Kār Tukulti Ninurta: Eine mittelasyrische Kult- und Residenzstadt*, Abhandlungen der deutschen Orientalgesellschaft 21 [Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1985], 48–50).

24. RIMA 1, A.O.78.23: 110–11.

25. For instance, see RIMA 2, A.O.101.17: v 13 and A.O.101.30: 53. Harmanşah describes Calah as a “‘quantum leap’ in the archaeological evidence in the form of large-scale building projects, which introduced innovative architectural technologies and a new artisanal vocabulary” (“New Cities,” 65). For sources in which Calah is commemorated as Ashurnasirpal II’s capital, see *ibid.*, 68.

26. Alan Millard, *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire, 910–612 BC*, SAAS 2 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1994), 46–48, 60 (Eponym Chronicles); Andreas Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen: Cuvillier, 1994), Stier II. 46–49 (royal inscription). The Assyrian Eponym Chronicles dated each year according to the name and title of an official (who was called the *limmu* official) and included important events that occurred in that year (Millard, *Eponyms*, 1, 4). Regarding Dūr-Šarrukīn, the Eponym Lists record, specifically, “717 Tab-shar-Ashur, chamberlain, [Dur-Sharru]ken founded”; “707 Sha-Ashur-dubbu, governor of Tushhan, . . . on 22nd Teshrit, the gods of Dur-Sharruken entered their temples”; “706 Mutakkil-Ashur, governor of Guzana, . . . on 6th Ayar, Dur-Sharruken completed” (*ibid.*, 60).

27. This is also found as simply *rimīti bēlūtišu*, referring to earlier kings.

28. For instance, see RINAP 3/1, 3: 61; RINAP 4, 1: ii 1; RINAP 5/1, Ashurbanipal 2: v 4.

29. Individual gods could be patrons of more than one city (for instance, Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela), but cities generally had only one patron god each. A notable exception to this is perhaps third-millennium Uruk, which seems to have had both Anu and Inana as patron deities, although Inana was apparently the more prominent (Angelika Berlejung, “Innovation als Restauration in Uruk und Jehud: Überlegungen zu Transformationsprozessen in vorderorientalischen Gesellschaften,” in *Reformen im Alten*

stature.³⁰ Because cities were seats of individual gods, the choice of making a city the new capital was especially significant to the standing of its patron god. It is possible that the patron god of a capital city was particularly important to the king who selected the city as a capital, which in turn raised the god's status within the Assyrian official pantheon under this king. This has been argued in the case of Ninurta, the patron god of Calah, whose appearances in Assyrian royal titulary and inscriptions enjoyed a marked increase under Ashurnāširpal II.³¹ To designate his status as patron god, Ninurta was called *ilūtu rabītu ina URU Kalḫi* (“the great divinity in Calah”), and, indeed, gods were often given geographical epithets that highlighted their residency in a particular city.

Attention should be paid, however, to distinguishing between epithets that seem to establish patron status and those that merely identify that a god lives in a particular city, meaning that there is a temple (*bītu*, “house”) to that god in the city. For instance, the goddess Šarrat-niḫi is also said to be a deity *āšibat URU Kalḫi* (“who dwells in Calah”),³² and these epithets are typical of texts found within the temple to the particular god in a specific city without indicating patron status for that deity. Occasionally, the convention is reversed and cities are given epithets that link them to a particular god, such as “Nineveh, city loved (*ālu narām*) by Ištar,” the patron goddess.³³ With new foundations such as Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta and Dūr-Šarrukīn, it is not immediately clear which god was the designated patron of each city or whether the new cities were assigned a tutelary god at all. It is difficult to imagine that a city would be without a patron god, but it could have been similarly problematic for kings to decide which god would have patronage over a new city. Perhaps this was a consideration with Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, where the primary god in residence was Aššur, who is said to have requested the new cult location himself, thus circumventing the need for the king to choose a patron god. One may speculate that the patron god of Dūr-Šarrukīn was Nabū, largely based on the discovery of a large temple to the god in the city,³⁴ but this is uncertain—Sargon II does not claim that any particular god asked him for a new cult city. In the case of Calah and Nineveh, Ninurta and Ištar (respectively) are portrayed as the long-standing patron gods of these cities. Patron gods were usually recipients of more dedications and cult offerings than other gods who dwelled in the same cities. Ziggurats, in addition, were generally dedicated to the patron deity.

Innovation Through Tradition: Construction Versus Rebuilding

In general, the line between renovation and creation in the Assyrian royal inscriptions is not always clear, since kings often claimed to renovate something that may in reality have been a new creation, and vice versa. Whether a temple, for instance, existed

Orient und der Antike, ed. E.-J. Waschke, *Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 2* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009], 78).

30. There are numerous examples of this phenomenon, but two noteworthy ones are Marduk (with Babylon) and Šin of Ḫarrān. See also Van de Mieroop, *Ancient Mesopotamian City*, 48.

31. Amar Annus, *The God Ninurta in the Mythology and Royal Ideology of Ancient Mesopotamia*, SAAS 14 (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2002), 42–43.

32. RIMA 2, A.o.101.28: i 7.

33. RINAP 3/1, 1: 63; 2: 34; 3: 34; 4: 61; 15: v 18–19; 16: v 41–42.

34. Francesco Pomponio, “Nabū. A. Philologisch,” *RIA* 9:19.

before a king claimed to rebuild it is often speculative and can be verified only through archaeological surveys.³⁵ The ambiguity has implications for city construction as well. For example, Ashurnasirpal II attributes the foundations of Calah to Shalmaneser I (1273–1244 BCE), although this claim is not found in the former king’s own inscriptions.³⁶ Tradition was important to the Assyrian kings, and, as a result, two of the new capital cities were not *ex novo* foundations but rather renovated cities within a long stream of continuity in Assyrian history. It is important to note that the kings did not rename Calah or Nineveh after themselves. There is precedent for renaming existing cities in such a way, but this generally applies only to cities that have been conquered by the Assyrian king.³⁷ When kings renamed existing cities, those cities may have been seen as essentially “new” in that they were newly Assyrian and thus subject to the same naming conventions that resulted in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta and Dūr-Šarrukīn. In contrast, there seems to have been a consciousness that the names of longstanding Assyrian cities such as Calah and Nineveh were tied to tradition and should not be changed.³⁸

In narratives about moving the capital to Calah, Ashurnasirpal II is clear in his inscriptions that his aim is to rebuild the entire city. The king’s declaration that “the city Calah I took in hand for renewal” or that “I rebuilt this city” is found in no fewer than fourteen inscriptions by this king, always preceding a more specific report of the various buildings and features he constructed.³⁹ The language of rebuilding often relies upon the city or building having become dilapidated, turned into ruins, or been neglected by previous rulers. Indeed, Ashurnasirpal II refers to Calah as having succumbed to extended inattention: “this city had become dilapidated, it lay dormant, (and) a long time ago had turned into a ruin hill.”⁴⁰ The remains of the previous settlement are removed in order for the king to lay new foundations, and he then describes, in detail, his own work on the capital.⁴¹ Similarly, Sennacherib blames the ignorance of all earlier kings regarding Nineveh, claiming that “not one among them had paid heed to (or) shown interest in the palace inside it, the seat of lordly dwelling whose site had become too small; nor had anyone (of them) conceived of and put his mind

35. For archaeological evidence that most Assyrian provincial capitals and regional centers in Upper Mesopotamia were actually based on previously existing settlements, see Harmanşah, “New Cities,” 58.

36. *Ibid.*, 59. Nor is this claim found in the inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II’s successor, Shalmaneser III, despite the fact that he and the city’s alleged founder shared a name. Shalmaneser III also had his main residence in Calah, and he is attested as completing building projects in the city but not general renovations of the nature that Ashurnasirpal II claims to have accomplished.

37. For instance, Shalmaneser III renamed Til Barsip and called it Kār-Shalmaneser. For more on the ideology of renaming cities, see Pongratz-Leisten, “Toponymy,” 325–43.

38. Portions of the city may have been (re)named after the king, especially walls, canals, and gates. For instance, Sennacherib named after himself two canals, Patti-Sennacherib and Nār-Sennacherib (RINAP 3/2, 223: 11–12, 15), and the gate “‘The One Who Flattens All Enemies’: (this is) the Sennacherib Gate, which (leads to) the land Ḫalzi” (RINAP 3/1, 18: vii 16). Ashurbanipal later replaced Sennacherib’s name with his own in the gate name (Reade, “Nineveh,” 401).

39. RIMA 2, A.O.101.1: ii 131–132; A.O.101.1: iii 132–133; A.O.101.2: 52–53; A.O.101.17: v 1–5; A.O.101.26: 46–48; A.O.101.30: 23; A.O.101.31: 11; A.O.101.32: 8–9; A.O.101.33: 19; A.O.101.34: 22–23, among others. Interestingly, he claims the same for Tušḫa, where he also builds a palace (A.O.101.17: ii 6–11).

40. RIMA 2, A.O.101.32: 7–8, among others.

41. For instance, RIMA 2, A.O.101.30: 23–36, including removing the old ruins, laying brick foundations, founding a palace (with details such as the type of wood used and decorations), settling deportees to populate the city, digging canals and irrigation, and planting orchards.

toward the straightening of the city's street(s) and the widening of (its) squares, the dredging of the river, (and) the planting of orchards."⁴² Criticism of previous rulers as careless or negligent is found frequently in the reconstruction records of individual buildings, which is meant to highlight the current king's own attentiveness and, in the cases of temple rebuilding, his piety.⁴³ Sennacherib even goes one step further than Ashurnasirpal II by expressing the ancient nature of Nineveh, which is called "the enduring foundation (and) eternal base whose plan had been designed by the stars (lit. "writing") of the firmament and whose arrangement was made manifest since time immemorial," essentially giving Nineveh mythological origins as a site as ancient as the world itself, in keeping with the Assyrian interest in maintaining traditions.⁴⁴ The Assyrian King List, for instance, traces the progression of all Assyrian kings as if they comprised one lineage that began in Assur, and there is evidence that this list was used by much later kings to construct their own lengthy genealogies.⁴⁵ Innovation was certainly possible, but there was a clear preference for innovation that could be styled as if it had its basis in a historical tradition.⁴⁶ Temples may also fall into this category, as kings claimed to have renovated temples after a long period of disrepair and decay, sometimes naming an earlier king (rarely, kings) who had worked on the building previously, whether or not the former king recorded that they worked on this temple in their own inscriptions.⁴⁷ In general, it is difficult to determine to what extent kings (re)built their new capital cities, but renovations are expressed as being in dire need after former kings left the city to decay for generations.

The capitals that are founded anew, Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta and Dūr-Šarrukīn, naturally deviate from the narrative of reconstruction and tradition. In both cases, the

42. RINAP 3/1, 1: 68–69, with very similar accounts in 2: 34–40; 3: 34–40; 4: 61–67; 15: v 18–39; 16: v 41–61; 17: v 23–47. See also RINAP 3/2, 223: 5–7: "At that time, I greatly enlarged the site of Nineveh. I had its (inner) wall and its outer wall, which had never been constructed before, built anew and I raised (them) as high as mountain(s). Its fields, which had been turned into wastelands due to lack of water, were woven over with spider webs. Moreover, its people did not know artificial irrigation, but had their eyes turned for rain (and) showers from the sky."

43. It is useful to note that the criticism never extends to the previous capital, which is not mentioned in the reconstruction or founding of the new capital.

44. For example, RINAP 3/1, 1: 64, although this description is found in almost all reconstruction accounts.

45. On genealogy and the legitimacy of the Assyrian kings, see Parker, "Construction and Performance," 367.

46. One example is Sennacherib's emendations to the *Enūma eliš* myth and the appropriation of the writing AN.ŠAR (originally a primordial god) for Aššur, which Sargon II had introduced. On this topic, see Wilfred Lambert, "The Assyrian Recension of Enūma eliš," in *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeit*, ed. H. Waetzoldt and H. Hauptmann, Heidelberg Studien zum Alten Orient 6 (Heidelberg: Heidelberg Orientverlag, 1997), 77–79.

47. Jamie Novotny discusses which former kings are mentioned in the building inscriptions of late Neo-Assyrian kings, which is a rather small group of specific kings from the Old, Middle, and early Neo-Assyrian periods, adding that the tendency was to refer to more distant ancestors in the Sargonid inscriptions except in those of Ashurbanipal and Sîn-šarra-iškun, who sometimes referenced their direct predecessors ("I Did Not Alter the Site Where That Temple Stood": Thoughts on Esarhaddon's Rebuilding of the Aššur Temple," *JCS* 66 [2014]: 109–12). On temple building conventions in the Neo-Assyrian period and later, see Jamie Novotny, "Temple Building in Assyria: Evidence from Royal Inscriptions," in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, ed. M. J. Boda and J. Novotny, AOAT 366 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 109–40; Hanspeter Schaudig, "The Restoration of Temples in the Neo- and Late Babylonian Periods: A Royal Prerogative as the Setting for Political Argument," in Boda and Novotny, *From the Foundations to the Crenellations*, 141–64.

emphasis is on how the area had previously not been settled. Tukultī-Ninurta I's language regarding the territory of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta in essence inverts the common tropes of pointing to long habitation and decayed foundations mentioned above:

I built before my city, Assur, a city for the god Aššur on the opposite bank, beside the Tigris, its uncultivated plains (and) meadows where there was neither house nor dwelling, where no ruin hills or rubble had accumulated, and no bricks had been laid. I called it Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta. I cut straight as a string through *rocky* terrain, I cleared a way through high difficult mountains with stone chisels, I cut a wide path for a stream which supports life in the land (and) which provides abundance, and I transformed the plains of my city into irrigated fields.⁴⁸

The description of what the king accomplished to make the city inhabitable emphasizes his ability to overcome the physical topography of what was essentially the hinterland of Assur. Indeed, the king may have seen the new capital as an extension of Assur in some way, especially given Aššur's prominent role in the decision to move. Dūr-Šarrukīn, too, is explicitly described as built where a city had not existed, at the foot of the Mušri mountain in Nineveh's countryside, despite the fact that it was the site of a rural town called Magganubba.⁴⁹ Like Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, Dūr-Šarrukīn is part of the hinterland of a previously existing city.⁵⁰ Unlike Tukultī-Ninurta I and more similarly to Ashurnāširpal II and Sennacherib, however, Sargon II critiques his predecessors, but for a different sort of neglect: he writes that they had foolishly never considered the site of Dūr-Šarrukīn as a possibility, claiming that "among the 350 previous rulers who exercised authority over Assyria before me . . . none had recognized the favorable location or knew how to settle it, or commanded that a canal be dug or a fruit garden planted."⁵¹ Even with such a strong statement, Sargon II situates himself within ancient tradition by identifying with the ancient sages in his construction reports, an innovation that Sennacherib later uses for himself in his inscriptions.⁵²

48. RIMA I, A.o. 78.23: 92–106. This may also explain a lack of direct connection to the past in Tukultī-Ninurta I's descriptions.

49. The king actually compensated the residents of Magganubba in exchange for leaving their land in order for him to build his capital there (Fuchs, *Die Inschriften*, Zyl II. 44–53).

50. For example, *ibid.*, Zyl II. 44, Si II. 8–12; Antimon II. 7–11; R II. 13–15. For Dūr-Šarrukīn's dependence upon Nineveh, see Radner, "Assur-Nineveh-Arbela Triangle," 325–27. As a counterexample, Bēl-Ḫarrān-bēl-ūšur, who was *nāgir ekalli* starting under Shalmaneser IV, founds his own city, Dūr-Bēl-Ḫarrān-bēl-ūšur, apparently not near any previous settlements: "I set out to build a city in the desert (*madbaru*), in the wasteland (*namū*), (and) completed it from top to bottom" (RIMA 3, A.o. 105.2: 11). See also Shana Zaia, "How To (Not) Be King: Negotiating the Limits of Power within the Assyrian Hierarchy," *JNES* 77 (2018): 214–16. The *madbaru* is a relatively infrequently used word, generally found in campaign reports, conceived of as a far-flung place with connotations of thirst and hunger, while the *namū* refers specifically to the "steppe (in contrast to cultivated land), deserted region," also in largely negative contexts (CAD M/1, s.v. *madbaru*; CAD N/1, s.v. *namū* A 2.b). It is interesting to note that Tukultī-Ninurta I also uses *namū* in the passage above for the "uncultivated plains (and) meadows" (*namū ugārū arbūtu*). Sennacherib will later use the related *namūtu* ("wasteland") to describe the poor state of Nineveh's desiccated pasture fields before he digs canals (RINAP 3/2, 223: 5–13).

51. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften*, Zyl II. 45–46, Stier II. 43–45.

52. See *ibid.*, Zyl I. 38, in which Sargon II calls himself a wise king, a master craftsman, and an equal to the *apkallu* (meaning Adapa), while Sennacherib compares himself directly to Adapa, also within the

In this way, two tropes—the critique of ancestors and the connection to tradition—are used quite differently between new and renovated cities but are nonetheless present in both. The differences in type of foundation also have implications for how much religious justification is utilized by the kings who are (re)building their capital cities.

Religious Justifications for Moving

When moving Assyrian capitals, divine endorsement and support is no less important than with any other endeavor of the king. Gods had various methods of communicating their desires concerning the capital, and these span from revealing the location of building materials to inspiring the king to renovate individual buildings or the entire city. Divine communication with regard to the initial move is perhaps most visible in the accounts of the two capitals that were created anew.⁵³ For instance, Tukultī-Ninurta I credits Aššur with the idea to create a new capital, which he frames as primarily a new cult center for the god:

At that time the god Aššur, my lord, requested of me a cult center on the bank opposite my city, the *desired object* of the gods, and he commanded me to build his sanctuary. At the command of the god Aššur, the god who loves me, I built before my city, Assur, a city for the god Aššur on the opposite bank.⁵⁴

Tukultī-Ninurta I makes it clear that the directive to build a new city came from the god Aššur, with the intention that the new capital would be a religious center first and a royal capital second, which is made more explicit in another inscription: “I built the great cult center (*māḥāzu rabū*), my royal dwelling (*šubat šarrūtiya*), (and) called it Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta.”⁵⁵ Aššur’s temple had not previously been moved from his eponymous city Assur, and this divine justification could have been an attempt to avoid the possible sacrilege of moving the god to a new city.⁵⁶ With Dūr-Šarrukīn, Sargon II gives himself credit for the initial idea of building a new capital, but, perhaps because he was also settling a capital city in a previously uninhabited area, he is similarly insistent that the gods support this decision. Despite often describing his choice to settle Dūr-Šarrukīn as *ina bibil libbiya* (“according to my heart’s desire”),

context of his wisdom: “Moreover, the god Ninšiku gave me wide understanding equal to (that of) the sage Adapa (and) endowed me with broad knowledge” (RINAP 3/2, 43: 4; 49: 4; 50: 4).

53. Contra Van de Mieroop, *Ancient Mesopotamian City*, 57. How gods relay such commands is never clear in the cases of building capital cities, however; compare, for instance, Sennacherib’s claim that, “[through] divination, at the command of the gods Samaš and [Adad, I built] the *akītu*-house of the steppe” (RINAP 3/2, 160: 2–3).

54. RIMA I, A.o.78.23: 88–93. See also a similar account in RIMA I, A.o.78.22: 39–42, which reads “at that time the god Aššur-Enlil, my lord, requested of me a cult center on the bank opposite my city and he commanded me to build his sanctuary. Beside the *desired object* of the gods (i.e., the city Assur) I built the great cult center, my royal dwelling, (and) called it Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta.”

55. RIMA I, A.o.78.22: 41–42.

56. Maul and others have attributed the failure of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta and the apparent reluctance of other kings to move Aššur’s cult to the perception of later rulers that relocating Aššur’s cult was sacrilegious; see Stefan Maul, “Assyrian Religion,” in *A Companion to Assyria*, ed. E. Frahm (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 340, and Maul, “Altorientalische Hauptstadt,” 122.

he declares that the gods gave him their permission to build his new city: “The gods who live in heaven, earth, and this city approved my command and granted to me the building of the city, as well as to grow old in it for eternity.”⁵⁷ Quite frequently, divine advice and Sargon II’s personal wishes are combined, with the divine recommendation *kī ṭēm ilānī* (“by the will of the gods”) carefully preceding any statements of his own initiative and his descriptions of building and naming Dūr-Šarrukīn.⁵⁸ In the inscriptions in which the founding of the city is ascribed only to Sargon II’s whims, what follows is always a list of the temples that he places within his capital, ensuring that the religious element is not neglected.⁵⁹

Even in the accounts in which the capital was moved to a renovated city rather than to a new foundation, the kings would credit the gods with the idea or ability to undertake construction. In the case of Ashurnāširpal II and Calah, however, this justification is found rarely and only indirectly. The king prefaces a building account with the claim that “Aššur, the great lord, cast his eyes upon me and my authority (and) my power came forth by his holy command. Ashurnāširpal, the king whose strength is praiseworthy, with my cunning which the god Ea, king of the *apsū*, extensively wise, gave to me, the city Calah I took in hand for renovation.”⁶⁰ While the gods bestowed upon Ashurnāširpal II the power and skills to renovate Calah, they did not explicitly request the project. Ashurnāširpal II does not appear to need the same kind of divine justification that Tukultī-Ninurta I or Sargon II invoked, and this is likely because Calah was an established city, and thus its renovation into a capital required less rationalization by the kings.

Sennacherib is closer to the model of Calah than to the *ex novo* cities, but he still relies more on divine justification than does Ashurnāširpal II. The inscriptions of Sennacherib are explicit, if brief, in their statements that the gods had communicated their desire for renovations in Nineveh. After listing various modifications needed for the city, which Sennacherib claims has become too small, the king declares that, although his predecessors had not performed necessary reconstruction, “as for me, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, the performing of this work came to my attention by the will of the gods (*kī ṭēm ilānī*) and I put my mind to it.”⁶¹ The contrast Sennacherib draws between himself and his forefathers suggests that his piety is greater and that he is more attentive to divine commands. Thus, Sennacherib does seem to attribute importance to this type of divine justification, possibly because of the circumstances around his father’s death and the need to explain why Dūr-Šarrukīn had to be abandoned as the capital immediately when Sennacherib ascended to the throne.⁶² Overall, the kings who built new cities for their capitals were more explicit in their claims that the gods had

57. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften*, Bro II. 26–28, 55–57; R II. 13–15, 26–28.

58. *Ibid.*, XIV II. 27–28; Ann II. 424–426; Prunk II. 153–155; S3 II. 23–29; S4 II. 90–97; S5 II. 28–33.

59. For example, *ibid.*, Bro II. 26–30; Si II. 8–15; Go II. 9–16.

60. RIMA 2, A.O.101.30: 20–23, with a similar passage in RIMA 2, A.O.101.32: 7–9 that omits Aššur’s command.

61. RINAP 3/1, I: 63–70; 2: 34–41; 3: 34–41; 4: 61–68.

62. As will be discussed below, Sargon II was killed in battle in Tabal. Since Sennacherib was the only king to move the capital right away, he may have felt additional pressure to explain why Nineveh was the correct choice, even though the city was not a new foundation. See also Eckart Frahm, “The Great City: Nineveh in the Age of Sennacherib,” *Journal of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 3 (2008): 13–20.

endorsed their decisions, suggesting a recognition that a break with tradition had to be divinely justified in order to remain correct in the eyes of the gods and the Assyrian people.

Divine Aid in Construction

Success in the actual process of (re)constructing the capital city is also attributed to the gods, particularly to Ea, the god of wisdom and skill, who is invoked in these contexts for his abilities as a designer and planner.⁶³ This occurs first in the inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II, who credits his ability to renovate Calah to the god Ea in the quotation above. Ea appears in this role in several building and reconstruction projects that take place in Calah during the reigns of Ashurnasirpal II and his successor, Shalmaneser III.⁶⁴ Ashurnasirpal II, in particular, appears to have taken on Ea's capabilities in design and construction in a personal way, as one inscription describes the king as "the sage (*eršu*), expert (*mūdū*), intelligent one (*hāsisu*), open to counsel (and) wisdom (*pet uzni nēmeqi*) which the god Ea, king of the *apsū*, destined for me," attributing several common epithets of Ea directly to the king.⁶⁵ While Ashurnasirpal II does not acknowledge divine aid in as much detail as Sargon II and Sennacherib do, it is clear through his numerous invocations of Ea that he saw reconstruction as a central feature in his reign and even in his character as king.

Like Ashurnasirpal II, Sargon II also includes Ea as one of his divine helpers in building Dūr-Šarrukīn, but he adds Bēlet-ilī, a mother goddess associated with creation in the form of birth, as one of the gods who granted him wisdom.⁶⁶ This divinely given intelligence allows Sargon II to found his capital, which he says was accomplished "with my extensive knowledge and my astute understanding, because Ea and Bēlet-ilī made my wisdom far surpass that of the kings, my predecessors."⁶⁷ Sargon II invokes the gods' assistance in constructing not only the entire city but also the divine images that would live in the temples he built, calling upon Ninšiku, *bān mimma* ("who creates everything"), to create them.⁶⁸ With regard to individual portions of the city, Sargon II is careful to perform certain actions, including creating bricks and

63. According to Claus Ambos, the participation of the gods was critical for a successful building project, and he identifies Ea, Šamaš, and Asaluḫhi as the most important deities, since they oversee that the ritual is done correctly (*Mesopotamische Baurituale aus dem 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* [Dresden: Islet, 2004], 21). Texts with rituals associated with construction have been found in all of the capitals mentioned here except Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta (ibid. 14–15).

64. Shalmaneser III seems to invoke this god specifically for building the ziggurat for Ninurta in Calah (RIMA 3, A.O.102.56: 6–7). Interestingly, he does not credit Ashurnasirpal II with having rebuilt Calah or having built the Ninurta temple, instead invoking the trope used in other building accounts that none of his predecessors had thought to place a ziggurat in the location where he constructed one.

65. RIMA 2, A.O.101.2: 23.

66. The two are paired as the creators of humankind, including in a Neo-Assyrian literary text that describes the creation of the king separately and as higher in status than other mortals (Radner, "Assyrian and Non-Assyrian Kingship," 26–27).

67. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften*, R II. 13–15. A similar account credits the same gods under their bynames but makes their roles clear: Lugal-abzu, *bēl nēmeqi* ("the god of wisdom"), and Ninmenanna, *bānūt ilānī* ("the creator of gods") (ibid., Zyl II. 47–48).

68. Ibid., Go II. 14–20. The phrasing is *bunnānē ilūtišunu rabūte . . . ūlidma; alādu* ("to birth, produce") is common for the creation of cult images. Ninšiku is often a second name for Ea, as discussed below.



laying the foundations, during ritually significant months. Simānu is one such month, and Sargon II claims that he chose this time to have the bricks painted because of its importance to Kulla, the brick-making god, and that this month was in fact associated with Kulla exactly “because it is the right one for making bricks (and) building the city and house.”⁶⁹ The king lays the foundations and brickwork for his city in the month of Abu, which he writes is a month when Gīra, the god of fire, changes the landscape and is thus when “one lays the foundation for city and house.”⁷⁰ Sargon II also records that he offered prayers and animal sacrifices to Kulla and Mušda, the divine master builder.⁷¹ In this way, Sargon II relies more heavily on gods associated with creation than Ashurnasirpal II does, as the latter is focused on Ea, likely motivated by the fact that Dūr-Šarrukīn is a new foundation. The emphasis on when construction happens is also not found in other accounts of capital building, as the most Sennacherib records is that some construction occurred “in a propitious month, on a favorable day.”⁷²

Sennacherib stands out with respect to divine aid in construction simply because he appeals to the gods’ assistance in multitudinous ways and to an extent that is unprecedented, showing a departure from how the earlier Assyrian capital cities are described. The level of detail provided is generally attributed to Sennacherib’s interest in engineering, and it is clear from the inscriptions that his skills and accomplishments are seen as god-given. As the palace is his primary focus, Sennacherib provides a lengthy description of how “inexpertly” his predecessors had fashioned the building and how flooding from the Tibilī River had eroded its foundations before providing his own, divinely sanctioned construction report: “So that the construction of my palace might be carried out correctly and that my handiwork be completed, at that time, the god Aššur and the goddess Ištar revealed to me the presence of white limestone in the city Balāṭāya,” which he used for colossi, sphinxes, gates, and the foundations of his palace.⁷³ An analogous statement is made about the same two gods regarding cedar beams and expensive alabaster, which were also important building materials.⁷⁴ Ištar is presumably involved because she is the patron goddess of Nineveh, granting further legitimacy to the project.

69. Ibid., Zyl II. 57–59. The month was also chosen for Kulla by Anu, Enlil, and Ea-Ninšiku, the last of whom is important in building accounts. Van de Mieroop explains that this month, Simānu (May/June), is the ideal time for brickmaking due to the weather (*Ancient Mesopotamian City*, 58). Ambos writes that Kulla is critical when building because he is the one who “verkörperte das wichtigste Baumaterial in Mesopotamien, den ungebrannten Lehmziegel” (Ambos, *Mesopotamische Baurituale*, 21–23). In the first millennium, a compilation of building rituals associated with the *āšipu* uses Kulla’s name as its rubric (7–8).

70. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften*, Zyl I. 61. Abu is July/August.

71. Ibid., Zyl I. 60, where Mušda is identified as Enlil’s chief builder. Mušda is also associated with Ea/Enki, found in the literary work *Enki and the World Order* and as a form of Ea in lexical god lists (Manfred Krebernik, “Mušdam(ma),” *RIA* 8:453). The creation of bricks is itself a quite ancient tradition in Mesopotamian royal inscriptions and is accomplished ritually. On Mušda, see also Ambos, *Mesopotamische Baurituale*, 23.

72. For instance, draining the site where he would build his palace in Nineveh (RINAP 3/1, 1: 76–79) and constructing wings of the palace (RINAP 3/1, 22: vi 51–58), but Sennacherib does not go into the level of detail that Sargon II does.

73. RINAP 3/1, 15: vi 20–27 (also found in RINAP 3/1, 16: vi 39–48 and RINAP 3/2, 151: i’ 8–11). Descriptions in RINAP 3/1, 17: vi 62–75; RINAP 3/2, 40: 18”–28”; 43: 49–63; 44: 52–55; and 46: 135–138 are similar but substitute *tēm ilānī* (“divine will”) instead of the gods’ names.

74. RINAP 3/1, 17: vi 45–56, with comparable accounts found in RINAP 3/2, 39: 38–43; 40: 1”–12”; 41: 7”–18”; 43: 33–46; 44: 47–51; and 46: 130–33.

Three other deities are regularly invoked as part of the project: Ninagal, Ninkura, and Ninšiku. The first two gods are fairly minor, but both have to do with construction: Ninagal is the god of smiths, and Ninkura is a craftwork deity. Ninšiku is closely associated with Ea, sometimes as an epithet and sometimes as a secondary name for the same god.⁷⁵ In Sennacherib's inscriptions, copper lions are cast "through the craftsmanship (*ina šipir*) of the god Ninagal,"⁷⁶ while limestone bull colossi and sphinxes are created "through the craft (*ina liptāt*) of the deity Ninkura."⁷⁷ Ninšiku is the deity that confers upon Sennacherib his aptitude for engineering. This skill, in turn, allows Sennacherib to create casts and molds for various figures, which his predecessors had not devised:

(But) as for me, Sennacherib, the foremost of all rulers, expert in every type of work, regarding large columns of copper (and) striding lion colossi, which none of the kings of the past (who came) before me had cast: with the ingenious mind that the prince, the god Ninšiku, had granted to me (and) taking counsel with myself, I intensively pondered how to perform this work. Then, with my (own) ideas and knowledge, I created a cast work of copper and expertly carried out its artful execution.⁷⁸

He claims to have completed these casts, which he enumerates following this passage, *kī ṭēm ili* ("by divine will").⁷⁹ No construction detail is too small, and Sennacherib attributes divine will to even very nuanced changes, such as modifying the orientation of the gate of Aššur's shrine in Assur, which he moves from south-facing to east-facing. In making this adjustment (which had potentially significant cultic ramifications),⁸⁰ he claims that, "with the extensive wisdom that the god Ea had given me, with the perspicacity that Aššur had granted to me, I took counsel with myself and made up my mind" and then consulted the gods of divination before making any renovations, recording, "I found out the will of the gods Šamaš (and) Adad and they answered me with a firm 'yes.'"⁸¹ In completing the construction of the cella and

75. Brief entries for these gods are found under their respective names in *R1A*.

76. RINAP 3/1, 15: vi 61–68.

77. RINAP 3/1, 17: vi 76–79. See also RINAP 3/2, 42: 14'–17'; 43: 63–67; 44: 55–57; 46: 138–39.

78. RINAP 3/1, 17: vi 89–vii 8. See also RINAP 3/2, 42: 22'–28'; 43: 73–79; 46: 141–43. In addition, RINAP 3/2, 43: 3–4 contains the statement "Moreover, the god Ninšiku gave me wide understanding equal to (that of) the sage Adapa (and) endowed me with broad knowledge."

79. A more succinct version of this passage is found in RINAP 3/2, 34: 77–80: "With the ingenious mind that the lord of wisdom, the god Ninšiku, had granted to me, by divine will, I created clay molds for all of the bronze works that I intended to cast in Nineveh for the requirements of my palatial halls, then I poured copper into them (text: "it") and my handiwork succeeded." The similar descriptions in RINAP 3/2, 39: 51–56; 40: 31'–35"; and 44: 57–60 replace Ninšiku's name with *kī ṭēm ilānī* ("divine will").

80. On the changes and possible ramifications, see Novotny, "I Did Not Alter," in which he argues that the modifications angered the Aššur priesthood and may have been interpreted as invoking divine wrath that resulted in Sennacherib's assassination, prompting Esarhaddon to emphasize that he did not change the temple's layout when recording his own rebuilding, even though Assyrian kings did not traditionally take issue with making changes to temples.

81. RINAP 3/2, 166: 8–17. A similar account but regarding the *akītu*-house instead of the Aššur temple is found in RINAP 3/2, 167: 15–26 and 168: 25–30. One should note that Sennacherib built *akītu*-houses in both Nineveh and Assur, and one could argue that he meant to strengthen the designations of political and religious capitals, respectively, as the *akītu* procession in Sargonid Assyria was an important military



its accompanying buildings and walls, he calls upon “the craft of (*ina šipir*) the god Kulla” as the god of brickmaking.⁸²

Gods were also an integral part of the water systems that Sennacherib built to provide Nineveh with canals, orchards, and gardens.⁸³ The canals, in particular, were created with the consent of the gods, and the greater water system was built “by the command of (*ina qibū*) the god Aššur.”⁸⁴ The opening of the canal was apparently undertaken with accompanying rituals, including an exorcist (*āšipu*) and lamentation singer (*kalū*) and offerings to various gods of water—Ea as the god of underground waters and cisterns and Enbilulu and En’e’imdu, gods of dikes and canals—to whom Sennacherib prays and records that “they heeded my supplications and made my handiwork (*lipit qātīya*) prosper.”⁸⁵ Upon completing the canal, Sennacherib claims that “its (sluice) gate was not ope[ned] through the work of human hands (*ina šipir qātī amīlūti*). According to the heart’s desire of the gods (*kīma bibil libbi ilānī*), I made (it) gurgle with water” before consecrating the canal by sacrificing animals to the gods.⁸⁶ While Sennacherib does not make these claims of divine aid for the city as a whole, essentially every facet of his renovations is supported by the gods. For Ashurnāširpal II, Sargon II, and Sennacherib, Ea’s participation is the common element when the kings begin their construction projects, regardless of whether the city is being built or renovated. It is Sargon II’s creation of a new city that prompts the inclusion of more gods, minor deities with specific roles in construction, and Sennacherib appropriates this language for his renovation of Nineveh. Notably, Sennacherib invokes these gods primarily for his own innovative additions to Nineveh, rather than for repairs to existing structures, and thus there is an element of newness that he claims is divinely supported, perhaps to avoid any appearances of changing a long-established city in drastic ways.

celebration that involved the public presentation of both king and god through the city to a *bū akīti* outside of the city walls. On the *akītu* under the Sargonids, see Cristina Barcina, “The Conceptualization of the Akītu by the Sargonids: Some Reflections,” *SAAB* 23 (2017): 91–129. This was not always the case, however, as the temple of Nabū in Calah had a *bū akīti* within the temple itself (Kiersten Neumann, “Reading the Temple of Nabū as a Coded Sensory Experience,” *Iraq* 80 [2018]: 181–211). Moreover, several other cities in Assyria had *akītu* houses, including Kurba’il, Arbela, Kilizi, and Ḥarrān; on the latter, see Jamie Novotny, “Eḥulḥul, Egipar, Emelamana, and Sīn’s Akītu-House: A Study of Assyrian Building Activities at Ḥarrān” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2003), 183–92. The *bū akītis* appear to correlate with the patron deity of the city except in the case of Nabū in Calah, perhaps because it was a different type of cultic ritual.

82. RINAP 3/2, 166: 27–30.

83. For Sennacherib’s canal system, see RINAP 3/2: pp. 24–25 and Jason Ur, “Sennacherib’s Northern Assyrian Canals: New Insights from Satellite Imagery and Aerial Photography,” *Iraq* 67.1 (2005): 317–45.

84. RINAP 3/2, 223: 13–23, which includes an interesting oath the king swears regarding the veracity of his claims: “(To) a later ruler, one of the kings, my descendants, who deliberates (the matter) in (his) heart but is not *able* to believe (it), (and) *s[ay]s* ‘how did he have this canal dug out w[ith] (only) these few men?’: [I swear] by the god Aššur, my great god, that I dug out this canal with (only) these [men]. Moreover, I completed the work on it within one year (and) three months; [. . .] was completed (and) I finished digging its excavation.” The king makes the same oath concerning his metalworking skills, claiming that he was able “to melt down (metal) from 1,000 talents to one shekel, (and) to smelt (them) together: I myself, the one who understands their technique (and) who grasps their casting, have mastered (these skills). If you do not believe (the record of) the casting of this bronze, I (hereby) swear by the king of the gods, Aššur, the god who created me, where this inscription is written down and where the image of Aššur and the image of the gods, as many as go to fight against Tiāmat with him, are depicted, that I myself had this metal-work cast” (RINAP 3/2, 160: 18–24).

85. RINAP 3/2, 223: 27–30. For the rituals of the exorcists and lamentation singers, see Ambos, *Mesopotamische Baurituale*, 3–10.

86. RINAP 3/2, 223: 30–33.

After the Completion of the Capital

Upon finishing their (re)building projects, kings would sometimes ritually invite the gods into the city, either through their residence in the temples or via the palace, occasionally holding banquets or offering sacrifices. In the examples that follow, it is apparent that the palace plays a particularly important role in the movement of the gods into the capital. The ritual feeding of the gods, such as that found in the *tākultu* ritual, is a separate phenomenon, as it happened regularly, whereas many other sacrifices are not routine, including the offerings and banquets that accompany the movement of the gods into the capital city.⁸⁷ Regular offerings and sacrifices are established in the context of Calah and Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, and these rely upon the canal systems created for the cities. Otherwise, all accounts of new capitals include food offered to the gods as part of the consecration of the city. While these instances are not often attested in the royal inscriptions, an unusual text of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BCE) suggests that all of the following rituals have a long history when it comes to palace building.⁸⁸ The description makes clear that palaces are secular residences and are not meant to be cult spaces but that there is a tradition of inviting the gods inside and presenting sacrifices:

This cedar palace I built with understanding and skill (and) called it Egallugalšarrakurkurra, ‘Palace of the King of All [Lands.]’ I [*made it fitting*] for my royal residence for eternity. As the former palaces—into which princes who preceded me, older kings down to my time, who constructed such palaces and (*made them fitting*) for royal [residences for eternity], would invite inside the god Aššur, my lord, and the [great] gods at the festivals of their city and make sacrifices [. . .]—(as) those palaces were not consecrated or designated as divine residences (*lā qaššudāma ana šubat ilūtī lā šaknā*) [but when a prince/king] built a palace, his gods would come inside (and) he would present therein sacrifices [to] the gods: as the numerous palaces, [*which*] the kings who preceded me did not consecrate or designate as divine residences, this cedar palace, first/one year, palace of the god Aššur, my lord, and the great gods [. . .] eternity, sacrifices were made before them (although) this palace was [not] consecrated or designated as a divine [residence]—the king and his [. . .] dwell therein.⁸⁹

While the text is difficult, it appears that, upon the completion of the palace, the gods were invited inside temporarily for the purpose of consecration, even though Tiglath-pileser I was not relocating to a new capital city in this inscription.⁹⁰ From

87. For the *tākultu* ritual, see SAA 20; Brigitte Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel*, 2 vols. (Rome: The Biblical Institute Press, 1981), vol. 2, T 113–45; van Driel, *Cult of Aššur*, 159–62.

88. The text is unusual for its high level of detail and difficulty (RIMA 2: pp. 38–45, i.e., A.o.87.4). The inscription is not about founding a new capital but rather about building the king’s palace at Assur. Nonetheless, the inscription has many commonalities with texts about the construction of capitals and merits further study. Ambos writes that the rituals are a prophylactic against the dangers and bad omens associated with building and are attested as early as the third millennium BCE (*Mesopotamische Baurituale*, 3–5).

89. RIMA 2, A.o.87.4: 77–89.

90. The palaces did have a visual program that incorporated religious elements, such as the *genii* depicted on Ashurnasirpal II’s palace reliefs, but the gods themselves were not thought to reside within the palace walls.

this passage, it is clear that there was a precedent for inviting the gods as guests into newly constructed royal residences, and the later kings who moved to a different capital describe offerings presented in the palace that are much like the passage above. The invitation of the gods and banquets, gifts, and offerings are found in several combinations, depending on the king. The following four subsections explore these postconstruction acts individually to untangle the ways in which the various kings incorporated their gods into the completed capital, including the gods' initial invitation into the city, the establishment of regular offerings, the singular instance of an entire city that was dedicated to a god, and the divine protections built into the city that were meant to serve the capital over the long term.

The Invitation of Gods into Cities and Banquets or Gifts

After his construction report, Ashurnāširpal II invites Aššur and the other gods of Assyria into his palace in Calah: “Ashurnāširpal, king of Assyria, consecrated (*ušarriuni*) the joyful palace, the palace full of wisdom, in Calah (and) invited (*iqar-rani*) inside Aššur, the great lord, and the gods of the entire land.”⁹¹ The invitation is followed by an extensive list of vast quantities of meat and produce that were used for a royal banquet. As for Aššur, if his cult could not be moved from Assur, the dedication of the city coupled with his invitation into the palace ensured that Aššur had a seat of power within Calah, which is consistent with the two later capitals as well. Referencing “the gods of the entire land (*māti gabbi*)” parallels the “men (and) women who were invited from every part of my land (*mātiya gabbiša*),” which includes foreign dignitaries, inhabitants of Calah, and palace personnel.⁹² One might imagine that the category of “gods of the lands” would include alongside the native gods of Assyria the deities from previously foreign territories—namely, those represented by the dignitaries and envoys—that had been placed under Assyrian hegemony.⁹³ The composition of the category is not made explicit except in that they are superseded by Aššur, who not only comes first but also is invoked by name, as is standard with lists of gods in Assyrian inscriptions.⁹⁴ With the various foods offered in the banquet situated in the text between divine and mortal invitees, the inscription seems to be intentionally ambiguous in a way that suggests that the banquet was intended for both the divine and human attendees. Overall, the presence of the gods is a critical part of the consecration of the palace.

Sennacherib, too, invites the gods into his palace in Nineveh, although the offerings are not explicitly called a banquet: “After I had finished the work on my lordly palace, broadened the squares, (and) brought light into the alleys (and) streets, making (them) as bright as day, I invited inside it (the palace) Aššur, the great lord, (and) the gods and goddesses living in Assyria, then I made splendid offerings and presented my

91. RIMA 2, A.o.101.30: 102–105. The word used for “invite” is consistently *qerū*.

92. RIMA 2, A.o.101.30: 106–54.

93. It is unclear whether the invitation of the gods meant actually moving their physical images to the palace for the occasion.

94. While sequences of gods appear frequently, in a multitude of contexts, and show a high level of variation, Aššur is always at the beginning of Assyrian deity lists. The pattern of pairing Aššur with a catchall category such as “the gods of Assyria” is quite common.

gift(s).”⁹⁵ Like the passages in the inscriptions of the other kings, Sennacherib invites Aššur by name and then includes the other gods of his pantheon under the general heading “the gods and goddesses living in Assyria.” In both Ashurnasirpal II and Sennacherib’s accounts, Aššur and other gods are present despite the lack of a temple in the city for Aššur and, presumably, for many other gods who would fall under the general categories “of the land” or “living in Assyria.” This implies that these gods were guests, not necessarily residents. The gods are also invited into the palace in both cases, suggesting that the palace can be regarded as a *pars pro toto* for the city itself, as the movement of the main royal residence is what transforms the city into a royal capital.

Sargon II’s invitation of the gods into the city via his palace is also frequently attested. One narrative concludes with an offering of gifts and the invitation of vassal kings, provincial rulers, and the like for a banquet in a similar fashion to those in Ashurnasirpal II’s inscriptions:

As soon as I had finished the work on the city and my palace, I invited Aššur, the father of the gods, the great lord, and the gods and goddesses that dwell in Assyria, inside it. Rich presents, heavy tribute, ceaseless gifts I brought to them and offered animal sacrifices before them as pure, voluntary offerings.⁹⁶

Other inscriptions record that Sargon II invites the gods—who, as in the inscriptions above, are Aššur and “the gods and goddesses who live in Assyria” or, in one case, the “great gods that live in Assyria and this city,” meaning Dūr-Šarrukīn—into his palace but are more brief, including only the invitation and the sacrifice of animals as offerings or the precious materials such as gold and silver given as tribute gifts.⁹⁷ While most of the accounts do not describe the invitation as occurring at a ritually important time, one of his inscriptions does state that the gods entered the city “in an appropriate month, on a very favorable day” before describing how Aššur and the great deities who live in Assyria were given gifts and sacrifices.⁹⁸ Whether the invitation of gods into other cities occurred on similarly propitious days is speculative. The banquets, offerings, and sacrifices in this section are all apparently one-time events to consecrate the opening of the palace, but regular offerings are also established outside of the palace context in the cases of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta and Calah.

Regular Offerings and Sacrifices

In his settling of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, Tukultī-Ninurta I built canals from the Tigris River to irrigate the land. These canals not only were meant to sustain the city but also

95. RINAP 3/1, 1: 91–92 and RINAP 3/1, 2: 68–69. The gods are also invited directly after a description of the completion of the palace in RINAP 3/1, 15: viii 8”–14”; 16: viii 52–55; 17: viii 65–70; 18: viii 24”–29”; RINAP 3/2, 42: 52’–53’; 43: 101–3; 46: 161–62. A similar account but apparently set in the palace in Assur is found in RINAP 3/2, 164: 12–15.

96. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften*, XIV ll. 54–56.

97. For instance, *ibid.*, S3 ll. 34–37; S4 ll. 123–30; and L ll. 4–6, the last of which was actually commissioned by Sargon II’s brother Sin-aḫu-ušur to praise Sargon II’s accomplishments.

98. *Ibid.*, Prunk ll. 167–74, with an extensive list of gifts and a prayer to the god for a long life and reign.

were directly provided to the gods, as they produced fish for offerings and connected to the sanctuaries in the new capitals. In one inscription, for example, the king claims, “I made the Pattu-mēšari (‘Canal of Justice’) flow as a wide (stream) to its sanctuaries (and) arranged for regular offerings to the great gods, my lords, in perpetuity from the fish (lit. ‘produce’) of the water of that canal.”⁹⁹ Rather than the gods being explicitly invited into the city, it is rather assumed that the deities have taken up residence in it via the temples the king built and that the offerings produced by the canal would be part of the cult in those temples. Ashurnasirpal II also created a canal for Calah, called Patti-ḫegalli, the “Canal of Abundance,” which connected the Upper Zab River to the new capital in order to promote the growth of gardens, meadows, and orchards.¹⁰⁰ Ashurnasirpal II ends his description with sacrificial offerings to Aššur and, in one inscription, to the “temples of the land,” presumably metonymic for the other gods of Assyria.¹⁰¹ The offerings themselves are wine and the first fruits of the new orchards of Calah, the products of the new irrigation system, symbolically connecting the city to the god’s cult.¹⁰² Ashurnasirpal II expresses the relationship between the city and the gods not only through offerings but also more directly through dedicating Calah to Aššur himself.

City Dedication

Dedications of the entire capital to a god are apparently exclusive to the inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II. After his rebuilding of Calah is completed, the king declares, “I dedicated (*qiāšu*) this city to Aššur, my lord.”¹⁰³ This statement represents the consecration of the city to the highest god of the Assyrian pantheon, possibly because the king perceived the new royal capital as needing the blessing of Aššur before it could officially serve as the new seat of kingship. This suggests that the dedication of the city preempted the need to grant Aššur a physical cult space in the city, as there is no attempt to move Aššur’s cult, unlike with Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta. As a brief note, Ashurnasirpal II also dedicated a foreign city to Aššur when he conquered it after the inhabitants of the city defaulted on their tribute, suggesting a connection between religion and imperialism not restricted to Calah.¹⁰⁴ Other kings are not said to dedicate their capital cities to the gods, but they instead rely upon the aforementioned conventions much more extensively than Ashurnasirpal II.

99. RIMA I, A.o.78.22: 45–48, with a similar account (omitting the canal’s name) in RIMA I, A.o.78.23: 100–109.

100. For example, RIMA 2, A.o.101.26: 53–54; A.o.101.30: 36–37; A.o.101.33: 24’–25’. RIMA 2, A.o.101.17: v 5–7 has a canal called Bābelat-ḫegalli (‘Bearer of Abundance’) instead of Patti-ḫegalli.

101. RIMA 2, A.o.101.30: 39; A.o.101.33: 26’.

102. RIMA 2, A.o.101.1: iii 135; A.o.101.17: v 5–10; A.o.101.26: 53–55; A.o.101.30: 38–40; A.o.101.33: 25’–27’. Offerings of wine and first fruits to the gods are attested elsewhere as tribute delivered by foreign rulers or conquered regions. See, for instance, the episode recorded in RINAP 3/2, 46: 6–9, 138: i 15’–22’; 213: 57–58. Sargon II makes brief mention of establishing regular offerings in the context of building temples to the gods in Dūr-Šarrukīn as well (Fuchs, *Die Inschriften*, Prunk II. 167–74).

103. RIMA 2, A.o.101.30: 39–40; A.o.101.33: 26’–27’. This formula, with the epithet *bēlī* (“my lord”), is standard language for dedicated objects, which are quite common. For example, kings would inscribe objects such as statues of themselves or mace heads that would then be identified as “dedicated to DN, my lord/lady,” generally for the longevity of the king or the success of his heirs.

104. RIMA 2, A.o.101.18: 9’–11’.

Divine Protection of Cities

In the city construction reports, the kings also included protections for the city in the form of inscriptional blessings and curses, as well as physical safeguards such as statues of protective divinities and gates that were named after deities. Blessings and curses are standard features of construction reports in Assyrian royal inscriptions, outlining what a future king should or should not do and then concluding with specific deities who either bless or curse the ruler, depending on his behavior.¹⁰⁵ Blessings and curses were primarily intended to protect the king's works, beseeching later rulers to preserve the king's inscriptions for posterity and to rebuild the king's works should they fall into disrepair. The majority of these formulae are meant to preserve specific buildings, but some also ensure the safety of the capital cities; other cities are not normally provided with protective blessings or curses.¹⁰⁶ Tukultī-Ninurta I, for instance, places a curse on the one "who destroys that [the city's] wall, discards my monumental inscription and my inscribed name, abandons Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, my capital, and neglects (it)," with the result that Aššur will annihilate the offender's reign and legacy.¹⁰⁷ The unusual inclusion of a prohibition against abandoning the city itself demonstrates the concern that Tukultī-Ninurta I has for his new capital, attempting to ensure its legacy, which is not guaranteed by tradition, as with older foundations.

The anxiety behind curses and blessings that were meant to keep the capital located in a particular city is not limited to a new foundation, however, and Ashurnāširpal II attempts to ensure the occupation of his royal residence in Calah in similar ways. In general, Ashurnāširpal II leaves behind extensive curses for his successors in the event that they do not heed his inscriptions (as well as blessings for those who do). Many of these are quite standard, but one in particular is intended to maintain the palace and, by extension, the city as the seat of kingship. He writes:

May a later prince restore its weakened (portions and) restore my inscribed name to its place. (Then) Aššur will listen to his prayers. He must not forsake my mighty palace, my royal residence, of Calah, nor abandon (it) in the face of enemies. He must not remove the doors, beams, (or) knobbed nails *of bronze* from it (and) put them in another city (in) another palace. He must not smash its beams. He must not tear out its drain pipes. He must not clog the outlets of its rain spouts. He must not block up its door, he must neither appropriate it for a warehouse (nor) turn it into a prison. He must not incarcerate its (the palace's) men or women as prisoners therein. He must not allow it to disintegrate through neglect, desertion, or lack of renovation. He must not move into another palace, either within or without the city, instead of my palace. He must not rend the lock, (for) there must not be open access. He must neither conceive an injurious

105. For the role of protective deities after a building is completed, see Ambos, *Mesopotamische Bau-rituale*, 24–25. For blessings of the "hearing gods" type, which were associated with construction reports, see Kyle Greenwood, "The Hearing Gods of the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," *JANER* 10 (2010): 211–18.

106. Temple building accounts, in particular, traditionally conclude with a blessing formula that beseeches a future ruler to protect the king's construction works, usually invoking the god to whom the temple is dedicated as the guarantor of the blessing.

107. RIMA 1, A.o.78.22: 59–67.

plan nor put it into effect to the disadvantage of my mighty palace, my royal residence.¹⁰⁸

Ashurnasirpal II's elaborate protections may originate from his awareness that he moved the Assyrian capital of his own volition but nonetheless hoped to dissuade his successors from doing the same, which would essentially leave his projects to lie neglected and in decay. Given how concerned Assyrian kings were with leaving inscriptions for future kings and becoming part of a lasting legacy, such a detailed and specific injunction against moving the palace, even within Calah, much less to a new capital, is understandable.

Similarly, Sargon II has numerous curses and blessings that seek to preserve his capital city. His inscriptions are just as insistent upon maintaining the occupation of his capital city but differ from Ashurnasirpal II's in that he is clearly more invested in both his and the city's long life and invokes the gods to deliver the order to preserve the city to future rulers. In several blessings, Aššur is asked to command that the city remain inhabited and maintained well beyond the king's reign:

May Aššur, the father of the gods, constantly look upon on this city and this palace, which I have always wished for with my entire heart, with a bright, pure countenance, and until distant times may he command that it remain inhabited . . . by his command, may the king who built them reach an advanced age, attain extreme age. May their builder live on forever. For me, Sargon, who lives in this palace, may he (Aššur) ordain as my fate the conservation of life, distant days, a healthy body, a happy heart, and a brilliant mood.¹⁰⁹

Another blessing appeals to the gods who live in Dūr-Šarrukīn and is meant to ensure the success of Sargon II's reign: "May all of the works of my hands find compassion before the gods who live in this city, may they command the (uninterrupted) occupancy of their sanctuaries and the undisturbed continuation of my reign forever and always!"¹¹⁰ A similar blessing includes Sargon II's successors: "Whoever lives in this palace: may he rejoice in it with a healthy body, jubilant heart, and bright mood and find joy in abundance!"¹¹¹ These blessings suggest that Sargon II viewed his construction of the city in some way as an offering to the gods in exchange for a long and fruitful life and sought to secure the protection of the city by ensuring that the gods would remain resident in their temples. Like Tukultī-Ninurta I and Ashurnasirpal II, Sargon II hoped essentially to begin a new tradition that would last for generations in Assyrian royal ideology, with his name preserved as the founder forever.

Sennacherib's inscriptions, on the other hand, include more or less standard protections of individual buildings, primarily the palace, but also the city walls and temples

108. RIMA 2, A.O.101.17: v 24–45.

109. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften*, XIV ll. 69–79, with similar blessings in Ann ll. 452–60 and Prunk ll. 186–94.

110. *Ibid.*, Stier ll. 101–2.

111. *Ibid.*, Ann ll. 458–60; Prunk ll. 193–94.



he rebuilt.¹¹² One blessing asks Aššur and Ištar to protect Sennacherib and his wife Tašmētu-šarrat in their palace, in part via the protective *šēdu* and *lamassu* deities: “By the command of the god Aššur, father of the gods, and the goddess Ištar, the queen, may we both live long and be satisfied with (our) prosperity in these palatial halls in good health and happiness. May the good *šēdu* (and) the good *lamassu* surround these palatial halls forever and ever. May they never leave them.”¹¹³ This is the most unusual blessing found in Sennacherib’s inscriptions, appearing only on colossi in the palace itself; it seems that, in general, this king is not particularly concerned with the preservation of his capital beyond the standard worries about his construction projects being left to decay.¹¹⁴ Sargon II also mentions the *šēdu* and *lamassu* in his blessing and curse formulae, although he does not discuss creating these apotropaic figures to the extent that Sennacherib does.¹¹⁵ These divinities were not considered full gods but were set up in doorways and other entrances in cities as protective forces.¹¹⁶

Particularly important for the safeguarding of the city were the main walls and their entrances or gates. Walls were the main physical protection of the city, and they were sometimes given names in the royal inscriptions that reflect their defensive powers.¹¹⁷ The names of the walls at Dūr-Šarrukīn and Nineveh are preserved, although only

112. A standard blessing is found in RINAP 3/1, 3: 62–63: “In the future, may one of the kings, my descendants, whom Aššur names for shepherding the land and people, renovate its dilapidated section(s) when that palace becomes old and dilapidated. May he find an inscribed object bearing my name, anoint (it) with oil, make an offering, (and) return (it) to its place. Aššur will (then) hear his prayers.” An example of a blessing that protects the wall is found in RINAP 3/1, 8: 19’–20’.

113. RINAP 3/2, 40: 47’–50’.

114. He does attempt to ensure both the well-being of his successors and his own status in Assyrian history, but in his inscriptions regarding construction in Assur rather than in Nineveh: “O foundation inscription, speak favorable things to (the god) Aššur about Sennacherib, king of Assyria, the one who loves correct behavior, the one who fashioned the image of his god, (and) the one who built (this) temple, so that his offspring, his sons, (and) his grandsons may flourish together with Baltil (Aššur) and Ešarra (and) endure forever with the black-headed (people)” (RINAP 3/2, 166: 30–33).

115. Sennacherib is also perhaps clearer in his royal inscriptions than any of the other kings discussed in this paper when it comes to what kind of statues these were and how he stationed them at gates and doorways—for instance, he records several times that he “made bull colossi with copper features, two of which were overlaid with *zahalū*-silver, (and) bull colossi of alabaster, together with bull colossi and sphinxes of white limestone, hold the door bolts of my palatial halls” (RINAP 3/2, 43: 83–85).

116. For more information about the *šēdu*, *lamassu*, and protective figures, see Annette Zgoll and Anne Löhnert, “Schutzgott. A. In Mesopotamien,” *RIA* 12:311–14; Virginie Danrey, “Winged Human-Headed Bulls of Nineveh: Genesis of and Iconographic Motif,” *Iraq* 66 (2004): 133–39; Margaret Huxley, “The Gates and Guardians in Sennacherib’s Addition to the Temple of Assur,” *Iraq* 62 (2000): 119–33.

117. Generally, there were two different walls, an inner wall (*dūru*) and an outer wall (*šalḫū*). All four of the capitals were walled, and the new foundations of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta and Dūr-Šarrukīn were apparently planned to be almost perfectly square. Unfortunately, little is known about the walls around the cities built by Tukultī-Ninurta I and Ashurnasirpal II, aside from the kings recording that they built them. Sargon II’s wall for Dūr-Šarrukīn includes an interesting and unsolved crux in which he claims that “I made the circumference (lit. measure) of its (the city’s) wall 16,283 cubits, (corresponding to) my name (*nibīt šumīya*)” (translation after Frahm, “Observations,” 48, who presents possible solutions for why that number was chosen). As the word for wall is the same as that for fortress, Dūr-Šarrukīn can mean both “fortress of Sargon” or “wall of Sargon.” For the variety of possible uses for *dūru*, see Dietz Edzard, “Mauer. A. Philologisch,” *RIA* 7:590–91; Edzard argues that the term can have several meanings, designating an inner-city wall, *pars pro toto* for a fortified complex, or an entire fortress. For city walls in particular, see Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, “Stadtmauer. A. Philologisch,” *RIA* 13:78–80; Dirk Mielke, “Stadtmauer. B. Archäologisch,” *RIA* 13:80–85.

the former had names with divine elements.¹¹⁸ The walls had gates with names that frequently included divine elements, and ritual offerings were even performed at gate chapels.¹¹⁹ Because gates were weak points in the walls of the city, associating them with gods was a form of counteracting the resulting vulnerability.¹²⁰ Gods could appear either in the name of the gate itself or in its ceremonial name (or both), which was phrased as a prayer to the god invoked: for example, one gate in Nineveh was called “O Ištar Bless the One Who Provides for You!”: (this is) the Mullissu Gate, which (leads to) the city Kār-Mullissi.”¹²¹ Information about gates is absent from Tukultī-Ninurta I and Ashurnāširpal II’s inscriptions, but they are described in detail in the inscriptions of Sargon II and, especially, of Sennacherib.¹²²

In Dūr-Šarrukīn, whose walls formed a square, there were two gates per side of the wall. These gates were dedicated to Šamaš and Adad, Enlil and Ninlil, Anu and Ištar, and Ea and Bēlet-īlī, and each of these were given ceremonial names, many of which also invoke gods.¹²³ The phenomenon of having multiple gates in the walls, fairly standard for Assyrian cities, appears to increase sharply during Sennacherib’s reign.¹²⁴ After recording the construction of the outer wall of Nineveh, Sennacherib claims to have originally built fourteen gates in the four cardinal directions.¹²⁵ In another inscription, Sennacherib records opening fifteen gates in a similar fashion for the inner

118. Sennacherib gives the walls of Nineveh names that denote their protective nature: Badnigalbilukurašūšu (“Wall Whose Brilliance Overwhelms Enemies”) and the outer wall Badnigerimḫuluḫa (“Terrorizer of Enemies”). (RINAP 3/1, 16: vii 29–33, vii 70–76, among others). As for the two walls of Dūr-Šarrukīn, the inner wall was called *Aššur mušalbir palē šarri ēpišišu nāšir ummānīšu* (“Aššur extends the reign of the king who built it (and) protects his troops”; CAD N/2, s.v. *našāru* 7c’), while the outer wall was called *Ninurta mukīn temmēn ālišu ana labār umē rūqūti* (“Ninurta is the establisher of the foundation of his city for future days to come”; CAD L, s.v. *labāru* a; see also Eckhard Unger, “Dūr-Šarrukīn,” *RIA* 2:250). For Assyrian city walls, their names, and their ideological meaning, see Beate Pongratz-Leisten, *Ina Šulmi Irub: Die kulttopographische und ideologische Programmatik der akitu-Prozession in Babylonien und Assyrien im 1. Jahrtausend V. Chr.* (Hainz am Rhein: P. von Zabern, 1994), 25, 31–34.

119. The *tākultu* ritual text includes a list of gate chapels (*bū ilāni ša abulli*, “the temples of the gate”) at which offerings would be made; see citations above and also, for a discussion of gates in Mesopotamia, Natalie N. May, “Gates and Their Functions in Mesopotamia and Ancient Israel,” in *The Fabric of Cities: Aspects of Urbanism, Urban Topography and Society in Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome*, ed. N. N. May and U. Steinert, CHANE 68 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 84.

120. For a drawing of the components of the gate, see Julien Reade, “The Gates of Nineveh,” *SAAB* 22 (2016): 66.

121. Sennacherib’s gates provide a wealth of examples for how the ceremonial and gate names functioned. A full typology is beyond the scope of this study, but a useful example is the one cited above. Ištar and Mullissu are goddesses that have been identified with each other by this period of Assyrian history, and the direction of the gate, to the city Kār-Mullissi (i.e., “the quay of Mullissu”), explains why the gate was named as such. Other gates with two named gods are not so clearly associated, but most gate names have to do with the hope that the gods will support the king’s reign or works, including a gate that led from Nineveh to Assur and was named “May the *iššak* of the God Aššur Endure”: (this is) the Aššur Gate, which (leads to) the Inner City (Aššur).” The “*iššak* of Aššur” is a common title of the Assyrian king.

122. Ashurnāširpal II only refers to work on the towers of the Kalkal gate in Aššur (RIMA 2, A.o.101.138: 5).

123. See Pongratz-Leisten, *Ina Šulmi Irub*, 33, for her suggested reconstruction of the walls and gates of Dūr-Šarrukīn, and Unger, “Dūr-Šarrukīn,” 250, including the ceremonial names.

124. A full description of the gates and updated maps of Nineveh are given in Reade, “Gates.” For more information, see Pongratz-Leisten, *Ina Šulmi Irub*, 28–31, 211–16.

125. RINAP 3/1, 16: vii 29–69. According to RINAP 3/1: p. 18, the fourteen gates came from inscriptions dated to 697–695, while a fifteenth gate is attested starting in 694.

wall of Nineveh and, by 691, the king lists eighteen.¹²⁶ Not all of the gates were named after deities; some were named after geographical features (e.g., the Quay Gate), locations (e.g., the gate to the city Šibaniba), or parts of the city (e.g., the Gardens Gate and the Armory Gate), and one was named after Sennacherib himself.¹²⁷ The gates that are named after gods invoke a predictable list—Aššur, Šamaš, Ištar/Mullissu,¹²⁸ Adad, Šin, and Nergal—while the ceremonial names of these and other gates added appeals to Šarur, Enlil, Erra, Ea, Igisigsig, and Anu.¹²⁹ How these selections were made depended upon the function of the gate, in particular where the gate led; for instance, Aššur’s gate opened toward the city Assur, Ištar/Mullissu’s gate toward Kār-Mullissu, and Nergal’s gate toward his patron city of Tarbišu.¹³⁰ That gates were given both standard names and ceremonial names, the former dedicating the gate itself to the god while the latter had the form of a prayer, highlights the role of the divine in protecting the city.

The Abandonment of Cities

While Calah and Nineveh remained the empire’s capitals after the deaths of Ashurnasirpal II and Sennacherib, respectively, it seems the same cannot be said of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta or Dūr-Šarrukīn. Ashurnasirpal II’s successor Shalmaneser III, for instance, referred to Assur as *ālī* (“my city”) but nonetheless seems to have maintained a primary residence in Calah, identifying several regnal years as *kī ina Kalḫi usbakūni* (“while I was residing in Calah”).¹³¹ Excavations in the city and the inscriptions from door sills, a throne base, and other items that were found in Calah confirm the existence of a palace there.¹³² Although the palace in Calah was not Shalmaneser III’s only one, it is clear that Calah and Assur were the king’s main priorities as administrative capital and religious center, respectively.¹³³ Successive kings, including Adad-nērārī III and Tiglath-pileser III, also built their own palaces in Calah, maintaining a continuous royal presence in the city. Likewise, Sennacherib’s successor, Esarhaddon, pointedly maintained Nineveh as his capital (though the reason why will be discussed further below), as did Ashurbanipal, as evidenced by Nineveh’s epithet *āl bēlūtiya* (“city of my lordship”).¹³⁴

126. In several cases, they appear to line up with the gates in the outer wall, and many names are similar but not identical (RINAP 3/1, 17: vii 74–viii 5).

127. A chart can be found in RINAP 3/1: p. 18; see also discussion in Reade, “Gates,” 57–59, including the mention that a later text from Sultantepe renames this gate after Ashurbanipal.

128. Earlier inscriptions use Ištar (Reade, “Gates,” 72). As mentioned above, the two became increasingly identified with one another.

129. See nn. 125 and 127 above.

130. Detailed discussions of each gate can be found in Reade “Gates.”

131. RIMA 3, A.O.102.14: 146–47, 159, 174–75, which mentions the twenty-eighth, thirtieth, and thirty-first regnal years explicitly; other regnal years do not identify where he is and are therefore ambiguous.

132. RIMA 3, A.O.102.28–37, 57, 62, 113–15.

133. Several inscribed bricks indicate that there was also a palace in Assur (RIMA 3, A.O.102.50, 102, 106, 109, 110 [plates]), in Nineveh (RIMA 3, A.O.102.107, 116), and in Šibaniba (RIMA 3, A.O.102.104).

134. See n. 28 above. One should also mention that Ashurbanipal had a secondary residence in Arbela as well.



Whether the capital moved from Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta immediately or not is less clear: the city was not entirely abandoned after the death of its eponymous king, although archaeological evidence suggests that the city was deliberately cleared out and buildings were blockaded at some point.¹³⁵ A major issue is that the royal inscriptions from the kings following Tukultī-Ninurta I either are not extant or are short and uninformative; for instance, Aššur-nādin-apli is known to have only three extant royal inscriptions. All three inscriptions are from Assur, one of which is a brick inscription identifying the king's palace there, and another of which is a tablet that refers to Assur as "my city" and relates his construction of a *bīt šalam šarrūtiya* ("house of my royal statue") in which he left several inscriptions and his own image.¹³⁶ This may indeed suggest that the king moved his primary residence back to Assur. The flood of the Tigris near Assur mentioned in the inscription either did not affect Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, or the city had become too unimportant for the king to invest royal resources into it, or perhaps the flood itself damaged the city and contributed to the decision to move back to Assur; in any case, the city is not mentioned in this context. There are no surviving royal inscriptions from the following two kings, Enlil-kudurri-ušur and Aššur-nērārī III. Ninurta-apil-Ekur's reign has yielded only small finds from Assur, and Aššur-dān I seems to have had a palace in Assur.¹³⁷ Thus, it seems likely that kings did not continue to reign from Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta but instead returned to Assur quite soon after Tukultī-Ninurta I's death. Archaeological surveys largely confirm a contraction in settlement and an absence of administrative structures until the ninth century, according to pottery and other small finds.¹³⁸ Regardless, after Tukultī-Ninurta I, his eponymous city was essentially no longer mentioned in the Neo-Assyrian official corpus except for the record of two governors who served as eponyms and supervised several territories, including Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta.¹³⁹

The sudden abandonment of Dūr-Šarrukīn as capital after its founder's death has been the source of much debate. The city lived on as a provincial capital, but, judging by Sargon II's inscriptions, the city's construction came at a tremendous cost to the empire's resources, and to leave it unfinished by relocating immediately to Nineveh is perplexing.¹⁴⁰ As with Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, the reasons for the abandonment of the cities as capitals are not explicitly stated in the inscriptions of the successive kings, and, indeed, there seems to be a general silence regarding why a capital was no longer adequate. In both cases, the decision of successor kings to relocate the capital could be

135. See Graham Hagens, "The Assyrian King List and Chronology: A Critique," *Or* 74 (2005): 37–39, and Eickhoff, *Kār Tukulti Ninurta*, 34–35, 45, 51, although it is difficult to tell when exactly the closure occurred.

136. RIMA 1, A.o.79.1–3.

137. Joshua Jeffers (personal communication) suggests the possibility that, had the capital not already returned to Assur before the reign of Ninurta-apil-Ekur, this king would have ascended the throne in Assur regardless as a usurper attempting to appear legitimate.

138. Reinhard Dittmann, "Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta Through the Ages: A Short Note," in Miglus and Mühl, *Between the Cultures*, 165–78.

139. Millard lists eponyms for the city in 804 and 748 BCE: Ilu-issīya and Adad-bēlu-ka'in, both of whom are identified as governors of Libbi-āli (Assur), Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, Ekallāte, Itū, and the land of Ruqaḡa on steles from Assur (*Eponyms*, 57–59).

140. The construction of the city appears to have taken about ten years (Parpola, "Construction," 50). There are several eponyms listed as governors of Dūr-Šarrukīn after Sargon II's death (Millard, *Eponyms*, 130; Unger, "Dūr-Šarrukīn," 250).

attributed to a variety of factors, ranging from the practical to the ideological. There is, of course, the risk that a new foundation was poorly chosen in location—presumably there were reasons why the kings’ predecessors did not build in these areas—and a lack of strategic value is certainly true in the case of Dūr-Šarrukīn.¹⁴¹ It is known from letters that Sennacherib was involved in the construction of his father’s capital while he was still a prince.¹⁴² These letters betray numerous problems in the building process, and these may have been a factor in Sennacherib’s decision to halt the project after his father’s death.¹⁴³ As for a practical reason to move the capital away from Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, it may simply be that Assur was viewed as strategically superior to its neighbor across the river or that the successive kings, not exactly the strongest rulers, were unable to maintain the new city and instead focused their efforts on the traditional capital.¹⁴⁴ There is also a general trend that cities named after a king or official are not well-attested after the death of their “patron.”¹⁴⁵ Indeed, Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta and Dūr-Šarrukīn share otherwise unique characteristics: they were *ex novo* foundations rather than reconstruction projects, and they were named after their founders. Whether these cities disappeared from the record because they were renamed, were considered no longer important, or were largely abandoned is difficult to determine.

There are possible ideological explanations. After all, both kings died rather ignominiously. Sargon II was killed on campaign in Tabal, and his body was never recovered or properly buried, both of which were unthinkable in the Assyrian mentality.¹⁴⁶ Tukultī-Ninurta I suffered a similarly shocking fate, apparently murdered by his own son during an uprising. This event, recorded in Chronicle P, reads that the “son of Tukultī-Ninurta (I), and the magnates of Assyria rebelled against him (Tukultī-Ninurta I), removed him from the throne and shut him up in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, in a house, and killed him.”¹⁴⁷ Van de Mieroop has proposed the hypothesis that “the

141. Following Radner, who writes, “Dūr-Šarruken’s location within the Assyrian core region shows very little concern for the communication with Assur and Arbela while the site is largely dependent on nearby Nineveh for its links to the rest of the empire” (“Assur-Nineveh-Arbela Triangle,” 325–26).

142. Eckart Frahm, “Family Matters: Psychohistorical Reflections on Sennacherib and His Times,” in *Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem: Story, History and Historiography*, ed. I. Kalimi and S. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 198–99.

143. For the descriptions of the city’s construction in the letters, see Parpola, “Construction,” 47–77.

144. As mentioned above, it seems as though the flooding of the Tigris recorded in an inscription of Aššur-nādin-apli as damaging Assur did not affect Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta despite its proximity, since the inscription mentions only Assur, although it is difficult to determine this for certain (RIMA 1, A.o.79.1).

145. See, for instance, the city Dūr-Bēl-Ḥarrān-bēlī-ušur, which is found in the only extant inscription of the official Bēl-Ḥarrān-bēlī-ušur and is never mentioned again (RIMA 3, A.o.105.2: 9–14). Sennacherib’s inscriptions also provide an example of the strong connection between name and founder in cases of renaming or *ex novo* foundations: Sargon II had renamed a conquered city Kār-Šarrukīn but, after the king’s death, Sennacherib referred to this city only by its original name, Ḥarḥar (Fuchs, “Sargon II,” 59).

146. Ibid., 59; Eckart Frahm, “Nabū-zuqup-kena, das Gilgames-Epos und der Tod Sargons II,” *JCS* 51 (1999): 75–76.

147. Translation following Shigeo Yamada, “The Assyrian King List and the Murderer of Tukulti-Ninurta I,” *NABU* 1998.1 (1998): 26–27. Yamada also resolves the issue of the son’s name (written Aššur-nāšir-apli as Aššur-nādin-apli. See also Olof Pedersén, “A Problematic King in the Assyrian King List,” in *Munuscula Mesopotamica: Festschrift für Johannes Renger*, ed. B. Böck, E. Cancik-Kirschbaum, and T. Richter, AOAT 267 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1999), 369–73; Pedersén concludes that texts from the Middle Assyrian period used two writings for the name Aššur-nādin-apli, which later exemplars of the Assyrian King List erroneously interpreted as two different sons for Tukultī-Ninurta I (contra Hagens, “Assyrian King List”). It is not clear whether Chronicle P is a truly historical account, however. For the

reluctance of Mesopotamian kings to boast about their city building was grounded in the general attitude toward the merits of such an enterprise. Founding a new city was considered to be an act of *hubris*,” since only gods were permitted to found cities.¹⁴⁸ Considering that, it is tempting to describe the abandonment of new cities as the rejection of such hubris by the successors of the kings who had created new capitals and thus deviated from tradition. As demonstrated above, however, new capitals and cities alike were recorded, and the capitals were thoroughly justified through the approval and presence of the gods.

Others have argued that Sennacherib abandoned the city due to the fact that his father died in battle and his body was never buried, an ominous sign. Tukulti-Ninurta I’s violent death within the walls of his own city and at the hands of his own sons would also have similar ideological ramifications. The suggestion that the circumstances of the kings’ deaths prompted the move is more likely than the hypothesis that it was due to the perceived hubris in building their cities in the first place. After all, the gods were conceptualized as protecting the king, even accompanying the ruler on campaign to ensure his success on the battlefield. Conversely, the king’s death in battle or his murder was a sign of his abandonment by the gods, and the divine endorsement of his city could then be interpreted as similarly revoked.¹⁴⁹ Essentially, if the gods had left the king’s side in battle, there is no reason to believe that they did not also leave their dwellings in his city, which he had built for them.¹⁵⁰ The divine abandonment of cities is often attested in Mesopotamian inscriptions to explain how a city was conquered by an outside force, as the departure of gods indicated that the city was left vulnerable to invasion.¹⁵¹ In other words, when Tukulti-Ninurta I was murdered, it may have logically followed that the gods had allowed this to happen by abandoning the king and his city to their fates, particularly if the king was killed within his own city. The absence of divine protection would then be a compelling reason for successor kings to set up their capital cities elsewhere. The movement in both cases to long-standing foundations, where the residence of their divine inhabitants had never been in question, supports this hypothesis.

Chronicles, see A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1975).

148. Van de Mieroop, *Ancient Mesopotamian City*, 59–61.

149. Van de Mieroop writes, “It is thus no exaggeration to say that, throughout Mesopotamian history, cities were regarded as the dwellings of individual deities, built by these divine beings, and that the fortunes of these cities were thought to depend upon the goodwill and the presence of those tutelary divinities” (ibid., 48).

150. Hanspeter Schaudig points to a controversial line in a ritual text that suggests the gods of Kār-Tukulti-Ninurta had moved and taken up residence in Assur by the time the text was composed, possibly in the reign of Tiglath-pileser I (“Cult Centralization in the Ancient Near East? Conceptions of the Ideal Capital in the Ancient Near East,” in *One God, One Cult, One Nation: Archaeological and Biblical Perspectives*, ed. R. G. Kratz [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010], 156). He notes that the statement cannot be taken as definitive proof that the gods had a permanent residence in Assur but supports Eickhoff’s argument that the temples of Kār-Tukulti-Ninurta were used only for a limited period of time (see Eickhoff, *Kār Tukulti Ninurta*, 34–35, 50–51).

151. In Sumerian literature, this trope is used often in city lamentations; in Akkadian literature, an example of the gods leaving the city to its ruin is found in the *Erra Epic*. For an overview of this genre, see John Jacobs, “The City Lament Genre in the Ancient Near East,” in *The Fall of Cities in the Mediterranean: Commemoration in Literature, Folk-Song, and Liturgy*, ed. M. R. Bachvarova, D. Dutsch, and A. Suter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 13–35.

The departure of the gods from the city is perhaps indicated more directly in the case of Sargon II's reports on the construction of Dūr-Šarrukīn, in which he asks in blessings that the gods grant him (and successors who maintain the city) a long life and successful reign because of his construction of a new capital.¹⁵² His untimely death, a rejection of this request, would surely suggest to the Assyrians that the gods were displeased with Sargon II, and, consequently, his construction of Dūr-Šarrukīn, and it may have allowed Sennacherib to simply turn away from maintaining his father's building projects without the fear of divine reprisal for violating his father's curse formulae.¹⁵³ In support of this reasoning is the fact that, while Dūr-Šarrukīn was not altogether abandoned after Sargon's death, the temples were apparently left empty and were not maintained.¹⁵⁴ Sennacherib's departure from Dūr-Šarrukīn has been explained as part of the king's reaction to Sargon II's death that led Sennacherib to distance himself from his father in several ways.¹⁵⁵ After all, the entire city of his father, especially the palace, was meant to glorify Sargon II's reign in reliefs and inscriptions, and the nature of the king's death was incompatible with the legacy that the city would have preserved, which would have likely made any successors who lived there uncomfortable regarding the potential success of their own reigns.¹⁵⁶ The abandonment of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta may have also been motivated by a similar desire by Tukultī-Ninurta I's successors to distance themselves from the fallen king and to begin afresh in a different capital.

One should note, however, that Esarhaddon took up his royal residence at Nineveh despite the murder of his father Sennacherib by his brother Arad-Mullissu. The circumstances around Esarhaddon's succession are complicated and beyond the scope of this study,¹⁵⁷ but Esarhaddon's retention of Nineveh as his royal residence may have been intentional, functioning as a statement of his legitimacy. After he defeated his brothers and secured what he claimed was his rightful role as king, Esarhaddon wrote, "In Addāru, a favorable month, on the eighth day, the *eššāšu*-festival of the god Nabû, I joyfully entered Nineveh, my capital city, and I sat happily on the throne of my father. The south wind, the breeze of the god Ea, the wind whose blowing is favorable for exercising kingship, blew upon me."¹⁵⁸ It is unusual that an Assyrian king would refer to his accession as taking "his father's throne," but it is clear that Esarhaddon

152. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften*, XIV ll. 69–85 and Ann ll. 452–66.

153. The blessings to ensure that the temples would remain occupied by the gods were also presumably considered void upon Sargon II's death (*ibid.*, Stier ll. 101–2, among others).

154. Sennacherib was not known for his neglect of the gods; on the contrary, he undertook many temple-building projects, not only in Nineveh but also in Assur and Tarbišu, and appears to have tried to appease the gods after his father's death, which he may have interpreted as due to divine wrath. Sennacherib attempted to secure the goodwill of the gods through construction works and by distancing himself from his father's legacy, including through his move to Nineveh (Frahm, "Nabû-zuqup-kena," 82). Most notable is that Sennacherib did not claim to maintain any of the existing temples in Dūr-Šarrukīn, despite the fact that most kings rebuilt temples in several major Assyrian cities, not just the capital, during their reigns.

155. For Sennacherib's reactions to Sargon's death, see *ibid.*, 82–84.

156. For the suggestion that continuing to live in Dūr-Šarrukīn would have been unbearable for Sennacherib and his successors, see Fuchs, "Sargon II," 60.

157. See Simo Parpola, "The Murderer of Sennacherib," in *Death in Mesopotamia: Papers Read at the XXV^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, ed. B. Alster, Mesopotamia 8 (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), 171–82.

158. RINAP 4, r: i 87–ii 4.

continued to use the trope of divine justification used by previous kings, albeit in this case as a reason to remain in Nineveh rather than to leave it. Indeed, taking the throne in Nineveh was central to establishing his legitimacy as king, as claiming the kingship in another city may have been perceived as an act of usurpation or may have left Nineveh vulnerable to someone else who had designs on the throne. In support of this is the fact that Esarhaddon seemingly planned to later move the capital back to Calah, where he started a major expansion project not long after he took the throne, including on the palace complex and the other military and administrative infrastructures. The construction took place over almost a decade but was still incomplete at the time of his death, perhaps accounting for why he did not formally consecrate it as a capital.¹⁵⁹ Thus, maintaining Nineveh as his capital, at least during the beginning of his reign, was not only more clearly politically motivated but also styled as explicitly endorsed by the gods, thereby deviating from the circumstances of the kings who moved to a new capital city after the deaths of their predecessors. Nonetheless, that Esarhaddon seems to have been planning to relocate the capital to Calah eventually lends further credence to the supposition that he did not altogether feel comfortable ruling from a capital whose “founder” had suffered such a shameful and shocking death.

Conclusions: The Religious Program of Capital Cities and Royal Ideology

In conclusion, kings’ movements to new capital cities and their construction projects were not only politically significant but also woven into Assyrian religious ideology. Regardless of whether the king was creating a new foundation or rebuilding an existing city, the kings who relocated to a new capital did so with the aim of securing for themselves a place in Assyrian history. These endeavors were also religious in nature and expressed a king’s assiduous performance of his duties to the gods in an attempt to gain their favor. The ways in which a city was consecrated varies depending on whether the capital was a new foundation or not, but any movement of the capital was accompanied by the recognition that the gods were also part of the process, whether it was through temple (re)building, their invitation as guests into the palace, or their esteemed position as guardians of the city. The capital was as much a dwelling of the gods as it was the ruler’s seat of kingship, and it is clear that the gods were essential to the establishment of a new imperial center. Any disrespect to the previous capital and the gods who lived there was avoided, as kings focused their narratives on the new capital and their own works. That said, kings were not loath to criticize their predecessors, citing their ignorance or their negligence as part of the reason why construction was necessary, or to demonstrate their own superior piety. Assyrian kings were deeply concerned with tradition, and the move to a new city must have been regarded as somewhat radical. By invoking religious language in their (re)construction descriptions, however, kings were able to justify the change in the capital city to themselves, to their citizens, and to the gods as well.

159. Barbara N. Porter, *Images, Power, Politics: Figurative Aspects of Esarhaddon’s Babylonian Policy* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1993), 71–73.

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