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The Art of Building a Late Assyrian Royal Palace

Abstract: This article discusses the architecture of Late Assyrian royal palaces. It argues that the palaces can be understood as comprising groups of spaces that combined into different types of suites. These suites were remarkably constant in their organization throughout the Late Assyrian period. The ways in which these suites were combined in each palace differed, but followed certain constraints such as the absence of second stories and the placement of the throneroom near the entrance of the palace. The actualization of these principles is discussed in more detail for the three preserved primary royal palaces of the Late Assyrian period: the Northwest Palace in Kalḫu (Nimrud), the Royal Palace of Dur-Sharruken (Khorsabad) and the Southwest Palace in Nineveh.

Keywords: architecture, Late Assyrian period, Kalḫu (Nimrud), Dur-Sharruken (Khorsabad), Nineveh

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Introduction: The Origin of Late Assyrian Palace Architecture

Late Assyrian palaces are mostly known for the decorated reliefs that once adorned the walls of their most monumental spaces. These reliefs have been studied continually since their discovery, but often as detached two-dimensional representations. Studies on their architectural context have been less frequent.[1] Little is known of the palace architecture of the preceding Middle Assyrian period. The date of the so-called Old Palace in Assur is uncertain (Pedde and Lundström 2008: 32), but its architecture is more reminiscent of the royal palaces of Qatna, Mari and Nuzi. Tukulti-Ninurta I's (1233–1197 BCE) palace at Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (Eickhoff 1985) represents the only other

1 The latest comprehensive works are Heinrich's 1984 book *Die Paläste im alten Mesopotamien* and to a lesser extent Turner's 1970 article "The State Apartments of Late Assyrian Palaces." Both works have been influential in shaping our understanding of these palaces and many of their interpretations are still valid today. Important contributions addressing specific buildings or aspects have been written by Margueron (1995, 2005), Reade (2000, 2002, 2008), Russell (1991, 1998, 1999) and Turner (1970b, 1976, 1998).

Middle Assyrian royal palace from the Assyrian heartland whose architecture is known in some detail, albeit very fragmentarily. The next known palace appeared more than 300 years later, when Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) constructed the Northwest Palace[2] in Kalḫu (Fig. 1). Its architecture differs considerably from the two Middle Assyrian palaces and sets the standard for the palace architecture of the Late Assyrian period. From a modern perspective the architectural tradition of the Late Assyrian period, first seen in Assurnasirpal II's palace, appears as if without precedent.

Its novel quality is probably exaggerated by the archaeological hiatus. The description of Tiglath-pileser I's (1114–1076 BCE) palace in Nineveh (RIMA 2: A.0.87.10: 63–77) is already quite reminiscent of the Late Assyrian period. Door colossi were constructed (RIMA 2: A.0.87.11) which, though described differently from the later Late Assyrian door colossi, were probably similar in nature to the colossi known from the Late Assyrian period (Maul 2000, especially 23–28). Stone reliefs with pictorial decoration seem absent, but other modes of decoration existed. Reliefs of basalt and "white limestone" decorated the lower parts of important rooms in Assur (RIMA 2: A.0.87.4: 63–65) and Nineveh (RIMA 2: A.0.87.10: 62). Inscribed reliefs were found in Assur (Orlamünde 2007; Pedde and Lundström 2008: 167–69). On one inscription mentioning the palace at Nineveh, Tiglath-pileser I states that "I portrayed therein [that is, the palace] the victory and *might* which the gods Assur and Ninurta, the gods who love my priesthood, had granted me" (RIMA 2: A.0.87.10: 76–77). This could refer to wall paintings, but also to tapestries; a text from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I mentions the presence of two tapestries decorated with pomegranates (?), a goat, rosettes, cities, a "farmstead" (*dunnu*) and two images of the king (Köcher 1958: 306–307, iii.27'–38'). Thus, as Pittmann (1996: 352) argues, "[t]he clues in the archaeological and textual record suggest that the Neo-Assyrian form of both historical annals and visual narrative generated by the court of the Assyrian kings was established at least from the time of Tiglath-pileser I."

The Multiplicity of Royal Palaces

The royal palaces of the Late Assyrian Empire can be described as a multiplicity, whose exact composition, nature and operation are still unclear. Palaces existed in all of the main Assyrian centers. The Assyrian Empire should be understood as multipolar. Cities such as Assur, Nineveh and Arbela all possessed important temples and palaces (Radner 2011; Reade 2011). Nonetheless, at any given moment, only one of these palaces appears to have functioned as the primary palace of the empire. The city in which it was located can likewise be described as the primary royal city during that time.

2 Many Late Assyrian palaces are named after their location on the citadel where they were discovered. All palace names used in this article are modern, mostly deriving from the excavations of Layard.

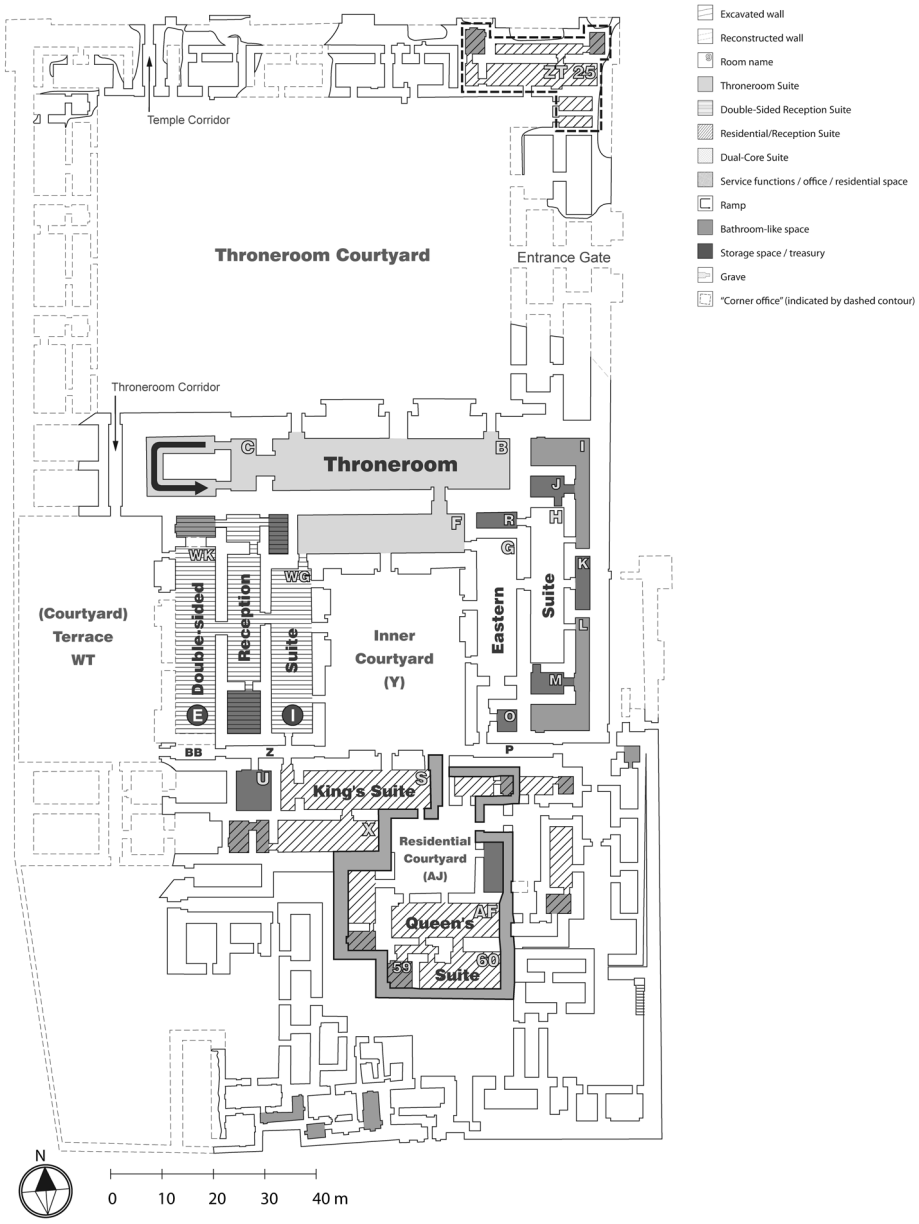

Figure 1: Floorplan of the Northwest Palace in Kalḫu. Drawn by author, based on Paley and Sobolewski 1987: plan 2; Reade 2002: fig. 2.

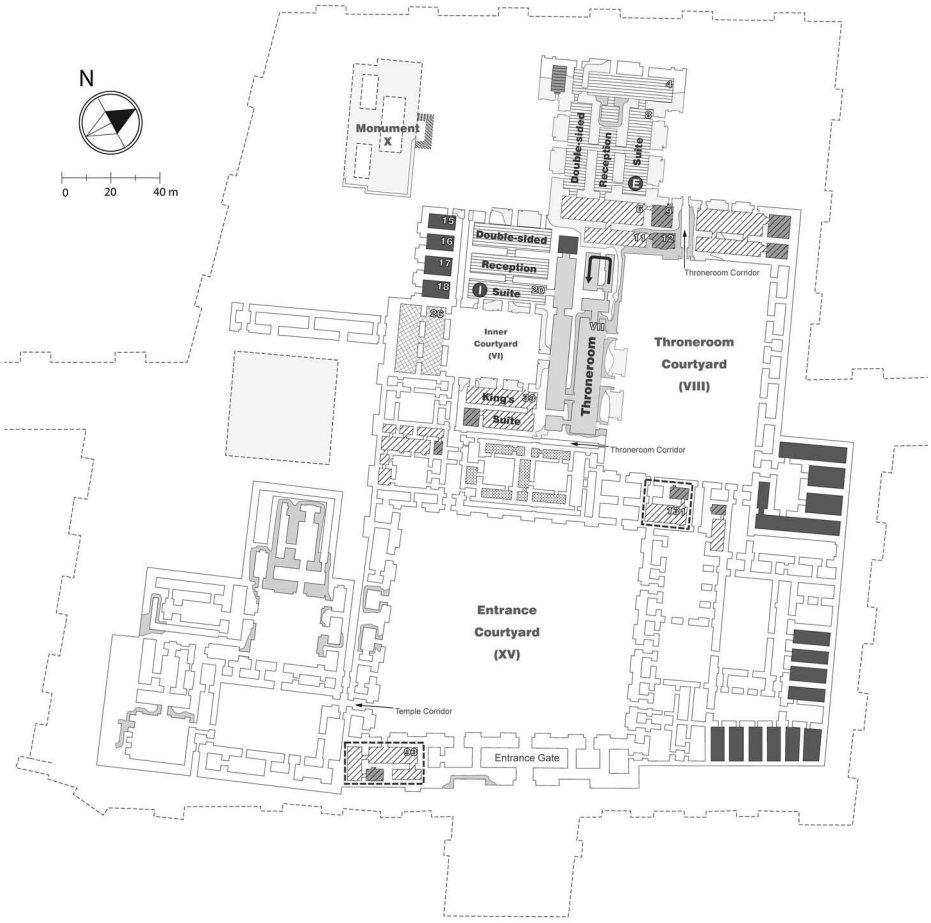

Figure 2: Floorplan of Sargon's Palace in Dur-Sharruken. Drawn by author, based on Botta 1849: pl. 6; Loud et al. 1936: fig. 22; Place 1867: pl. 3. Note that a large part of the floorplan is conjectural.

It can be argued that throughout the entire Late Assyrian period only three primary palaces existed (Kertai 2013). Assurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace in Kalḫu (Nimrud) was the main palace for approximately 150 years, after which Sargon's Royal Palace in Dur-Sharruken (Khorsabad) (Fig. 2) took over this status for a very short period of time. During the last century of the Assyrian Empire, Sennacherib's Southwest Palace in Nineveh (Fig. 4) functioned as the primary palace. Other royal palaces, such as Tiglath-pileser III's (744–727 BCE) so-called Central Palace and Esarhaddon's (681–669 BCE) Southwest Palace, both in Kalḫu, were never finished, whereas Assurbanipal's North Palace in Nineveh was simply too small to have replaced the primary palace of the period (Kertai 2013).

The empire contained a second type of monumental palace, which is usually called an Arsenal or Review Palace (see Dalley and Postgate 1984: 2). Here the name Military Palace is used to stress its combined palatial and military nature. The designation Military Complex would probably be more accurate as Military Palaces were always part of larger establishments. The general Akkadian designation was *ekal māšarti*. A textual description of such a complex is known first from the reign of Sennacherib, who mentions that it was intended "for the care of the camp, the stabling of the horses and the storing of things in general" (Luckenbill 1924: 131, H4 i 56). The most famous excavated structure of this type was located in the lower town of Kalḫu and is often referred to in scholarship as Fort Shalmaneser after its founder Shalmaneser III (Mallowan 1966: 369–470).

Each new primary royal city that was established entailed the construction of a new Military Palace. Sargon's city contained Palace F (Heinrich 1984: 170; Loud and Altman 1938: 75–78), whereas Sennacherib's Nineveh housed this structure on and around Nebi Yunus (Scott and MacGinnis 1990: 64–67, 71–72; Turner 1970b).

Based on the royal inscriptions and the limited sizes of the palaces known from Assur, Nineveh is likely to have functioned as the primary royal city in the centuries before Assurnasirpal II established Kalḫu. The royal palaces in Nineveh constructed by Tiglath-pileser I were especially monumental (Engel 1987: 170–72; Luckenbill 1924: 128–34, H2; RIMA 2: A.0.87.10: 63–77; A.0.87.11). Nothing of a similar monumentality is known to have existed in Assur. The main Military Palace is also likely to have stood in Nineveh from at least this time onwards. Assur-resh-ishi I (1132–1115 BCE) mentioned restoring the *bīt kutalli*, or Rear Palace (RIMA 1: A.0.86.4: 4) – the name of Nineveh's Military Palace – which suggests that it was already in existence by then.

The Spaces of a Late Assyrian Royal Palace

When discussing Late Assyrian palaces it is helpful to remind oneself of the spatial dimensions involved. The palace was filled with massive rooms and was by all accounts colossal. The throneroom, the largest room within each palace, usually measured a staggering 500 sq. m. Such space could easily have accommodated a thousand people (though getting them in and out of the room would not have been easy). Even the bathrooms reached 25 sq. m in size. In general we do not know the height of rooms, but we do have some clues to help us. The most important among these is the known minimum height of the throneroom of Residence K in Dur-Sharruken (Loud and Altman 1938: 90, pl. 88). The collapsed wall paintings found on the floor of the room were at least ten meters high, though its upper part was missing. Loud reconstructed the original height of the wall painting as 12.80 m and concluded that the room must have been at least 14 m high. Even though Residence K was palatial in nature, it can be assumed that the walls of royal palaces could reach even higher. The

main royal thronerooms are thus likely to have been at least 14 m and may well have been higher.

Second Stories

Even though the presence of second stories is sometimes assumed (see, for example, Winter 1993: 31), its archaeological basis is dubious. Three fundamental problems exclude their presence in general. First, any second story needs a means to reach it, but most Assyrian palaces lack staircases, except for the primary stairwell (actually a ramp) that was located in the Throneroom Suite. This ramp was only accessible from the throneroom, a location that seems especially inappropriate as the main means to reach upper floors. It was therefore almost certainly not intended for general use, but closely connected to the functioning of the throneroom itself. Other staircases or ramps are generally absent from the main parts of the palaces.

This requires the reconstruction of additional staircases or the acceptance that the second story was hardly accessible. Staircases are usually so inconveniently placed that Loud (Loud and Altman 1938: 27) suggested that the architects had simply realized the need for their existence too late during the building process. It is, however, unlikely that the Assyrian architects would have repeated this mistake in each palace constructed over the 250 years under discussion. Staircases or ladders of wood could theoretically have existed, but can be excluded on practical grounds. Additional monumental staircases would have concealed the stone reliefs that blanket all monumental rooms, and traces of the holes needed for the construction of wooden staircases have not been found.[3] Simpler staircases would lack the monumentality typical of these palaces. It is difficult to image the king or queen having to climb ladders to reach a second story.

Second, reconstructing a second story often entails the introduction of a different architecture than the one known from the ground floor. The spatial organization of the ground floor could not have been copied on a second story, since the ground floor used courtyards as a means of communication. The problems arising from reconstructing a second story come to the fore in the work of Margueron (2005), the only scholar to propose reconstructions for second stories. His work introduces numerous ways to answer the challenges of organizing the spaces of a second story. These included columned halls, balustrades and new types of suites. Such modern-day creativity is problematic. Architecture is a socially constrained way of organizing space, making any reconstruction that requires the introduction of spatial concepts that are not substantiated by the known architecture suspect.

3 The remains of wooden staircases were found in the entrance gate of the Military Palace of Kalḫu (Oates 1962: 7–8, pl. II).

Interpreting room fills forms a related problem. The presence of fragments of the same object in different rooms has been taken to indicate the original existence of a second story, in whose rooms such objects would once have been intact. This argument must be considered a fallacy. It usually requires the assumption that the walls of a second story differed from those on the ground floor, which is impossible on constructive grounds. It is highly implausible for an object to end up in two rooms by falling down. It would require one part of an object to have fallen through the walls separating the ground floor rooms. In almost all cases the scattering of objects should be blamed on looting, destruction and post-Assyrian use.[4]

The third fundamental problem associated with a second story is how light and air would have gotten into the spaces of the ground floor. Late Assyrian palaces, and most Mesopotamian buildings, were relatively closed to the outside. A second story would have taken away the means to get light into rooms, especially the internal ones, and would have complicated their ventilation.

The absence of second stories is certainly not the result of a lack of technical know-how, but must be considered a conscious decision. In general it can be assumed that any beam capable of bridging the large width of the rooms found in these palaces would have been strong enough to accommodate a second story. The width of the walls was not related to the potential presence of a second story, as assumed by Mallowan (1966: 168–69, 378), but seems correlated to the height of the respective rooms, as was already argued by Loud (Loud and Altman 1938: 19–20). The width of the walls appears to have been intended to counter the instability associated with their height.

The height of the main ground floor rooms, which must often have reached 10 meters, and the accompanying number of stairs would certainly have diminished the enthusiasm for second stories. The available space on the ground floor appears to have sufficed to accommodate all relevant functions without the need to extend the palace vertically.

A New Typology for Late Assyrian Palatial Suites

Following Loud's work (Loud and Altman 1938: 10–13), most scholars have interpreted Late Assyrian palaces as consisting of different suites. This remains one of the most fundamental aspects of Late Assyrian palaces. The best-known typology is presented by Turner (1970a). Later typologies, such as those of Margueron (2005) and

4 In the case of the reliefs labeled S' and V' that fell into Rooms S, T and V of Nineveh's North Palace, these rooms are located in the basement; the upper rooms, that is the rooms associated with the reliefs S'–V', were located on the ground floor. These rooms must have been located next to, rather than on, the basement rooms. It would have been impossible to place reliefs on top of room S without them crashing down. The upper rooms were thus regular ground floor rooms.

Manuelli (2009), have added details and improved upon Turner. There are nonetheless still several problems with these attempts. In any typology one of the basic questions concerns the criteria by which differences are defined as significant. Typologies have the tendency to mix different criteria. Several kinds of typologies are conceivable when it comes to palatial spaces. The most obvious are architectural and functional in nature. Most typologies have been predominantly architectural, focusing on morphology.

Turner distinguishes between the "Principal Reception Suite," which forms his designation for the Throneroom Suite, and six other types. This is still a valid representation of our understanding of Late Assyrian palaces, in which the Throneroom Suite stands out as the only suite whose designation seems beyond doubt, simply because the architectural setting for a throne has been preserved, though not the throne itself. Nonetheless, several rooms were designed to accommodate thrones, basically turning them into thronerooms as well. Functionally speaking, each room where a throne was placed can be called a throneroom even when the room was not fitted with each permanent installation seen in the morphologically defined throneroom.

Turner's other types are functionally less clear and are assigned letters as a means to distinguish them. They are mostly categorized on the basis of morphological aspects with the range of rooms forming the main guiding principle. Reception Suite Type A is basically the catchall category, which contains all suites consisting of two rows of rooms. Types B-F represents the larger suites, but are only populated by a few examples each. The differences between types B–D are negligible, whereas type E is represented only by the fragmentarily known Town Wall Palace in Kalḫu. Reception Suite Type F is typified by its position within the palace.

Turner does not state the aim of his typology, aside from noting that Late Assyrian palaces show remarkable similarities that could be categorized. Except for the Throneroom Suite, none of the other types seem to have any intrinsic value, except for those interested in morphology. The range of rooms, and thus the size of the suite, is unlikely to have been functionally significant.

While we normally cannot assign specific functions to suites, one can trace some relevant differences that could correspond to the potential uses a suite was able to accommodate. The typology presented here, based primarily on the notion of agglutination and secondarily on location, is intended to assist in this goal. Each type is based on an architectural core that provides significance and coherence. Two of the resulting types follow Turner: the Principal Reception Suite and Reception Suite Type F. Three further types of suites can be designated. Some of these types are defined by more than just architectural aspects, but are also found at specific locations within the palace.

This new typology should not be used too rigidly. Some suites share aspects of different types and several suites appear to be unique. Such suites indicate that the heterogeneity is greater than our typology would suggest. Nonetheless, the clustering

of the palatial suites into the proposed types seems too consistent to be meaningless. The similarity between palaces and the tradition in the architecture of suites is certainly not random and must correlate, at least to some extent, to a consistency in use.

The Throneroom Suite

The Throneroom Suite consists of a throneroom, a ramp and an internal room that connected to an inner courtyard. Later Throneroom Suites possessed a bathroom next to the throne dais. The architectural differences between Throneroom Suites were minimal, making it one of the most conservative spaces of the Late Assyrian period. The suite was two-sided and could be entered from the main forecourt (i.e. the Throneroom Courtyard) and an inner courtyard. A strong hierarchical difference existed between the two sides, with the throneroom clearly forming the front of the suite. The two-sidedness did allow the throneroom to be entered from the back. Such back entries were rare in the other suites, which usually only possessed a frontal way of entering. The arrangement seen in the Throneroom Suite was not exclusive to the king. Most elite residences, especially those from Dur-Sharruken (Loud and Altman 1938), possessed a similar set of rooms.

The Double-Sided Reception Suite

The Double-Sided Reception Suite is located behind the Throneroom Suite and represents Turner's Reception Suite Type F.[5] The core of the suite consists of two reception rooms, usually separated by a T-shaped series of rooms. The suite is defined by its two-sidedness, which allowed its two reception rooms to be accessed from two directions. Though its two sides are comparable, their place within the palace created differences in accessibility. Its "external" side is always directly accessible from the Throneroom Courtyard through a corridor.[6] This "external" reception room forms a secondary throneroom. The "internal" reception room is located along an inner courtyard and is often connected internally to the Throneroom Suite.

5 Double-Sided Reception Suites were found in Kalḫu's Northwest Palace (Fig. 1), Kalḫu's Military Palace (rooms T10 and T20–28), Sargon's palace in Dur-Sharruken (Fig. 2), The Military Palace at Dur-Sharruken (Palace F, rooms 16–19) and probably in the palace at Til-Barsip (rooms 44–47).

6 The "external" reception room is indicated by an encircled "E" on the plans. The "internal" reception room is indicated by an encircled "I" on the plans

The Residential/Reception Suites

The core of this type of suite is formed by a large room combined with a bathroom. The bathroom usually takes up one-third of this core. The absolute and relative size of these bathrooms is remarkable and might from our perspective seem like a waste of precious space, but it was clearly an essential and important room. This core probably represents the minimum requirements to be able to talk of a residential suite. It could be enlarged to create more monumental suites. It is doubtful whether suites without a bathroom had residential uses. Single rooms are usually better understood as storage spaces.

We should certainly be cautious in using the word residential. First, we do not know the exact uses of spaces, in part because their original furnishing has not been preserved. Second, it is unlikely that pure bedrooms existed. We should assume that most spaces were multifunctional. The more monumental suites clearly served as spaces for receptions and other court activity, possessing reliefs, elaborate wall paintings, tram-rails, etc. Nonetheless, one can argue that it is this type of suite that was most suitable for sleeping regardless of the other uses it might also have possessed.

Whether this type of suite can be called residential is probably partly dependent on its location. Suites located in the most accessible parts of the palace are more likely to have formed the office of palace functionaries and are less likely to have been residential in nature. Many officials will have worked on a daily basis within the palace. The more important among them appear to have possessed their own offices. One of the most common and monumental offices was located in the corner of the Throneroom Courtyard, often close to the main entrance. The best preserved "corner office" was found in the Northwest Palace of Kalḫu (Fig. 1, Rooms ZT 21, 25–27 and perhaps ZT 32–34). Another one may be reconstructed in the Military Palace of Kalḫu (Rooms SE 21–23). Everything within Sargon's palace in Dur-Sharruken is architecturally unclear (Fig. 3), but Rooms 131–33 could represent a similar office. Entrance courtyards seem to have possessed their own corner offices, for example, Rooms 92–95 in Sargon's palace in Dur-Sharruken and Rooms NW 1–3, NE 51–54 in the Military Palace of Kalḫu.

The most monumental Residential/Reception Suites of the Northwest Palace in Kalḫu (Fig. 1, Rooms S–X) and the Southwest Palace in Nineveh (Fig. 4, Rooms 7–8) can be argued to be somewhat different. Their similarity is remarkable, especially if one considers the considerable changes in the architecture between both palaces. The architecture of the suite in the Northwest Palace was typical for that palace. The suite of the Southwest Palace was, however, unique within the palace precisely because it was so similar to the suite of the Northwest Palace. At least in these two palaces, it can be argued that these suites represented the King's Suite. They formed the most monumental Residential/Reception Suites and were thus likely intended for the king. Their locations within the palace were comparable. Both surrounded the courtyard behind the Throneroom Suite and were positioned between the monumental part and the more residential/service area of the palace.

Service Quadrants

Many royal palaces possess square units consisting of smaller rooms surrounding a courtyard. They are found in the palace of Tarbiṣu (Miglus, forthcoming), can be reconstructed in the Southwest Palace of Nineveh (Fig. 4; Reade 2000: fig. 11) and potentially in Sargon's palace in Dur-Sharruken (Fig. 2). None of these quadrants has been properly excavated and/or published. Their inventories and possible installations are unknown. They were residential in nature and/or intended as service units. They are always located next to the monumental suites, set apart and closely connected to the outside. The small size of their rooms and their location in the center of the palace seems to make them quite suitable for service functions such as kitchens, which are otherwise lacking.

The Dual-Core Suite

The fifth general type of suite can be called the Dual-Core Suite. It consisted of two central rooms of similar length, with the internal room often being somewhat less wide, surrounded by different kinds of spaces. The agglutinative nature of Late Assyrian suites is especially pronounced in these suites, which could possess an especially high number of attachments.

Dual-Core Suites appeared for the first time in Sargon's palace in Dur-Sharruken. They became common in later royal palaces. Most such suites were found in the Southwest Palace of Nineveh, which contained at least five suites of this type.[7] Rooms F-I of Nineveh's North Palace appear to have formed a small Dual-Core Suite as well (Barnett 1976: pl. 6). The only known suite of Esarhaddon's Southwest Palace in Kalḫu was similar in nature (Layard 1849: pl. 100). In the more monumental Dual-Core Suites, large rooms were placed perpendicular to the central ones, basically expanding the core with one or two additional rooms.

This type of suite does not so much represent a functional category, but rather a changed architectural idiom. It coincided with the emergence of a set of interrelated architectural features that transformed the functioning of Late Assyrian palatial spaces. These changes can be summarized as an increased fluidity of the internal space. This was achieved by increasing the number of internal doors, aligning them with those on the outside and, if present, with those further inside. These internal doors were often wider than the internal doors in earlier palaces. Some doors could no longer be closed and were filled with columns, which could rest on statues (for example, in Esarhaddon's Southwest Palace in Kalḫu; see Barnett and Falkner 1962: pl. CVIII–CIX). The increased fluidity and monumentality of the interior did not

7 (1) rooms 9 and 10, (2) rooms 24–27, (3) rooms 29–41; (4) rooms 51s-59; (5) rooms 65–68.

Figure 3: Schematic plan of Sargon's Palace in Dur-Sharruken showing the different quadrants of the palace. Drawn by author.

change the relation to the outside. Even though the suite was more permeable, with the aligned doors creating visual axes from the outside, the external facades were as closed as they had been throughout the Late Assyrian period.

This suite can alternatively be interpreted as a rearranged Double-Sided Reception Suite, whose two reception rooms are joined. This removed the double-sidedness and forced the attached rooms to surround the core. The consistency of having two reception rooms in one suite seems noteworthy. If functionally significant, it would suggest that the two rooms of the Double-Sided Reception Suite were intended to be used simultaneously, at least sometimes. Both types of suites could accommodate a similar amount of people, but played out the related hierarchies of distance differently.

Making a Palace from the Available Suites

It is sometimes assumed that the Assyrian king was inaccessible and located deep inside his own palace (see, for example, Grayson 1986: 10; Parpola 2000: 30). Access was certainly curtailed, for instance by locating palaces on citadels, but seclusion does

not appear to have been an important architectural principle. The throneroom, the preeminent room of the king, was always the first state apartment encountered when entering the palace. It meant that the royal throne was only one door away from the most accessible part of the palace. Being near does not necessarily represent an ease of access, but it is clearly not a sign of seclusion. The throneroom can be understood as embodying a closeness to the king, regardless of his physical presence. This pattern continues with respect to the Residential/Reception Suites. The most monumental suite of this type, and thus most likely to have belonged to the king, was the first such suite to be encountered. Both the Throneroom Suite and the King's Suite possessed a threshold quality within the palace, placing the king to the fore in his own palace.

The palaces are typically thought to have been divided into a public and a private realm. This duality is often expressed in modern scholarship by means of the Akkadian words *bābānu* and *bētānu* (for example, Heinrich 1984; Postgate 2004: 222). There are two problems with this assumed duality. First, the duality is absent from the Late Assyrian textual sources, making it a modern construct. Attestations of the Akkadian terms can best be understood as referring to the inside and outside of the palace (Kertai, forthcoming b). Second, the existence of private and public spaces or zones seems doubtful. These are modern concepts whose heuristic value when describing the Late Assyrian period is dubious. Viewing space through the lens of zoning represents a Modernist approach. It forms an unnecessary layer in the spatial analysis of these palaces.

Spatial analyses are best done on the level of the suites. Late Assyrian palaces can be described as a combination of independent suites that were pavilion-like in their organization. They were, however, not articulated as such. Visually, the different suites were all integrated within the larger palace. Most suites were accessible from a courtyard and could only be entered from one side.[8] Suites were autonomous in the sense that they did not depend on other suites or rooms for their accessibility. One did not need to pass through one suite to reach another suite. This independence was achieved by connecting all courtyards through corridors.

Three types of corridors are especially noteworthy. The "throneroom corridor" lay next to the throneroom and connected the Throneroom Courtyard with the rest of the palace, thereby circumventing the throneroom. Thus, though the throneroom was the first monumental reception room to be encountered, one did not need to pass through it to reach the rest of the palace. The "temple corridor" connected one of the forecourts with the main temple precinct next to the palace.[9] "Descending corridors"

8 The Throneroom Suite, The Double-Sided Reception Suite and the King's Suite are among the few suites possessing multiple entrances. These, however, represent only a small sample of all palace suites.

9 A "temple corridor" was found in Kalḫu's Northwest Palace (room ZT 2), in Dur-Sharruken's Royal Palace (room 90) and Nineveh's Southwest Palace (only the reliefs associated with this corridor were found, they are nowadays designated as IT; see Barnett *et al.* 1998: pls. 658–74).

connected the center of the palace with the outside, providing a side entrance into the palace.[10]

The pavilion-like structure of the palace had two main consequences. First, routing in the palaces was dependent on corridors and courtyards. This routing was direct and concentrated along only a few corridors. This facilitated control and made it easy for areas to be closed off if so desired.[11] The alternation of relatively dark corridors and light courtyards funneled movement through the palace. This will have made the monumentality of the courtyards even more striking. The corridors were located, one could say hidden, in the corners of courtyards and do not seem to have differed architecturally from the smaller entrances into the nearby suites. The second consequence of this spatial organization was the absence of alternative routes within the palace. Routing was mostly predetermined both within each suite as well as in the palace at large.

These characteristics typified the organization of all Late Assyrian royal palaces. Differences were nonetheless many. It cannot have been easy to combine the conflicting requirements of pomp and circumstance, security, tradition, seclusion and practicality. The rest of this article will look at the three primary royal palaces of the Late Assyrian period in order to trace the main differences and continuities in their architecture.

Assurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace at Kalḫu

The Northwest Palace (Fig. 1) is the only Late Assyrian royal palace whose inner parts are largely known (though see below). The palace was organized linearly, with the main entrance being located in the northern part of the palace, east of the Throneroom Courtyard. Further east additional forecourts could have existed (Kertai 2013: 11–13; Postgate and Reade 1976–1980: 311; Reade 2002: 196). The Throneroom Courtyard was, as always, centered on the facade of the throneroom.

Two monumental suites lay behind the Throneroom Suite – the suite centered on Room G (here called the Eastern Suite) and a Double-Sided Reception Suite to the west. Together these three suites formed the State Apartments of the palace. They surrounded an inner courtyard (Y). The primary rooms of these suites contained several features also found within the throneroom and were therefore strongly associated with the king. These include the placement of the king's image in the middle of the short wall, an internal and external door in close proximity and an axial approach from the opposite side of the room through a vestibule.

10 A "descending corridor" was found in Kalḫu's Military Palace (rooms R1-R7), Nineveh's Southwest Palace (room 51n) and Nineveh's North Palace (rooms A, R, S and W).

11 For the officials in charge of security within the palace see Radner 2010.

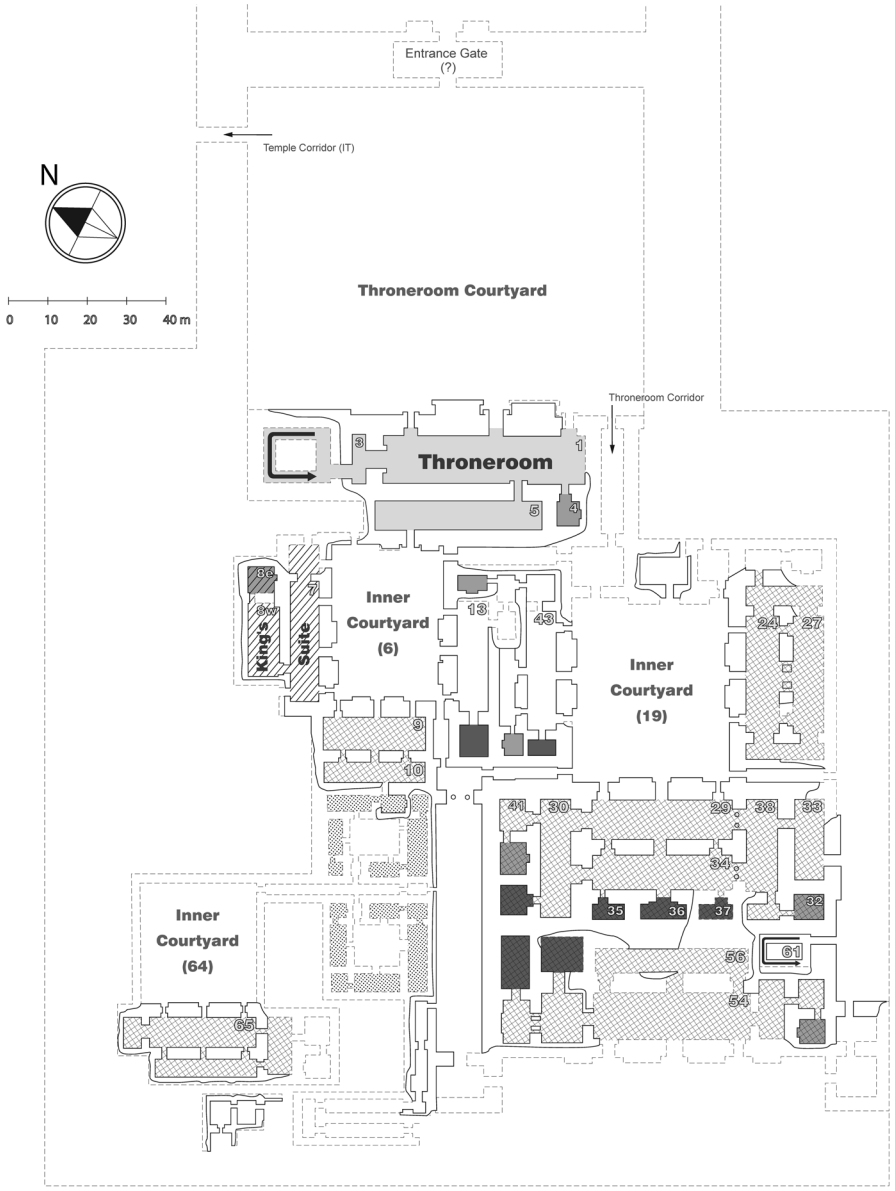

Figure 4: Floorplan of Southwest Palace in Nineveh. Drawn by author, based on Layard 1853b: pl. 71.

The palace shows a predilection for asymmetry, which manifests itself in irregularly placed doors, the organization of facades and the general absence of spatial axes. The pavilion quality of Late Assyrian palaces was countered in this palace by an inner route surrounding Courtyard Y, which connected all four major suites surrounding

this courtyard. This route seems circular, but the direction in which the apotropaic figures within its doors face suggests that it emanated from the throneroom (Kertai, forthcoming a). It can thus be associated with the king (Russell 1998: 714). The added internal connections are absent in later palaces.

The architecture of the Eastern Suite seems unique in the corpus of Late Assyrian architecture. The suite is unusual both for its architecture as well as for the topics depicted on its reliefs (Russell 1998). Room G is, architecturally speaking, a typical reception room, with Room H functioning as its retiring room. The number of rooms attached to Room H (that is, Rooms I-M and R) is, however, atypical for such a room. Rooms I-M and R were all paved, but can be divided into two bathrooms and five storage spaces. While attention is usually concentrated on the bathrooms, the quantity of storage spaces may be more remarkable. They could have stored items needed for rituals and other events taking place in the suite, but could also represent a primary function, for instance as treasuries (especially Room K). These functions are not mutually exclusive. The suite seems to have integrated receptions, storage and purifications (Brandes 1970; Russell 1998).[12]

It could be argued that the suite represents a predecessor of the Dual-Core Suite as they appear in Sargonic period palaces.[13] The Eastern Suite can similarly be interpreted as having a core of two main rooms to which a series of other units were attached. The core of the suite was not organized as regularly and symmetrically as the later Dual-Core suites, but this correlates to the general absence of symmetry in this palace. While such association provides few clues for understanding the use of the suite it would suggest that it was not as unique as it appears to be. The main problem with this association is the absence of a similar suite in Sargon's Royal Palace in Dur-Sharruken. This makes its historical continuity somewhat problematic.

The absence of similar apotropaic scenes in later Dual-Core suites is not necessarily functionally significant. No later palace blanketed its walls with apotropaic figures in a similar way as the Northwest Palace did. Attitudes to decoration, and the protection by apotropaic figures, were much more differentiated than architectural ones. Decoration often seems only weakly correlated to the use of spaces, though the link may have been stronger in the Northwest Palace.

Two corridors, BB/Z in the west and P in the east, separated the State Apartments from the southern part of the palace. The southern part can be reconstructed as the service area of the palace. The area contained storage spaces, the burials of several Assyrian queens (Hussein and Suleiman 2000; Curtis *et al*. 2008) and a few suites. The southern part was organized around a single circular route that consisted of a series of courtyards in the south and Corridors BB/Z and P in the north. Corridors BB/Z and P

12 For alternative reconstructions see Brown 2010; Richardson 1999–2001.

13 Turner (1970a: 200–202, n. 120; 1998: 29–30) already argued that this suite could be compared to the suite surrounding Room 29 in Sennacherib's Southwest Palace.

formed the only direct connection between the State Apartments and the southern part of the palace.

Between both areas lay two more monumental suites (S-X and AF, 59–61). The suite surrounding Room S can be identified as the King's Suite.[14] The suite surrounding Room AF represents the second most monumental Residential/Reception Suite and could therefore have belonged to the queen. The associated Courtyard AJ can be described as the residential courtyard of the palace. Together with the King's Suite, the suites surrounding it represent most of the known Residential/Reception Suites found in the palace. This residential courtyard was directed towards the State Apartments. It was not directly connected to the southern service area of the palace.

The Royal Palace of Sargon II (722–705 BCE) at Dur-Sharruken

The Northwest Palace remained the primary palace of the empire for approximately 150 years until Sargon finished his new palace in Dur-Sharruken (Kertai 2013: 11–18). Sargon's palace is organized into an irregular square, subdivided into four quadrants (Fig. 3). Two quadrants are taken up by large courtyards. The southern quadrant forms the Entrance Courtyard (XV), whereas the northern quadrant represents the Throneroom Courtyard (VIII). The eastern quadrant was occupied by service functions. What we would normally consider a Late Assyrian royal palace only occupies the two northwestern quadrants (Fig. 2). This area contained most functions that were present in other royal palaces and can therefore be described as the palace proper. A fifth quadrant, to the southwest, is formed by the main temple precinct. This scheme is unique within the corpus of Late Assyrian architecture.

The size of the western quadrant is similar to the Northwest Palace south of its Throneroom Courtyard. Its constitutive parts are also comparable. Most decorations that must once have existed have disappeared, but some general tendencies in their application are nonetheless noticeable. These considerations are mostly based on the excavations carried out by Botta (1849). In comparison to the Northwest Palace two aspects stand out. First, the reliefs in Sargon's palace put the emphasis on other, partly new, subjects. Apotropaic figures are used sporadically and more strategically. Their absence seems partly substituted by an increased amount of military scenes, but the most striking change is the increased number of courtiers on the walls of the palace. The palace put more emphasis on the Assyrian elite and their relations with the king. The largest beneficiaries of these new subjects were courtiers and the crown prince

14 Reade (1980: 84) was the first to assign this suite to the king; Russell (1998: 697–99) later came to the same conclusion.

Sennacherib. The images of the crown prince were almost as numerous as those of the king, often forming a joint scene with the crown prince standing in front of the king in his role of introducing courtiers, tribute bearers and prisoners. The second main development in the decoration of the palace is to be found in the monumental courtyards, which were now decorated with figurative reliefs throughout.

The increased amount of State Apartments could no longer be grouped around a single courtyard. The additional suites were placed on the western edge of the palace on and around the terrace. The circulation patterns necessarily are more complex as direct connections between all suites are no longer possible. The Inner Courtyard (VI) behind the throneroom was still surrounded by State Apartments, but the additional monumental suites were placed on the palace terrace. A Double-Sided Reception Suite was located in its usual position behind the throneroom. While the basic features of this suite can readily be identified, the suite had only a few associated spaces, and it seems unlikely that further spaces can be reconstructed.

The terrace is dominated by a large protruding suite. It is by far the largest suite within the palace, consisting of eleven rooms. It represents the only suite in the palace whose architecture and decoration are well preserved. At first sight, the suite might appear to have been a monumental version of a Double-Sided Reception Suite, with the additional rooms being extensions of the familiar central part. Some of these extensions formed a typical Residential/Reception Suite (Rooms 6, 9 and 11–12). Within the unique organization of this suite can be traced the emergence of a different spatial conception that would become common in the seventh century, especially in the form of the Dual-Core Suites. The complexity of the suite formed a departure from the principles that had typified, and would continue to be common within, Late Assyrian palace architecture. Late Assyrian palatial suites had always been characterized by routes that branched out, mostly ending in dead ends. After entering a suite, routing was predetermined, with internal rooms usually only possessing a single door. This suite differed by introducing alternative routes. This was further enhanced by the multiplication of external entrances. This fundamentally changed the way movement and access could be organized. The internal rooms, oriented perpendicularly in relation to each other, increased the size of these suites. The added internal connections and related fluidity of space would become more pronounced during the seventh century, but would largely remain an internal aspect of architecture. With a few notable exceptions, usually found in corridors, Assyrian architecture would not open up towards the outside.

The Southwest Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh

Less than a year after the inauguration of Sargon's palace, Sennacherib started construction on a new royal city following the death of his father. He did not return to Kalḫu, but chose to expand the ancient city of Nineveh. Even though Sargon's Royal

Palace had been more monumental than its predecessor, it seems that it was already insufficient the moment it was inaugurated (among other possible motives for his move). The Southwest Palace (Fig. 4) drastically increased the quantity of monumental suites. Its suites were larger and their interiors more monumental and fluid. The expansion of the State Apartments was accompanied by a shift away from the courtyard behind the throneroom. Whereas Sargon had focused on the palace terrace, the Southwest Palace introduced additional internal courtyards. The organization of the Southwest Palace can be summarized as a combination of interlocking zones emanating from the Throneroom Courtyard and centered on different internal courtyards. This allowed the different zones of the palace to be separated from each other, while keeping the distances between them to a minimum.

The decoration of the Southwest Palace differed from Sargon's Royal Palace in multiple ways (Russell 1991: 179–222). Some of these changes can be described as a homogenization. Whereas Sargon's palace introduced a wide range of topics on its reliefs, the Southwest Palace used only military campaigns to decorate its rooms. Any correlation that might have existed between the use of rooms and the topics depicted on its walls were no longer present. Only courtyards and corridors depicted other topics, such as the procurement of building material (Russell 1987). A second homogenization occurred in the doors. Sargon's palace had used apotropaic figures intermittently and strategically. The doors of the Southwest Palace were, however, protected by apotropaic figures throughout (Ornan 2004).

In the suite surrounding Rooms 7 and 8 one can recognize the King's Suite. It was probably the most monumental Residential/Reception Suite of the palace, but is currently the only such suite known. Its organization is atypical for this palace, but similar to the King's Suite in Assurnasirpal's Northwest Palace. The traditionalism of the King's Suite is especially remarkable in a palace where only a few suites still bore a resemblance to the suites of the Northwest Palace.

Courtyard 19 forms the largest courtyard behind the throneroom. It is surrounded by some of the most monumental suites within the palace. The largest, and therefore probably most important, suite was formed by Rooms 29 to 41. It represents a Dual-Core Suite comprised of a large number of attachments surrounding a core of Rooms 29 and 34. It formed the location of the two most famous discoveries made within this palace: the Lachish reliefs in Room 36 (Ussishkin 1982) and Assurbanipal's library (Room 41). Its core was expanded by two perpendicular rooms (30 and 38) placed on either end. This created secondary routes between the two central rooms, while also giving access to additional rooms. The monumentality and organization of this suite are unprecedented for a Late Assyrian palatial suite.

The floorplan of the western part of the palace is mostly unknown. The area was separated from the state apartments, but did not lack in monumental suites. The area contained at least one large courtyard (64), whose dimensions seem comparable to the courtyard behind the throneroom. Only the suite occupying the western side of this courtyard is known. Inscriptions indicate it to have been built for Queen Tashme-

tum-sharrat (Galter *et al*. 1986: 31–32). The themes used for the reliefs in Courtyard 64 and Room 65 continue the military themes seen throughout the palace (Layard 1853a: 584–86). Nothing in its decoration or architecture is stereotypically "feminine," nor indicates that its inhabitant was lacking in status or power. On the contrary, the preserved architecture is comparable with the monumentality seen in other parts of the palace. The suite does not appear to have been residential in nature, but represents a standard Dual-Core Suite, resembling the suites surrounding Rooms 9/10 and 24/27 in size as well as in its known organization. Courtyard 64 was, however, relatively far removed from the other state apartments. Like most other royal palaces an external entrance could have existed in this area, as suggested by Turner (1998: 36).

Conclusion

What we call Late Assyrian palace architecture is likely a continuation of older traditions, which originated early, probably in the centuries after 1200 BCE. These traditions were undoubtedly inspired by surrounding cultures and traditions. Babylonian interactions are likely to have been the most influential, but cannot be followed due to a lack of known Babylonian architecture. Several influences can be traced to the so-called Neo-Hittite and Aramaean kingdoms west of Assyria. The Assyrians selectively incorporated aspects from these cultures, most famously the use of decorated orthostats, which they transformed into internal decorations (Bonatz 2004: 399). The pavilion-like organization of Late Assyrian palaces may also have been influenced by these palaces (Brown 2008: 219–20).

Late Assyrian royal palaces show a tendency toward "Assyrianization" similar to what has been discussed for other arts (Feldman 2011: 142–43; Thomason 2005: 140–45). Feldman's description of this process as "the making of something other into something Assyrian" seems to be a good description of the traceable Neo-Hittite and Aramaean influences. This Assyrianization can be described as part of the identity formation of Assyria's elite, but must also represent distinctly Assyrian uses of space related to the organization of its court and associated protocol.

The idea of a Late Assyrian royal palace is remarkably consistent over time, which makes the corpus easily recognizable. Once the notion of an Assyrian palace emerged, architectural changes appear to have been generally avoided. Most changes were incremental, but the resulting differences between the Northwest Palace in Kalḫu and the North Palace in Nineveh are considerable. Most changes can be understood as consequences of the increased number and size of the State Apartments. This necessitated new ways of organizing the palace. The main increase in monumentality occurred inside the suites, which expanded in size, became more fluid and were decorated more lavishly. These changes are likely to reflect changed palace activities, which emerged during the Late Assyrian period, especially in the seventh century.

From an architectural viewpoint the palaces can be described as conservative. While full of creative solutions, the conservatism of its spaces and key architectural principles must have been intentional. Each Late Assyrian royal palace can be defined as a multiplicity of suites, each with its own, quite stable, role to play within the palace. The suites themselves were made through a process of agglutination, but so was the palace itself, which consisted of individual pavilions, merged into a single ensemble and connected through corridors and courtyards. This resulted in a lack of alternative routing within the palace. In combination, these principles created palaces that are easily recognizable as Late Assyrian. Their conservatism was selective and much less pronounced in their decorations, whose placement and topics differed considerably.

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