

The Urbanism of Some Old Babylonian Capital Cities

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ABSTRACT

The period between the fall of Ur in 2004 BC and the fall of Babylon in 1595 BC, which was nearly five hundred years old, - the two cities built according to urban planning that reflects a conscious mentality of what is to be built, - has been witnessed a revolution in civil and urban planning, so the cities of Nippur, Isin, Larsa and Babylon (we did not touch upon the city of Babylon in this article because there are no architectural plans that prevented groundwater Excavators can access it), Uruk and Eshnunna were built among the capitals, whether they are political or religious capitals, and Haradum, Nerebtum and Shaduppum are among the towns. Where the architectural facilities were distributed in their places after the construction of the temple and the palace, all of them were surrounded by a wall, and some cities were fenced with more than one wall, All this is evidenced by archaeological fieldwork, whether excavations or surveys.

Keywords: Amorites ,Gula,Old Babylonian, Babylon, Isin, Larsa.

العمران وأنماطه -مدن من العصر البابلي القديم-

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الخلاصة:

لقد شهدت المدة الزمنية بين سقوط مدينة اور في 2004 قبل الميلاد وسقوط بابل في عام 1595 ق.م، والتي قاربت خمسمائة عام، - المدينتان المشيدتان وفق تخطيط عمراني ينم عن عقلية واعية لما يراد ببناءه، - ثورة في المدنية والتخطيط العمراني، فشيدت مدن نهر ايسن ولارسا وبابل (لم نتطرق لمدينة بابل في بحثنا هذا لعدم وجود مخططات عمرانية لها منعت المياه الجوفية المنقبون من الوصول له)، والوركاء واشنونا من بين العواصم سواء كانت عواصم سياسية او دينية، و خرادوم ونيربتوم وشادبوم من بين المدن الصغيرة، كل تلك المدن سواء كانت عواصم او مدن صغيرة شيدت وفق تخطيط عمراني مدروس، حيث وزعت المنشآت العمرانية باماكنها بعد بناء المعبد والقصر وقد أحاط بجميعها السور، وبعض المدن سورت بأكثر من سور واحد، هذا كله دللنا عليه الاعمال الحقلية الاثرية سواء كانت تنقيبات او مسوحات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاموريون، كولا، العصر البابلي القديم، بابل، ايسن، لارسا.

1.1 The City of Isin

Isin is one of the most important Mesopotamian cities: its name has been mentioned since the earliest historical times in texts of the Early Dynastic period and Akkadian time with the logogram IN^{ki} referring to the name of Insin or Isin.¹ The relationship of the city's name to the logogram "IN^{ki}" was previously unknown, so it was believed that the city of Isin did not exist or was not important in the Early Dynastic period. In fact, its name did not appear in syllabic writing as In-si-na^{ki}.² After the identification of the logogram with the city, this idea changed and it is now certain that the logogram "IN^{ki}" refers to the city of Isin, with the writing "IN-si-in" in the texts of the Ur III period. According to the interpretation of E. Sollberger, the letters N and S were probably pronounced as S: because of that, the name became Isin with a different division of syllables like in-si-na^{ki}, i - si - in - na^{ki}, i - si - in - na^{ki}, and also i-ši -in or i-šin.³

It is important to note here that the name of the city was written in Sumerian with the word EZEN (meaning "feast" or "celebration", which was quoted in Akkadian as "isinnu"). Writing the name of the city of Isin with this word may imply that the city had the same meaning: however, this is not certain, as the word may have been used because the pronunciation was very similar to the sound of the name of the city. In texts of the Middle Babylonian period, the name Isin was written with two signs "PA-EŠ^{ki}", which can be read as Isin or Išin.⁴

History of Isin

The archaeological evidence indicates that Isin was inhabited in prehistoric times, as seen by the presence of the pottery dated to the Ubaid and Uruk periods. Isin was also important in the Early Dynastic period and the Akkadian dynasty.⁵ In the Ur III period, its name was mentioned in many texts, and after the fall of Ur, Isin became the heir of the city in the land of Sumer.⁶ It became the dominant power of the Ur III legacy from Dilmun to Arrapha,⁷ ruling over great cities such as Uruk, Ur, Eridu, Umma, Lagash, Kazallu and others.⁸

With the separation from the authority of the Ur III Dynasty, Ishbi-Irra managed to establish a ruling dynasty in Isin.⁹ Sixteen kings belonging to various families ruled the city. The power of these kings lasted for a period of over two centuries (nearly 230 years).¹⁰ The kings of this dynasty, after the founder Ishbi-Irra, are: Shu-ilishu, Iddin-Dagan, Ishme-Dagan, Lipit-Ishtar, Ur-Ninurta, Bur-Sin, Lipit-Enlil, Erra-Imitti, Tappaya, Enlil-bani, Zambia, Iter-Pisha, Ur-dukuga, Sin-Magir and Damiq-ilishu, the last king of this dynasty.¹¹ It should be noted that some kings had a greater role and were responsible for more activity than others. The first four kings were able to expand the influence of this kingdom until it became the dominant force not only in the central and southern regions of ancient Mesopotamia, but also in the north.¹²

During the reign of the fifth King Lipit-Ishtar, the authority of the kingdom was reduced and its importance was primarily due to the issuing of a code law, known as "the laws of Lipit-Ishtar".¹³ Subsequently, a king who did not belong to the family of Ishbi-Irra and was of Sumerian origin (according to his name, Ur-Ninurta) came into power. During his reign, the kingdom lost many of its possessions and its control was reduced to the sole city of Isin.¹⁴ A great force characterized the following king, Bur-Sin. He re-conquered many previously lost cities such as Nippur, Ur, Eridu and Uruk. He also promoted important construction works.¹⁵ After the reign of Bur-Sin, the kingdom began to weaken and recede. This happened

during the reign of king Lipit-Enlil (information on him and his activities is scanty).¹⁶ King Erra-Imitti was his successor. The most important event of his reign consists in the phenomenon of the substitute king:¹⁷ the gardener Enlil-bani was, at first, temporarily crowned as Erra-imitti's substitute in response to an evil prophecy, then became the ruling king after the death of the real one¹⁸. One of the characteristics of the reign of the substitute king Enlil-bani is the conclusion of the rebellion led by Tappaya. His rule was also characterized by force and he was able to restore the military prestige of Isin. The reign of king Enlil-bani established the important role of the kingdom of Isin in a time of conflicts. Next to Isin, other important cities ruled in central and southern Mesopotamia such as Larsa, Babylon and Uruk.¹⁹ Around 1794 BC, the power of the first dynasty of Isin began to diminish during the reign of its last king, Damiq-ilishu.²⁰ It then fell under the control of the Larsa dynasty during the reign of Rim-Sin in 1794 BC. It was finally subject to the First Dynasty of Babylon at the time of King Hammurabi starting from the seventh year of his reign.²¹

The Gods of Isin

Gula is the patron deity of the city of Isin.²² She was called "the great doctor", and was symbolized by a dog.²³ Since happiness and misery come from the gods who, however, can also send diseases, human health is especially dependent on the goddess Gula, as she heals diseases and restores wellbeing.²⁴ Gula was the daughter of the god of heaven Anu; later it is said that her father was Enlil; she had the titles of "Nin-Isina" and "Nin-karak",²⁵ her temple (é-gal-mah) was Isin.²⁶

Gula also has other names, including Nintinuga and Meme,²⁷ specialists in medicine and healing, also known as Kurribba; this name, meaning "she was angry at the mountain", was also known in the Early Dynastic period in the much earlier texts of the cities of Fara and Abu Salabikh, as well as in the texts from Susa.²⁸ Enlil commissioned the goddess Gula with his own tasks, including the punishment of offenders; he appoints Gula with the duty and emphasizes the role of commander of the soldiers in the war by saying:

"When the heart of that mountain rises up, Enlil, and when he draws his eyebrows at a foreign country or decides the fate of a rebellious country, the rebellious father of Enlil sends me and turns his eyebrows toward him".²⁹

The family consists of the goddess Gula, her husband Pabilsag, her son Damu and her daughter Gunuru. Sacrifices were given to them in Isin and in other cities.³⁰ Isin was not only a center for the worship of this divine family, but also of other gods as well. In Isin, the god Dumuzi and the god Ningishzida were also worshipped with sacrificial offerings;³¹ the goddess Inanna was also worshipped in the temple Sig₄-me-zi-du, and received gifts from the kings of Isin;³² other deities include Amurru, Me-siksl-la, Nargal, Dagan of the é-di-kud-kalam-me. Ninurta, the son of Enlil and possibly married to the goddess Gula, was given an important role among the gods³³ by the first kings of Isin.

Location of Isin

The ruins of Isin, known now as Ishan-Bahriyat, are located 24 km south of Afak and 28 km southwest of Nippur.³⁴ The ruins of Isin cover an area of 200² hectares to the east of the current Euphrates River and are located in a barren desert in which the nearest source of water today lies 16 km from Isin.³⁵

Isin was located on the river "Isinnitu", which may be either a western branch of the main Euphrates, or an eastern stretch of the Arakhtum River, after its passage through the city of Marad. The city's ruins occupy a large area but do not exceed the elevation of the surrounding plain. It seems there is no Ziggurat in the city of Isin,³⁶ and the highest altitude is no more than six meters. The city's outer perimeter rises only one foot from ground level. An ancient watercourse may surround the city, and this can be clearly observed in the northern, eastern and southern sectors thanks to the presence of snails and shellfish on the surface.³⁷

The location of the city of Isin is very important. It is considered one of the most important cities of Sumerian civilization. It is close to Nippur, Adab, Shuruppak, Abu Salabikh, Borsippa and Marad, and this position gave it great importance at the beginning of the Old Babylonian period, as it was the center of cultural irradiation and the political axis of ancient Mesopotamia and controlled a large area at the time.³⁸ The site of Isin is insufficiently known to get a clear idea of its urban shape (Fig. 2): surely the Gula temple held a central position and it was surrounded by dwelling quarters, but not much more than this is known³⁹.

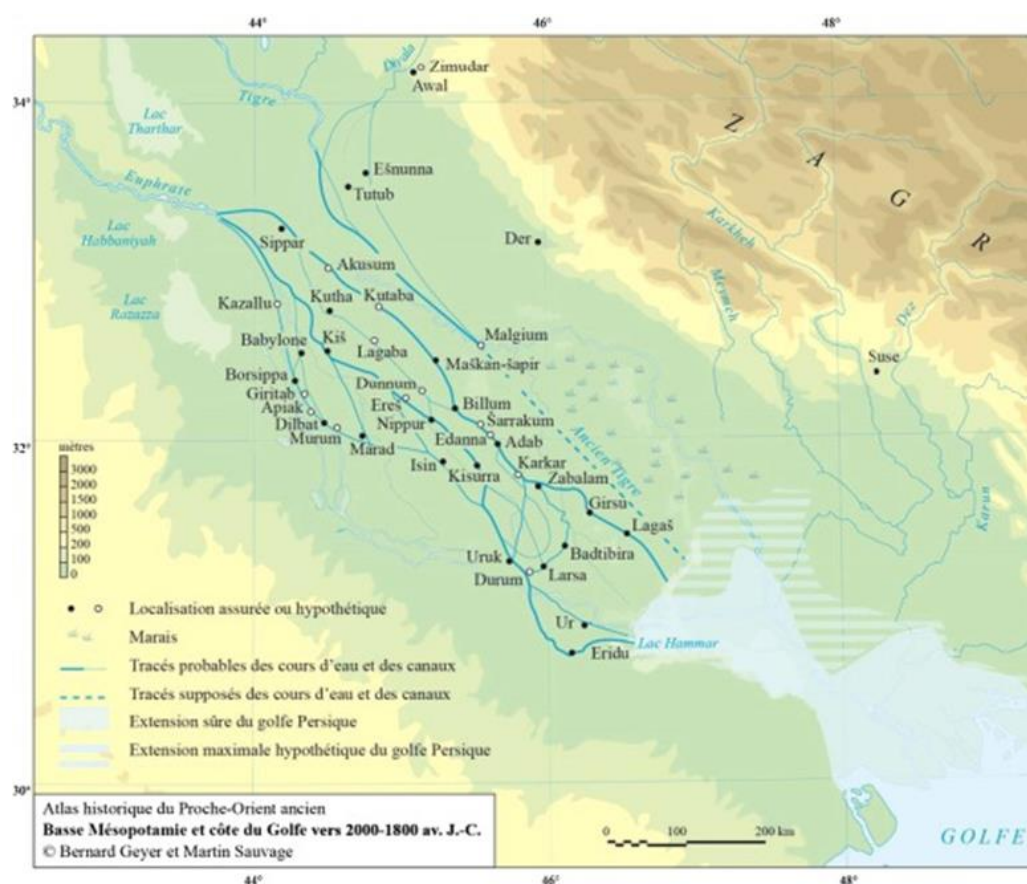


Fig.1 Map showing the location of the cities

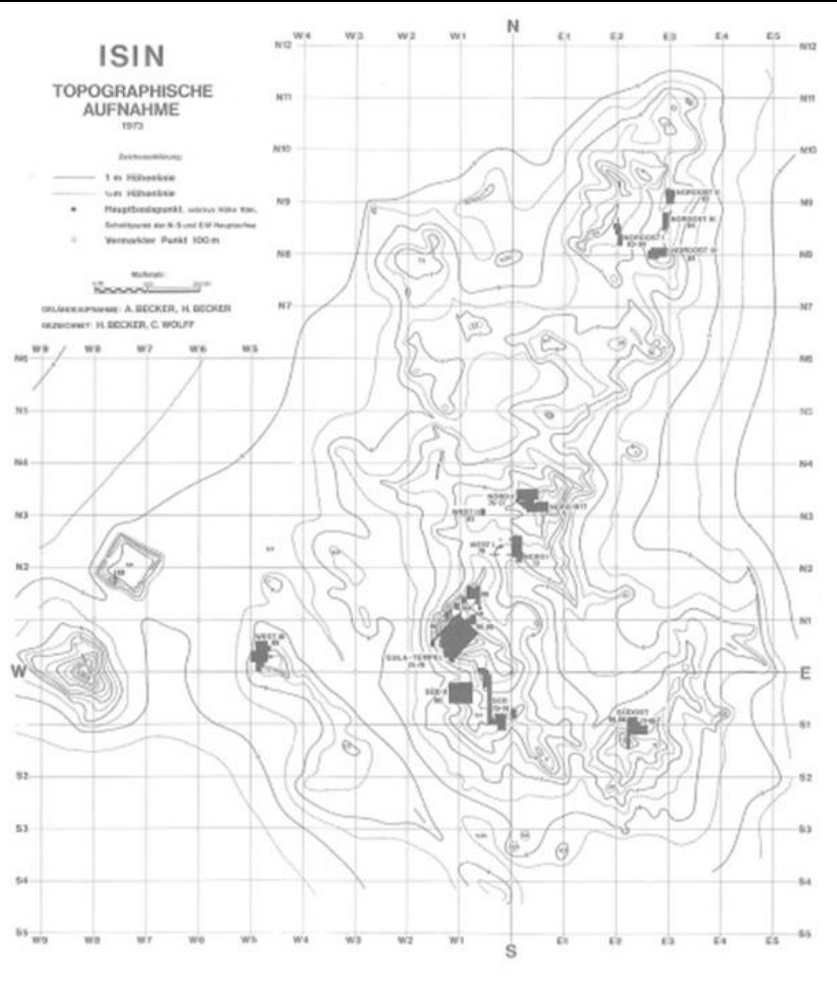


Fig. 2 Topographic plan of Isin

The city of Larsa

Larsa is one of the important Mesopotamian cities mentioned in the earliest historical times and may have been mentioned previously in the texts of the Jemdet Nasr Period (3000-2900 BC), as well as in the Early Dynastic Period with the signs (UD-AB). The modern name of this city is Tell al-Sankara.⁴⁰

The name of the city was written as UD.UNU^{ki} since Pre-Sargonic times, while the Sumerian name was Ararma: a.ra.ar.ma^{ki} = La-ar-sa.⁴¹ The city of Larsa was mentioned in letters, omen and historical texts in the form of ud-unug^{ki} / Larsa.⁴² This name continued to be written in the Ur III period, from the beginning of the reign of King Ur-Nammu. The city of Larsa was also mentioned in the Torah as “Ellasar”.

History of Larsa

During the reign of King Ibbi-Sin, the last king of the Ur III dynasty, many cities became independent from Ur. Larsa was the first: in 2025 BC it achieved its freedom under Naplanum who founded a dynasty within the city eight years before the independence of Ishbi-Irra in Isin.⁴³ The kings of Larsa called themselves “kings of Sumer and Akkad”, kings

of Larsa and kings of Ur, as the kings of Ur III had previously done. They used Sumerian as their official language.⁴⁴

Information about the first period of the rulers of Larsa from the time of Naplanum, and the three rulers who succeeded to the throne of the kingdom after him, namely Emisum, Samium and Zabaia,⁴⁵ is scanty and for the most part unknown. Despite the long reigns⁴⁶ of the four early kings, the Larsa dynasty did not see any expansion of its influence and the size of its power. The early Larsa dynasty remained in the shadow of its rival Isin: this situation lasted for sixteen kings.⁴⁷

The real birth of the kingdom of Larsa took place with King Gungunum. He is the first among the kings of Larsa to increase the power of the reign and its prestige. Gungunum was able to expand the city's influence all the way to the Gulf region by controlling trade in the area and penetrating within Elam thanks to his extensive military campaigns.⁴⁸

Historical sources related to Gungunum indicate that he made a pact with the kingdom of Eshnunna to strengthen his position after the kingdom of Isin began to demonstrate signs of weakness. This friendly relationship between Larsa and Eshnunna was positive and successful under the reign of Gungunum and Abi-Sare,⁴⁹ but it deteriorated during the reign of Sin-iddinam of Larsa.⁵⁰ Sin-iddinam attacked Abi-Sare and destroyed his kingdom. The attack may have been carried out in cooperation with the king of Assur, in order to diminish the military and political power of Eshnunna and to limit its expansion. The reigns of Warad-Sin and Rim-Sin, who managed to establish commercial ties with the kingdom of Eshnunna, were characterized by tranquility and prosperity. The relations between the two parties grew until the King Šilli-Sin ascended the throne of Eshnunna. He made a pact with Hammurabi to attack Larsa. The attack on Larsa took place during the 30th year of the reign of the Hammurabi, while he attacked Eshnunna in his 31st year of reign.⁵¹

The power and expansion of the kingdom of Larsa led to the establishment of economic relations with regions such as the Elamite cities and the Gulf. Larsa controlled the Gulf trade because of the operations led by Gungunum and subsequent kings in this region.⁵² The expansion of Larsa and its growing influence led to the outbreak of a conflict with the city of Isin. As a result of this conflict, the kingdom of Isin lost many of its properties and eventually its territorial power did not go beyond the borders of the city itself. The kingdom of Larsa expanded and strengthened its power during the reign of the last king, Rim-Sin, who was able to extend the boundaries of his kingdom and reach Uruk (1801 BC). In his thirtieth year, Rim-Sin managed to control and subjugate Isin and eliminated his enemies and rivals. This event was so important to him that he dated all the thirty remaining years of his reign from the fall of Isin.⁵³

Two years after the fall of the kingdom of Isin, Hammurabi became king of Babylon, and turned the city into the only strong rival of Larsa and Rim-Sin. Hammurabi, who was able to overthrow the kingdom of Larsa, conquered the city in 1763 BC.⁵⁴

The gods of Larsa

The main god of Larsa was Shamash (Šamaš), and his symbol was the sun disk. The god was known in Sumerian as "dUTU", while the newcomers (Akkadians) called him Šamaš. Šamaš was son of Sin and Ningal and the twin brother of the goddess Ishtar / Inanna. The wife of the god Shamash was known during the Sumerian period as Sherida, Aya in Akkadian, who was worshipped as the wife of Shamash in the city of Larsa.⁵⁵

The Temple of the God Shamash in the city of Larsa was named É-Babbar (the White Temple).⁵⁶ The temple's ziggurat was called the É-dur-an-ki, which means "bond of heaven and earth".⁵⁷ The texts indicate that there was another temple of the god Shamash in Larsa, called the Holy Throne, and the temple of É-gal-bar-ra, which means "the outer palace". The goddess Aya was worshipped in a temple beside her husband, the god Shamash.⁵⁸ The god Nergal was also worshipped in Larsa and his temple name is (É-á-ág-gá-kilib-ur₄-ur₄) ("the temple which Gathers all Decrees");⁵⁹ for other deities, there was the temple É-ú-nam-tila ("the temple of the herbs of life")⁶⁰ for the goddess Gula (Nin-Isina), the temple for the god Adad built by Rim-Sin, and the temple for the god Sin, also built by Rim-Sin in the fourth year of his reign.⁶¹

Location of Larsa

Ancient Larsa, known as Tell al-Sankara or Senkereh lies 70 km northwest of the city of Nasiriyah, 40 km from the city of Ur.⁶² The city was located on a river named Iturungal, which was a eastern branch of the main Euphrates River, and can be identified with the Kasahar-ra River which is located at a distance from the Euphrates.⁶³

The archaeological excavations, in a circular area with a circumference of 4.5 km, revealed a high elevation in the center (70 feet) which was identified as the ziggurat of the Temple of Shamash. The city may have been surrounded by an ancient mound or a lake connected to the main course of the Euphrates. This can be observed in the southern and southeastern sectors. There are a number of tributaries along the edge of the marshes that have not yet been archaeologically investigated and surveyed. Some cuneiform texts refer to the existence of another river that passed through the city of Larsa, named id-^dNanna-Šita, that is mentioned in a number of foundation bricks.

The site of Larsa which probably supplies some of the best evidence for the period (Fig. 3), other than Ur. This mega-city – ranging between 300 and 400 hectares – was encircled by city walls (although still unexcavated) and had a main street running circa north-south⁶⁴. The large residencies of the wealthy local elite were located to the north-east, while about in the middle, to the west of the main street was the palace of Nur-Adad and the enormous temple complex of the sun-god Shamash, which is known as the E-babbar⁶⁵.



Fig. 2a Middle Bronze Age Larsa

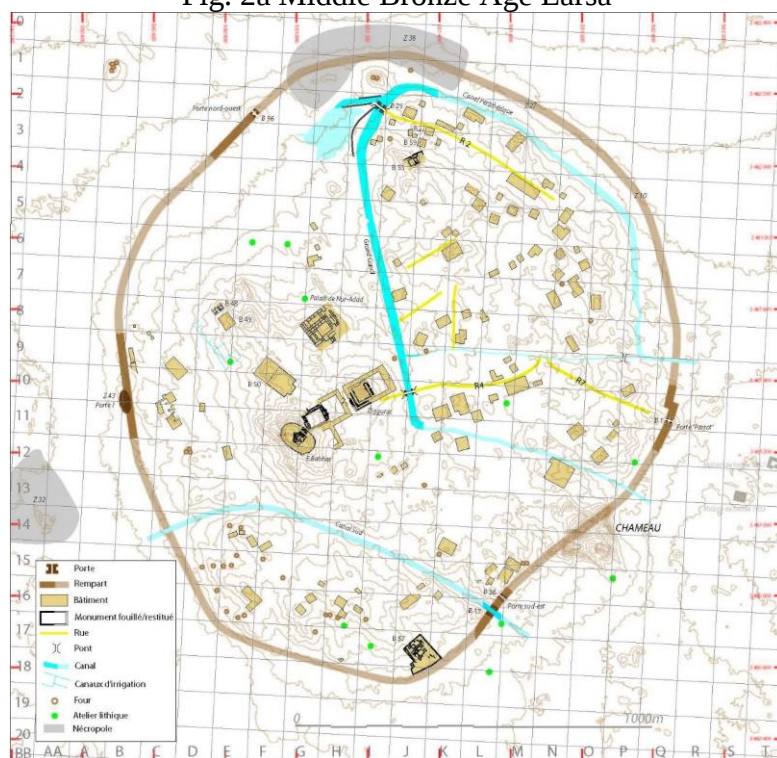


Fig. 2b Middle Bronze Age Larsa

Nippur, although not a political capital, was a religious one and the scale of its urbanism compares well with the cities mentioned above⁶⁶. On an extraordinary Kassite tablet, we have a detailed survey of the urban shape of Nippur, but it is quite certain that the previous city had a similar layout (Fig. 4): a canal crossed the city from north to south and a line of city walls encircling the town (cf. area WC) was pierced by many city gates. The excavations (Fig. 5) revealed the temenos of the Enlil temple (called Ekur) featuring a ziqqurat in the middle of it. To the west of the Ekur, the Inana temple belonged to a different type, being a large complex with two main internal courtyards and a cella of the new broad type at the very back (actually on top of the previous ED temple). Dwelling areas with courtyard houses of varying complexity ("Scribal Quarter", areas TA and TB) were excavated to the south of the temple sector⁶⁷.

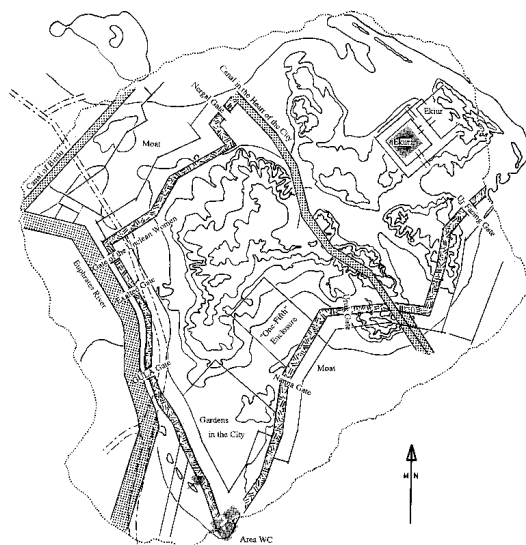


Fig. 4 Map of Nippur on a Kassite tablet

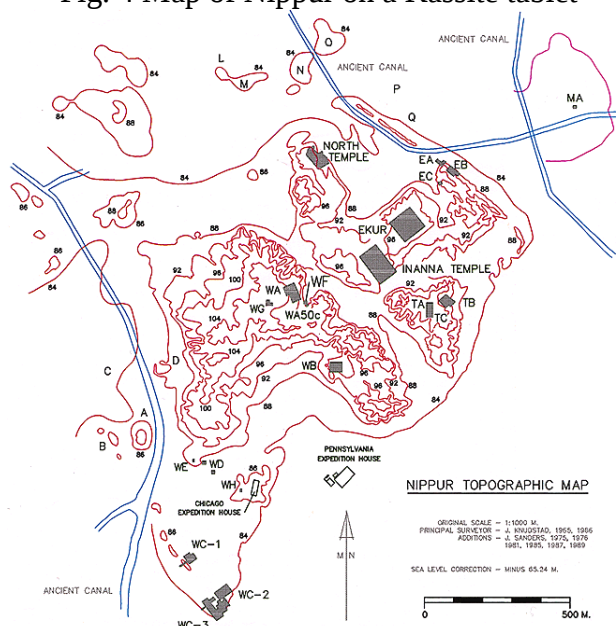


Fig. 5 Topographic plan of Nippur

The site of Mashkan-Shapir was only probed through small soundings, but the systematic survey allows us to grasp the structure of the city (Fig. 6): canals crossed it in several directions piercing the city walls and it seems that a definite functional differentiation was in place between sectors: thus, the temple and the residential sectors were clearly divided from the artisanal quarters⁶⁸.

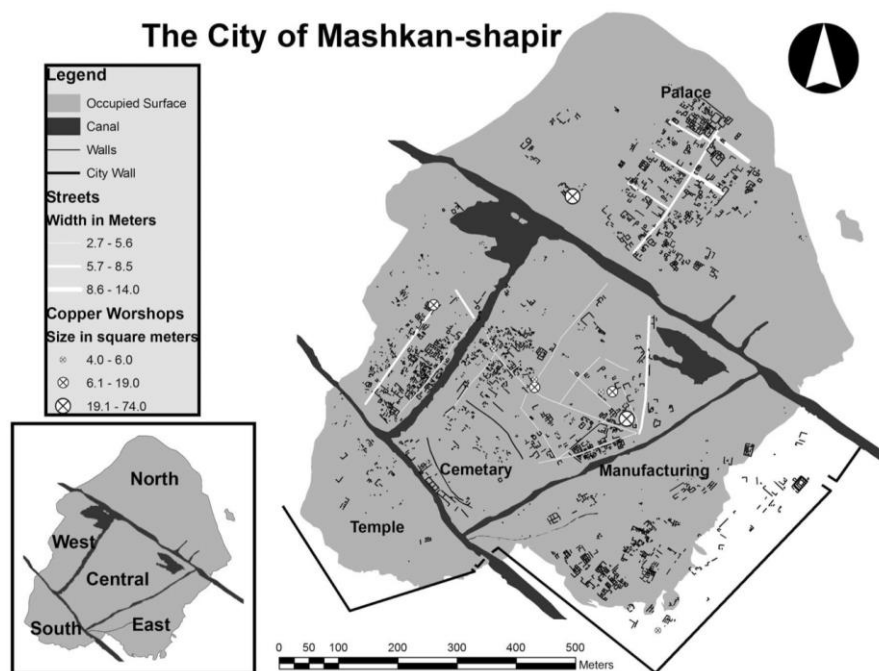


Fig. 6 Sketch plan of Mashkan-Shapir

One of the largest political entities of ancient Mesopotamia, Tell Asmar ancient Eshnunna, has been patchily explored for the time under consideration here (Fig. 7).⁶⁹ The irregularly shaped city walls enclose densely built dwelling quarters while at the center of the town there was the large palatial complex known as the Palace of the Rulers, a walled enclosure made up of different units which underwent several functional transformations during the centuries, before being substituted by the large unfinished Southern Building. The temple of Tishpak has not been identified but it is likely that it lay at the edge of the town, judging from the retrieval of Dadusha's stele in the field at the base of the mound.

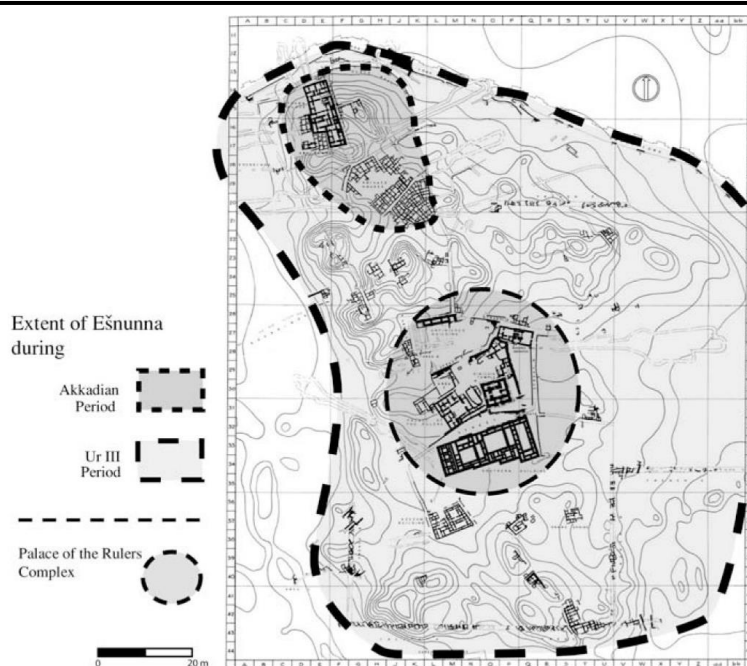


Fig. 7 Map of Eshnunna

Uruk is not well known in the Middle Bronze Age, save for the Eanna of the Neo Sumerian phase at the center of the town and the palace of Sinkashid, located near the NW city walls (Fig. 8).⁷⁰

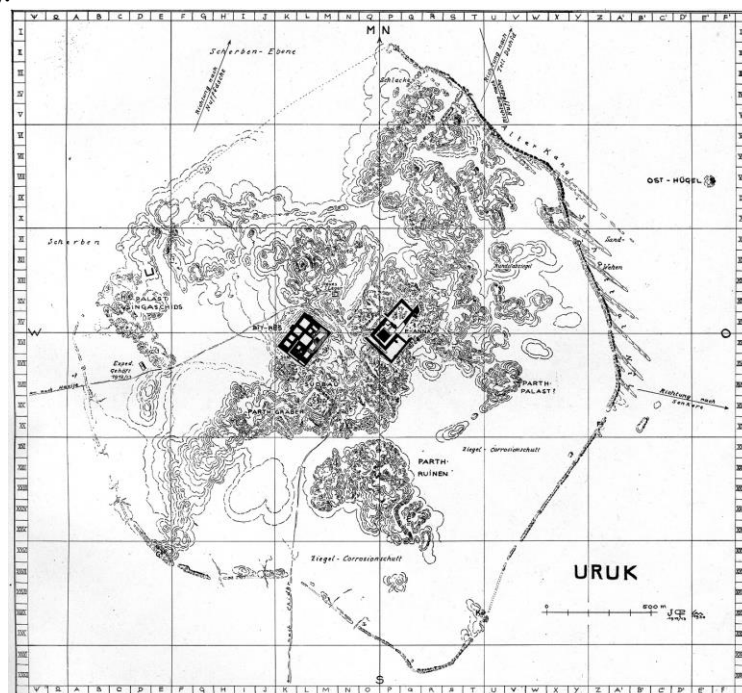


Fig. 8 Topographic map of Uruk

The Iraqi excavations at Zabalam have exposed a massive temple from the age of Hammurabi set within a densely built up urban space (Fig. 9): although more details on the urban structure are needed, it seems clear that we have here a town organized around its main monument.⁷¹

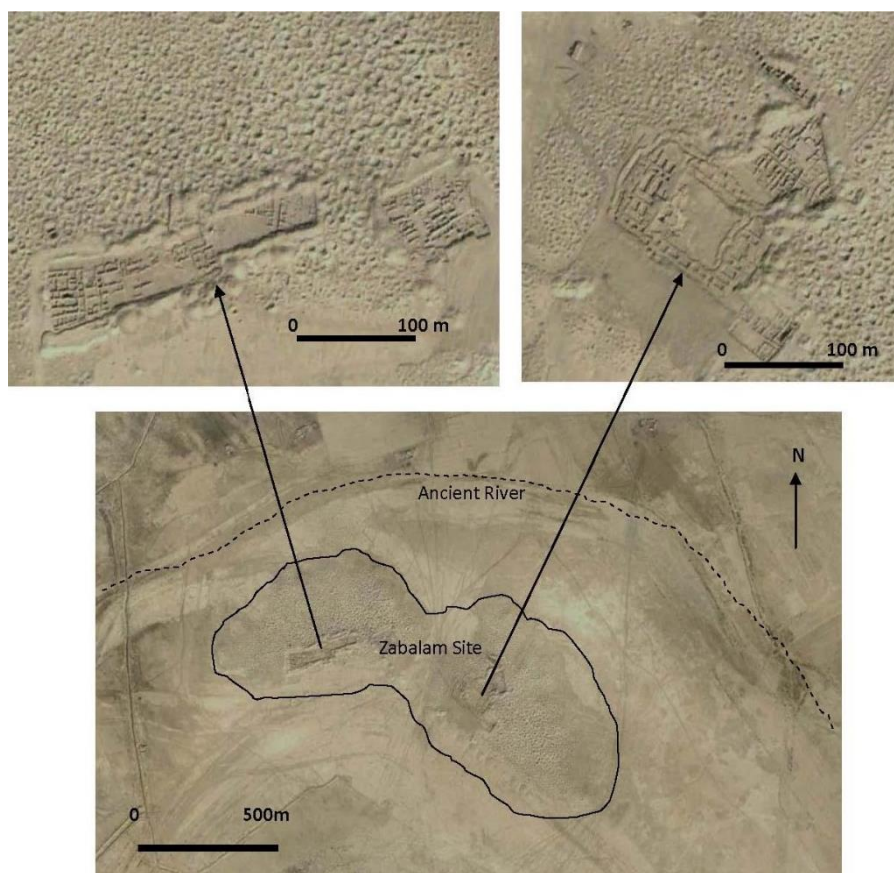


Fig. 9 Satellite imagery and site limits of Zabalam

The town of Nerebtum (Ishchali) has only been explored in a sector, though crucial (Fig. 10): behind the city gate we have the temple of Shamash, a wealthy private residence (the Seray) and dwelling quarter and the monumental complex of the Ishtar Kititum temple, most probably the largest in town.⁷²

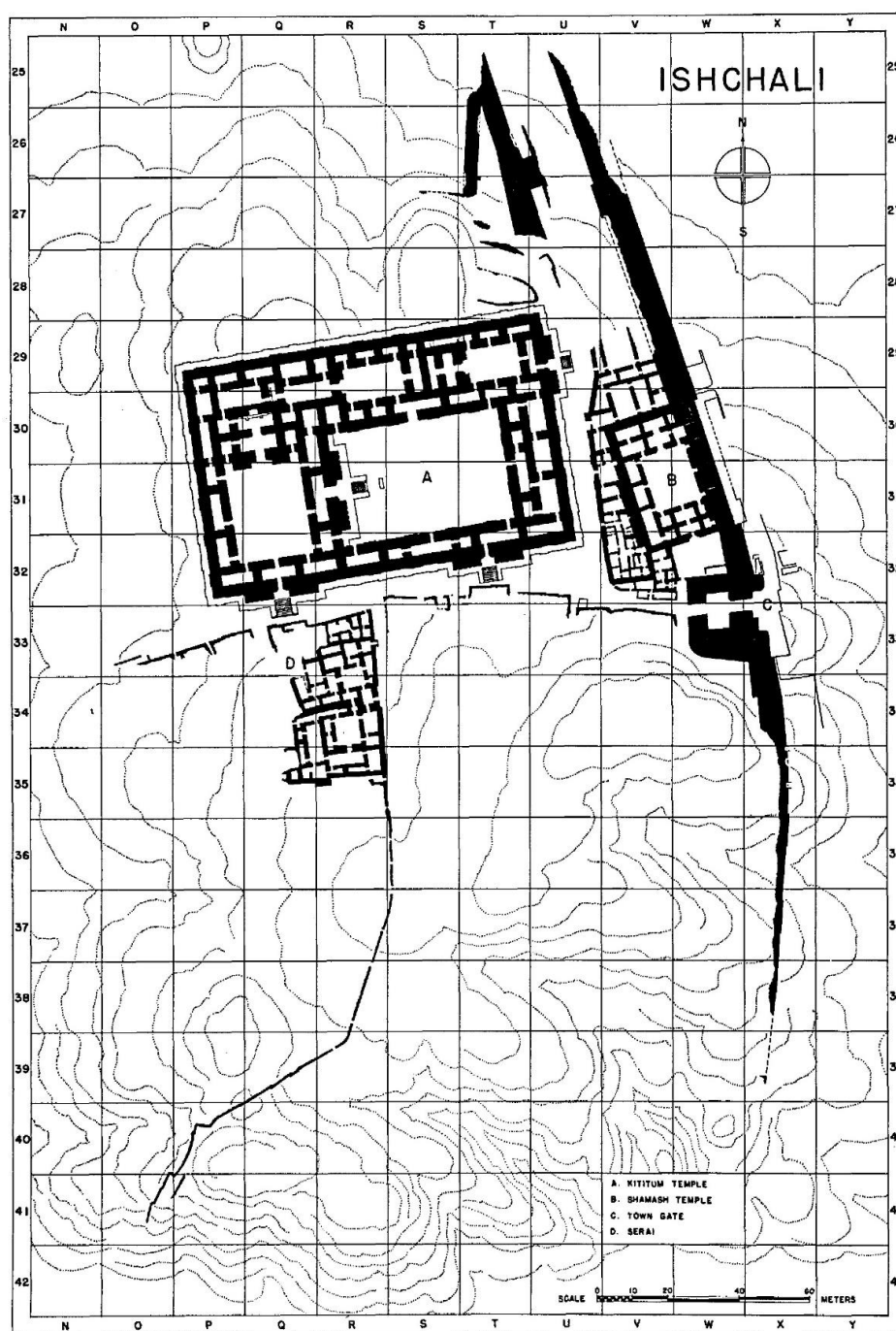


Fig. 10 Topographic map of Nerebtum

Smaller cities like Shaduppum (Tell Harmal) present in a small scale the general pattern with utmost clarity (Fig. 11): the only city gate through the city walls leads to a space on which first the main temple and the sacred quarter (opposite, to the south) are located, progressing on the main street then the governor's palace is encountered and then the densely organized dwelling quarters⁷³.



Fig. 11 Schematic plan of Shaduppum

In fact, in small cities where the public authority does not even seem to have resided, like Haradum on the Middle Euphrates (Fig. 12), the city walls with two opposite gates enclosed an area of small houses with only a temple at the very center of the town⁷⁴.

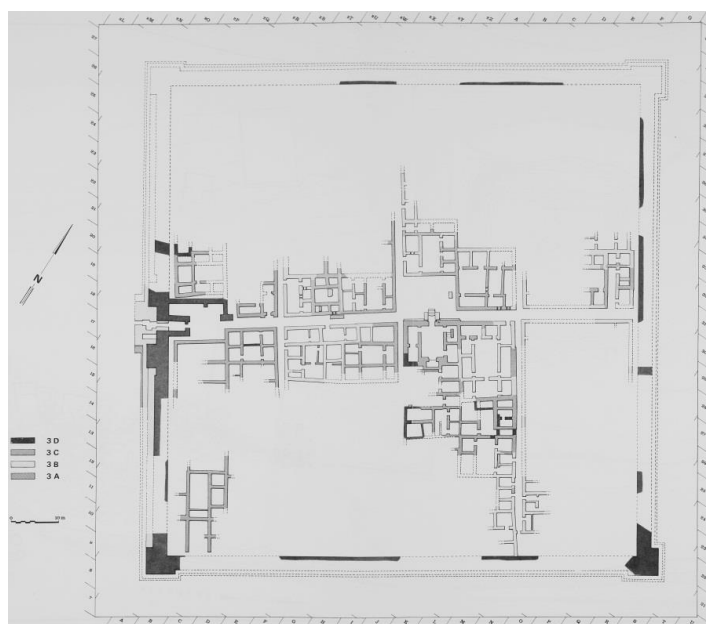


Fig. 12 Schematic plan of Haradum

The settlement on Mound D at Khafajah, ancient Tutub perfectly fits the pattern discernible thus far (Fig. 13):⁷⁵ city walls enclose a densely spaced settlement with a large temple complex in its middle, bordered by a main street c. crossing the town from North to South as at Larsa.

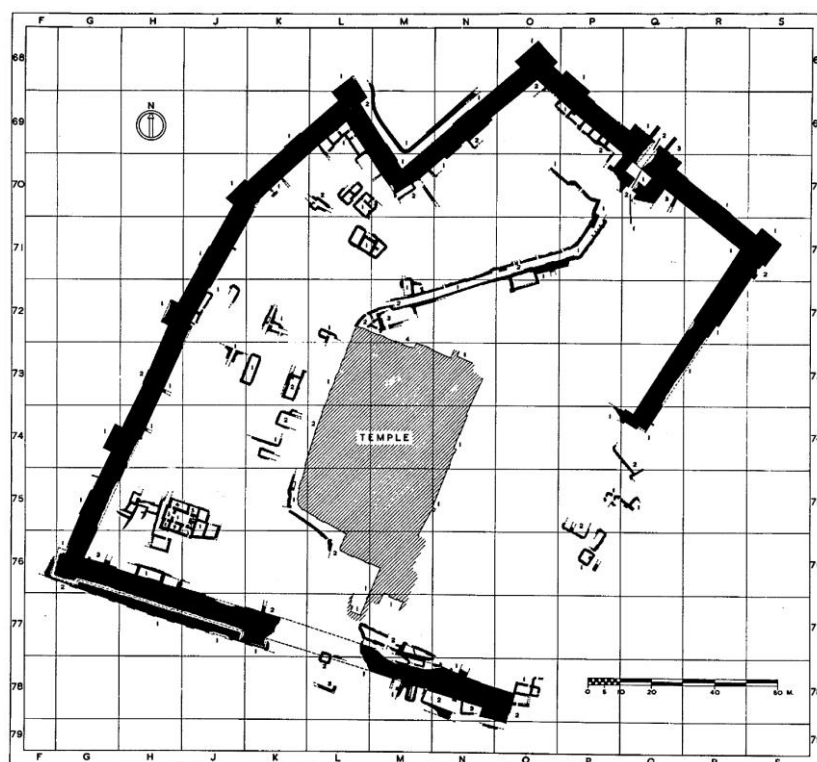


Fig. 13 Schematic plan of Mound D at Khafajah/Tutub

Footnotes:

- ¹ Edzard 1977, 70.
- ² Postgate 1974, 207.
- ³ Sollberger 1966, 137.
- ⁴ Borger 1978, No. 12.
- ⁵ Hrouda 1977, 13-14.
- ⁶ Van De Mierop 2004, 78.
- ⁷ Champdor 1958, 45.
- ⁸ Livingstone 1988, 57; Dalley 1998, 141.
- ⁹ Frayne 1990, 5.
- ¹⁰ Van De Mierop 2004, 87-88; Macqueen 1964, 31-33.
- ¹¹ Frayne 1990.
- ¹² Macqueen 1964, 30.
- ¹³ Kramer 1974, 159-161.
- ¹⁴ Woolley 1927, 174.
- ¹⁵ Weidner 1927, 130-131.
- ¹⁶ Macqueen 1964, 39.
- ¹⁷ Gelb 1952, 54.
- ¹⁸ Labat 1945-6, 123-142.
- ¹⁹ Stephens 1947, 269.

- ²⁰ Prang 1975.
- ²¹ Van De Mierop 2004, 87-88 .
- ²² Deimel 1914, 91.
- ²³ Black, Green 1998, 101.
- ²⁴ Larousse 1959,63 and Leick 1991, 192-193.
- ²⁵ Black, Green 1998, 101.
- ²⁶ George 1993, 88.
- ²⁷ Black, Green 1998, 101
- ²⁸ Lambert 1980 - 1983, 371.
- ²⁹ Al-Hussainy 2004, 19.
- ³⁰ Kraus 1951, 84.
- ³¹ Ibid., 78
- ³² Ebeling 1953, 77.
- ³³ Black, Green 1998, 142.
- ³⁴ Langdon 1924, 109.
- ³⁵ Hrouda 1977, 9.
- ³⁶ Al-Hussainy 2004, 19.
- ³⁷ Langdon 1924, 109.
- ³⁸ Al-Hussainy 2004, 16.
- ³⁹ Hrouda 1992.
- ⁴⁰ Edzard 1977, 110.
- ⁴¹ Fitzgerald 2002, 6.
- ⁴² Labat 1976, No.381.
- ⁴³ Jacobsen 1953, 40.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 42.
- ⁴⁵ Fitzgerald 2002, 31 .
- ⁴⁶ Frayne 1990, 107.
- ⁴⁷ Macqueen 1964, 34; Frayne 1990, 107-320.
- ⁴⁸ Radau 1900, 228; Woolley 1929, 174-196.
- ⁴⁹ Delaporte 1997, 43.
- ⁵⁰ Woolley 1929, 174-196.
- ⁵¹ Jean 1929, 101-110.
- ⁵² Woolley 1929, 174-196.
- ⁵³ Hallo 1959, 56.
- ⁵⁴ Van De Mierop 2004, 104-106; Jean 1927, 52-65.
- ⁵⁵ Black, Green, 1992, 182-184; Robert 1972, 149.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 184.
- ⁵⁷ George 1993, 80.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 87.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 64.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 152.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 169.
- ⁶² Groneberg 1980, 152; Zadok 1985, map.
- ⁶³ Groneberg 1980, s.v. Larsa and map.
- ⁶⁴ Vallet R. et al 2020, 133-176.
- ⁶⁵ Huot 2003.

- ⁶⁶ Gibson 1992.
⁶⁷ Gibson 1992.
⁶⁸ Stone, Zimansky 2004.
⁶⁹ Lloyd, Jacobsen 1940; Hill et al. 1990.
⁷⁰ Margueron 1982; Van Ess 2001.
⁷¹ Al-Subaihawi 2003/2004.
⁷² Hill et al. 1990.
⁷³ Miglus, Hussein 2001-2002, 114-122.
⁷⁴ Kepinski-Lecomte 1992.
⁷⁵ Hill et al. 1990.

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