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DEATH, AMUSEMENT AND THE CITY: CIVIC SPECTACLES AND THE THEATRE
PALACE OF KAPARA, KING OF GŪZĀNA.

Alessandra Gilibert

In the autumn of 1899, the German baron, diplomat and amateur archaeologist Max Oppenheim left Aleppo armed and on horseback, leading a camel caravan deep into the lesser-known piedmont routes between the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers.¹ Among the purposes of the journey was a survey of ancient ruins. The highlight of the enterprise was reached on the third week of November, when Oppenheim pitched his tents in the Syrian Jezirah and was directed by Circassian settlers to Tell Halaf, an imposing mound overlooking a tributary stream of the river Khābūr (Fig. 1).² Rumors about sculptures hidden underneath the surface of the mound had already been verified in 1882 by the Iraqi-British scholar Hormuzd Rassam.³ Oppenheim, who appears not to

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1. For an account of the journey, see Oppenheim 1901 and Oppenheim 1908. Oppenheim’s journey can be usefully compared with a similar journey undertaken more or less at the same time by the British baronet Mark Sykes (Sykes 1907). For a discussion of the “great piedmont route” followed by both, see Semple 1919.
2. The Khābūr River is the largest tributary to the Euphrates in Syrian territory; the karst springs around Tell Halaf and the nearby Ras el-Ain are its main perennial source of water (Taylor 1868, 348-351; Burdon – Safadi 1963; Reade 1983, 98-99).
3. In April 1882, these rumors reached Hormuzd Rassam while he was passing by Deir-ez-Zor. Rassam sent an “overseer” to Tell Halaf. The overseer “made some tentative excavations, and after a few days’ labour some important sculptures were discovered; but as soon as the local authorities at Ras-al-ain heard of the find they sent and turned away my workmen, and took possession of the relics” (Rassam 1897, 313). The overseer was able to come away with the basalt relief of an archer, which reached the British Museum in January 1883. The full account of the events is told in Reade 1983.

have been aware of Rassam's findings (he never mentioned them), hired a crew of Bedouin workers and opened four test trenches. Within three days, the workers uncovered a significant number of impressively sculpted stones, which Oppenheim realized must have belonged to the entrance of a monumental structure that had collapsed in antiquity during a great conflagration. Later, he called those days "a turning point" in his life (Oppenheim 1931, 16) – but he did not possess an excavation permit and could not stay. He ordered the trenches to be refilled with soil and left for Istanbul, imparting instructions not to show the site to any other Western traveler. Oppenheim knew that he had hit on something important. In fact, he had just come across one of the most remarkable buildings ever found in Upper Mesopotamia: the Palace of Kapara, king of the ancient city of Gūzāna around 900 BC.⁴ In 1911, Oppenheim returned to Tell Halaf with the necessary permit and five German architects and started to "dissect with the steel of the spade the organism of the mound"⁵ (Langenegger 1950, 5).⁶ The Oppenheim expedition uncovered the ground plan of a rectangular fortified city extending over 55 hectares with a walled city centre overlooking the river (Fig. 2). The Palace of Kapara, the structure that most intrigued the excavators, was a conspicuous single building at the western half of the walled city centre.

Since its discovery, the Palace of Kapara has puzzled generations of scholars. If we put aside problems of dating, the main point of contention has been the function of the building. This paper approaches the issue from a 'theatrical' point of view, analyzing the Palace and its surroundings as a stage for events of ritual and festive nature. Following the studies of Mazzoni and Pucci on the 'scenographic' character of the Syro-Anatolian monumental buildings⁷ and drawing further on Performance Studies,⁸ I argue that the Palace of Kapara functioned as a 'theatre palace', an architectural device for spectacular practices in which place, performance and public were intimately bound together.

In her discussion of "Space as Theatrical Signifier", Gay McAuley defines performance as an event generated by the interactions of three variables: the performers, the spectators, and the space where the performance takes place (McAuley 1999). Thus, in MacAuley's analysis, a performance is analyzed first of all as a set of spatial relationships between bodies.⁹ For the analysis of ancient architecture, a focus on the human body requires a double turn in perspective. First, it makes us "switch from the bird's eye view on architecture and the associated thinking in ground plans to an

4. The dating of Kapara's reign has been hotly debated: for an overview of the question and its evaluation, see the excursus on the chronology of Gūzāna in Sass 2005, 93-95. At present, scholar opinions range between the mid-10th century BC (Fuchs 2011) and the mid-9th century BC (Schaudig 2011). Here, I follow the palaeographic analysis by Dornauer, according to which Kapara's inscriptions date in the late 10th century, less likely early 9th century BC (Dornauer 2010, 51-52).
5. Here and in the following, translations from German are by the author.
6. Excavations went on without significant breaks for two years and employed the manual labour of hundreds of local men, women and children to expose vast areas of the ancient settlement. In fact, what we know today of the site's ancient topography derives in great part from the Oppenheim expedition. Since 2006, a Syrian-German team resumed the excavations and also contributed importantly to a new understanding of the site and his history (Baghdo *et al.* 2009; Cholidis – Martin 2010; Baghdo *et al.* 2012).
7. Cf. in particular Mazzoni 1997b and 2006, Pucci 2006 and 2008. See also Mazzoni 2010, 102-103.
8. For a resume of anthropological approaches to theatre and spectacle, see Beeman 1993. For a discussion of the differences and shared traits between theatrical and ritual performances, see Dücker 2007, 90-98.
9. On this topic see also Garner 1994 and Nuki 2010.

approach which takes the perspective of the visitor into account” (Maran 2006, 75).¹⁰ Second, it brings about what we may call a shift of accent from the convex to the concave: as in an Escher illusion, ‘empty’ spaces (such as streets and plazas) pop up to the surface of our attention as positive volumetric features and remind us that the specific *urban* dimension of an agglomeration of architectural units is generated by circulations, exchanges and negotiations that take place *in between* rather than inside these units.¹¹

In accordance with these considerations, in the following I propose to approach the Palace of Kapara, as one might, ‘from the outside in’.

1. The Four Pillars of the Syro-Anatolian City

Gūzāna is a typical example of an Iron Age Syro-Anatolian city. Its foundation goes probably back to the 11th century BC (Martin *et al.* 2012, 52),¹² when the “rump states” (Harrison 2009) left over by the collapse of the Hittite empire increasingly split into a dense network of competing city-states. This period of transition lasted throughout the 10th century BC and was accompanied by political change. At a long-established centre such as Carchemish, centuries-old dynasties were torn into fractions and had to devise new ways to ensure their survival. Elsewhere, as at Gūzāna, entirely new elites rose to power. In both cases, a compelling need to consolidate social consensus and legitimize rule led to new civic habits, which in turn materialized into a new urban design (Gilibert 2011a; Gilbert 2012).

Essentially, the new urban design was based on four basic elements, all of them developed from earlier Levantine and Hittite traditions and combined into a novel, characteristically Iron Age urban scheme. The first organizing principle of this scheme is the city surrounding a ‘citadel’, or, better, a walled city centre that includes both the royal palace and important ceremonial spaces.¹³ At Gūzāna, this scheme takes the form of nested quadrangular spaces bordering onto the river

10. Here comes to mind the opening adagio in Kevin Lynch’s influential book *The Image of the City*: “We must consider not just the city as a thing in itself, but the city as being perceived by its inhabitants” (Lynch 1960, 3).
11. Analyzing Giambattista Nolli’s *Map of Rome* (1748), Trancik comments: “In Nolli’s map the outdoor civic space is a positive void and is more *figural* than the solids that define it. Space is conceived as a positive entity in an integrated relationship with the surrounded solids” (Trancik 1986, 98). For a theoretical approach to the plaza as a positive volumetric feature, see Jöchner 2010. On the scenic qualities of the urban void in the Syro-Anatolian cities, see Mazzoni 2006, 231-232.
12. The oldest Iron Age remains excavated at Tell Halaf are dated by Martin to the period 1110-1060. Fuchs 2011, 354 finds more likely a date in the 10th century BC.
13. The Syro-Anatolian city centre was invariably surrounded by walls. At Gūzāna, as well at cities like Hama and Zincirli, the walls encircled a natural mound, creating the impression of a fortified citadel. At Carchemish and elsewhere, however, the city centre included large spaces which were not elevated above the rest of the city (Orthmann 2006). Notably, the Assyrian neighbors adopted a different scheme and located the official quarters of the town on elevated platforms against or astride the city fortification wall (Bunnens 1996).

Khābūr, with the walled city centre built upon and around a natural hill with a steep slope overlooking the river.¹⁴

The second urban principle is that of a bipolar city centre, i.e., a walled city centre segmented into a ceremonial area and a residential area. At Gūzāna, a vast ceremonial area with its own system of walls and with the Palace of Kapara at its centre occupied the western half of the walled city centre. The other half of the citadel was occupied by a fortified building, probably including the living quarters and administrative rooms of the royal court (Fig. 3; Orthmann 2002, 28-30; Pucci 2008, 126, 172).¹⁵

The third pillar is that of a well-defined ‘hard space’ around and within the ceremonial area. In urban space analysis, ‘hard space’ is the open space bounded by architectural walls: the streets and squares of the city, as opposed to the ‘soft space’ of parks and gardens (Trancik 1986, 61). An important signature of the Syro-Anatolian hard space is the existence of a straight street that connected the main city gate with the gate to the ceremonial area, thus opening a vista through the city fabric.¹⁶ The gate to the ceremonial area was the vanishing point of the street perspective and was sometimes decorated with monumental reliefs of religious and ceremonial nature (Mazzoni 1997a). At Gūzāna, just outside the gate there was a small public square with mortuary chapels for members of the elite (Fig. 4).¹⁷ The complex was one of the oldest urban structures and remained in use well after Gūzāna fell under direct Assyrian control, surviving at least three major architectural modifications of its surroundings.¹⁸ Thus, “every single person who wanted to enter the walled city centre had to pass by the crypts and was reminded of those resting there” (ibid., 170).

14. Much attention has been devoted to the allegedly meaningful difference between round vs. orthogonal city plans (e.g., Bunnens 1996, Casana – Herrmann 2010). Indeed, the two forms call for a different engineering (specifically, a circular plan is more difficult to realize). From the point of view of space syntax, however, the shape is irrelevant. And the spatial logic behind round and orthogonal Syro-Anatolian cities responds essentially to the same basic criteria.
15. In the eastern half of the citadel, a Neo-Assyrian residential and administrative complex, the *Nordost-Palast*, was excavated (Langenegger 1950, 222-319; Orthmann 2002, 40-44; Pucci 2008, 83-88; Novák – Ghafour 2009, 41-60; Novák – Ghafour 2012). The Neo-Assyrian palace was built in the second half of the 9th century BC (Novák – Ghafour 2012, 93; Becker – Novák 2012, 228) above a previously existing building complex, of which only the important embankment walls, a gate of access, and rests of walls and floors are known (Orthmann 2002, 44; Pucci 2008, 83, 85, 87-88; Novák – Ghafour 2012, 88). Both functional continuity and parallels in the urban scheme of Zincirli, Carchemish, Tell Tayinat and Hama (Gilibert 2012) support the hypothesis that the older building at Tell Halaf was a royal residential and administrative complex.
16. See also Mazzoni 2006, 231. “Walls, passages, carved gates and statues shaping the external ‘public’ areas along axes” at Zincirli, Tell Halaf and Tell Tayinat are discussed by Pucci 2008, 170-171.
17. The mortuary function of the architectural complex is indicated by the presence of at least four cremation burials. Three cremation burials were accompanied by grave goods, and two of them were buried underneath monumental ancestor statues. A number of installations such as mud-brick platforms, drains and a basalt socle probably served ritual purposes (Langenegger 1950, 169-178; Orthmann 2002, 50-53; Pucci 2008, 104).
18. Langenegger argues on the basis of wall orientation, mud-brick joints, and mud-brick typology that the mortuary complex was built together with or immediately after the oldest citadel gate, which in Langenegger’s analysis pre-dates the Palace of Kapara (Langenegger 1950, 170). For a different interpretation, see Pucci 2008, 93-94.

Behind the walls, vast ceremonial plazas decorated with monumental art and studded with ritual installations revealed themselves to the visitor. The ceremonial plaza,¹⁹ a civic space much neglected by scholars of ancient Near Eastern urbanism, stands out as the most significant feature of the Syro-Anatolian urban 'hard space'.²⁰ At Gūzāna, King Kapara terraced the natural slope of the mound, gently rising towards the river cliff, into a lower plaza and an upper plaza (Fig. 3).²¹ The

19. A ceremonial plaza is understood here as any open and, at least upon specific occasions, easily accessible urban space lined by buildings and devised to "host structured or communal activities" (Kostof 1992, 124; see also Jöchner – Nova 2010). Against today's scientific consensus, open urban spaces where people could gather "to esconce community and to arbitrate social conflict" (Kostof 1992, 124) existed throughout the ancient Near East, including Uruk, Ur, Urkeš, Babylon, Assur, Ugarit, etc. These spaces, ranging from tiny neighborhood squares to the occasional grand plaza, were not related to specific civic institutions. Rather, they should be analyzed as the material correlate of the "citizens" as a generic political subject (on "citizenship" in the ancient Near East, see now Liverani 2013, 210-219, with further literature). In Akkadian, town squares were probably called *rebitum*, a term whose meaning seems to oscillate between "crossroads", "plaza", and "gathering-place" (Jastrow – Clay 1920, 70-71; Schramm 2008, 241; Charpin 1991, 84; Edzard 2000, 295), as opposed to *sūqu*, "street", or *mūtaqu*, "thoroughfare" (George 1992, 361). In early second millennium Syria, the *rebitum* was such a significant urban feature that Old Babylonian texts from Tell Leilan use it as a *pars pro toto* to indicate fortified urban centres (Ristvet 2007, 203). See also Durand 1991 (and George 2007) for the term *rebitum* as a synecdoche for "city with a plaza", or "city where people gathers", used as a synonym for "capital city", or "great centre". For a recent and exhaustive discussion of Akkadian terminology for open urban spaces, including an extensive discussion of the term *rebitum*, see Steinert 2011.
20. The Syro-Anatolian plazas structured their surroundings and exerted a sort of "centripetal effect", as described in Lehner 1998, 351.
21. Plazas have also been excavated at Carchemish, Zincirli, and Hama, and the existence of plazas may be surmised at Malatya, Tell Ahmar and Arslan Tash (Gilibert 2012). At Tell Halaf, both the upper plaza and the lower plaza have been excavated to an extent of c. 1300 m², mostly following the perimeter of the buildings lining the plazas, but also including some 'tests' towards the plaza centres. Since none of these tests met contemporary buildings, it is possible to assume that the extent of the plazas was considerably higher than the surface actually excavated: Langenegger estimates the extent of the upper plaza between 4675 m² (Langenegger 1950, 112) and a maximum of 6475 m² (Langenegger 1950, 97; however, this maximum estimate is probably to be understood as including the terrace in front of Kapara's Palace). It is important to notice that both the Oppenheim's excavations and the new German excavations since 2006 identified minor building remains at the lower plaza, near the south-eastern corner of Kapara's Palace. Part of these remains, identified by Martin as "Building A9", certainly pre-date Kapara's Palace (Martin *et al.* 2012, 52; see also sections in Langenegger 1950, pl. 11). A "Building A7" was later built upon the foundations of "Building A9". The foundations of "Building A7" are 90 cm lower than those of Kapara's Palace and Martin dates them before Kapara's reign, suggesting that the walls of "Building A9" were leveled upon the occasion of the building of the Plaza (Martin *et al.* 2012, 52). If this interpretation is correct, it supports the idea that the lower plaza not only did exist, but that it had been actively planned. "Building A7", however, was already partly excavated by Langenegger, who, on the basis of its alignment (Langenegger 1950, 33) and perhaps also because of its wall elevation (as recorded in Langenegger 1950, 21, fig. 5), interpreted it as a building contemporary to Kapara's Palace. If not Martin's but Langenegger's interpretation is correct, then "Building A7" may be seen as a later addition to the plaza, perhaps connected with the removal of the bench and the orthostats at the southeastern corner of the Palace in order to create a narrow lane. The possibility that "Building A7" was planned together with Kapara's Palace, and thus belonged to the original layout of the plaza, seems unlikely, since it would imply that the building covered part of the Palace's façade, creating a weird 50 cm narrow interstice along the southern face of the eastern corner tower of the Palace.

Palace of Kapara towered over the plazas, set at their junction (actually being the junction between the plazas) and partly sunk into the slope (Fig. 5).

With the Palace of Kapara comes the fourth pillar of the Syro-Anatolian spatial syntax: the isolated central building. The Syro-Anatolian ceremonial plazas are often dominated by a free-standing, monumental ‘solitaire’.²² This building imposes its mass upon the immediate surroundings, it is a landmark visible from beyond the walls surrounding the city centre and, in some cases, it even shapes the skyline of the city from faraway. The emotional impact of the isolated central building is augmented by specific architectural features devised to single out the main entrance of the building. In Tell Halaf and in Tell Tayinat the building’s main façade reveals itself to the visitor only after he or she has completed a 180° turn (Pucci 2008, 171). Further architectural strategies to enhance the meaning of the main entrance of the building and detach it from its surroundings are conspicuous terraces in front of it and curtain walls that screened spaces adjacent to the building from the plaza around it.²³ Evidently, these almost completely free-standing buildings held great significance. What kind of activities took place inside and around them?

At Carchemish, Luwian hieroglyphic inscriptions identify the isolated building erected in the middle of the main city square as the Temple of the Storm God (Hawkins 2000, 108-112). Elsewhere, the complicated archaeological record makes functional classification difficult. Of “Hilani I” at Zincirli and “Building XIII” at Tell Tayinat, for example, only the foundations have been recovered, although their locations also suggest a religious and cultic function (Pucci 2008, 76, 160-161). The Palace of Kapara, however, has been fully excavated, and recent re-investigations provided additional, important insights. Even so, Kapara remains the “grande inconnue” of Gūzāna (Dion 1997, 41) and the function of his Palace is still a riddle.

2. The Temple Palace Dilemma

So far, functional analysis of the Palace of Kapara has been based on the comparison of architectural features and epigraphic evidence. In the following, I review why, considered together, the two classes of evidence apparently lead to a puzzling impasse.

22. For a review of Syro-Anatolian isolated central buildings as “une partie essentielle du paysage urbanistique monumental”, see Mazzoni 2006, 234-236.

23. For the use of terraced surfaces, cf. most conspicuously the terraces in front of the Kapara’s Palace at Tell Halaf and of *Bâtiment II* at Hama, but see also the elevated platforms placed at key-points next to significant entrances at the central plaza of Carchemish. For the use of screen walls, cf. the “Long Wall of Sculpture” at Carchemish and the walls that, at the citadel of Zincirli, separated both the Hilani I and the Royal Palace Complex from the upper plaza (Gilibert 2012, with drawings). Particularly the “Long Wall of Sculpture” at Carchemish is the quintessence of a ‘screen wall’: on one hand, it screened the courtyard of the Storm God Temple from the adjacent plaza; on the other hand, it functioned as a screen surface to reproduce monumental images addressing the visitors outside the temple. The temple itself, although ‘screened’ from its surroundings, still imposed itself visually to outside viewers with its tower-like architecture. At Tell Halaf, curtain walls played less of a role than at other sites, probably because the same effect could be obtained by using the increasing elevation. Nonetheless, curtain walls screened the forecourt to the terrace in front of the entrance to the Palace.

Let us begin with the architectural evidence. The Palace of Kapara (Fig. 5) was a mud-brick edifice almost exactly twice as long as deep. It stood upon a 5-5.50 m high mud-brick platform²⁴ and possessed a magnificent, yet simple ground plan. Its total floor area of 1100 m² was organized around two adjacent grand halls paved in white stone. An internal stairway may have been situated at the western side of the building; if so, it probably led to a roof area.²⁵ The building, which was entirely coated with white plaster, had a single, large and imposing entrance facing north. The entrance consisted of a 9 m wide and 6 m high four-bay portico lavishly decorated with dark grey basalt sculptures (Fig. 6).²⁶ Three extraordinary statues, a female and two male figures standing on bulls and lions, served as entrance caryatids. They were flanked by slabs and jambs sculpted with mythical creatures and hunting scenes. A 600 m², U-shaped terrace paved in white stone stretched in front of the sculptural ensemble (Fig. 7).²⁷ At its lowest elevation, the terrace floor was 1.5 m above the level of the surrounding plaza, i.e., just below the eye line of an adult individual standing at the plaza. Remarkably, the floor of the terrace tilted upwards with a 3° angle from the area closest to the plaza towards the entrance into the building. This mode of construction emphasized the monumental entrance of the Palace and at the same time enhanced the visibility of the terrace from the plaza. The terrace was accessible by a frontal staircase protruding out into a forecourt screened by a surrounding wall. At the outer edge of the terrace, a set of installations for ritual libations consisting of a channel, an open pit with a tiled floor, and a drain was located. Further back, right in front of the entrance, the excavators recorded the collapsed remains of a conspicuous platform of glazed bricks (almost certainly an altar). Behind it, small offering stones were originally placed in front of the entrance reliefs.²⁸

The grand entrance faced north, turning its back to the city. Thus, the first prospect met by the visitor coming through the main gate to the city centre was that of the building's south façade (Fig. 8). The south façade had no ground-floor opening²⁹ and dominated the lower plaza with the sheer mass of its height. A single row of originally over 240³⁰ sculpted slabs of small size and indifferent

24. The south face of the platform was only very slightly sunk in the ground, while its north face was built into the slope. Thus, from the perspective of the visitor approaching the building from the citadel gate, the platform was almost completely above ground (Martin *et al.* 2012, 49).

25. The debris found collapsed into the rooms does not point to the existence of a second floor (Langenegger 1950, 44-45).

26. For a discussion of the reconstruction of the entrance and related problems, see Cholidis – Martin 2010, 346-354.

27. Langenegger observes here three building phases and relates them to three periods of use, during which the terrace would have been progressively enlarged (Langenegger 1950, 69-71). Langenegger's first and second building phases are treated here as belonging to the same building process. For a discussion of this issue, see also Pucci 2008, 106-107.

28. A half-moon-shaped offering stone was found in situ in front of the sphinx at the Eastern jamb of the portico (Schaudig 2011, 360, fig. 281). A round, flat stone table and a stone with a cup mark were found in front of the central slab of the Eastern wall section, representing the symbol of the Sun God (Fig. 13). Similar offering stones were found scattered around the terrace.

29. The first 5.50 m of the building face at the lower plaza consisted of the massive foundation platform (Martin *et al.* 2012, 49).

30. 182 'small orthostats' have been found in situ during the Oppenheim excavations; the original total number must have been around 240-250 (Cholidis – Martin 2010, 136). The missing orthostats of the

quality – the so-called ‘small orthostats’ – ran along the lower part of the façade, just above a 50 cm high mud-brick socle.³¹ The orthostats created a strong chromatic dado at the façade’s lower level, with alternating dark grey basalt slabs and red-painted limestone slabs. The mud-brick socle of seat-like scale and the ‘small orthostats’ made a bench with a decorated backrest that lined the lower plaza and wrapped around the entire southern half of the Palace. The ‘small orthostats’ are carved in an informal style with simple, abbreviated compositions, mostly hunting scenes, but also war scenes, scenes of worship, scenes of contest and, as we shall see below, even parodic images. The style of the reliefs shares important traits with North Syrian ivory carvings and jewelry of the so-called ‘frame and frond’ school.³² Irrespective of the much-debated question whether they were produced in Tell Halaf or elsewhere,³³ these luxury goods were often used as inlays for wooden furniture, most notably as decorative panels for chair-backs (Herrmann 1996). Thus, it is conceivable that the bench with the frieze of orthostats was designed as a vernacular version of contemporary luxury chairs.³⁴

Both the ‘small orthostats’ and the grand sculptures at the Palace’s entrance bore epigraphs. Five variants of a standard cuneiform inscription were carved on the columns of the porch and on a sphinx at the Eastern jamb of the entrance. The text of the inscription consistently calls the building “Palace of Kapara” (Akk. É.GAL-*lim*^m*ka-pa-ra*).³⁵ A number of ‘small orthostats’ were also labeled in the same way. However, others bore the inscription “Palace of the Storm God” (É.GAL-*lim* U), and a third group, significantly, was inscribed with both epithets (Dornauer 2010, 50-51; Cholidis – Martin 2010, 183-192). This difference has been explained by postulating the existence of an older temple of the Storm God: the ‘small orthostats’ originally erected in this temple and labeled accordingly would have been re-used (and re-inscribed) by Kapara for his palace (Orthmann 2002, 74-89). However, recent palaeographic and stylistic analyses refute the Storm God Temple hypothesis and indicate convincingly that the entire corpus of inscriptions was carved in the reign of king Kapara (Cholidis – Martin 2010, 145-146).³⁶ This observation, if correct, indicates that the

eastern corner tower may have been those removed by Rassam’s agent in 1882 (s. above, n.3), part of which Oppenheim may have recovered and catalogued as of uncertain provenance.

31. The socle was a feature standing over ground, as indicated by the height of the plaza floor documented at the Scorpion’s Gate (Langenegger 1950, 85, with fig. 41-43; cf also drawings and reconstructions in Langenegger 1950, 21, fig. 5, 17; fig. 3; pl. 11; pl. 13).
32. See most recently Orthmann 2002, 95-99; Herrmann 2005; Affanni 2009; Mazzoni 2010, with previous literature.
33. See in particular Kantor 1956 and Winter 1989 for the hypothesis that the ivories were produced elsewhere and reached Tell Halaf as imports, subsequently influencing the style of the stone reliefs produced locally.
34. For the use of stone orthostats as monumental chair-backs, cf. also Phoenician “sphinx thrones” (Morstadt 2012, 495-496; Nunn 2008, 113-114). For further discussion of the possible function of the bench at the lower plaza, see below, with fn.49. A connection between the Kapara’s sculptures and contemporary furniture design, although with reference to the “caryatids” at the entrance of the Palace, is proposed in Moortgat 1973 (see also the discussion in Orthmann 2002, 95-99).
35. An unusual way to render the nominative in status constructus: cf. Meissner 1933.
36. A number of “Palace of the Storm God” inscriptions were (later?) selectively erased or effaced, but this does not seem enough to postulate for them an earlier date than for the “Palace of Kapara” inscriptions (contra, Dornauer 2010, 51). The interpretation of the ‘small orthostats’ is made particularly difficult by the fact that, as excavated, the ‘small orthostats’ had been secondarily re-arranged along the façade’s

“Palace of Kapara”, alias “Palace of the Storm God”, was the result of a single planning effort undertaken during the reign of King Kapara.³⁷ Kapara conceived the building as É.GAL, a “Palace”, and apparently saw no contradiction in describing this palace as belonging both to himself and to the Storm God. How should we understand this dual value in terms of function? The epigraphic sources do not say.

Trying to describe the Palace of Kapara in one word, the excavators solomonically settled for “Temple-Palace”: “the building was labeled *Tempelpalast* because of its monumental plan similar to that of a Hilani, combined with a rich sculptural décor consisting of religious images” (Langenegger 1950, 23). The term “Hilani” is used by Langenegger in reference to a complex of royal residences excavated at the site of Zincirli, which he believed to be examples of the *bīt hilāni* mentioned in Assyrian texts. The Assyrian *bīt hilāni* was a pavilion-like building with a portico façade, explicitly fashioned in Syro-Anatolian style (Novák 2004).³⁸ The royal residences at Zincirli were free standing buildings with a porticoed entrance, a large main hall, smaller adjoining rooms, and a stairway leading to an upper floor. Although the Palace of Kapara shares significant features with these royal residences (the porticoed entrance, the two grand halls), other features are different. Above all, the royal residences at Zincirli and other Syro-Anatolian palaces lack both the monumentality and the ritual paraphernalia of the Palace of Kapara. Moreover, the *bīt hilāni* of the Assyrian texts and the Syro-Anatolian ‘hilani’ residences such as the buildings in Zincirli are later in date than the Palace of Kapara.³⁹ Earlier Iron Age ‘hilanis’ elude homogeneous functional

perimeter in a makeshift order. The date of this re-arrangement and the original rationale of the orthostats may be surmised by indirect evidence. For example, the ‘small orthostats’ made of limestone are all painted red. In some cases, they also bear an inscription. In all these cases, the red coating covers the inscriptions. In two cases, however, the red coating does not cover a side “strip”, which had originally been left rough on corner orthostats. These corner orthostats were later re-used in different positions. This proves that the red coating was applied in the primary setup – at least in selected cases (Orthmann 2002, 75 fn. 33). In their recent re-examination of the iconography and style of the slabs, Cholidis and Martin (2010, 145-146) argue convincingly that most ‘small orthostats’ date to the reign of Kapara, thus confirming the stylistic observations by Orthmann (Orthmann 2002, 76, 80) and Winter (Winter 1989, 323-324). However, they also highlight how some orthostats were probably added in the course of later re-arrangements (Cholidis – Martin 2010, 146). Indeed, the Palace of Kapara underwent numerous architectural changes during his post-Kapara life-history: the terrace was enlarged, part of the northern hall was walled up (to block access to the roof?), the outer walls were reinforced, and finally, perhaps, a new building along the main street at the lower plaza was built (“Building A7”: see above, fn. 21). Upon this occasion, the orthostats and the bench at the south-eastern buttress were removed in order to create a narrow alley (Langenegger 1950, pl. 4). It was perhaps upon the same occasion that all the ‘small orthostats’ were re-arranged. For all these changes to take place we should allow a longer period than the 80 to 130 years indicated by Cholidis and Martin (2010, 146) and consider the possibility to date the final destruction of the Palace to the period of the Babylonian raids in Northern Mesopotamia at the end of the 7th century BC.

37. Langenegger mistook the building’s foundations for the remains of an almost identical, antecedent building, which he called “Altbau” (Langenegger 1950, 30-33). The existence of this *Altbau* was already doubted by Pucci years ago (Pucci 2008, 95). The recent re-examination of the stratigraphy on site confirmed that the *Altbau* never existed (Cholidis – Martin 2010, 70).

38. For a recent revisitation of the literature on Hilani and *bīt hilāni*, see Osborne 2013.

39. The epigraphic occurrences of the term *bīt hilāni* in Assyrian sources date to the 8th and 7th centuries BC (Renger 1972-1975). The Palace of Kulamuwa, which is the earliest Hilani building at Zincirli certainly identified as a royal residence, dates to c. 810 BC (Gilibert 2011a, 79-84). For a discussion of further Iron

classification. Mazzoni has highlighted how the Palace of Kapara replicates architectural features of the temple at Ain Dara (Mazzoni 2010, 103). The Palace of Kapara may be reasonably compared also with other buildings likely to have had a cultic function, such as the “Hilani I” at Zincirli, the “Hilani” at Carchemish and perhaps the so-called “Temple of Kubaba” at the same site (Pucci 2008, 160-161; Gilibert 2012, 117-118). On the other hand, the Palace shares traits with secular buildings as well, such as “Building XIII” at Tell Tayinat and “Bâtiment II” at Hama. The contrast between the Palace of Kapara and “Bâtiment II” at Hama is particularly significant. Both edifices date to the 10th to early 9th century BC and both were similar in size. Both were free standing, rectangular structures with buttresses and a front terrace. Both were connected with ritual installations upon and adjacent to the front terrace. Both were situated at the ceremonial centre of the city. However, Hama’s “Bâtiment II” had a service access and a large number of storage and business rooms on the ground floor. Important collapse layers, including well-preserved walls, indicate that living and reception rooms were located on the upper floors (Fugmann 1958, 226-227; De Maigret 1979, 34-40).⁴⁰ Even if probably not the residence of the king of Hama,⁴¹ “Bâtiment II” was indeed the hub of administrative and secular activities in town. The Palace of Kapara, on the contrary, had only one – magnificent – way of access and the absence of cellars, storage rooms and utility rooms within the building is striking. The plan was dominated by the white-paved, vast halls. In the floor at the corners of passages, the excavators did not record stone door sockets, raised thresholds or stop stones, and thus perhaps doors were lacking altogether (Langenegger 1950, 54). Modest collapse layers suggest the absence of upper floors. These observations suggest that the Palace of Kapara was not a place for living. Rather, it was the grandiose architectonic abbreviation of a royal palace: it looked like a palace, it was labeled a palace, but it did not function like a palace.⁴²

3. Scenography of a Theatre Palace

The Palace of Kapara had a multiform character that offered different viewpoints at every turn: the south façade conveyed a sense of place radically different from that of the north façade, and neither reflected the organization of space inside the building (Pucci 2008, 107). In order to explain these illusionistic metamorphoses and in order to put forth hypotheses about the activities the Palace of

Age buildings of this kind, cf. Fritz 1983, Mazzoni 2006 and Lehmann – Killbrew 2010, with further literature. See now also Osborne 2012.

40. The absence of spaces for the preparation of food suggests that the impressive cellars of “Bâtiment II” held goods for redistribution purposes.
41. The royal residence of the kings of Hama is probably to be identified with “Bâtiment V”, which, much as the royal palace in the eastern quarters of the citadel at Tell Halaf, was located within a different section of the walled citadel.
42. An interesting parallel here is the ‘scenographic’ interpretation given by Scholl of the Pergamon Altar, which he calls “die gebaute Abbeviatur einer Palastarchitektur” (Scholl 2009, 267). See also Lehner, who, following a similar line of argument, describes Mastaba S3503 in Saqqara, Egypt as “the condensed, symbolic version [of a Palace], a ‘Gate Palace’, where all design elements considered constitutive of a Palace had been strunged together at the entrance gate” (Lehner 1998, 192).

Kapara had been planned for, we have to turn to the topographic features around the building, and in particular to the ‘hard space’ that surrounded it.

The Palace of Kapara had not been planned alone, but within the framework of a larger re-design of the ceremonial urban centre initiated by Kapara in the late 10th or early 9th century BC. Together with the erection of the Palace, Kapara foresaw at least three concerted urban measures: first, the framing of the Palace between a lower plaza and an upper plaza; second, the re-planning of the main gate to the city centre (the “South Gate”); and finally, the erection of a new monumental gate connecting the lower with the upper plaza (the “Gate of the Scorpions”).⁴³ A broad paved street leading from the city straight through the main gate, intersecting the lower plaza, passing through the Gate of the Scorpions, taking a turn into the upper plaza and coming to a halt in front of the ceremonial façade of the Palace mapped the connection between the key elements of this urban re-planning. The culmination of the street in front of the terrace and the porticoed entrance of the Palace coincided with the highest point of the natural mound (Cholidis and Martin 2010, 70, fn. 213). Thus, the experience of the visitor coming from outside was one of inward progression, underlined by the increasing absolute height and dramatized step by step by an attentive use of buffer zones, thresholds, platforms, ramps, staircases, curtain walls, lighting, and monumental artwork. Visitors climbed further and further up and into the architectural system surrounding the Palace, until they reached what theatre people refer to as “the point beyond which one cannot go” (McAuley 1999, 50), a sort of “magical area” (Mackintosh 1993, 144) that is built to capture the gaze of the visitor, suspend his or her disbelief and create “a space for concentration which permits every gesture to carry its full weight of meaning” (Peter Brook, quoted by McAuley 1999, 36). In a theatre building, this place is the interface between audience space and actors’ stage; at the Palace of Kapara, the ‘magical area’ in the theatrical sense was the terrace in front of the palace and the upper plaza surrounding it.⁴⁴

The ascent to the terrace began at the “South Gate”, the main and only direct access to the ceremonial centre of the city. In Kapara’s times, an “Old Gateway”, probably dating to the 11th century BC, was partly leveled and redesigned into a new gate, the “South Gate” (Fig. 4).⁴⁵ The Old

43. A large mud-brick platform expanding west of the South Gate does not belong to Kapara’s *ensemble* but rather dates not earlier than the 8th century BC (Baghdo *et al.* 2009, 17; contra Pucci 2008, 92-93).

44. Mazzoni calls this space an “espace limite” (Mazzoni 2006, 233).

45. The South Gate was built upon the leveled remains of the western half of the Old Gate. The eastern half of the Old Gate, consisting of small square rooms and a stairway well, were integrated into the South Gate and kept in use, as a number of modifications indicate (e.g., the floors were raised to the level of the plaza: Langenegger 1950, 151, fig. 76; cf. also Pucci 2008, 91). Later, probably in the 8th century BC, this wing of the gate and other nearby structures were included into a massive mud-brick platform on which Assyrian elite houses were built (Martin *et al.* 2012, 57). Novák proposes to link the re-design of the Old Gate into the South Gate with the building of the Neo-Assyrian mud-brick platform (Novák 2010, 313, Becker – Novák 2012, 226-227). However, this thesis is contradicted by architectural evidence provided by a ramp providing access to the mud-brick platform. The substructure of the ramp rests on parts of the South Gate and covers the row of rooms to the east, indicating that the ramp (and thus the platform) was built after the South Gate (see also Pucci 2008, 93). The stone threshold of the South Gate is decorated in a fashion also employed in Neo-Assyrian gates (Orthmann 2002, 33 fn. 22), but this fact can be explained with later manipulations, or else with common architectural traditions, particularly considering that thresholds of this kind seem to have also been installed at the Scorpion Gate (Langenegger 1950, 53, fig. 20; but see the caveat in Orthmann 2002, 34).

Gateway had been a defensive gate with a double-bent passage secured by a door and, perhaps, a portcullis (Langenegger 1950, 117, 123). The new South Gate followed a different blueprint and provided a wider, virtually direct opening into the lower plaza. Its elegantly decorated door sockets held door wings that would not withstand a military attack and that indeed seems to have had a largely symbolic meaning.⁴⁶ The main gate to the city centre had been transformed from a military device into a ceremonial marker of liminality. The main function of the gate was not to act as a physical boundary, but rather to frame and order access to the lower plaza. The latter, apparently, was a place frequented by many: the road surface and the stone thresholds of the gate bore traces of intense pedestrian traffic (Langenegger 1950, 133). The last 8 m of the street approaching the gate from the south were framed by two low walls, which were probably designed as ‘guard rails’ to control the pedestrian flow (*ibid.*), either to channel people inside or to keep people off the street.

The lower plaza was a vast rectangular open space, gently rising up to the south façade of the Palace. The plaza expanded west of the street that continued up to the upper plaza. Apparently, it was empty and unpaved. The closed frontage of the Palace towered over it. Its five massive towers imposed a strong vertical rhythm to this part of the building and nearly doubled the length of its wall into a 108.5 m long perimeter. Exposed to full sun for the whole day, the towers created a sharp blend of light and shadow that added a sensory dimension of texture, depth, and form to the place. As already mentioned above, all along the frontage wall of the Palace ran a bench at sitting height. The backrest of the bench was composed of over 240 ‘small orthostats’ with simple but characteristically expressive images of hunters, wild game, and fantastic creatures in contrasting colours – one of the longest image cycles of ancient Near Eastern Art. A few larger slabs bore more complex scenes including carnivalesque details (Fig. 9, Slab no. 57: a parodic encounter between a lyre-playing lion and a defecating horse, both with an erect penis)⁴⁷ or cruel innuendos (Slab no.

46. The gate foresaw a wooden, double-leaf door. Langenegger reconstructs its mechanism in detail and points out a number features incompatible with a reliable defense structure, such as the absence of a drop-bolt and the presence of wide slits between the closed gate leaves (Langenegger 1950, 138). The presence of two large stone blocks whose function was to keep the gate leaves fixed against the side walls indicates that it was not unusual to keep the gate wide open.

47. Slab no. 57 is a larger-size orthostat, which, at least at later times, was placed at a prominent location in the centre of the westernmost niche (“Rücklage 1”; Langenegger 1950, pl. 13). At least three other orthostats bear similar imagery (Stone no. 92; no. 110; no. 163). The imagery is closely reminiscent of carnivalesque parodies found on Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age ostraca and papyri from Egypt (Curto 1965; Brunner-Traut 1974; Brunner-Traut 1979; Flores 2004). Curto 1965 put forth the theory that the figured ostraca were “drafts” for humorous wall paintings in private houses, while von Lieven 2009 advances the hypothesis that the ostraca were used as pictorial memory aides to accompany theatrical performances involving oral storytelling (for the figured ostraca as memory-aides for storytelling, see also Brunner-Traut 1979, 9 and Babcock 2012). Von Lieven links the ostraca tradition with a set of building blocks from Medamud, Egypt. The Medamud blocks are incised with reliefs of similar scenes of animals acting like humans (e.g., a crocodile playing the lute). The blocks were originally employed to decorate the outer walls of a chapel built by Shepenupet II in the 7th century BC. Other walls of the same temple were decorated with standard, large-scale scenes of gods and the dedicator. Von Lieven interprets the animal reliefs as illustrations of humorous and didactic fables and proposes that they may have been the backdrop for a stage for storytelling and dancing performances that mixed sacred and profane rhetoric registers (2009, 4-7). If her interpretation is correct, it may provide an intriguing parallel for the reliefs of Kapara’s Palace at Tell Halaf (where a number of small-scale aegyptiaca found on site indicate that Egyptian imagery was known and appreciated).

146: the depiction of a naked and mutilated enemy overrun by a war chariot). As found, the arrangement of the ‘small orthostats’ was not the original one but was the result of later modifications. However, it can be reasonably surmised that the original visual strategy of the relief cycle did not differ substantially from the strategy with which the later one complied. The latter was a strategy based on three levels of compositional order, adapted to the changing perception of the relief cycle by a viewer moving around the plaza. The visitor entering the lower plaza from the South Gate would have taken in the massive southern façade of the Palace as a whole and from a significant distance of over 30 m, thus perceiving nothing more than the background “visual music” of the black and red chromatic dado. Getting closer or just walking by, the viewer would have noticed longer compositional sequences, mostly heraldic combinations of hunting and fighting scenes (Fig. 10). These sequences impressed a sense of movement and action to the surroundings and corresponded with the alternation of convex and concave perimetral spaces. However, the sequences were relatively redundant and did not engage the gaze of the visitor with any kind of complex narrative. A higher degree of image perception was reserved for those who came closer to the façade, who lingered around or took a seat at the bench, seeking perhaps relief from the heat in the cool shadow of a tower, or else enjoying exposure to the sun rays of an early spring. The visitors could then engage with the relief in a close, direct and tactile way, a way that relates to the informal style and at times informal topic of the reliefs themselves. For those visitors sitting at the bench or lingering around the perimetral niches, the Palace created a sheltered place, allowing the perception to narrow its focus on the images and their details.⁴⁸

With the exception of the bench and the reliefs, the lower plaza was conspicuously devoid of installations. This situation may be due to the fact that only a portion of the whole area has been excavated. However, the difference to other open spaces at the same site, most notably to the nearby upper plaza, is indeed striking and suggests that the lower plaza was a place designed for informal gatherings, where movement was free, focal points were downplayed, and people met at eye-level. The lower plaza was a buffer zone, an interspace, a sort of public common room. The wall bench created a “see-and-be-seen” place without inherent hierarchy that did not channel the gaze of the seated persons anywhere particularly and did not offer privileged points of views.⁴⁹

48. The reader should not be tempted to dismiss the visibility degree of a decorated backrest on the ground that one cannot see what’s behind one’s back: from medieval carved choir stalls to contemporary bench advertisement, backrests are universally appreciated as eye-level, high-impact surfaces for the display of imagery and writings. An early example of a backrest used as a surface for writing is found on an outdoor bench in the gymnasium by the lower agora at Agrigento (now on exhibit in the cloister of the Archaeological Museum).

49. In her study on outdoor benches as loci of social and political interaction, the art historian Yvonne Elet writes: “In early modern Florence, as in other cultures highly attuned to communicative nuances of the built environment and to the rituals of daily and ceremonial exchange, the provision of seating – by whom, for whom, its design and placement – has much to tell us about the representation of power, social control, and urban life in the spaces framing iconic monuments” (Elet 2002, 463). Elet provides detailed examples of how, in early modern Tuscany, outdoor benches lining public squares were used not only for everyday seating, but also, on specific occasions, as informal concert stages as well as viewing stands (Elet 2002, 451; 457, fig. 15). Elet also elaborates on the significance of decorative backrests and recalls in particular the case of the Ducal Palace in Urbino, whose facades were lined with a stone bench with a frieze of seventy-two sculpted panels depicting machines of war (ibid., 460-461). On outdoor city

The Scorpion Gate (Fig. 11) was the ceremonial frame of a steep ramp that led from the lower to the upper plaza. The gate was erected together with the Palace of Kapara (Cholidis and Martin 2010, 197). A pair of *girtablilu*, or scorpion-men, carved in black basalt guarded the entrance, “announcing the marvels beyond” (Langenegger 1950, 29).⁵⁰ The ramp was paved in rough stone, and there was a raised stone in the middle of the gate against which the door leaves provided. These features were probably implemented to facilitate the occasional passage of a wheeled vehicle (Langenegger 1950, 91, 93).⁵¹ However, the relatively narrow width of gate (3.5 m), the slight tilt of the gate’s axis and the absence of wheel tracks indicate the gate had been mostly used by pedestrians.

Once beyond the Scorpion Gate, the paved road turned around the north-east corner of the Palace, entered the upper plaza and stopped in front of the staircase to the terrace in front of the Palace. Here, the visitor found himself immersed into a highly formalized *espace théâtral* (Ubersfeld 1977) structured into an audience space (the plaza), a stage (the terrace in front of the Palace), and, at least from the viewpoint of the viewer at the plaza, a backstage (inside the Palace).⁵²

It seems reasonable to assume that the upper plaza covered about 3500 m², perhaps considerably more.⁵³ If this size estimate is correct, the plaza had the capacity to house a crowd of thousands (a crowd of medium density consists of 2-3 people per square meter: Gilibert 2011a, 103-104; Watson – Yip 2011). The elevated platform in front of the Palace was raked upwards from front to back, thus making its space more visible to those standing at the plaza and conferring to the plaza the feeling of an auditorium for spectacles.⁵⁴ During the staging of ceremonial events, the visitors would have apprehended the space of the plaza “through kinetics, smell, sonic vibrations or an osmosis running through packed shoulders” (Wiles 2003, 7). In front of the visitor, the terrace would elevate itself as a place of crossing gazes: the gaze of the spectators, the gaze of the actors, and the fixed, wide, unblinking gaze of the sculptures at the magnificent backdrop of the scene.

life and its connection to streetside benches in Pompeii, see also Hartnett 2008. For a sitting platform and a sitting bench at the third-millennium BC central plaza of Tell Mozan, see Dohmann-Pfälzner – Pfälzner 2000, 202-203.

50. The *girtablilu* were winged, human-headed, scorpion-tailed, bird-footed creatures (Rittig 1977, 218). On their possible symbolic ties in the context of the Scorpion Gate, see below, fn. 68.
51. This must not necessarily be a cart or a wagon: we know from seal imagery that the king also moved by rickshaw (Elsen-Novák 2011).
52. For a similar use of theatre vocabulary to describe an archaeological context, see Lehner on Mesoamerican plazas and temples, which he describes as “open-air theatres” with the temples serving as stages and the plazas as auditoria for large audiences (Lehner 1998, 377).
53. See above, fn. 21.
54. A raked surface can be seen as a device to enhance visibility while at the same time prompting power relationships. In his book on *Architecture, Actor, and Audience*, MacKintosh analyzes the difference between an audience positioned above or below the actors in these terms: “The audience looking down [on the actor] will be contemplating the performer critically as did the director at the rehearsal. If the attention of the audience wavers the actor is in a weak position. [...] If, on the other hand, the audience looks up to the actor, the actor is in control, can elicit responses and can manage the audience because he or she is, quite simply, in the dominant physical position. Actors as well as stand-up comedians generally prefer this. Actors also understand the need for a raked stage so that the dominant position is not confined to the front edge” (MacKintosh 1993, 133).

A monumental stairway led from the plaza to the terrace. A forecourt shadowed by a curtain wall limited access to the stairway and created a buffer zone in front of the terrace. Its peculiar, L-shaped form and a basalt monolith next to the staircase⁵⁵ indicate that the forecourt was devised for specific activities that may have accompanied the events on the terrace.⁵⁶

On the terrace, space was organized around three sets of fixed installations: the libation drain and the basin up front, the glazed brick platform in the middle of the stage, and the offering tables in front of the sculpted slabs. The installations focused, materialized and predetermined the way on specific occasions the bodies of actors moved on stage “to create visual patterns and to emblemize relationships” (Elam 1980, 65). In theatre studies, the process of combining segments of actions with spatial groupings of elements of a set is called ‘blocking’ and it is considered to be fundamental to the creation of theatrical meaning: “It is through blocking that the space is activated and made meaningful, that the fictional world is mapped onto the presentational space, that the action is spatialized and thereby given specific meaning” (McAuley 1999, 106). The presence of different installations for ritual activities on the terrace suggests that this was a stage space conceived for a choreography with multi-focused chains of actions. The “emotional geometry” (ibid., 108) of the bodies moving on stage ranged from sequences that took place right up in front of the spectators, such as the pouring of a liquid into the libation drain, to sequences during which the ritual actors would turn their backs to the plaza and crouch down to deposit small offerings in front of specific images. Considered from a choreographic point of view, the sculpted entrance and indeed the Palace as a whole is reminiscent of the σκην  of ancient Greek theatres: it served as frame for the actions taking place on the terrace; it deployed a rich series of impressive *imagines agentes*, ‘active images’ that triggered narratives and bundled ritual meaning in the spectators (Bergmann 1994, 249); and finally, it enabled dramatic entrances and exits for those performing on the terrace. The organisation of space around the sculpted portico gives hints as to the number of people involved in the ritual choreography. From the point of view of its ground plan, the sculpted portico was characterized by a high degree of openness.⁵⁷ However, the glazed brick platform between its central bay and the stairway of access was a stumbling-block both for vision and for traffic: this was not a place where many people would come and go, but rather a space devised for a very limited number of ritual actors. For those who observed what happened on the terrace from the surrounding plaza, the portico did not appear at all as a transparent curtain. Exposed to the north and framed by protruding towers, the portico was veiled in a shroud of shadow. The shape, size, and position of its elements were carefully sited to create the impression of a sculptured wall rather than a gate. The receding interior space was evoked by surrounding the sculptures with layers of darkness and eliciting the illusion of an impenetrable membrane (Langenegger 1950, 52).

The space inside the Palace did not live up to the expectations created by the decorative grandeur of its entrance (Pucci 2008, 107). As opposed to the terrace outside, the vast halls inside

55. A picture of the monolith in situ has been published in Martin and Cholidis 2010, 346, fig. XV.7. The function of the monolith is unclear. It is too high (1 m) to be used as a seat; at the same time, the absence of peg holes makes it difficult to postulate a use as the base for a statue or a standard.

56. Perhaps as orchestra pit for musicians? At Carchemish, a comparable stairway area was decorated with a relief of musicians (Gilibert 2011a, *Carchemish* 74).

57. On the absence of doors both here and at the passage to the central hall, see Langenegger 1950, 54.

did not have fixed installations for formalized or ritual behavior. The only notable object found inside the palace was a wheeled hearth, which was moved around to heat areas as needed. Inside the palace, the sacred atmosphere generated by imagery and ritual installations outside fades away.⁵⁸ The griffins and sphinxes framing the entrance to the second hall were clearly located in relation to the portico bays and were set to achieve a second-order sculpture depth for the viewers in the plaza rather than to address insiders. Next to them, a slightly oblique line of black stones was set into the white floor. This pavement marking probably related to important and specific codes of practice that may also relate to issues of hiding and revealing for the viewers outside (marking out the starting point for the exit procedure to the terrace? Or perhaps the position of a movable curtain?).

The Palace of Kapara was a place of performance, devised to impress crowds of spectators. Its main function was a theatrical one: it was a θέατρον, a “place for viewing”, where elements of stagecraft were used to enhance the presence and the efficacy of a spectacular experience. It is in this sense that I call the Palace of Kapara a ‘theatre palace’.⁵⁹

4. Death (and its Amusing Side)

We have no direct information as to the precise nature of the rituals enacted at the Palace. Langenegger suggested that the building served a number of different official purposes: “There was no better place within the citadel to celebrate great official ceremonies, public sacrifices and jubilees, to welcome foreign ambassadors, to promulgate laws and to pronounce sentences: here, in front of the monumental Sublime Porte on the Khābūr river” (Langenegger 1950, 25). Here, I argue that the Palace of Kapara served as a royal mausoleum, and that the performances taking place in front of it were connected with the cult of the royal ancestors.⁶⁰ I also argue that these emphatically ‘serious’ ritual performances involved a large audience and were embedded into a greater festive frame that also included informal and amusing activities.

A key iconographic clue for the interpretation of the Palace as a royal mausoleum is given by the three caryatids of the Palace’s portico. The statues were clearly intimately bound with the essence of the building.⁶¹ The cuneiform inscriptions extol them as Kapara’s specific great achievement and declare: “These statues, which my father and my grandfather had not made, I [Kapara] have made” (Sader 1985, but see also Postgate 1983-1984). It is often assumed that the caryatids depict a triad of gods. This assumption is based on the fact that the two male figures wear a horned crown and that each figure stands on the back of a lion or of a bull, two important features that are consistent with the Upper Mesopotamian iconography of gods (Orthmann 2002, 68). However, other divine

58. Pucci points out the “dichotomy between internal and external areas” of the Palace, with the external area marked as “religious” and the internal space marked as “secular” (Pucci 2008, 109).

59. If this interpretation is correct, then the emotional impact of monuments, ceremonies and crowds on foreign visitors should be taken into account to explain the extraordinary success of Syro-Anatolian urban and visual tradition in the neighboring regions, from Assyria to Greece (Mazzoni 2001; Gilibert 2004; Mazzoni 2006, 237).

60. This thesis has already been tentatively advanced by Bunnens, who points out that decoration and layout of the Palace “would suit a temple devoted to the cult of ancestors” (Bunnens 2006, 61).

61. Langenegger notes that for structural purposes two would have been sufficient (Langenegger 1950, 64).

attributes are lacking and the same features were also employed in representations of ‘deified’ royal ancestors.⁶² Indeed, the best parallel for the portico ensemble of the Palace is provided by the ‘mortuary chapel’⁶³ excavated at the lower town of Tell Halaf.⁶⁴ Here, the statues of two male and a female deceased persons sharing iconographic details with the caryatids (Bunnens 2006, 61) were set in front of a mud-brick altar and surrounded by ritual installations, including an offering table with a drain similar to the offering pit at the Palace terrace (Müller 1950, 360). In short, the mortuary chapel reproduces in iconography and context the situation at the Palace⁶⁵ and thus supports the identification of the Palace caryatids as images of deceased members of the royal dynasty. Seen in light of this interpretation, the inscription on the central figure of the portico (the man on the bull) is invested of a unique dimension. While all the longer inscriptions at the Palace begin with the standard formula “[This is] the Palace of Kapara, son of Hadianu”, the inscription on the central figure as the only one begins with the statement: “I am Kapara, son of Hadianu” (Meissner 1933). This is a significant variant of the standard inscription and connects the “I-narrator” to the represented figure, according to the literary and artistic conventions of the Syro-Anatolian corpus of funerary monuments (Bonatz 2000).

The further imagery of the portico also fits into the interpretation of the Palace as a royal mausoleum. Images of the hunt are found here together with images of *Mischwesen*, in particular sphinxes. The association between hunt, sphinxes and dead ancestors occurs repeatedly in the Syro-Anatolian visual sources and seems to bear a specific significance for mortuary cults (Gilibert 2011b). Further, a slab with the symbol of the Sun God and a slab with an image of the Storm God were located at either sides of the portico, each with offering installations in front of it (Fig. 13). The Sun God and the Storm God are known to have been ritually involved with the cult of the dead (Bonatz 2000, 102-103; Niehr 1994, 2001, 2006). Inscriptions from Zincirli evoke a common meal between the Storm God and the deceased (Niehr, *ibid.*; Struble – Herrmann 2009; Sanders 2013). This may explain why a minority of the ‘small orthostats’ at the Lower Plaza are labeled as belonging to a “Palace of the Storm God” (Cholidis – Martin 2010, 183-184). This may have just been another name for the mausoleum of Kapara, where rituals calling prominently on the Storm God were expected to take place.

62. The identification of the caryatids as images of members of the royal dynasty is supported by parallels at other Syro-Anatolian city-states of the earlier Iron Age, including the statues of the kings Suhis and Katuwas at the ceremonial plaza of Carchemish, the statue of an anonymous king at the upper plaza of Zincirli, the images of PUGNUS-mili at Malatya and a stele found at İspekçür, representing King Arnuwantis of Malatya with his grandparents (Bonatz 2000, Gilibert 2011b, Harmanşah 2011). Inscriptions directly related to these images indicate that they were sometime commissioned by the subject represented when he or she was still alive, but at the same time they were conceived for the future after the death of the donor. Inscriptions are explicit about the embedment of the images of deceased kings and queens within public rituals involving offerings, and thus correlate directly to the installations on the terrace of Kapara’s Palace.

63. See Sanders 2013 for the discussion of ‘mortuary chapels’ and ‘assembly halls’ in the West Semitic funerary rituals.

64. The description of the archaeological context is given by Müller 1950, 357-360. The most recent reappraisal has been published by Orthmann 2011, with further literature references.

65. At the feet of the statues were grouped seven small and rough stone figurines sharing the same iconography of the statues (Müller 1950, 359), probably representing less important deceased persons.

The notably less hieratic reliefs on the south façade of the Palace are not particularly focused on mortuary imagery, and sometimes even have playful and parodic undertones. However, the ‘small orthostats’ located close to the Scorpion Gate stand apart. This set of reliefs contributed to define the space immediately in front of the gate rather than the lower plaza and was apparently chosen specifically for their ritual significance. In particular, the massive corner block right next the ramp to the gate (Fig. 11, at the right margin; Fig. 12)⁶⁶ reproduces the same symbol of the Sun God set up at the portico (Fig. 13). In the version right outside the Scorpion Gate, a (deceased?) king is depicted sitting in front of the symbol,⁶⁷ confirming the ties between the divine symbol and the royal family and perhaps functioning as a visual anticipation of a ritual that took place at the upper plaza. Thus, the inward progression from the lower to the upper plaza was accompanied by a growing density of ritually significant images.⁶⁸

A last important clue to the function of the Palace lies beneath the upper plaza. Here, a vaulted crypt was excavated.⁶⁹ The tomb was a small, thick-walled square structure with a low and narrow access door (Langenegger calls it a *Schlupfloch*), which was found walled up. The crypt contained bones of a richly adorned body⁷⁰ buried with precious grave goods.⁷¹ A gold sheet worked in the shape of a bearded mouth indicates the male gender of the buried individual. The exceptionality of the grave goods and the location of the crypt make it likely that this was the burial of a king. The style of embossed jewelry pieces and of metal vessels dates the grave goods to the same general time horizon of the Palace (Orthmann 2002, 95-99, with further literature; Becker – Novák 2012, 226). Until recently, it has been assumed that the crypt belonged to a pre-Kapara phase of the Palace and that Kapara consciously planned his ceremonial area over the burial place of a previous king (Orthmann 2002, 48). However, as already discussed above, archaeological investigations have

66. Due to its extraordinary thickness, this stone (No. 170 in the reports) was probably not re-used but in its primary position. Cf. Orthmann 2002, 87-88.

67. At a later date, the relief of a bull-man holding a symbol was set up behind the king (Stone no. 169), who was thus surrounded by mythical beings: this fact, and the drooping lotus held by the king, may indicate that the sitting figure was understood as the representation of a deceased king.

68. The question is open as to the symbolic meaning of the scorpion-men guarding the Scorpion Gate: were they generically apotropaic, as suggested by Assyrian protective rituals and magic deposition practices against evil demons and sickness (Green 1985; Wiggermann 1992, 52), or did they convey a specific narrative? Scorpion men are variously portrayed on monumental art and on seals as guardians of gates and supporters of the winged disk of the Sun God (Huxley 2000). In the ninth tablet of the Epic of Gilgamesh, a scorpion-man and his mate (a scorpion-woman?) are introduced as guards to the entrance gate to the dark mountain ‘road’ where the Sun God goes at the end of its day. Down this road Gilgamesh will go in his quest for eternal life (on the “doors of heaven”, the “road of Šamaš” and the “garden of Šamaš”, see Heimpel 1986 and Dickson 2007. On the ‘mortuary journey’ of Gilgamesh and its ties to the mythology of the Sun God, see Clark 1997). The tale of Gilgamesh enjoyed much popularity in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (Sallaberger 2008, 90-97). Perhaps, the symbolism of the Scorpion-Men at the gate to the upper plaza of Tell Halaf, which was decorated with repeated visual references to the Sun God and mortuary rituals, is a testimony to it (Huxley 2000, 122 fn. 64).

69. A northern tomb with two chambers was found empty and badly preserved. This tomb postdated the Palace and was probably a significantly later addition (Pucci 2008, 96-97).

70. The bones were found disarticulated and the skull was missing. The excavators attribute this situation to post-depositional processes and rule out secondary mortuary practices, although the reasons for this choice are not discussed (Langenegger 1950, 102).

71. A list of the objects is published in Pucci 2008, 232.

now refuted the existence of this alleged pre-Kapara phase. Since the foundation walls of the crypt cut through what we now recognize as the deeper soil fill of the upper plaza,⁷² it follows that the crypt was built *after* the plaza. Following the detailed description of Langenegger (1950, 100-103), the building history of the crypt can be reconstructed as follows (Fig. 14): first, a large square pit was dug into the upper soil fill of the plaza, until the lower foundations of it were reached. A second pit was then dug at the bottom of the first one, in part cutting through older layers. The crypt was then built with its lower half sunk into the deeper pit and its upper half standing free (Langenegger 1950, 101, 103).⁷³ A gravel street (a ramp?) was laid out, connecting the entrance of the crypt with the paved street that came up from the Scorpion Gate (Langenegger 1950, 96). Subsequently, the crypt was left open to the air over a short period of time,⁷⁴ during which, we must assume, the royal funeral took place. Then, the narrow entrance was walled up, the structure was covered up with the soil earlier removed, a cement-like gravel was spread above it and the surface of the plaza was restored (Langenegger 1950, 102). In short, the crypt had only an ephemeral existence as a visible structure.

Who was the king buried in the crypt? If the reconstruction proposed here is correct, then it must be a king that died not long after the layout of the upper plaza, and there is no better candidate than Kapara himself. The Palace with the dynastic statues the terrace with the ritual installations, the open spaces around it, and finally the crypt: I argue that Kapara devised this ensemble – a theatrical mausoleum to his dynasty and himself – as an overblown, monumental version of the older mortuary complex right outside the walls of the ceremonial centre. Kapara revisited the traditional cult of the royal ancestors and recast old ritual practices into a hitherto unknown spectacular dimension.

Kapara's 'theatrical' design of the area around its Palace allowed a large audience to participate to royal memorial rituals in scenic surroundings. The ensemble was carefully constructed to touch upon a wide spectrum of senses and emotions. At the upper plaza, the architecture and the imposing presence of the three statues engendered a solemn and hieratic feeling. But there seems to have been an amusing side to it: at the lower plaza, the atmosphere conjured up by the architecture and by the monuments was open, informal, even ludic. Here, perhaps, as it is often the case upon the occasion of large-scale ceremonies, side activities took place and people gathered for playful meetings. The space inside the Palace, on the other hand, was reserved for the selected few. Here, the individuals that performed the rituals at the terrace retreated for activities that did not require fixed installations but at the same time required a grand space with ancillary rooms: perhaps for the

72. For the stratigraphic details of the crypt, see Langenegger 1950, 103. Langenegger's analysis must now be revisited keeping in mind that he mistook the foundations of the Palace for the remains of an older building (the *Altbau*).

73. The boundary of the foundation trench is indicated as a negative by the irregular outer wall face of the lower 1,80 m of the building. The upper part of the wall face, evidently above ground, was set regularly and even (Langenegger 1950, 103).

74. A paved surface in front of the narrow entrance to the crypt and the smooth upper section of the mud-brick walls (Langenegger 1950, 97-98; 102-103) indicate that the crypt was left visible and that something happened in front of it over a certain period of time. On the other hand, the lack of wall plastering indicates that this period had been relatively brief (Langenegger 1950, 103; Orthmann 2002, 48).

commemorative banqueting that is known to have gone together with ancestral and mortuary rituals.⁷⁵

Thus, Kapara's design reflected a 'ceremonial turn' in ritual habits. This seems to have been a widespread trend in the Syro-Anatolian city-states of the late 10th century BC (Gilibert 2012). The development or, better, the spectacular inflation of specific ritual traditions relates to political stress. The late 10th to early 9th century BC was a period in which many Syro-Anatolian ruling families faced serious challenges to the political order they sought to establish. The dynasty of Kapara may have been no exception: at the turn of the 10th century, the dynasty of Kapara may have been already been substituted by another family, the "House of Bahianu" (Fuchs 2011, 354-355). In search of methods to increase consensus and reinforce their own legitimacy, the Syro-Anatolian ruling families turned to the community-building power of civic spectacle (Fischer-Lichte 2005) and invested greatly in the creation of ceremonial plazas and monumental architecture. At Gūzāna, this development of ritual on a grand scale focused around the cult of royal ancestors in general and of king Kapara himself in particular.⁷⁶ After Kapara, his Palace and the ceremonial plazas continued to be used for at least four generations of rulers (perhaps even belonging to competing dynasties)⁷⁷ and at least three further tombs were added to Kapara's crypt.⁷⁸ Kapara's 'theatre palace' evidently proved a very effective ceremonial machine.

75. Brown has linked the layout of Kapara's Palace with the East Suite of the North-western Palace at Nimrud, which he convincingly interprets as a locus for ancestral rituals, including banqueting (Brown 2008, 219, fig. 25; Brown 2010; see also below, fn. 76).

76. The modern parallel found by Langenegger in the Sublime Porte of the Ottoman sultan could be more aptly substituted with the Anıtkabir (literally, "memorial tomb") of Kemal Atatürk, that shares a surprising number of features with the Palace of Kapara and whose decoration was overtly inspired by the Syro-Anatolian visual repertoire. For a case-study of monuments embedded into ancestral cults (and probably inspired by Syro-Anatolian practices) at Nimrud's Northwest Palace, see Brown 2010. According to Brown, the East Suite of the North-West Palace was a mortuary cult complex, where a monumental iconography that he links to Syro-Anatolian models was used in order to elicit and reinforce in the viewers "a sense of leaving the world of the living and entering that of the dead" (20). Brown explains the Assyrian appropriation of Syro-Anatolian monumental traditions for the Assyrian royal palace as a metaphoric claim of the Assyrian urban elite to the Syro-Anatolian cities (36-37).

77. Gūzāna became first an Assyrian client state and then an Assyrian province in the course of the 9th and 8th centuries BC (Novák 2009; Dornauer 2010; Fuchs 2011). Schaudig ascribes the final destruction of the Palace to the Assyrian army and dates it to the mid-8th century BC (Schaudig 2011). However, the history of architectural modification of the Palace, the many additions and above all the large-scale substitution of hundreds of 'small orthostats' at its south façade indicate a long lifeline for the building and strongly suggest a later date for its final destruction.

78. After Kapara's period, a double-chambered crypt was added next to the original crypt, and a further mortuary chamber was built inside a poorly known building lining the north edge of the upper plaza, the so-called "Nordbau".

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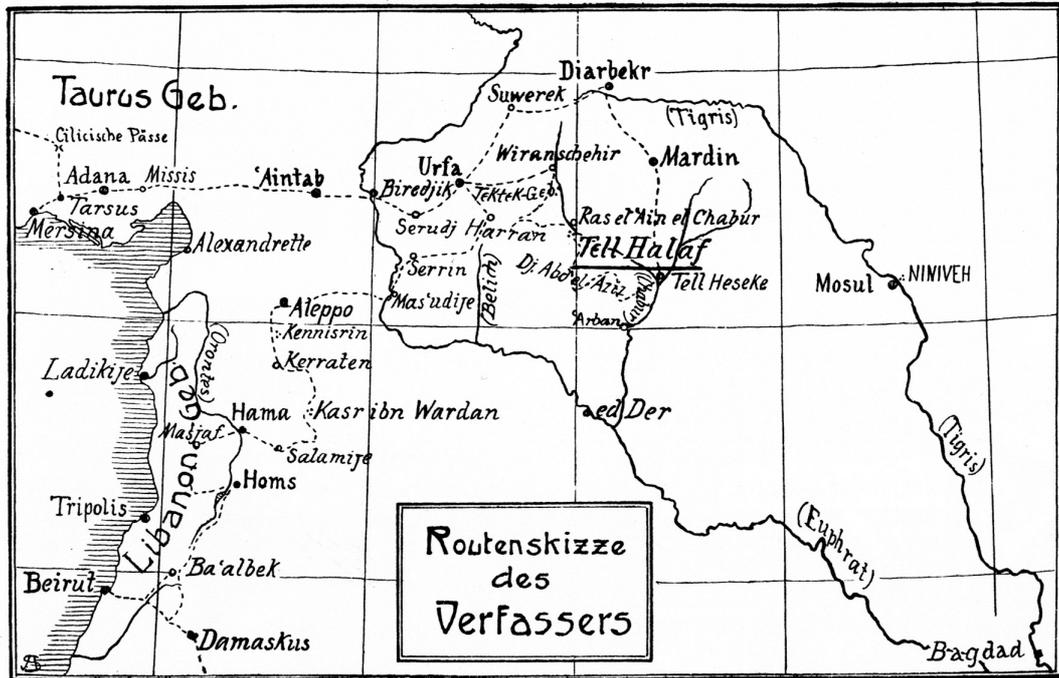


Fig. 1: The itinerary of Oppenheim's journey in 1899 (from Cholidis et al. 2011: 13, fig. 5).



Fig. 2: General plan of Tell Halaf as recorded by the Oppenheim expedition. A north-south oriented grid of 100x100 m squares is laid out on the plan; the contour interval of the contour lines is 0.25 m (Langenegger et al. 1950, pl. I).

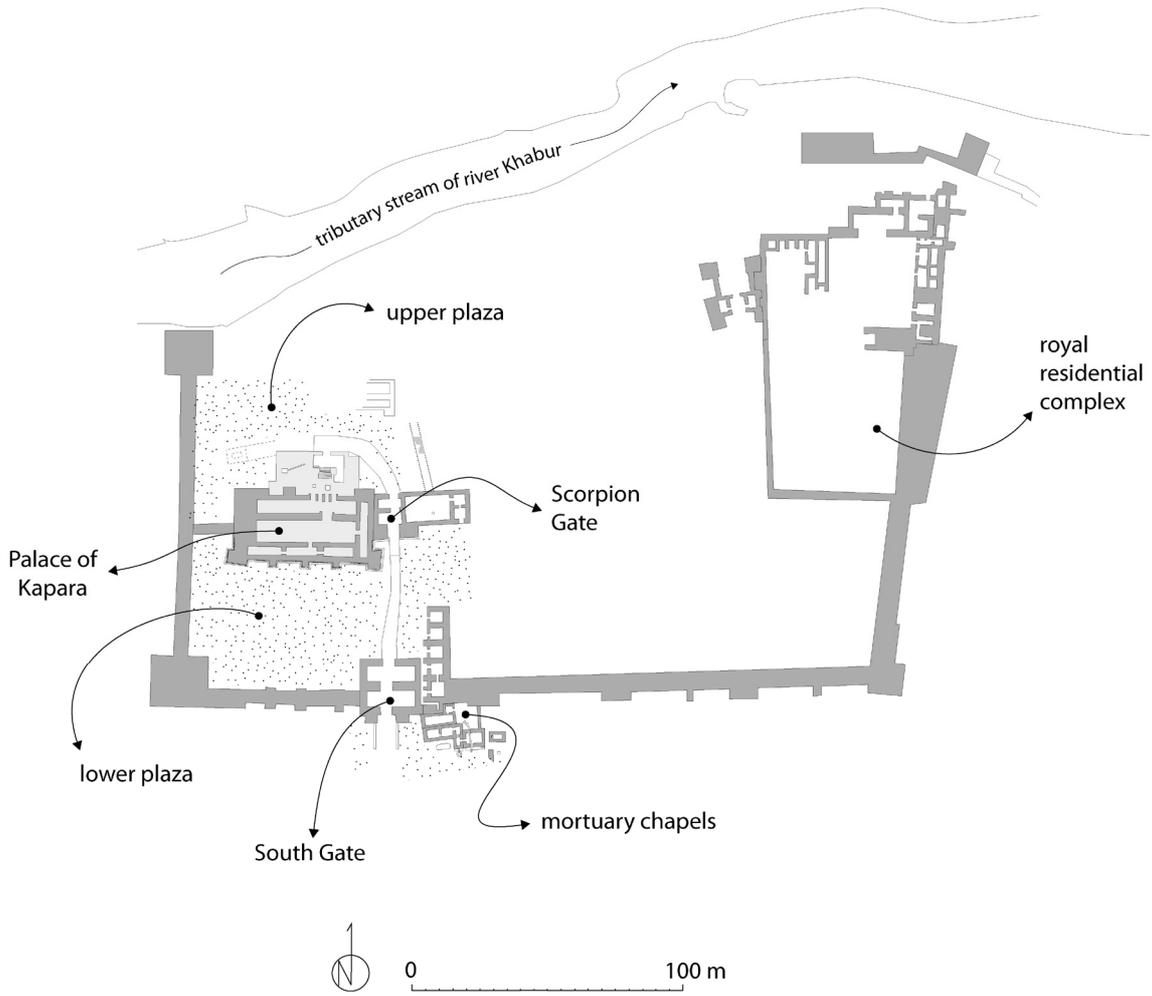


Fig. 3: The walled city centre at Tell Halaf. Drawing A. Gilbert.

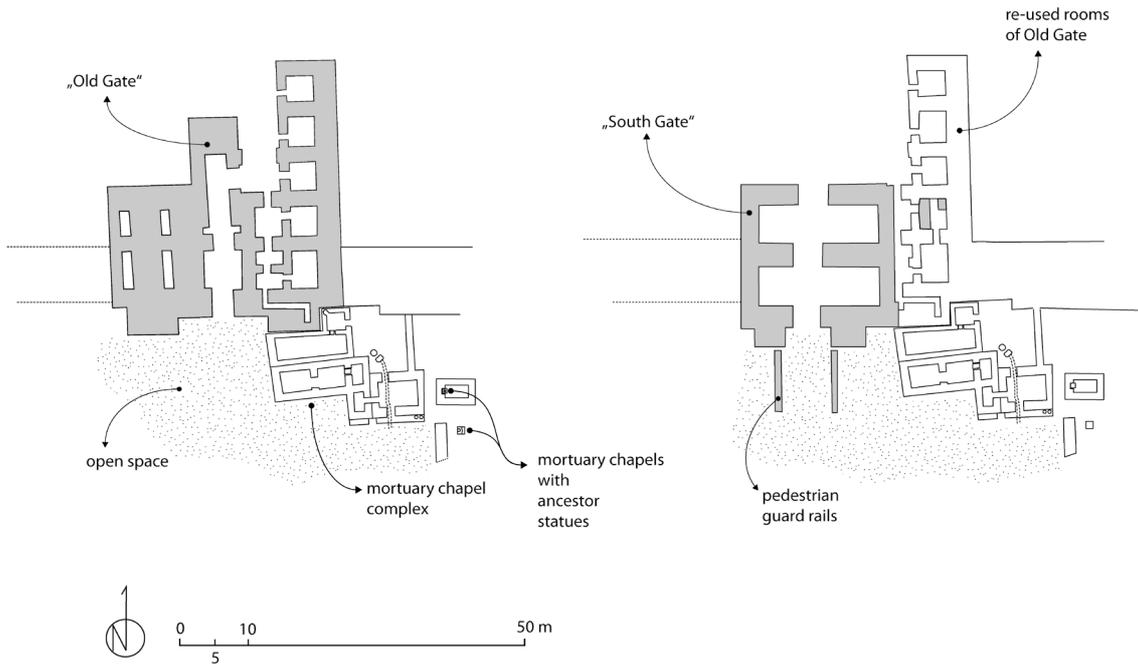


Fig. 4: The “Old Gate” to the western half of the walled city centre (11th century BCE) and the subsequent “South Gate” (late 10th / early 9th century BCE), with adjoining complex of mortuary chapels built together or immediately after the Old Gate and remaining in use together with the South Gate. Drawing A. Gilibert

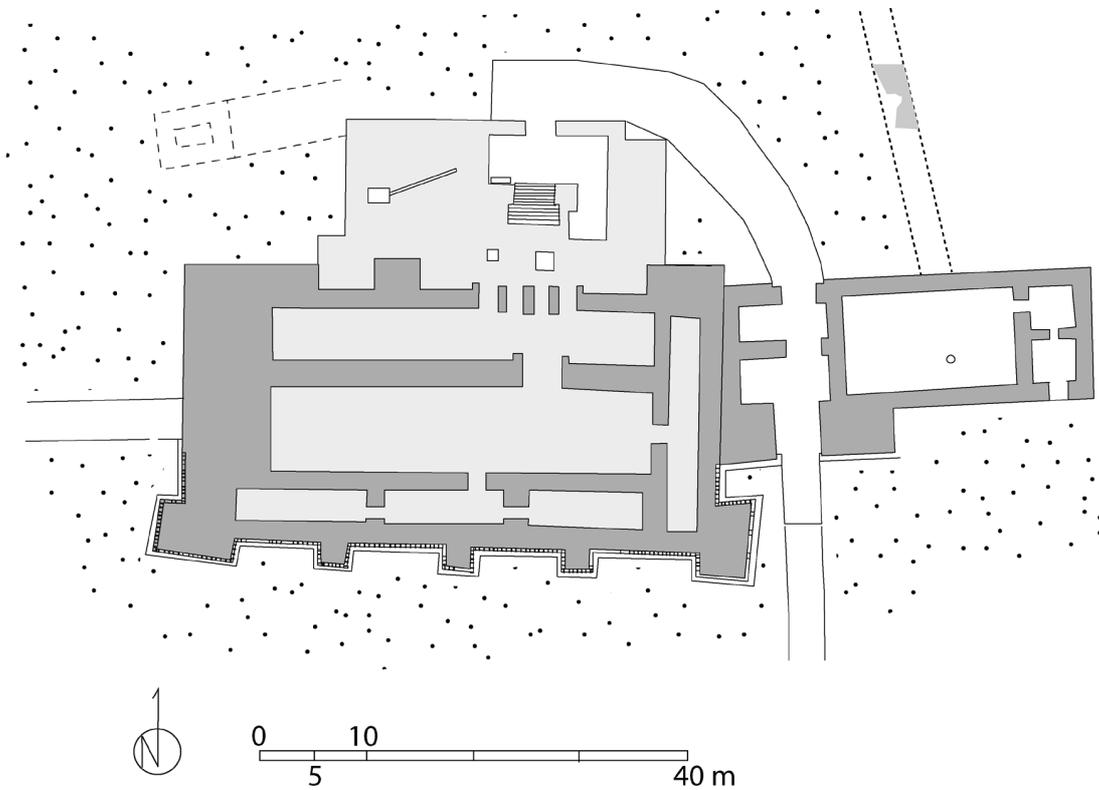
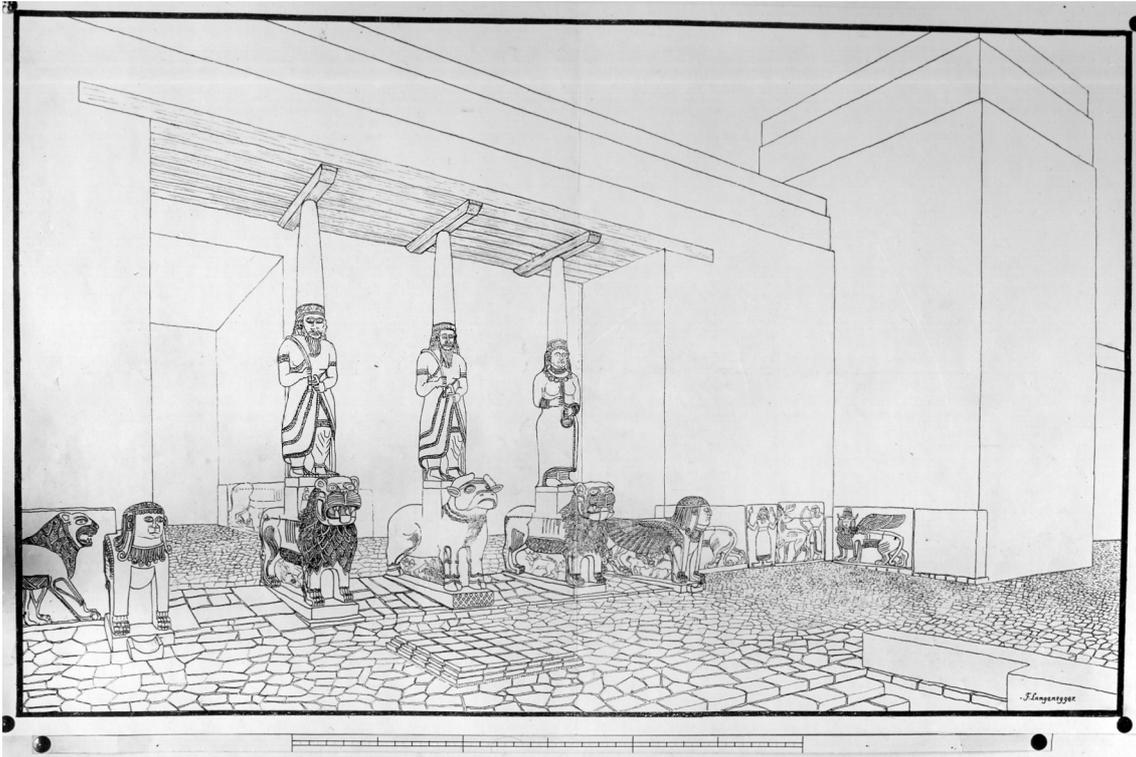


Fig. 5: The Palace of Kapara and its surroundings. Drawing A. Gilibert.



Slg. Oppenheim 29/16.29 S. 25

Fig. 6: The entrance portico of Kapara's Palace in a drawing by Felix Langenegger. Copyright Sal. Oppenheim Hausarchiv, Nachlass Max von Oppenheim.

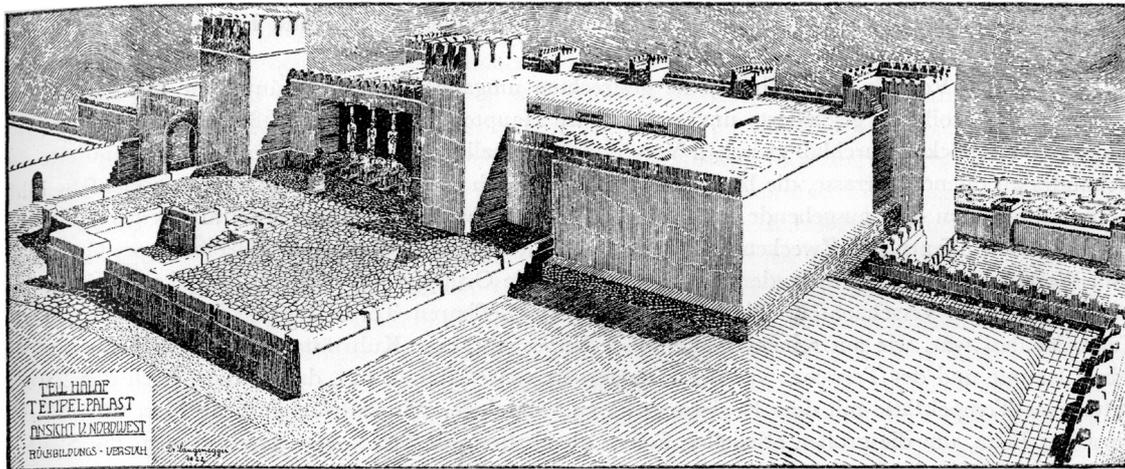


Fig. 7: The Palace of Kapara seen from north-west in a drawing by Felix Langenegger (from Langenegger 1950, 23, fig. 6). The parapet at the edge of the terrace is Langenegger's (likely wrong) suggestion.

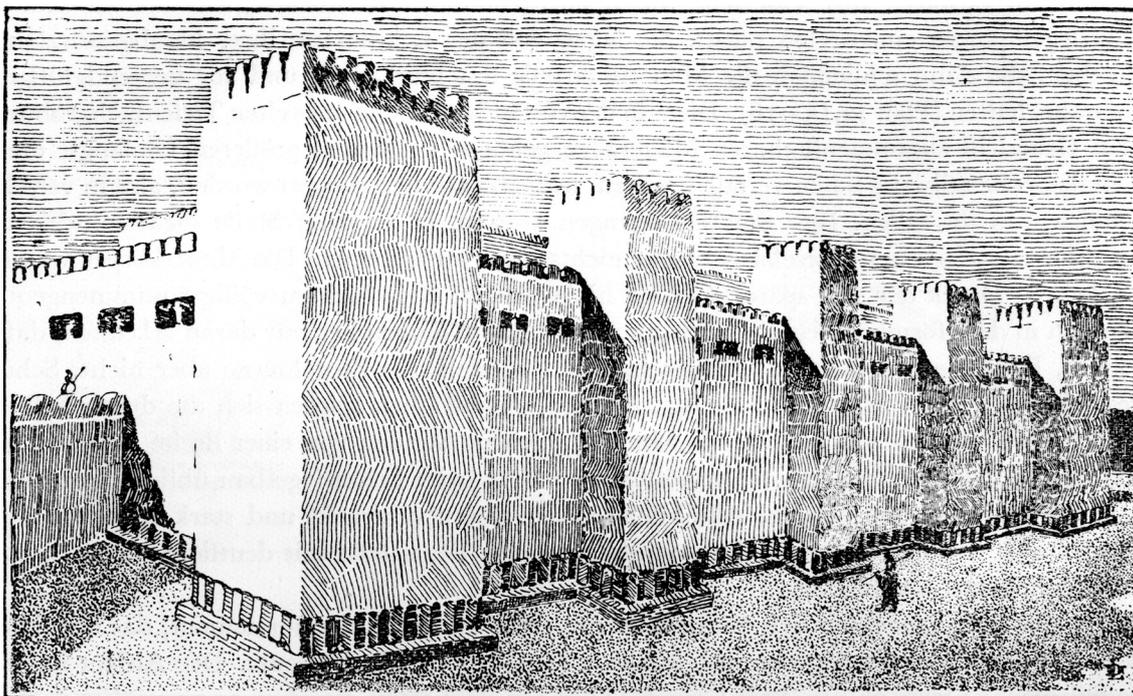


Fig. 8: The Palace of Kapara seen from south-west in a drawing by Felix Langenegger (from Langenegger 1950, 36, fig. 8).

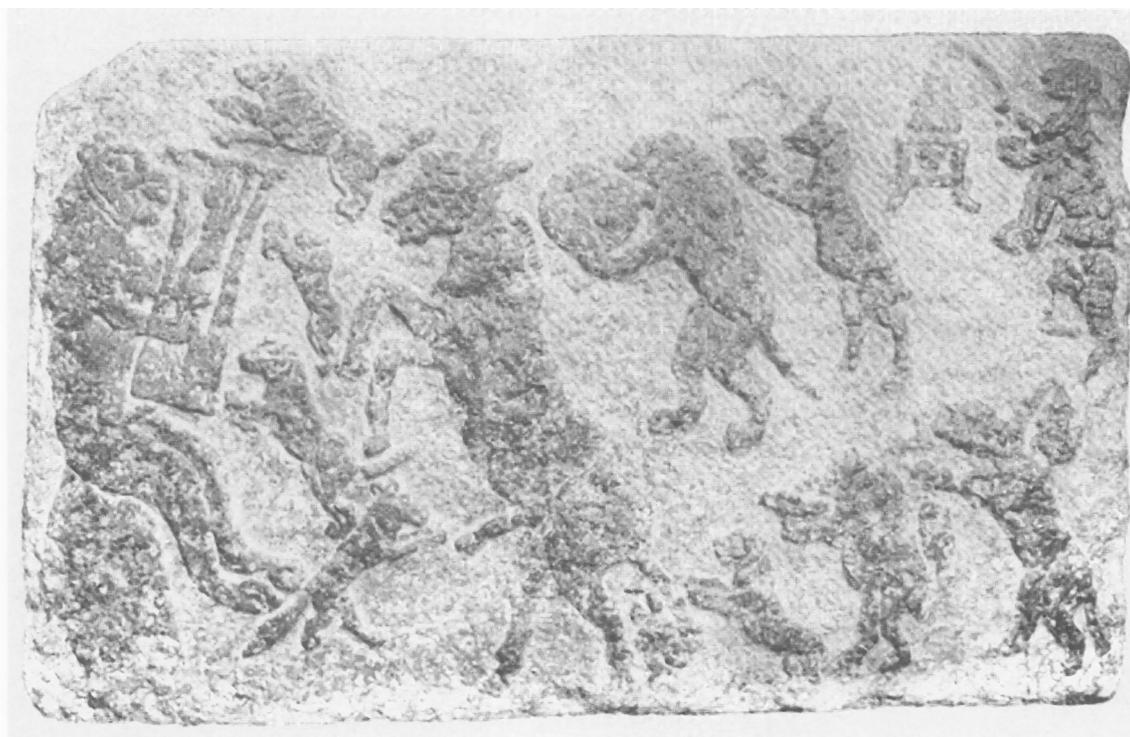


Fig. 9: Slab no. 57 of the 'small orthostats', the so-called *Tierkapelle* (from Orthmann 2002, 87, fig. 72).



Fig. 10: The sequence of 'small orthostats' as found by the excavators at the second bastion from west (from Cholidis and Martin 2010, 140, fig. V.124).

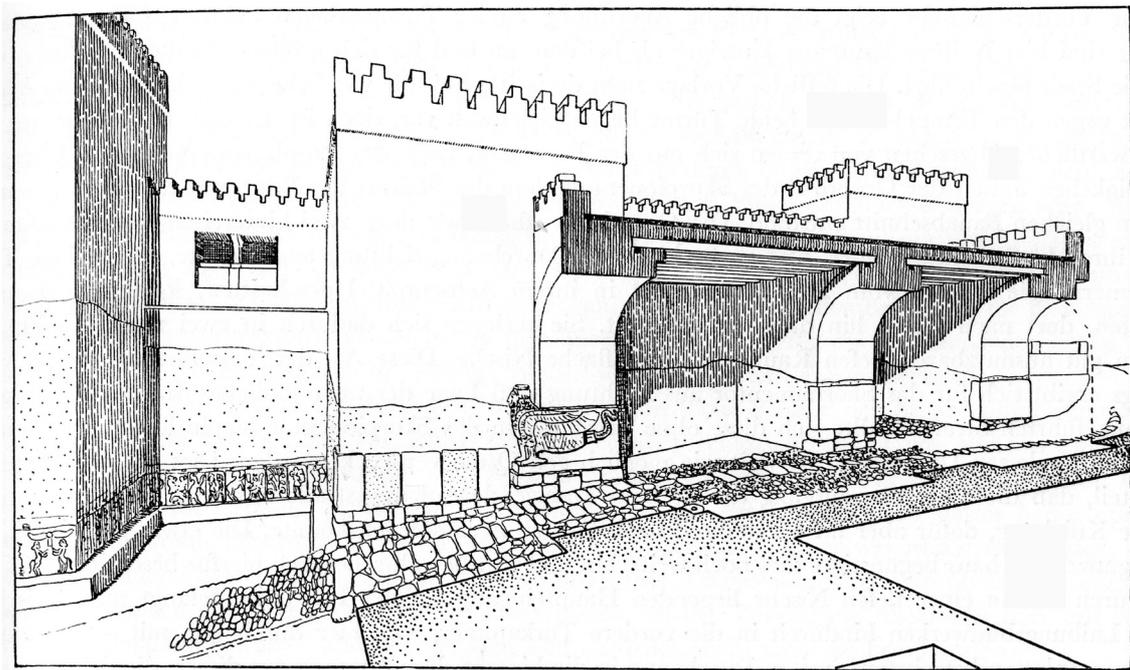


Fig. 11: The Scorpion Gate as reconstructed by Langenegger (Langenegger 1950, 87, fig. 42).



Fig. 12: The corner orthostat no. 170 in situ (Orthmann 2002, 88, fig. 73).



Fig. 13: Orthostat “Ba 2” at the entrance of the Palace as found in situ, with offering stones in front of it (Cholidis – Martin 2010, 311, fig. XIII.5).

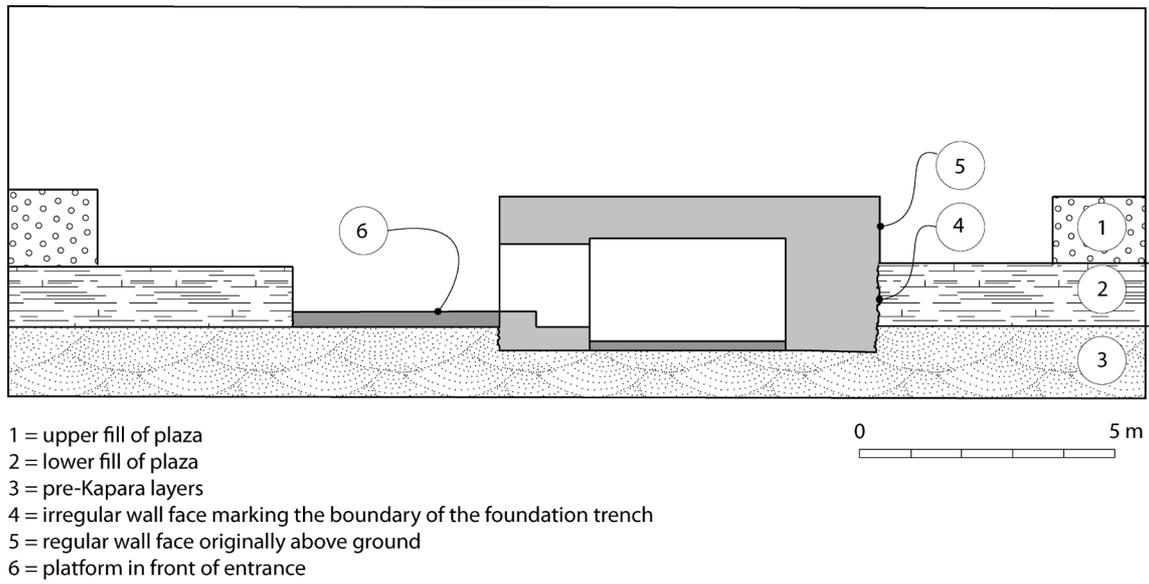


Fig. 14: Sketch of the crypt in section (east-west). Drawing A. Gilbert.