

# “The Reception Room” in the Tripartite Plan and Its Effects on the Mesopotamian Domestic Architecture in the Historical Times

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**Key Words:** tripartite plan, main room, reception room, domestic architecture, women’s quarters (*gynaikon/harem*) and men’s quarters (*andron/selam*).

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** üç bölümlü plan, ana oda, kabul odası, konut mimarlığı, harem ve selam geleneği.

Tripartite plan is the most popular plan type of Mesopotamian architecture. It is widely used in the Ubaid and Uruk Periods between the V-IV millennium BC both in domestic and public architecture. This plan scheme, which has emerged with Ubaid Culture (5800-4200 BC), named after Tell-al Ubaid in the South Mesopotamian region, has kept on being used undergoing spatial evolutions while preserving the general establishment principles thereof during V-IV millennium BC.

Architectural standardization and symmetry can be observed from the earliest phase of Ubaid Period which is divided into 5 stages within itself as 0-4. The plan which decisively bears a pre-designed spatial design, in its simplest form consists of a long rectangular central main room flanked by a group of rooms on each long side of the central space. This type is called as “*Simple Tripartite Plan*” (fig. 1). It is main living room of the house to be used for daily works. The central room which is the main determinant and formative element of the plan is sometime roofed or not. Generally there is no direct access from the street door to the main room. This central room has been highlighted from many aspects. This space which is the largest room of the building is at the same time the main connection area within the other rooms of the house. Another unchangeable characteristic of the central room (courtyard) is that the hearth of the house is always here

(Frangipane 2002: 121; 2003: 151). This indicates that the central nature of this room is not only emphasized due to the geometrical means thereof but also due to some conceptional significance (ibid). These houses which belong to extended families as a social structure when used as dwellings have other living areas functioning as bedrooms, living room and service places to be used for daily works in the symmetric sectors which lie along the 2 long sides of the central room.

In the further phases of the plan, the long central hall has transept at one end forming a 'cross' or the letter T. This type is called as "*Simple Cruciform Building*" and is surrounded with a line of small rooms on each side according to the general characteristics of the plan (fig. 2). In the more developed form of this model, a building with a cruciform-shaped central hall is flanked by one or more smaller cruciform-shaped rooms on either side. This subtype named as "*Tri-Cruciform Building*" and it is used in the large houses in Tell Abada and Kheit Qasim (Kubba 1987: 126; 1998: 65) (fig. 3).

Tripartite plan used in public architecture in addition to domestic architecture during V-IV millennium BC has undergone an evolution by creating subtypes after different applications in terms of the formation of the central hall and the line of rooms and the arrangement thereof surrounding same. Different variations of tripartite plan have been employed during these periods in the public buildings in Eridu, Uruk and Tepe Gawra level XIII. The walls of these buildings were built thicker and niches with certain distances which were used for decorative purposes were added along the external walls. They give the buildings the monumental appearance. There is an altar at one end of the central hall –cella/naos- in these buildings (Kubba 1987: 126; 1998: 65).

## The Uruk Period

The evolution of the tripartite plan has also continued during the Uruk Period in IV millennium BC and different sub-types of the plan have been employed in the public structures in E-anna and A-nu precincts in Uruk which is the core center of the period.

However the most significant form of the tripartite plan in the Uruk Period emerges in Uruk colonial settlements, such as Habuba Kabira, Jebel Aruda and Hassek Höyük. In this new sub-plan, the houses comprises two main components; a house in tripartite plan and an inner courtyard with a *reception room*. This new subtype is employed in the large-size elite dwellings and they have

certainly a pre-design. Reception room is a guest room. It is usually the largest roofed room of the house. The household, on the other hand keep living in the dwelling unit with the tripartite plan type. All reception rooms are situated as far as possible from the main house entrance, thus well shielded from privacy and street noise. The Uruk reception room may take three forms; either a simple large room, or bipartite type, or a large room with surrounded rooms on three sides (Forest – Vallet 2008: 41). As a rule, the wall in courtyard side of the reception rooms are always thicker than other walls of the room. Sometimes there are 2 reception rooms in the courtyard. This case may be attributed to the occurrence that these parts possibly functioned as women's quarters (*gynaikon/harem*) and men's quarters (*andron/selam*).

The first application of this new type is sighted in the House 2 in Habuba Kabira. Here, domestic unit in the simple tripartite plan type is located in the east of a large courtyard which has a reception room in northern and southern sides (fig. 4). There are 2 rectangular reception rooms opposite to each other in northern and southern sides of this courtyard. They have three symmetric doors facing one another. The wall in courtyard side of the reception rooms are thicker as a rule (Sürenhagen 1986: 18-19; Vallet 1997: 63; Finet 1975: 159).

Another example of reception room application is observed in the House 40 in Habuba Kabira. Here, the inner courtyard with 2 rectangular reception rooms is located in the middle of two house units (fig. 5). So, two house units belonging to the same house are connected with a courtyard with reception rooms facing one another. One of the house is built in simple tripartite plan and other in simple cru-ciform plan. The walls of the reception rooms in the court direction are thicker again. This house owned by one of the outstanding families of the settlement (Sürenhagen 1986: 22; Vallet 1997: 67; Finet 1975: 160; Schmandt-Besserat 1992: 89-90).

The same plan pattern with small variations has also been applied in large elite residences in the southern part of the public space in Jebel Aruda. In House I, a rectangular reception room with a thicker front wall located at one side of the court which is in the south of the simple tripartite house unit (Driel – Driel 1979: 19) (fig. 6). A suite constructed in *bipartite* plan, comprising small rooms along only one long side of a rectangular main room, lies along across the reception room at the other side of the court. This suite probably is the second reception room of the building and belongs to traditions of women's quarters (*gynaikon/harem*) and men's quarters (*andron/selam*) (Kohlmeyer 1996: 102). Courtyard is inclosed by service'room.

The other complex House 2, constructed adjacent to House I, consists of a simple cruciform type. In the south of the house, there is a inner courtyard. A large reception room with a thicker front wall is situated at southern side of the court and it is surrounded by the rooms on three sides, converting it to a reception suite. Here, there are niches on the short sides of the reception room. Other rooms at the other sides of the courtyard are service areas (fig. 6) (Driel – Driel 1979: 22; Kohlmeyer 1996: 105; Frangipane – Palmieri 1988: 551-552; Driel 2002: 194-195).

Another example of the reception room tradition is seen in the acropolis of Hasek Höyük, which is other Uruk colonial in southeastern Anatolia. Inside the acropolis, the ruler house built in simple tripartite plan type and a reception suite in *bipartite* type has been located in the south of the inner courtyard (fig. 7). Other sides of the courtyard are surrounded by the service's spaces (Forest – Vallet 2008: 42).

## The Central Courtyard Plan

As from the third millennium BC, Mesopotamian domestic architecture consists of “central courtyard plan type”. The central courtyard plan based on a courtyard surrounded by rooms frequently on all four sides. This court as being central, unroofed area where much of the daily life the inhabitants is enacted.

Within this period, “*the main room*” (living room/*oikos*) phenomenon has emerged in the Mesopotamian domestic architecture. Main room is the prime living space of the house and it is the largest room of the house. It is situated in one side of the court. Sometimes there is a single small room next to it while sometimes it is surrounded by rooms on three sides to create a *suite*.

In this period, the reception room pattern of Uruk Period has also influenced to “the central courtyard plan type”, but this time, it is different in use than the Uruk period. The reception room of this period is the second large room of the house and located in front of the main room. There is an access to reception room from the courtyard. In all samples, the wall in the courtyard of the reception room is thicker than the others like in the Uruk Period. The entries of the reception room and the main room were situated in different directions due to privacy. As such, it is not possible to enter to the reception room from the main room, and vice versa. In this period, the reception room is used in three different ways; 1). It is located in front of the main room, 2). The reception room and the main room are located in different directions

of the courtyard, 3). It is situated on one side of the outer courtyard in the double courtyard type. In this plan, vestibule, kitchen, bathroom, pantry, the staircase room and service venues used for everyday tasks is located around the courtyard (Forest – Vallet 008: 41).

First application appears in Lagaş (Telloh), Nippur, Esnunna and Ur. In these examples, the reception room with a small ante room is lying in front of the main room. The main room of the house with surrounded rooms on one or two sides is behind the reception room. The walls in the courtyard of the reception rooms are again thicker than the others (Crawford 1974: 245; Gibson 1988: 38; Zettler 1988: 330; Postgate 1990: 345; Delougaz – Hill – Lloyd 1967: 39; Woolley 1974: 220) (figs. 8, 9, 10).

In the second practice, the reception room and the main room are located in different directions of the courtyard. This is used both Neribtum and Nippur. In Neribtum, the reception room and the main room (*oikos*) are situated in different directions of the courtyard. Both the main room and the reception room are encircled by the rooms on two or three sides. Thus both composes *suites*. The wall in the courtyard of the reception room is thicker again (Hill – Jacobsen – Delougaz 1990: 56) (fig. 11). There is a connection between the main room and the reception room. In other practice in Nippur, the reception and the main room are located in different directions of the courtyard. Here, main room is surrounded by the rooms on two sides. The only one entrance to the main room is given from the reception room (Haines – McCown 1960: 78; Postgate 1990: 345; Stone 1987: 67) (fig. 12).

Reception room figure was also used in mansions the Mesopotamian architecture of historical times. The best example of this practice can be seen in the house of Shilwi-Teshub in Nuzi in the Kassit Period. Here, there is a reception room having a thicker wall in the courtyard direction, along the southern side of the inner courtyard. The opening of the two doors of the reception room is quite large. The main room suite (*oikos*) surrounded by a series of rooms on three sides is behind the reception room (fig. 13). To the southwest of the building complex, there is an area, designed in the plan with the central courtyard, where servants had lived (Starr 1938: 127).

## The Reception Room in the Double Courtyard

Another practice of the reception room appears in the double courtyard. Here, the house consists of two courtyard, fore (outer) courtyard and inner courtyard. The fore (outer) courtyard is enclosed by numerous small service

rooms built fairly flimsily. To the only one access of the house is given from the outer (fore) courtyard. The inner courtyard is *harem* unite of the house and is surrounded by residential rooms or *harem* suites. The reception room is placed on one side of the outer courtyard and the only access of the inner courtyard is from the reception room.

The first application of the double courtyard plan is performed in the Grosse Wohnhaus in Asur. In this example, the mansion is consists of double courtyard. The outer courtyard is circled by numerous small service rooms placed haphazardly and they built fairly flimsily. The reception room is placed on one side of the outer courtyard. Thus, these two units are connected by the reception room There is only access from the reception room to the inner courtyard. There are two main room suites (*oikos*) in the inner courtyard facing one another. They have clearly better quality workmanship and thicker walls. These suites can be related to the tradition of men's quarters (*selam*) and women's quarters (*harem*) (Preusser 1954: 68) (fig. 14).

The similar planning in the Grosse Wohnhaus is seen in Red House in Assur. Here, the mansion consists of double courtyard. The outer courtyard is enclosed by numerous small service rooms with thinner wall. The reception room is placed on one side of the outer courtyard (Preusser 1954: 80) (fig. 15). There are two main room suites in the inner courtyard, but this time they are placed juxtaposition. They have thicker walls and good quality workmanship. The main room suites are surrounded by bedrooms, magazine and bath rooms. Again, these suites can be attributed to the men's quarters (*harem*) and women's quarters (*selam*). Two units, the outer and inner courtyard, are conjoined by the reception room (Andrae 1938: 128; Preusser 1954: 82).

## The Reflections of Reception Room in Other Building Types

The plan of the central courtyard with the reception room lying in front of the main room has also been used in public architecture in this period. The central courtyard and its subtypes is the unique plan employed in both temple and palace buildings in this period. Reception room and main room located one after the other were used in temple and palace architecture as they were used in domestic architecture only with some slight variations.

The first example of this application appears in Naramsin Audience Hall in Esnunna (civil palace) (Frankfort – Lloyd – Jacobsen 1940: 100-115). Here, the throneroom is replaced by the reception room and the Great Hall is replaced by the main room. The walls of both Throneroom and Great Hall in

the courtyard direction are thicker (fig. 16). Building complex proved to be very rich in finds. Among the most important items were some 1500 tablets - largely economic documents and letters - and inscribed seal impressions. Other objects include terracotta figurines and plaques, cylinder and stamp seals, metal objects (tools/weapons) and numerous kinds of artifact (Frankfort – Lloyd – Jacobsen 1940: 235-243).

Double courtyard plan type was also used in the Late Assyrian Period in the large, private palaces in Khorsabad. In all private palaces, the throne-room is placed on one side of the outer courtyard (fig. 17). The throneroom contained the main audience hall of the palace that opened off the forecourt and led through a smaller hall into the inner courtyard. To one end of the throneroom lay a small anteroom giving into a stairwell (Loud 1936: 97; Loud – Altman 1938: 170; Turner 1970: 179). The walls of the throneroom are decorated by red, blue, white and black frescos. In front of this room lie a retiring chamber and a bath (Turner 1970: 181). Around the outer courtyard are uncovered administrative offices, service quarters, storerooms and stables while inner courtyard are surrounded by residential rooms or *harem* suites (Sevin 1991: 84). This plan is employed at all Late Assyrian civil or formal palaces.

## Conclusion

As can be seen, reception room application that was commenced to be employed as a sub-type of the tripartite plan firstly in the Uruk colonial settlements has become the most substantial architectural element influencing the Mesopotamian domestic and public architecture during all the historical times.

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## Üç Bölümlü Plan Tipi'nde 'Resepsiyon Odası' Kullanımı ve Tarih Devirler Mezopotamya Konut Mimarlığına Etkileri

Türkçeye “Üç Bölümlü Plan” olarak çevrilen tripartite plan Mezopotamya mimarlığının en sevilen plan tipi olup Mezopotamya mimarisinde MÖ V. bin yıldan itibaren genel kuruluş ilkeleri aynı kalmakla birlikte mekansal evrim geçirerek evsel ve kamusal mimarlıkta yaygın olarak kullanılmıştır.

Kesinlikle ön-tasarımlı mekan kurgusuna sahip olan ve mimaride standartlaşmaya işaret eden plan en basit şekliyle, uzun bir ana odanın (avlu) 2 uzun kanadı boyunca yerleştirilmiş odalardan oluşur. İlk kez Ubaid Dönemi'nde ortaya çıkan planın asıl belirleyici ögesi ve şekillendiricisi olan ana oda (avlu), sıcak iklimden dolayı uzun süreler kullanıldığı için üzeri açık karakterdedir. Bu mekana genelde sokak kapısından direk ulaşılmaz. Yapının ana yaşama mekanı olan ana oda (avlu) bir çok yönden öne çıkarılmıştır. Yapının en büyük odası olan bu mekan aynı zamanda ana bağlantı alanıdır. Büyük ve tek parçalı olan ana odanın değişmez bir özelliği de evin ocağının burada oluşudur. Bu, odanın merkezsel niteliğinin sadece geometrik değil anlamsal olarak da vurgulandığını gösterir. Konut olarak kullanıldığında sosyal yapı olarak kalabalık geniş ailelere ait olan bu evlerde ana odanın 2 uzun kenarında bulunan simetrik sektörlerde ise evin yatma ve oturma birimleri bulunur.

Tripartite planın en önemli gelişimi ise Geç Uruk Dönemi koloni yerleşmeleri olan Habuba Kabira, Jebel Aruda ve Hassek Höyük'te ortaya çıkar. Bu yerleşmelerdeki büyük boyutlu seçkin konutlarında kullanılan alt tipte evler, tripartite planda inşa edilmiş konut bölümü ve resepsiyon (kabul/misafir odası) odalı iç avlulu ünite olmak üzere 2 bölümden oluşur. Evin en büyük odası olan bu oda mahremiyet ve gürültüden dolayı evin ana girişinden uzakta konumlandırılmış olup bu odanın avlu yönündeki duvarı tüm örneklerde daha kalın tutulmuştur. Reseption odalarının çift olması durumunda ise bu bölümlerin harem (gynaikon) ve selam (andron) odası geleneğine referans vermiş olabilecekleri düşünülür.

Resepsiyon odası geleneği dört yönden oda dizisiyle çevrili “merkezi avlu plan şeması”ndan oluşan MÖ 3. bin yıl Mezopotamya mimarlığını da etkilemiştir. Bu dönemde resepsiyon odası ev ölçeğindeki en büyük ikinci oda olup yine tüm örneklerde Uruk Dönemi'nde olduğu gibi avlu yönündeki duvarı



daha kalındır. Asla avludan direk giriş verilmeyen resepsiyon odası 3 farklı şekilde yerleştirilmiştir. Bunlardan ilkinde ana odanın önünde bu odaya paralel şekilde uzanırken, bir diğer kullanımda ana odadan bağımsız olarak avlunun farklı bir kanadında konumlandırılmış, bir diğerinde ise çift avlulu kurgulanmış bir yapının dış avlu bölümünde bulunmaktadır. Bazen etrafı iki veya üç yönden çevrilerek bir resepsiyon suiti oluşturur.

Resepsiyon odası motifi bu dönemler Mezopotamya mimarlığında evsel kullanımın yanısıra kamusal mimarlığı da etkilemiştir. Bu dönemin çift avlulu saray yapılarında resepsiyon odası yerini taht salonuna bırakmıştır. Görüldüğü gibi ilkin Geç Uruk Dönemi'nde Uruk koloni yerleşmelerinde tripartite planın bir alt-tipi olarak kullanılan elit konutlarında ortaya çıkan resepsiyon odası geleneği tüm tarihi devirler Mezopotamya evsel ve kamusal mimarlığını etkilemiştir.

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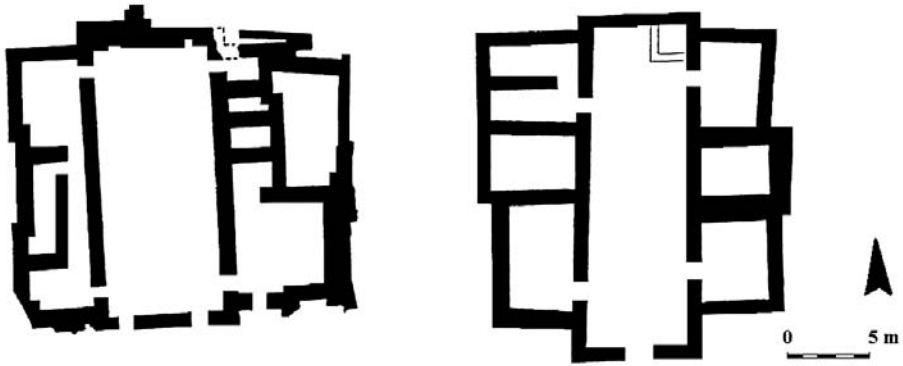


Fig. 1 Simple Tripartite Plan (Kubba, 1998)

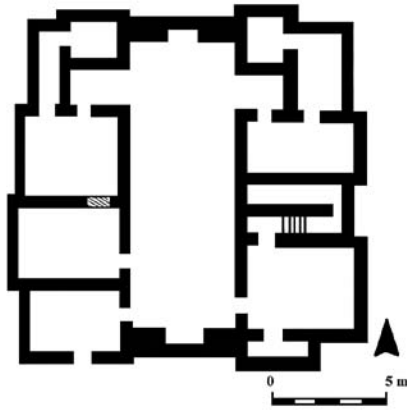


Fig. 2 Tell Madhur. Simple Cruciform Building (Kubba, 1998)

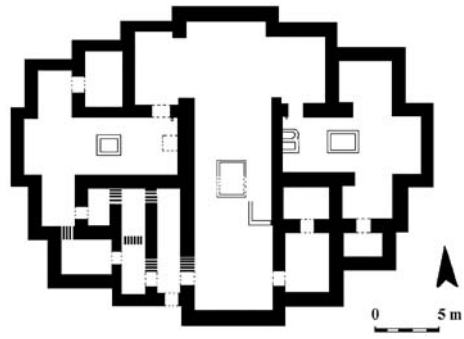


Fig. 3 Kheit Qasim. "Tri-cruciform Building" (Kubba, 1998)

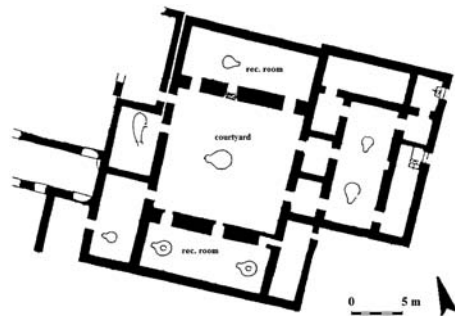


Fig. 4 Habuba Kabira. House 2 (Sürenhagen, 1986)

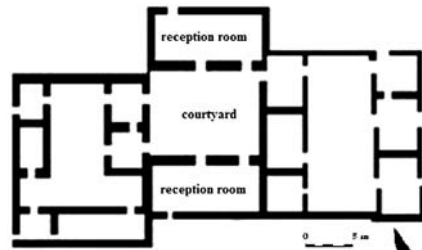


Fig. 5 Habuba Kabira. House 40 (Sürenhagen, 1986)



Fig. 6 *Jebel Aruda* (Driel, 2002)

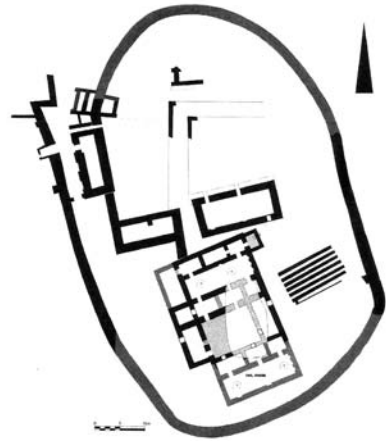


Fig. 7 *Hasek Höyük* (Forest, Vallet 2008)

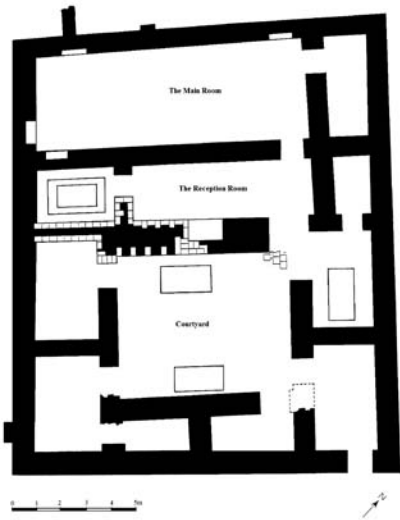


Fig. 8 *Tello* (Parrot 1948)



Fig. 9 *Ur* (Miglus 1996)



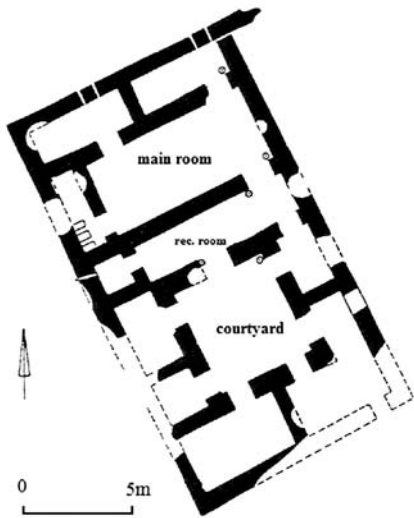


Fig. 10 Nippur (Miglus 1996)



Fig. 11 Neribtum (Miglus 1996)

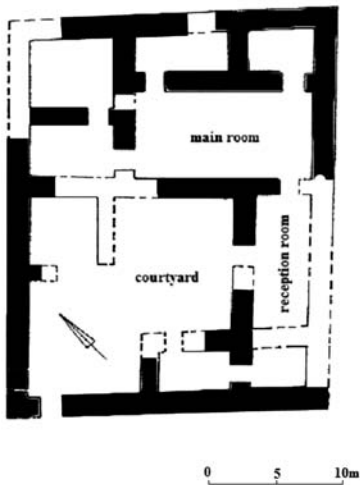


Fig. 12 Nippur (Miglus 1996)

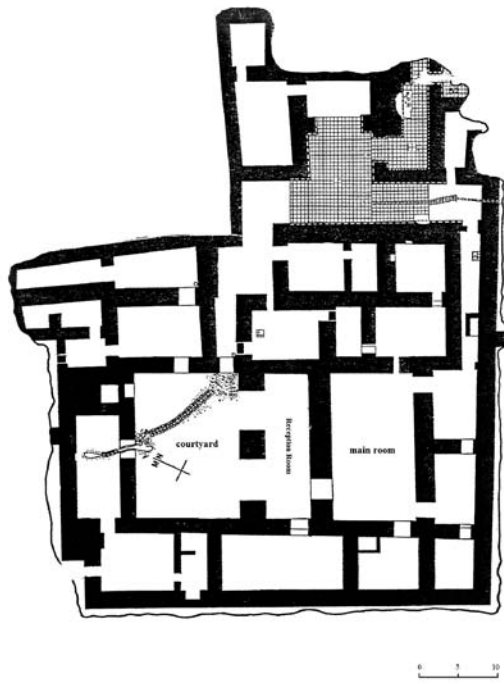


Fig. 13 Nuzi. The Mansion of Shilwi-Teshub (Haines, McCown 1960)



Fig. 14 Asur. Grosse Wohnhaus (Preusser 1954)

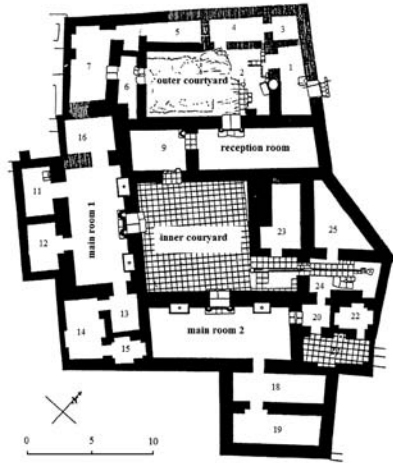


Fig. 15 Assur. Red House (Preusser 1954)

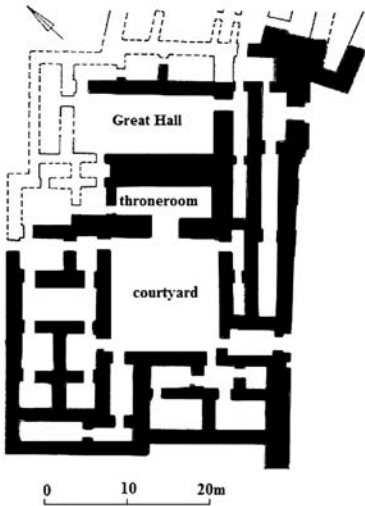


Fig. 16 Ruler Palast in Esnunna (Miglus 1996) Ur III



Fig. 17 Residence K at Khorsabad (Sevin 1991)