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Edited by
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Cover illustration: Hall A of the Royal Palace of Qaṣṭa. with hypothesis for roofing. © Landesmuseum Württemberg and FaberCourtial.

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This collection of studies on Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian palaces is the result of a workshop organised by Manfred Bietak (Austrian Academy of Sciences) and Paolo Matthiae (Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei) for the 10th ICAANE held in Vienna from the 25th to the 26th of April 2016.

The workshop follows the most successful conference on Ancient Egyptian palaces organised by the Austrian Academy, the University of Würzburg and the Egypt Exploration Society in June 2013 in London, and now published in the volume “Ancient Egyptian and Ancient Near Eastern Palaces I” (Vienna 2018). Its objective was especially to present and increase our knowledge about Ancient Near Eastern palaces in Mesopotamia and the Levant in comparison to those in Egypt. In the process of the workshop, it became clear that while concepts of axial plans and symmetry in Egyptian palaces reflect the pharaonic mind, Ancient Near Eastern architects were more flexible in planning. Besides the canonical principles exhibited by the core of palaces as witnessed in Mesopotamia in the times of the great empires, the additive construction process, as particularly found in Syria, allowed the adaptation of architecture to the needs of a growing palatial household.

This, and other observations, are expressed in the papers collated in the current volume. The keynote lecture was presented by Jean-Claude Margueron (École Pratique des Hautes Études) who, after years of excavation work in Mari (Syria), is a highly respected authority on Mesopotamian palaces with an extensive publication list on the subject. His paper here addresses more general aspects of Mesopotamian palaces, discussing our present state of knowledge as well as future research objectives on certain aspects of Mesopotamian palaces and their development from the 5th to the 1st millennium BC. It is followed by a number of essays on palaces in Mesopotamia, the Northern and Southern Levant, as well as Egypt and Nubia.

In his contribution about the AP palace at Tell Mozan/Urkesh, Federico Buccellati (Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin) explores how the archaeological record can be better understood by the analysis of sensory perception in relation to ancient architecture and environment. David Kertaj (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem) analyses the monumental Assyrian Throne Rooms, their layout, setting, included installations and their distinct features.

In the next section concerning palaces in the Northern Levant, Alexander Tamm (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg) shows that the Early Bronze Age palace F in Tell Chuera is a monumental building with distinct architectural elements that are comparable with palaces in other centres of the northern Syrian plains, namely Ebba, Tell Beydar, Tell Bi’a and Tell Brak. Frances Pinnock (La Sapienza University of Rome) introduces the only partly investigated Early Syrian Palace G at Ebla, presenting recent results as well as the layout of the complex as far as excavated. Staying at Ebla, Paolo Matthiae (Accademia dei Lincei) examines the architectural culture of its Middle Bronze Age Palaces in detail, and explains how three architectural principles are a mutual feature.

Natalie Kallas (FU Berlin) discusses local traditions and foreign influences in Middle Bronze Age palatial architecture, focusing on building materials, technique and particular elements of the layout, including those of the Southern Levant. In his contribution about modularisation of palatial architecture in the 2nd millennium BC, Peter Pfälzner (Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen) uses the royal palace at Qatna as an example to show that the construction of a palace mirrors the construction of power. Also exploring palaces at Qatna, Luigi Turri (University of Verona) demonstrates that at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age a decentralised palace model came into use, with ceremonial, administrative, residential and production activities shared among more than one edifice that one can address as palace.

The next section discusses palaces in the Southern Levant. In his contribution about Early Bronze Age palaces, Pierre de Miroschedji (CNRS, UMR 7041, Nanterre) reflects about the theoretical and archaeological definition of a palace in general before he presents the archaeological evidence according to his defined criteria. For the Middle Bronze Age, Assaf Yapha Landau (University of Haifa) and Eric H. Cline (George Washington University) present an updated picture of their new assessment of the last phase of occupation of the palace at Tell Kabri. Ann E. Killebrew (Pennsylvania State University) explores the plan, function and architectural lineage of Iron Age structures often identified as palaces (bīt-ḫilāni), revealing after examination their multi-functional use and regional character.

The final section deals with palaces in Egypt and Nubia. Manfred Bietak (Austrian Academy of Sciences) explores the palace at Bubastis, which was most probably constructed before the time of Amenemhat III and was used throughout the 13th Dynasty. This complex was utilised by the local administration and mayors of Bubastis, but both its second approach from the north and related epigraphic evidence make it highly likely that it also accommodated the king for temporary stays. Charles Bonnet (Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres) introduces a unique assemblage of buildings in Nubia’s Doukki Gel-Kerma that incorporates palaces of important early New Kingdom pharaohs with a very particular layout, most likely of ceremonial character. It seems that after the destruction of the Kingdom of Kush, the pharaohs transformed the circular multi-columned
ceremonial buildings of the Nubians into an orthogonal system but kept the Nubian character of the architecture. In his second contribution, Charles Bonnet presents a palace within the mnnw (temple town), built by Thutmose I at the same site.

Overall, the collections of papers in this volume present important insights into palaces of the Ancient Near East and Egypt. It is intended that this approach to palace research continues with more workshops that would highlight both the differences in architecture and function, and the mutual influences and similarities between the regions. Another of our aims is to identify the regionality of palace features – one of the objectives taken up i.a. by the ERC Advanced Grant “The Hyksos Enigma” in connection with the Hyksos Palace at Avaris/Tell el-Dab’a.

This workshop and publication of this volume took place as part of a project on Ancient Egyptian Palaces, granted to Manfred Bietak by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF Grant P 25945-G21), to which the participants are most grateful. We would also like to thank all colleagues who participated in the workshop. Our thanks go as well to our colleagues who helped with their expertise in producing this volume. For technical support, we would like to thank Kim-Denise Uhle, Rosa Matic, Inbal Samet, and Patrick Appenz. 

Vienna, 6th of October 2018

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