



Abstract

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Women in Neo-Assyrian Palaces: The case of the *ekal mašarti* in Nimrud/Kalḫu

Over the last few years, there has been a growing interest in reconstructing the life of women in the Neo-Assyrian period. However, most of these studies have chosen a philological approach, whereas the archaeological data has remained mostly neglected. Because the texts do not mention a specific secluded area for women in this period, there has never been a serious attempt to look for such areas, with the exception of the suggestions given by the original excavators.

In my study, I aim to identify finds from Neo-Assyrian Palaces that can be linked with women and therefore indicate the presence of female residents in these buildings. I also want to identify the area in the palace where the personal quarters of women were situated. The palaces in Neo-Assyrian times were highly standardised and it is therefore likely, that the apartments for palace residents were always in the same area in every palace. My other focus is on the question of how many women lived in a single palace at the same time. We do have texts listing personnel from the queen's household, but does this necessarily mean that all of these people found room in one palace?

To be able to answer these questions a palace with good archaeological documentation, (regarding finds as well as architecture) is needed. Even though most Neo-Assyrian palaces have been excavated rather early, Max Mallowan's campaigns at Nimrud were ahead of their time. This is the reason why these palaces are the best suited to answering the questions above.

The *ekal mašarti* especially, built under the rule of Salmaneser V, makes for an interesting subject for my study. Even though it was mainly meant for military purposes, we do have archaeological data hinting as to the presence of women in this palace. Area S in particular seems like a good candidate when looking for living quarters – as already suggested by Mallowan. Different objects which can be assumed to have belonged to women, as well as rooms like S5, the possible throne room of the queen, seem to fit in well with the proposed theory. In addition, the excavators found some kind of special locking mechanism in two corridors, which would have enabled the complete isolation of area S from the rest of the palace.

Even though the data is often problematic and not nearly complete, I would like to show that it is possible to locate women in Neo-Assyrian palaces, by combining textual sources with archaeological data, and add some ideas to our view on the role of women in the Ancient Near East.