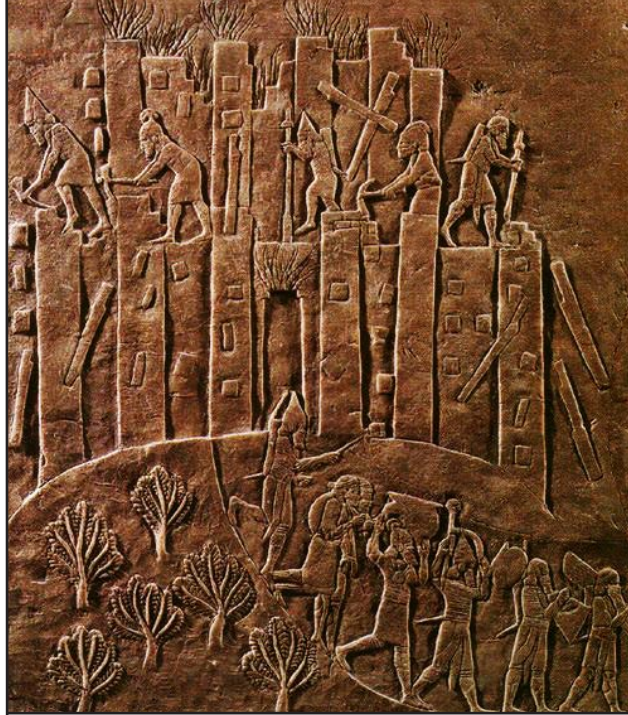


4.617

URBICIDE: HISTORY OF A VIOLENT PRACTICE

Instructors:	Nasser Rabbat
Schedule:	T 2-5
Room:	5-216
Units:	3-0-6, 3-0-9 G

PERMISSION OF INSTRUCTOR NEEDED. OPEN TO ADVANCED UNDERGRADUATES



Ashurbanipal's campaign against Susa is triumphantly recorded in this relief showing the sack of Susa in 647 BC. Flames rise from the city as Assyrian soldiers topple it with pickaxes and crowbars and carry off the spoils.

The destruction of cities has historically been an act of punishment, retribution, projection of absolute power, or a fulfillment of an oath, dream, or divine intervention. In modern times, new factors entered the causative inventory that have to do with the enormous advances in the technologies and strategies of destruction and reconstruction coupled with the modernist philosophical and legal reframing of the individual and the collective as well as the rise of economics to the top of the modern state's metrics of self-evaluation and international standing. All along, the destruction of cities has been, first and foremost, an architectural and urban gesture of no less importance than the construction of cities, which gave us the critical term urbicide, coined after the destructive streak of the grand American urban vision of the 1960s. These developments have had tremendous effects not only on architecture and urbanism, but, perhaps even more importantly, on cities' identity and memory, on the mapping and definition of territories and states, on the conceptualization of ethics, and on the complex relationship between the city and the world's various political and religious systems.

This seminar will probe the history of urbicide as it unfolds across time and space from the divine destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, to the ancient destruction of Babylon, Troy, Carthage, and Jerusalem to the medieval destruction of Nishapur, Baghdad, Teotihuacan, Cusco, on to the ravages of the two World Wars and the decolonization wars, and ending with the destruction of Middle Eastern cities in the present. It will review paradigmatic cases of urbicide in reality and in fiction noting their similarities and particularities and addressing how urbicide itself has evolved and how it has contributed to understanding the city as one of the most intricate artifacts humanity has produced and arranged itself around. Beside urbicide, concepts to be critically explored include the city, ruins, violence, destruction, memory, and urbanism as a vulnerable sociospatial process.