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NEO-ASSYRIAN GEOGRAPHY

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The Assyrians on the Middle Euphrates and the Ḫābūr

Hartmut Kühne - Berlin

1. Introductory remarks

This paper will cover a time range of about 1250 to 610 B.C. In addition, it will give a brief outlook on the so called post-Assyrian period. Geographically it will concentrate on the two river systems of the Euphrates and the Ḫābūr, but it will also deal with the steppe. There will be more emphasis on the Ḫābūr, simply because the archaeological evidence from this region is more familiar to me, and the material from the Haditha rescue excavations is as yet too fragmentarily published¹.

One major problem for an archaeologist to deal within this period is the lacking evidence of a pottery typology based on a sound stratigraphic sequence. With the exception of the late and post-Assyrian pottery from Nimrud², the pottery assemblages excavated in the Assyrian capitals are not available. A recent study by Bernbeck³ differentiates three phases of Neo-Assyrian pottery from the ʿAğā survey, based on the stratigraphic sequence of the excavations of Tall ʿAğāga / Šadikanni⁴ and Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad / Dūr-katlimmu (see below).

The nucleus of Assyria (Fig. 1-2) is but a small entity and is normally given the shape of a heart on maps⁵, the capital Aššur being situated near its point. In the north and the northeast the Zagros, in the southeast, towards Babylonia, the Hamrin mountains and the lower Zab form natural barriers. From the Babylonian point of view, the capital Aššur was the gateway to the north, to Subartu or the land of Aššur⁶.

To the west the heartland of Assyria flanks the flat table land of the steppe or Ġazīra, and in the northwest touches the slopes of the Singār mountain chain. The western borderline of the heartland does not correspond to a natural barrier which would keep the Assyrians from penetrating further west, but rather to the edge of the dry-farming belt. The environment of the flat table land continues towards the Syrian Ġazīra, with the first natural barrier being the perennial stream of the lower Ḫābūr. This river in the west, the Singār mountains in the north, the Euphrates in the south, and the Tigris in the east form the limits of a region of about 50.000 square kilometers, most of which being situated beyond the dry-farming belt. This is what Postgate recently called "Assyria proper"⁷.

This steppe area then was the natural hinterland of the capital of Assyria, Aššur. For it is the only one of the four Assyrian capitals situated on the west bank of the Tigris and at the edge of the dry-farming belt. Thus, from the beginning, Assyria was essentially a "steppe-bound empire"⁸.

The geoclimatical position of Aššur and its hinterland is responsible for its economical potential and thereby its historical behaviour throughout its existence, even that of the Neo-Assyrian empire. It seems to explain why provincial centers lying rather far away were liable for grain rations to the god

¹R. Bernbeck, *Steppe als Kulturlandschaft*, Berlin 1993, pp. 115-116.

²J. Oates, *Late Assyrian Pottery from Fort Shalmaneser*: Iraq 21 (1959), pp. 130-146.

³Bernbeck, *Steppe als Kulturlandschaft*, pp. 97-120.

⁴A. Mahmoud - H. Kühne, *Tall ʿAğāga-Šadikanni 1984-1990*: AfO 40/41 (1993-94), pp. 215-221.

⁵K. Kessler, *Assyrien bis 800 v. Chr.* (TAVO B IV 10), 1987.

⁶W.W. Hallo, *The Ancient Near East, A History*, New York 1971, p. 114.

⁷J.N. Postgate, *The Land of Aššur and the Yoke of Aššur*: World Archaeology 23 (1992), pp. 247-263.

⁸H. Kühne, *The Urbanization of the Assyrian Provinces*, in S. Mazzoni (ed.), *Nuove fondazioni nel Vicino Oriente Antico: realtà e ideologia*, Pisa 1994, pp. 55-84.

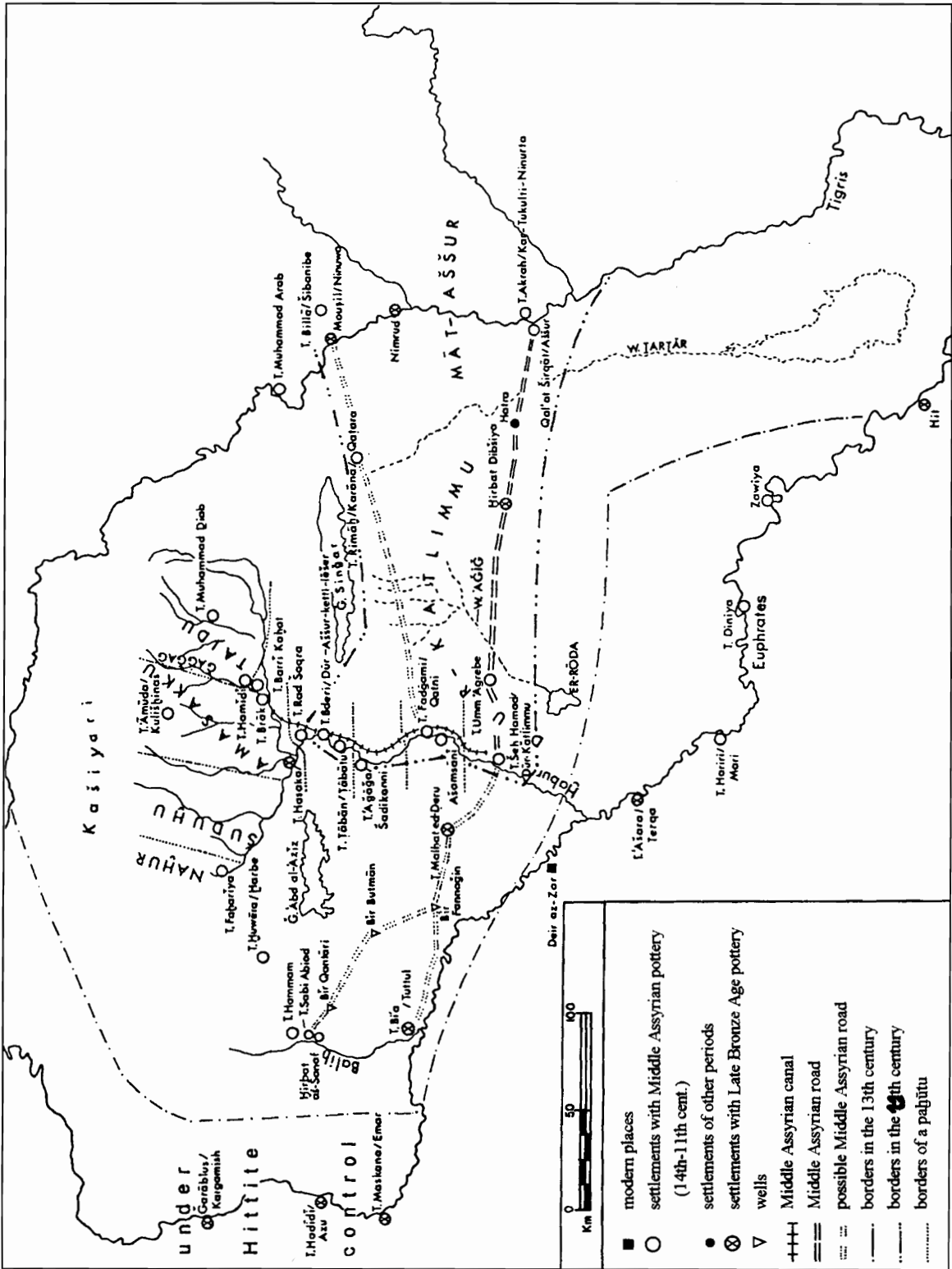


Fig. 2. - The western extension of the Middle Assyrian empire.

of Aššur⁹. The need for dry-farming land seems to have been one of the motives for the constant Assyrian drive to the west, the other being the lack of natural resources, especially metal¹⁰. It may explain also why the Assyrian kings founded new capital residences on the east bank of the Tigris, beginning with Kalḫu and Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta in the Middle-Assyrian period—the latter opposite Aššur—and then moving north to Nimrud / Kalḫu, Nineveh / Ninua, and Chorsabad / Dūr-Šarrukīn, all situated within the dry-farming zone. Water supplies for these cities almost certainly were more abundant than for Aššur and were also easier to be stepped up, as is known especially from Sennacherib who boasted that he had created and watered the gardens of Nineveh by deriving the water from the Zagros mountains.

2. The Middle Assyrian empire and the 'dark ages'

Historians have labeled the time after the death of Tukulti-ninurta I (1207) down to the reign of Aššurdan II (932-910) the 'dark ages' due to the few written sources available. According to most scholars, the territory under Assyrian control was reduced to the bare nucleus of Assyria except for the reign of Tiglath-pileser I and Aššur-bel-kala who tried to reestablish the limits of the 13th century empire but without lasting success¹¹.

New historical evidence from the Middle Assyrian archive of Dūr-katlimmu, modern Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad¹², the analysis of the pottery of the excavation¹³ as well as of the steppe site Tall Umm 'Aqrēbe¹⁴, and the settlement pattern¹⁵ have revealed that the ~~western~~^{eastern} part of the Middle Assyrian empire in the 13th century B.C. ought to be considered a territorial empire as opposed to the suggestion by Liverani¹⁶. A three tier settlement pattern along the lower Ḥābūr (Fig. 3) was governed by a well organized and firmly established administration, supported by a communication system consisting of a regional canal and one (probably several) steppe route with regular road stations (Fig. 2)¹⁷.

The recently discovered small Middle Assyrian archives of Tall Chuera / HAR-be and Tall Sabi Abyad¹⁸ may indicate that for the western part of the empire the 'network system'¹⁹ was still in use although HAR-be seems to have been the seat of a governor (*bēl paḫēte*), too (personal communication by W. Orthmann).

The question is then, if and how this territorial empire of Middle Assyrian times survived during the 'dark ages', during periods of extreme weakness of the central government. To what extent was it

⁹J.N. Postgate: AfO 32 (1985), pp. 95-101.

¹⁰M. Wäfler, *Zum assyrisch-urartäischen Westkonflikt*: APA 11/12 (1980-81), pp. 79-97.

¹¹A. Moortgat, - A. Scharf, *Ägypten und Vorderasien im Altertum*, München 1950, p. 400; J.N. Postgate: AfO 32 (1985), pp. 95-101; id.: *World Archaeology* 23 (1992), pp. 247-263.

¹²E. Cancik, *Die mittellassyrischen Briefe aus Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad* (Dissertation an der Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen. In preparation for: *Berichte der Ausgrabung Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad / Dūr-katlimmu* Band 4).

¹³P. Pfälzner, *Mittanische und mittellassyrische Keramik*, Berlin (in press).

¹⁴P. Pfälzner, *Die Spätbronzezeit: Tall Umm 'Aqrēbe*, in Bernbeck, *Steppe als Kulturlandschaft*, pp. 70-96.

¹⁵D. Morandi, *Il fiume e la steppa. La struttura insediativa del Basso Ḥābūr in epoca neo-assira* (Unpublished dissertation), Padova 1992; Bernbeck, *Steppe als Kulturlandschaft*, pp. 97-120; H. Kühne (ed.), *Die Rezente Umwelt von Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad und Daten zur Umweltrekonstruktion der assyrischen Stadt Dūr-katlimmu*, Berlin 1991; id. in *Nuove fondazioni*, pp. 55-84.

¹⁶M. Liverani, *The Growth of the Assyrian Empire in the Ḥābūr / Middle Euphrates Area: a New Paradigm*: SAAB 2 (1988), pp. 81-98.

¹⁷H. Kühne, *Dūr-katlimmu and the Middle Assyrian Empire*, in *Actes du Colloque International 'La Djezire et l'Euphrate Syriens de la Protohistoire à la Fin du Second Millenaire av.J.-C.'* (Paris 21-24.6.1993), in press.

¹⁸P.M.M.G. Akkermans - J. Limpens - R.H. Spoor, *On the Frontier of Assyria: Excavations at Tell Sabi Abyad, 1991*: *Akkadica* 84-85 (1993), pp. 1-52; K. Bartl, *Soundings at Khirbet esh-Shenef, a Late Bronze Age Settlement in the Balikh Valley, Northern Syria*: *Akkadica* 67 (1990), pp. 10-32.

¹⁹Liverani: SAAB 2 (1988), pp. 81-98.

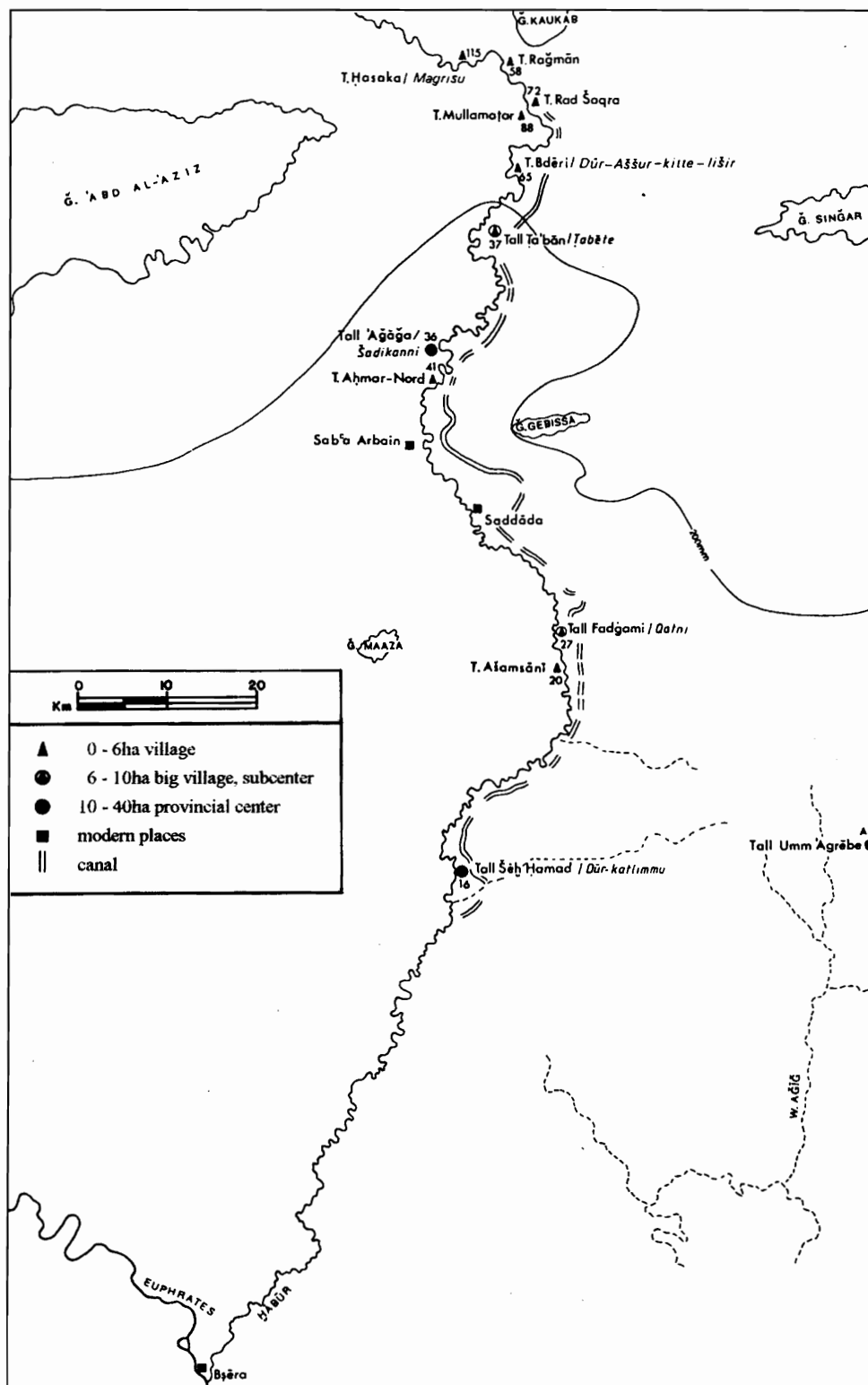


Fig. 3. - Settlements on the Lower Ḫābūr and in the Wadi ʿAḡḡ Region. Middle Assyrian Period (1300 - 1000 BC). Plan: H. Kühne; Execution: M. Leicht 1994.

taken over by the Aramaean tribes? Was the central power really reduced to the Assyrian heartland? More recent research suggests that Aššur never lost control over the lower Ḫābūr during the 'dark ages' completely (for a contrary view see Postgate)²⁰. The following evidence may be taken in favor of this suggestion. The discovery and publication of inscribed clay cylinders from Tall Bdēri²¹ has shed some light on the darkness of these former Middle Assyrian provinces. They inform us of a hitherto unknown local dynasty of Ṭābētu in the land of Māri. The third generation king by the name of Aššur-kettī-lēšer reoccupies the site of Tall Bdēri and gives it the name of Dūr-Aššur-kettī-lēšer. The *limu* Bēlu-libūr dates the texts to the year 1096 of the reign of Tiglath-pileser I. Maul suggests that the dynasty may have had Assyrian roots because the kings carry personal names with the element Aššur. In any case, the personal name demonstrates a close relationship to if not a dependency on Aššur. On the other hand, the designation with the title 'king' seems to indicate an unusual amount of independence from the central Assyrian government which this dynasty cherished. The overestimation of this independence is perhaps the reason for the downfall of the dynasty, about which no information is given.

In a second clay cylinder, originally published by Lambert²², the same king Aššur-kettī-lēšer is reported to have captured another town by the name of Adališḫu (modern Tall Rad Shaqra?) which was—according to Maul—situated in the region bordering the land of Māri in the north, in Katmuḫu. In this town Aššur-kettī-lēšer even erects a palace. Maul suggests that this conquest created some uneasiness among the governors of the other provinces so that Tiglath-pileser himself may have made an end to the ambitious king Aššur-kettī-lēšer of Ṭābētu of the land of Māri. However, one could suspect also that Aššur-kettī-lēšer used Tiglath-pileser I's engagement against the Musri in Katmuḫu to enlarge his territory and was punished subsequently.

Historically, this information about a local dynasty in the region of the lower Ḫābūr, covering three generations, with strong ties to central Assyria, refers well back to the 12th century, to the time after the death of Tukulti-Ninurta I. Archaeologically, the findspot of the cylinders provides, for the first time, well dated pottery of the late 12th and early 11th century B.C. Typologically, it seems to represent the continuation of the stratigraphic sequence of Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad / Dūr-katlimmu, covering most of the 12th century B.C.²³

In the light of these new inscriptions, attention should again be paid to an old and well known one²⁴. It is the inscription of Bēl-ereš, on a very similar clay cylinder (Pl. I; published by courtesy of the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul), which was discovered in Aššur prior to world war one²⁵. This text originates clearly from Šadikanni, modern Tall ʿAḡāḡa, on the western bank of the Ḫābūr, about 25 km south of Tall Bdēri. It is dated to the reign of king Aššur-reš-iši II (969-965) but refers to the long reign of king Aššur-rabi II (1010-970). Since Bēl-ereš mentions his forefathers, one can suspect that this local dynasty had been in power for some time during the 11th century. The character of this local dynasty in relation to the central Assyrian government is clearly defined by the reference to the two Assyrian kings, to whom Bēl-ereš announces his suzerainty. His title, *šangû*, translated by von Soden (AHw) as 'Priester, Tempelverwalter' but by Grayson as 'vice-regent'²⁶, clearly does not imply the same amount of independence as the title 'king' used by Aššur-kettī-lēšer.

These texts, and in addition the new archaeological evidence, provide almost continuous testimony for the existence of local dynasties and an occupation along the lower Ḫābūr from the time after the

²⁰J.N. Postgate: AfO 32 (1985), pp. 95-101; id.: World Archaeology 23 (1992), pp. 247-263.

²¹P. Pfälzner, *Tall Bdēri 1985-1987*: AfO 36/37 (1989-90), pp. 212-221; S.M. Maul, *Die Inschriften von Tall Bdēri*, Berlin 1992.

²²W.G. Lambert, *An Unknown King in an Unknown City*, in M.Cogan - I. Eph'al (eds.), *Ah, Assyria... Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography presented to Hayim Tadmor*, Jerusalem 1991, pp. 314-319.

²³Pfälzner, *Mittanische und mittelassyrische Keramik*.

²⁴E. Nassouhi, *Textes divers relatifs à l'histoire de l'Assyrie*: MAOG III/1-2 (1927).

²⁵RIMA 2, pp. 126-128.

²⁶RIMA 2, p. 127.

death of Tukulti-Ninurta I to the reestablishment of central Assyrian power in the region by the campaigns of Adad-Nirari II, Tukulti-Ninurta II and Aššurnāṣirpal II²⁷. These local dynasties may have been the offspring of the former governors (*bēl paḫēte*) during the 13th century, who—after the death of Tukulti-Ninurta I—gained more independence on account of the weak central government, but they were still loyal to Assyria.

The major center of the area during the 13th century had been Dūr-katlimmu, modern Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad. The *limus* of the archive do not provide any date from the 12th century. But the stratigraphic and material evidence furnishes an ongoing usage of parts of the 13th century palace which must be dated to the 12th century. The 12th century pottery typology from these levels seems to match the pottery of Tell Bdēri / Dūr Aššur-kettī-lēšer. Proof for the existence of Dūr-katlimmu in the 11th century is the mention of the site in the inscription of the 'broken obelisk' of the time of Aššur-bel-kala²⁸. It seems that the recent translation by Grayson does fit the actual events better than former ones: "In that year, in the same month, on campaign against the Aramaeans, he fought (with them) at the city of Dūr-katlimmu"²⁹. Dūr-katlimmu may have lost its likely former privileged status as a palatine center but it certainly existed as a provincial center. No local 'dynasty' is as yet reported from this city. Archaeological evidence indicates that the steppe route with the road station of Tall Umm ʿAqrēbe, 40 km east of Dūr-katlimmu, was in use from the late 13th to the second half of the 12th century B.C.³⁰.

Daily life in the lower Ḫābūr region does not seem to have changed much after the death of Tukulti-ninurta I. Assyrian control became less intensive, but the settlement pattern and the administrative sectors were still functioning, considering that all the former centers and subcenters continued to exist. The regional canal on the east bank of the Ḫābūr³¹ and the traffic connections across the steppe (Fig. 2) via Tall Umm ʿAqrēbe and thus the economic and administrative system functioned as before, perhaps only in a less intensive way.

The systemic nature³² of the new local dynasties arising in Ṭābēte and Šadikanni along the lower Ḫābūr and the political pressure by the Aḫlamû / Aramaeans could have forced the local potentates to keep an ally in Assyria, to defend the region against the ambitious Aramaean leaders. It may have been some kind of community in fate which kept the two parts together. Only after central Assyrian power had strengthened the relationship changed again.

On the contrary, the political situation around this 'community of fate' is demonstrated best by the establishment of the tribe of Bīt Ḫalupe in the land of Laqe and just south of Dūr-katlimmu. Here the economic situation had been and still was different, since the region south of Dūr-katlimmu was not developed by the Middle Assyrian canal, which ended at Dūr-katlimmu³³. Therefore it was less urbanized and thus more susceptible to nomadic life. In the middle Euphrates region the lands of Laqe, Ḫindānu and Suḫu were unable to resist the Aramaeans, resulting in a deurbanization³⁴. The penetration of the upper Ḫābūr region by the Aramaeans eventually culminated in the establishment of the city state of Bīt Baḫiani in the 10th and 9th centuries B.C. As will be seen below, the material culture of Tall Ḫalaf / Guzana contrasts sharply with the Assyrian dominated center of Tall ʿAḡāḡa / Šadikanni.

²⁷H. Kühne, *Zur Rekonstruktion der Feldzüge Adad-Nirārī II., Tukulti-Ninurta II. und Aššurnāṣirpal II. im Ḫābūr-Gebiet*: BaM 11 (1980), pp. 44-70; H.F. Russel, *The Historical Geography of the Euphrates and Habur according to the Middle- and Neo-Assyrian Sources*: Iraq 47 (1985), pp. 57-74; Liverani, ATA.

²⁸Brinkman, PKB, pp. 383-386.

²⁹RIMA 2, p. 102.

³⁰Pfälzner, in *Steppe als Kulturlandschaft*, p. 81.

³¹P. J. Ergenzinger - H. Kühne, *Ein regionales Bewässerungssystem am Ḫābūr*, in *Die Rezente Umwelt*, pp. 163-190.

³²Kühne, in *Nuove fondazioni*, pp. 55-84.

³³Ergenzinger - Kühne, in *Die Rezente Umwelt*, p. 186.

³⁴Pfälzner, in *Steppe als Kulturlandschaft*, p. 95.

Thus, contrary to the *communis opinio*, it seems that the central Assyrian government did not lose control entirely over its western hinterland south of Ġabal Sinġar, the lower Ĥābūr between Ṭābēte / Tall Ṭābān and Dūr-katlimmu / Tall Šēḥ Ḥamad and a southern border which may be drawn somewhat south of Dūr-katlimmu and Aššur crossing the steppe north of the Euphrates in the 12th to the 10th century B.C. (Fig. 2), and that Assyria therefore was not reduced to its nucleus during that period. However, the mechanisms of control and administration had loosened, they were less centralised and left plenty of room for local but still loyal potentates, whose position was probably derived from the former governors and therefore coincided with the former administrative centers.

3. The early Neo-Assyrian empire (934 - 811)

The period in which the political relationship between the Ĥābūr region and Assyria changed again is quite well documented by the annals of the early Neo-Assyrian kings. The campaigns of Adad-Nirari II, Tukulti-ninurta II and Aššurnāṣirpal II³⁵ clearly mark the end of the independence of the local potentates along the lower Ĥābūr. The character of these campaigns has been disputed but it seems—with regard to the above suggested earlier type of relationship—that they were far from being a conquest, at least in the lower Ĥābūr region, but rather a demonstration of regained power. One of the political consequences was that the local potentates lost their independence and with the establishment of the 'province' of Rašappa the central government had regained territorial power. In the Euphrates region, fighting some stubborn and unyielding potentates and even conquering their territory was occasionally necessary.

The archaeological evidence for the 9th century is scanty, and if one had to rely only on the pottery it would be very hazardous to come to any conclusions. Fortunately the excavation of Tall 'Aġāġa / Šadikanni has provided independent dating criteria by the discovery of five *lamassus*, one lion sculpture, two stelae, and two orthostates³⁶. Four *lamassus* and the lion sculpture are actually a rediscovery because they had been excavated by Sir A.H. Layard more than a century ago. According to him³⁷ each one of them was carrying an inscription, but the actual state of preservation records only one inscription.

The inscription reads "pa(lace of) Mušēzib-Ninurta"³⁸; according to Layard originally the title "šangū" was readable.

Mušēzib-Ninurta is to be identified with a local dynast of Šadikanni on the grounds of the inscription on a cylinder seal, which was found in Sharif Han / Tarbišu, and renders a genealogy which runs: Mušēzib-Ninurta, son of Ninurta-ereš, grandson of Samanuḥa-šar-ilāni. The grandfather is mentioned in the annals of Aššurnāṣirpal II, in the year 883, as being the *šangū* of Šadikanni and having delivered tribute. Consequently Mušēzib-Ninurta is the third generation offspring of this local dynasty of Šadikanni. If regarded in relation to the above mentioned Bēl-ereš, who ruled over Šadikanni some 80 years before Samanuḥa-šar-ilāni, it seems to be conceivable that Šadikanni was ruled continuously by independent but loyal rulers throughout the 'dark ages'. Unger suggested that the seal "was probably removed from its original location at the captivity of its prince (i.e. Mušēzib-Ninurta) in 808 B.C."³⁹. If so, the local dynasty would have come to an end by 808, however this is not confirmed by later data (see below). This historical evidence has been available before and has not been altered by the new excavations; it has been confirmed by the physical appearance of the sculptures.

³⁵Kühne: BaM 11 (1980), pp. 44-70; Russel: Iraq 47 (1985), pp. 57-74; Liverani, ATA.

³⁶Mahmoud - Kühne: AfO 40/41 (1993-94), pp. 215-221.

³⁷A.H. Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon*, London 1853, p. 277.

³⁸W. Röllig, in *Die Ausgrabungen auf dem Tall 'Aġāġa/Šadikanni 1982*: DaM 3 (1988), pp. 141-184.

³⁹E. Unger, *Two Seals of the ninth century B.C. from Shadikanni on the Habur*: BASOR 130 (1953), p. 21.

The stratigraphic evidence⁴⁰ reveals that all the sculptures were reused in level 19 a. Their original position was in level 19 b. A thin layer of debris separates both floors which cannot be interpreted as a long lapse of time but rather as a renovation phase. The pottery collected in level 19 a therefore must date more to the end of the 9th century while the pottery of level 19 b clearly belongs to most of the 9th century, being more or less contemporary with Aššurnāṣirpal II and Šalmanaser III. But since the material of both sublevels does not differ typologically very much, it was used by Bernbeck to date his 'period A' material from the 'Ağğ-survey'⁴¹.

The inscription and its historical implications as well as the archaeological, stratigraphical and stylistical evidence firmly date level 19 of Tall 'Ağğ / Šadikanni to the 9th century B.C. In no other site along the lower Ḫābūr, have levels of the 9th century been excavated. But further evidence of the material presence of this period is provided by a surface find of an orthostate (Pl. II) in Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad / Dūr-katlimmu⁴² which can be compared stylistically to an orthostate of room G of the northwest palace of Aššurnāṣirpal II in Nimrud and therefore should be dated to his reign. The scene suggests that a seated king, possibly Aššurnāṣirpal II himself, was rendered on the slab; if so, Dūr-katlimmu could have regained its possible former status of a palatial center. The style is quite clearly of imperial workmanship, sharply contrasting the provincial style of the fragmentary stele of Adad-nirari III which was found most probably by Rassam in Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad more than a century ago⁴³.

The significance of the former piece of art lies rather in the fact that it was found in Dūr-katlimmu which according to Kessler⁴⁴ did not furnish a residence in that period. One can hardly imagine a building, decorated with this kind of sculpture, not being a residence and not being related to the king in some special manner. If so, the town must have functioned as an Assyrian residence, perhaps even as a palatial residence, in the 9th century B.C. In addition, although literary evidence is lacking, Dūr-katlimmu seems to have functioned as a center of administration, too.

In the Wadi 'Ağğ, during Bernbeck's period A, which is roughly contemporary with the 9th century B.C., the road station Tall Umm 'Aqrēbe is revitalized (or was it used throughout the intervening centuries?). Two very small settlements adhere to the center but do not make up for a settlement system⁴⁵.

The overall emerging picture for a settlement pattern of the early Neo-Assyrian period along the lower Ḫābūr and the steppe east of Dūr-katlimmu (Fig. 4) is surprisingly similar to the settlement pattern of the 'dark ages', which in turn is basically a continuation of the pattern of the Middle Assyrian period of the 13th century B.C. (Fig. 3), as was demonstrated above. The four centers and subcenters then known, do exist in the 9th century also, these being from north to south Tall Ṭābān / Ṭābēte, Tall 'Ağğ / Šadikanni, Tall Fadgami / Qatni and Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad / Dūr-katlimmu. Smaller settlements are situated within the distance of carrying capacity but do not seem to follow a certain pattern other than being lined up along the river.

In the upper Ḫābūr basin, a palace was founded by Tukulti-Ninurta II in Kaḫat / Tall Barri. Along the upper Ḫābūr river, the establishment of the Aramaean city state of Bīt Baḫiani and its center Tall Ḫalaf / Guzana during the late 10th and the 9th century clearly marked the line which separated politically and in the way of material culture the Assyrian 'provinces' on the lower Ḫābūr from the west. Tall Ḫalaf / Guzana lies within a distance of 80 kilometers from Tall 'Ağğ / Šadikanni and after the recent discovery of the sculptures one can virtually feel the difference of mentality.

⁴⁰Mahmoud - Kühne: AfO 40/41 (1993-94), pp. 215- 221.

⁴¹Bernbeck, *Steppe als Kulturlandschaft*, p. 115.

⁴²H. Kühne, *Report on the Excavation at Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad / Dūr-katlimmu 1988*: AAAS 38/39 (1988-89), pp. 145, 157, Fig. 17.

⁴³A.R. Millard - H. Tadmor, *Adad-Nirari III in Syria*: Iraq 35 (1973), pp. 57-64.

⁴⁴Kessler, TAVO B IV 10.

⁴⁵Bernbeck, *Steppe als Kulturlandschaft*, p. 174 Abb. 11.

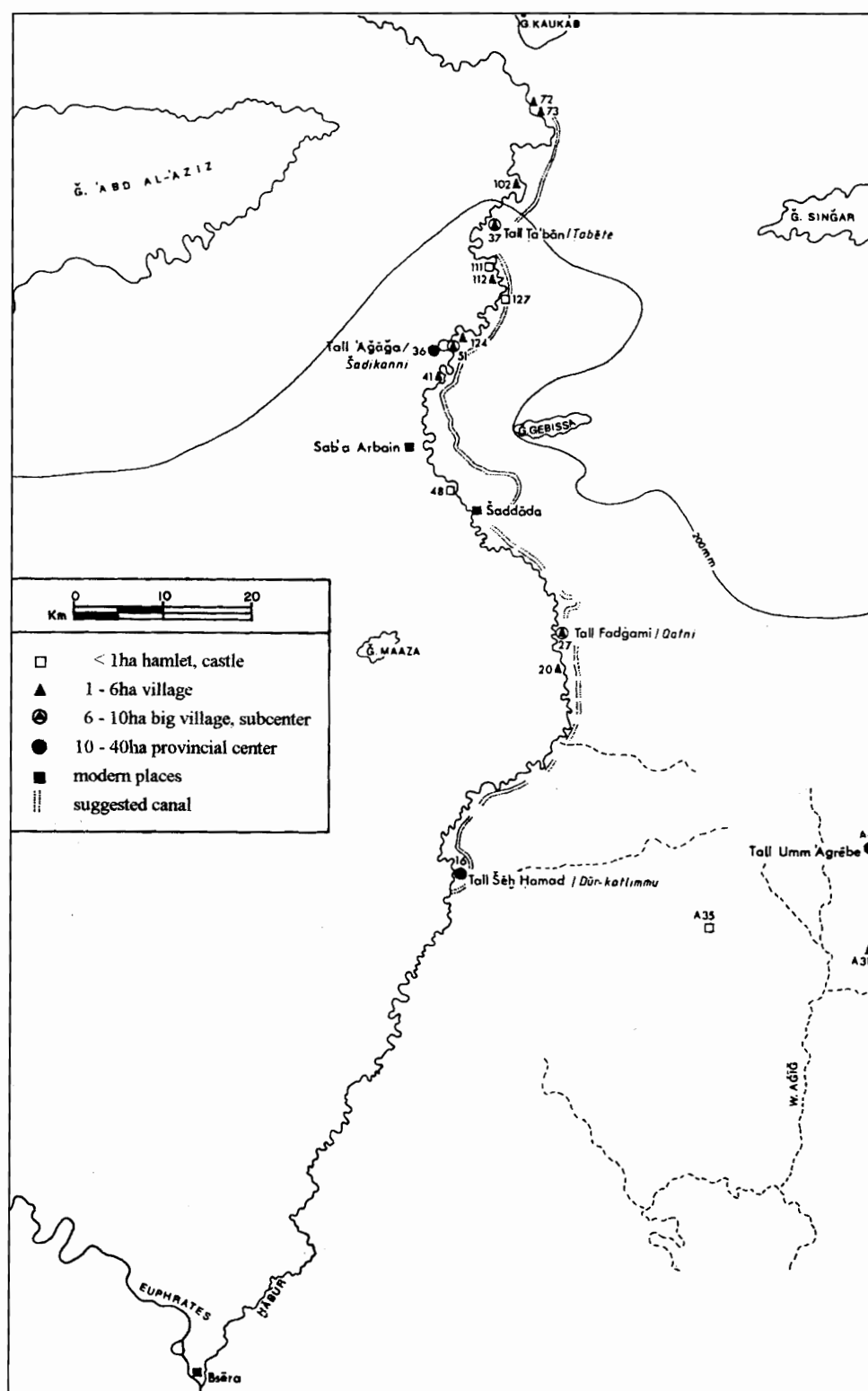


Fig. 4. - Settlements on the Lower Hābūr and in the Wadi 'Aḡiḡ Region. Early Neo-Assyrian Period (1000 - 800 BC). Plan: H. Kühne; Execution: M. Leicht 1994.

Mentality is not a matter of sudden change but grows continuously, especially in the Near East. Therefore this stylistic and thereby mental difference can only be explained by a longer, peaceful development and it may be interpreted as a confirmation of the close ties between the local units along the lower Ḫābūr and Assyria during the dark ages on the one hand, and on the other as an Aramaic tradition implying that the city state of Bīt Baḫiani had existed for some time. Virtually from the other end of the region of concern, the stele from Tall ʿAšāra / Terqa⁴⁶ with the inscription of Tukulti-Ninurta II is another point in case, regardless of whether the inscription is secondary or not, the *terminus ante quem* for the production of the stele is the inscription which has to be dated before 883 B.C. The region of the lower Ḫābūr was surrounded by Aramaean political entities and cultural behaviour, the lower Ḫābūr itself remained within the Assyrian political as well as cultural sphere.

Apart from the stele of Tall ʿAšāra / Terqa very little material can be associated with the 9th century in the middle Euphrates region. Some pottery from Qalʿat ʿAna⁴⁷ would fit the typological criteria from the Ḫābūr and ʿAḡiḡ A. The pottery from Sūr Ġurʿa is dated according to the tablets to the early and first half of the 8th century, thus corresponding to ʿAḡiḡ B. Other assemblages, for instance the one from the Polish excavation at Baiḡān, seem to be mixed, according to a paper read by F. Stepniowski 4.11.93 in Berlin. The 9000 sherds from Tall Yamīniya⁴⁸ are not published yet. On account of this evidence, nothing can be said about the character of 9th century occupation in the Haditha area, in the area of the land of Suḫu. The early historical evidence has been summarized by Brinkman⁴⁹.

4. The late Neo-Assyrian empire (810 - 612)

At the beginning of the 8th century not much of a change is noticeable within the settlement pattern of the lower Ḫābūr yet (Fig. 4). The settlements seem to develop gradually towards the pattern pictured in Fig. 5. From the archaeological evidence along the valley it is not possible to fix a date for the beginning of this change. But it ends in the most densely populated occupation the lower Ḫābūr had seen in its history so far.

On the other hand, in the steppe, in the Wadi ʿAḡiḡ, a considerable change attracts attention. The road station Tall Umm ʿAqrēbe is finally given up in favor of a new foundation further south by the name of Tall Umm ʿAqrubba. This settlement now becomes the central place for eight villages within a distance of 10 km; three more villages are situated further south, one further north⁵⁰. For the first time in the history of this steppe region, a settlement system is created hereby. Like the Middle Assyrian road station Tall Umm ʿAqrēbe, this new cluster of settlements around Tall Umm ʿAqrubba was dominated by the nearest regional center which was Dūr-katlimmu.

This development clearly marks a change in policy, from a single albeit large road station to an occupation. Consequently an increase of population, according to Bernbeck 27%, and a new economic strategy have to be postulated. It is quite obvious that this 'new deal' corresponds well to the policy of the Assyrian king Adad-Nirari III. The colonization of the steppe is attested by inscriptions on stelae which were found at four sites within our geographical concern, at Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad / Dūr-katlimmu, at Para at the western edge of the Sinḡar, at Tall Rimāḥ and at Sabaʿa⁵¹, but also in the texts from Sūr Ġurʿa from the middle Euphrates region. Under the reign of this king, the governor

⁴⁶R.J. Tournay - S. Saouaf, *Stèle de Tukulti-Ninurta II*: AAS 2 (1952), pp. 169-190.

⁴⁷A. Northedge et al., *Excavations at 'Ana*, Warminster 1988; R. Killick, *Pottery from the Neo-Assyrian to Early Sasanian Periods*, *ibid.*, Fig. 28, 2.8.

⁴⁸C. Young, *An Outpost of Empire*: Rotunda 16 (1983), p. 8.

⁴⁹PKB, p. 184, fn. 1127.

⁵⁰Bernbeck, *Steppe als Kulturlandschaft*, p. 174 Abb. 12.

⁵¹M. Weippert, *Die Feldzüge Adadniraris III. nach Syrien. Voraussetzungen, Verlauf, Folgen*: ZDPV 108 (1992), p. 43.

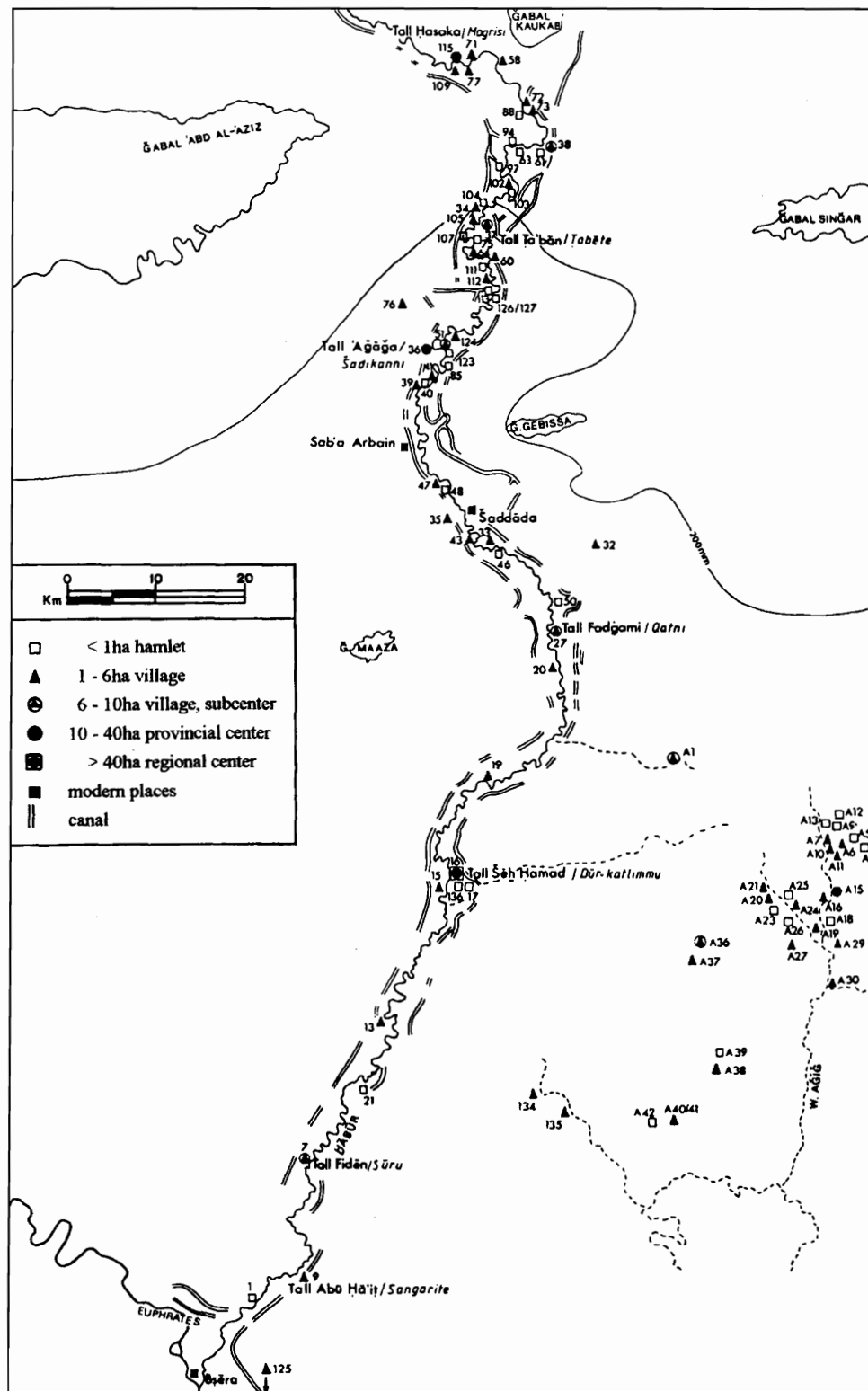


Fig. 5. - Settlements on the Lower Hābūr and in the Wadi 'Aḡīḡ Region. Late Neo-Assyrian Period (800 - 600 BC). Plan: H. Kühne; Execution: M. Leicht 1994.

Palil-ereš united the steppe region east of Aššur, south of the Singār and west of the Ḫābūr into one administrative unit or 'province' called Rašappa. He served at least two Assyrian kings and was twice *limu*, in the years 803 and 775. Since the study of Forrer⁵², it is widely accepted that Tiglath-pileser III initiated a reform of the provincial system. Evaluating this colonization and the archaeological data it seems conceivable that the process towards this reform had already started in the time of Adad-Nirari III (see Postgate this volume).

In the Rimāḥ stele, Palil-ereš is said to have founded 331 places, of which nine central places are named and a variable number of villages is added⁵³. This corresponds well to the development in the ʿAḡiḡ region, where in period B 11 villages and in period C 18 villages adhere to the center of Tall Umm ʿAqrubba⁵⁴.

The findspot of the stele of Sabaʿa was surveyed during the ʿAḡiḡ expedition. It seems that the description of the findspot by Unger⁵⁵ was wrong because the modern place to be identified with Sabaʿa seems to be Sabkhat es-Soubbah⁵⁶; this is situated southwest of lake Bouara instead of southeast as Unger describes it. In the vicinity of Sabkhat es-Soubbah no traces of occupation were found so that Unger's assumption that the stele was found at the place where it had been originally erected is more than doubtful. Consequently, the identification of Sabaʿa with the town of Zabannu or Habannu⁵⁷, which is mentioned in the inscription as the place of erection, is not valid. Bernbeck suggests that the stele may have been in transport when the transportation means broke down and the stele was left on the spot subsequently. In any case, the location of its original erection should be looked for elsewhere, and he argues for Tall Umm ʿAqrubba, the central place of the ʿAḡiḡ colonization, to be identified with Zabannu⁵⁸.

The lands listed in the inscriptions from Rimāḥ and Sabaʿa are Rašappa, Qatni, Laqe, Ḫindānu, and Suḫu. Morandi gives a tentative idea of the administrative borders of the listed lands⁵⁹. Neither Šadikanni nor Dūr-katlimmu are mentioned. It is difficult to assess their administrative significance. Šadikanni could have belonged to one of the listed lands, Rašappa or Qatnu. This would explain why it is not mentioned; it could have been a land of its own (Dikanni?), but then it is difficult to explain why it is not mentioned; or it belonged to still another land. The last seems to be the least probable, and considering the above discussed history of Šadikanni, it may have lost its independence by 808 B.C. and become part of one of the listed lands. Dūr-katlimmu could have belonged to the land of Laqe; the city of Laqe is mentioned in a geographical list but unlocalised so far⁶⁰. Following the present evidence, Dūr-katlimmu would have been too large to be regarded as a secondary provincial town. Therefore it is more conceivable that it should be regarded as a land of its own. However, any documentary evidence for this idea is lacking. Alternatively, it is imaginable that Dūr-katlimmu may have been a city of special function, a palatial center, directly subordinated to the central government, however—as far as I know—cities of special functions are not recorded in Assyrian documents⁶¹.

Unfortunately, the Assyrian cuneiform sources of the greater part of the 8th and of the 7th century fail to provide any information about the area of our concern. It seems that the region had reached a state of integration within the territorial empire in which everyday life ran along such normal lines that it did not provoke any recording. Regional sources have been lacking completely and are now

⁵²PAR, 1920.

⁵³Weippert: ZDPV 108 (1992), p. 62.

⁵⁴Bernbeck, *Steppe als Kulturlandschaft*, p. 135.

⁵⁵E. Unger, *Reliefstele Adadnirari III. aus Sabaʿa und Semiramis*, Istanbul 1916.

⁵⁶Bernbeck, *Steppe als Kulturlandschaft*, p. 141; Weippert: ZDPV 108 (1992), p. 43 Anm. 12.

⁵⁷Weippert: ZDPV 108 (1992), p. 44.

⁵⁸Bernbeck, *Steppe als Kulturlandschaft*, p. 143.

⁵⁹Morandi, *Il fiume e la steppa*; M. Liverani, *Rašappu and Ḫatallu*: SAAB 6 (1992), pp. 35-40.

⁶⁰PAR, p. 52; NAT, p. 224; ATA, pp. 32-33, 69.

⁶¹Y. Ikeda, *Royal Cities and Fortified Cities: Iraq 41* (1979), pp. 75-87.

available in a limited quantity from Dūr-katlimmu but do not furnish any information relevant to the problem. They do not even record the city's name so far.

The archaeological evidence is more informative. The better typological knowledge of the pottery in combination with archaeological fieldwork provides a safe basis of judgement.

For the first time in the occupational history of the lower Ḫābūr, large parts of the lowest terrace are occupied. As a result of an urbanisation process⁶² many villages are new foundations. This was made possible by the construction of a regional canal system on both banks of the river, probably during the final part of the 8th century⁶³. The western canal derived its water from the upper Ḫābūr, the eastern canal from the Ġagğag / Ḫarmiš. This canal joined a system on the east bank of the Euphrates which is known as the Daurin from Islamic history and very markedly distinguishable in the topography of the area, extending southeast to the present Syrian-Iraqi border. Whether it continued into present day Iraqi territory is uncertain. Cavigneaux and Ismail⁶⁴ claim not to know anything about traces on the ground. On the other hand, Šamaš-reš-ušur reports the construction of many canals, among them one with the width of 22 Babylonian cubits, that is about 11 m, which would be comparable to the geometry of the Daurin or the Ḫābūr canals.

The canals enlarged the basis of subsistence for the local population by a factor of three and made sedentary life more secure against the abitrariness of climate. Consequently, the population grew, the settlements grew and more settlements had to be founded⁶⁵.

The sampling strategy of the Ḫābūr survey enabled the reconstruction of the settlement size of each period. Within the settlement pattern of the late Neo-Assyrian period (Fig. 5), five categories are distinguishable, from a hamlet to a regional center. The latter is Tall Šēḫ Ḫamad / Dūr-katlimmu, the largest settlement along the lower Ḫābūr and probably also along the eastern Euphrates bank. The former centers of Tall Hasaka / Magrisi, Tall Ṭābān / Ṭābēte, Tall ʿAğāğa / Šadikanni, and Tall Fadgami / Qatni fall within the next two categories, 'provincial centers' and 'subcenters'. The two new sites in these categories are Tall Tnēnir, situated halfway between Tall Hasaka and Tall Ṭābān, and the steppe site Tall Umm ʿAqrubba / Zabannu. Comparing this pattern with the Middle Assyrian and the early Neo-Assyrian settlement system (Figs. 3, 4), the radical change becomes obvious: the hierarchy has been stepped up from a three tier to a five tier system. This has been explained as an urbanization process⁶⁶ and it may go hand in hand with the reform of the provincial system.

It is the size of the regional center of Dūr-katlimmu which causes a convex curve in rank size diagrams⁶⁷. Another diagram of the steppe settlements in the ʿAğīğ area shows a parallel result⁶⁸. Bernbeck interprets this as a sign of poor or peripheric integration of the Wadi ʿAğīğ occupation in the provincial system of the Neo-Assyrian empire⁶⁹. Of the four possible explanations for the general situation Bernbeck offers, overcentralization, accidental limit of research area, peripheric situation, and governmental interference in economic affairs, the first and the last seem to be the more suitable ones. The excavation of about four hectares in the lower town II of Dūr-katlimmu has revealed a palace in the northeast corner and several residences of higher officials in the central part of the lower town, large open areas and streets, but only one house of domestic character. This underlines the administrative character of this late 8th century extension of intramural ground, covering an area of 35 hectares and enlarging the city by a factor of three to about 55 hectares intramural occupation area. The domestic settlement was apparently situated outside the city of Dūr-katlimmu, about one kilometer to the southeast, under the modern village of Ġaribe. No other settlement along the lower Ḫābūr has the

⁶²Kühne, in *Nuove fondazioni*, pp. 55-84.

⁶³Kühne, in *Die Rezente Umwelt*, pp. 163-190.

⁶⁴A. Cavigneaux - B.K. Ismail, *Die Statthalter von Suḫu und Māri im 8. Jh.v.Chr.*: BaM 21 (1990), p. 331.

⁶⁵Kühne, in *Die Rezente Umwelt*, pp. 32, 186.

⁶⁶Kühne, in *Nuove fondazioni*, pp. 55-84.

⁶⁷Morandi, *Il fiume e la steppa*, Fig. 25.

⁶⁸Bernbeck, *Steppe als Kulturlandschaft*, p. 134, Tab. 69.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 140.

potential to house an administrative aristocracy of that size. This may indeed be interpreted as the material expression of overcentralisation.

Archaeological criteria are provided also by the occupation of the Wadi ʿAğīḡ region. In this late Assyrian period of the 7th century, Bernbeck's phase C, the ʿAğīḡ region is the most densely settled in its whole history and the only period with a stratified settlement system. In all probability, Dūr-katlimmu was the responsible center for the ʿAğīḡ area.

On the middle Euphrates most of the sites excavated seem to belong to this period, like Sūr Ġurʿa, Qalʿat ʿAna and Ḫirbat Qasriḡ⁷⁰. In the upper Ḫābūr basin the material from Tall Hamidiya seems to be mixed⁷¹. Stratified material from the 8th and 7th century is therefore very scanty.

In summary, the archaeological documentation contrasts sharply with the textual evidence about the significance of Dūr-katlimmu in the Neo-Assyrian period. Its role in the 'dark ages' and in the 9th century may be interpreted along the lines of its function in the Middle Assyrian period, then being the seat of a governor but possibly a palatial center, too (see above). But after the settlement extension in the late 8th century it needs a different explanation for which any written documentation is lacking, except one private letter⁷² which indicates that a branch of the *ḫarrān šarri* lead down to Dūr-katlimmu. The net of traffic routes across the steppe was thus connected with the main east-west route of the Assyrian empire. It has to be considered also that the canals were navigable. Thus Dūr-katlimmu became the crossing point of important traffic routes in the 7th century, underlining its significance as a regional and administration center. It is amazing that this significance is not reflected in cuneiform sources.

5. The 'post-Assyrian' period: a brief outlook

Until very recently it appeared that the collapse of the Assyrian empire had created a vacuum in northern Mesopotamia, both in material culture as well as in literary evidence. The Assyrians seemed to have disappeared, and the Babylonians did not show up. Some material evidence from Nimrud was associated with a squatter habitation, clearly of post-Assyrian date, which added to the overall impression that the country had fallen into despair⁷³.

During the 1992 season in Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad / Dūr-katlimmu four cuneiform tablets were excavated, which are of unique character. They are written in Assyrian, but dated to the years 2 and 5 of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II⁷⁴.

These tablets were found in a corner room of a building which was clearly superimposed upon the late Assyrian level, with foundation trenches cutting into the Assyrian architecture. During the 1993 season, an effort was made to excavate this late Babylonian building. It turned out to be very large, covering an area of more than 2.500 square meters. The architecture was well preserved but the rooms did not reveal too much inventory. What was found will be sufficient to define the characteristics of the material culture of the 'post-Assyrian' period within the region.

In any case, there was no occupation hiatus, the Babylonians stepped in and took over the administrative structure and personnel (?) of Dūr-katlimmu with its Assyrian formulars, using them more than ten years after the fall of Nineveh. Likewise, there was no sudden change in material culture, any changes being introduced gradually.

⁷⁰Cavigneaux - Ismail: BaM 21 (1990), pp. 321-456; Northedge, *Excavations at 'Ana*; J. Curtis, *Excavation at Qasriḡ Cliff and Khirbet Qasriḡ*, London 1989; see discussion in Bernbeck, *Steppe als Kulturlandschaft*, pp. 116-117.

⁷¹Pfälzner, *Mittanische und mittelassyrische Keramik*.

⁷²UTN, pp. 227-229.

⁷³S. Dalley, *Nineveh after 612 BC*: AoF 20 (1993), pp. 134-147.

⁷⁴H. Kühne - J.N. Postgate - W. Röllig - J.A. Brinkman - F.M. Fales, *Vier Spätbabylonische Tontafeln aus Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad*: SAAB 7 (1993), pp. 75-150.

6. Summary

An effort was taken to make the following points:

1. It was argued that the establishment of the Middle Assyrian 'provinces' (*paḫutu*) associated with the centers of Ṭābēte, Šadikanni, Qatni and Dūr-katlimmu at the lower Ḫābūr were so firmly controlled via traffic routes and settlements (Tall Umm ʿAqrēbe) across the steppe that (a) the 'hinterland' of Aššur within the limits of the Singār mountains in the north, the Ḫābūr in the west, the Tigris in the east and a straight line south of the steppe route in the south should be considered a territorial empire, and (b) that these ties were so lasting that they kept the spreading local potentates as loyal vassals to Aššur during the 'dark ages'. It seems that the lower Ḫābūr between the 'kingdom' of Ṭābēte and Dūr-katlimmu was the frontier against the Aramaeans.
2. The 9th century settlement pattern along the lower Ḫābūr is not to be considered as a reestablishment but rather a continuation of the Middle Assyrian one, with the Aramaean lands of Laqe including Bīt Ḫalupe in the south and Bīt Baḫiani in the north now firmly established.
3. At the beginning of the 8th century, the whole region was united in the province of Raṣappa. An occupation of the steppe begins, indicating a change in policy which has been called a colonisation but turned into an urbanisation. This possibly coincides with the beginning of a reform of the 'provincial' system.
4. This development results in the most intensive occupation of the lower Ḫābūr and the steppe so far seen in the history of the region during the 7th century. It is accompanied or even prompted by the construction of a regional canal system. The ultimate settlement pattern is dominated by the regional center of Dūr-katlimmu and reveals signs of overcentralisation.

1. Sites of the Ḫābūr survey:

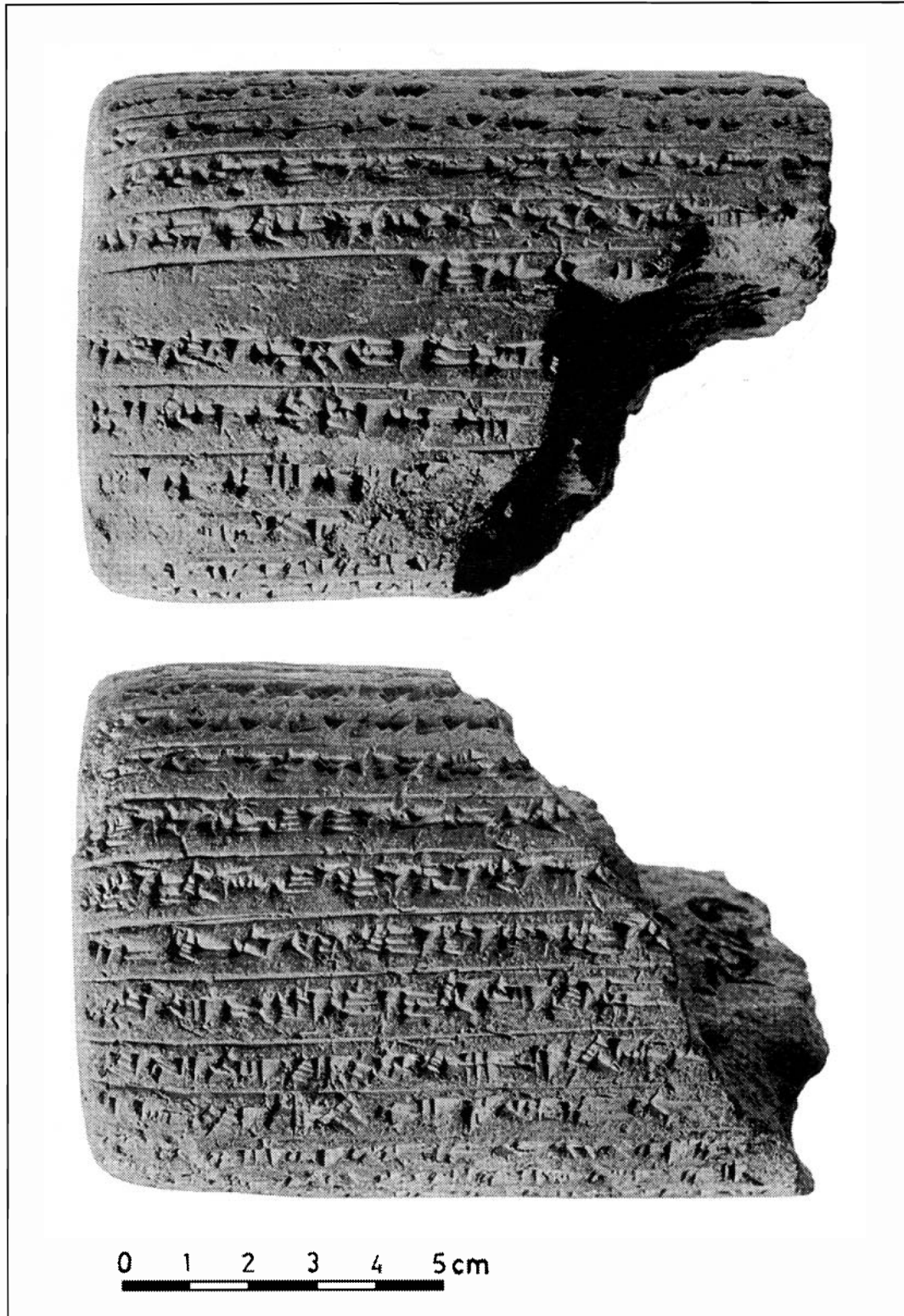
- 01 T. Čubn
- 07 T. Fidēn
- 09 T. Abū Ḫāʾit
- 13 T. Šuwar
- 15 T. Ḫuṣēn
- 16 T. Šēḫ Ḫamad
- 17 Ḫirbat al-Ḫumra
- 19 T. Marqada
- 20 T. Ašamsānī
- 21 T. Namliya
- 27 T. Fadḡami
- 33 T. Brīk
- 34 T. Knēdiḡ
- 35 T. Šaddada
- 36 T. ʿAḡāḡa
- 37 T. Ṭaʾbān
- 38 T. Tnēnīr
- 39 T. Aḫmar
- 40 T. Aḫmar-Mitte
- 41 T. Aḫmar-Nord
- 43 T. ʿAdla
- 46 T. Čarmiz
- 47 T. Bahza
- 48 Ḫirbat al-Bahza
- 50 T. Abū Hamda
- 51 T. Maqbara ʿAḡāḡa
- 58 T. Raḡman
- 60 T. Mašnaqa
- 61 T. Šēḫ ʿOṭmān
- 63 T. Hasna
- 64 T. Maṭariya
- 65 T. Bdēri
- 71 T. Abū Amšah
- 72 T. Rad Šaqra
- 73 T. Kerma
- 75 T. Ḍahab
- 76 T. Maraza
- 77 T. Abū Bakr
- 85 Ḫirbat al-Banat
- 88 T. Mullā Maṭar
- 94 T. Naḡa
- 97 T. Bwēd
- 102 T. Nahnāb-Süd
- 103 T. Nahnāb-Ost
- 104 T. Knēdiḡ-Nord
- 105 T. Dagaga
- 107 T. Dḡērāt
- 109 T. Guwerān

- 111 T. Mašnaqa-West
- 112 T. Flēti
- 113 T. Maqbara Flēti
- 115 T. Hasaka
- 123 T. Maqbara ʿAḡāḡa-Süd-II
- 124 Ḫirbat Gamal
- 125 T. Kraḡ
- 126 T. Tayara-Nord
- 127 T. Tayara-Süd
- 134 Čilīb al-Adad
- 135 Čedad
- 136 T. Gariba I

2. Sites of the ʿAḡiḡ survey (A #):

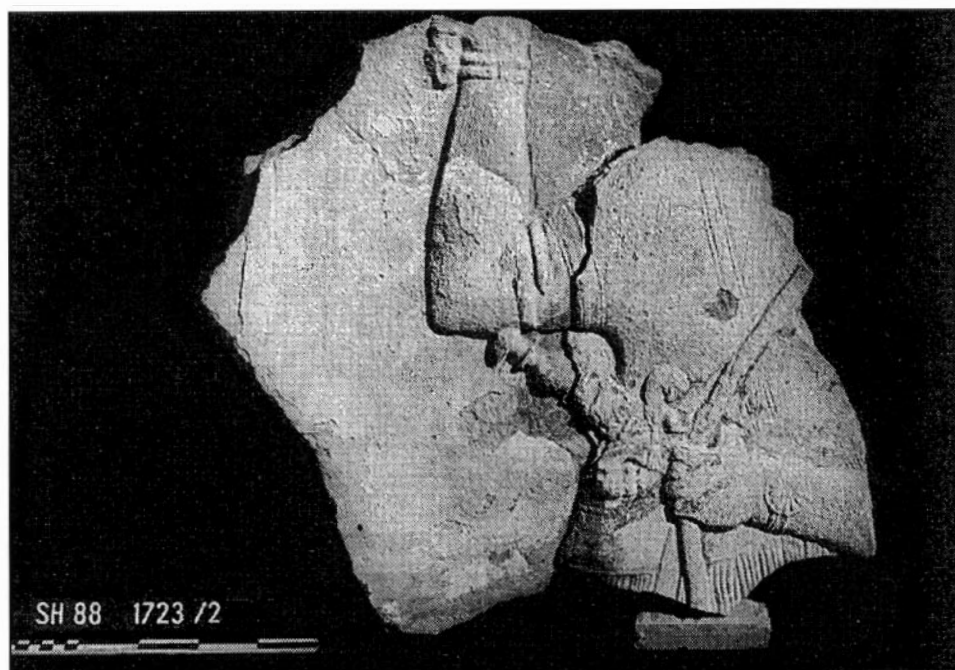
- A 1 Abū Šuwēl
- A 4 Tall Umm ʿAqrēbe
- A 5 Umm ʿAqrēbe II
- A 6 Umm ʿAqrēbe III
- A 7 Umm ʿAqrēbe IV
- A 8 Umm ʿAqrēbe V
- A 9 Umm ʿAqrēbe VI
- A 10 Umm ʿAqrēbe VII
- A 11 Umm ʿAqrēbe VIII
- A 12 Umm ʿAqrēbe IX
- A 13 Umm ʿAqrēbe X
- A 15 Tall Umm ʿAqrubba
- A 16 Umm ʿAqrubba-Süd
- A 18 Qaret Umm ʿAqrubba I
- A 19 Qadīr an-Našmi
- A 20 ʿAnaiāt eš-Šarqi I
- A 21 ʿAnaiāt eš-Šarqi II
- A 23 ʿAnaiāt eš-Šarqi IV
- A 24 ʿAnaiāt eš-Šarqi V
- A 25 Ḍahr ʿAnaiāt
- A 26 Hoḡ Hšām
- A 27 Čilīb el Haḡḡi ʿObēd
- A 29 Mḡālat Čdeide
- A 30 Mūqa ed-Dabawiya
- A 31 Mešḡadaniya I
- A 35 Čilīb es-Siyāḡ
- A 36 Čilīb el ʿAmah
- A 37 Čilīb el ʿAbūd
- A 38 Abū Kiṭāḡa I
- A 39 Abū Kiṭāḡa II
- A 40/41 ʿAuaḡ I/II
- A 42 ʿAuaḡ III

Table I - List of Sites for Figs. 3, 4, 5.

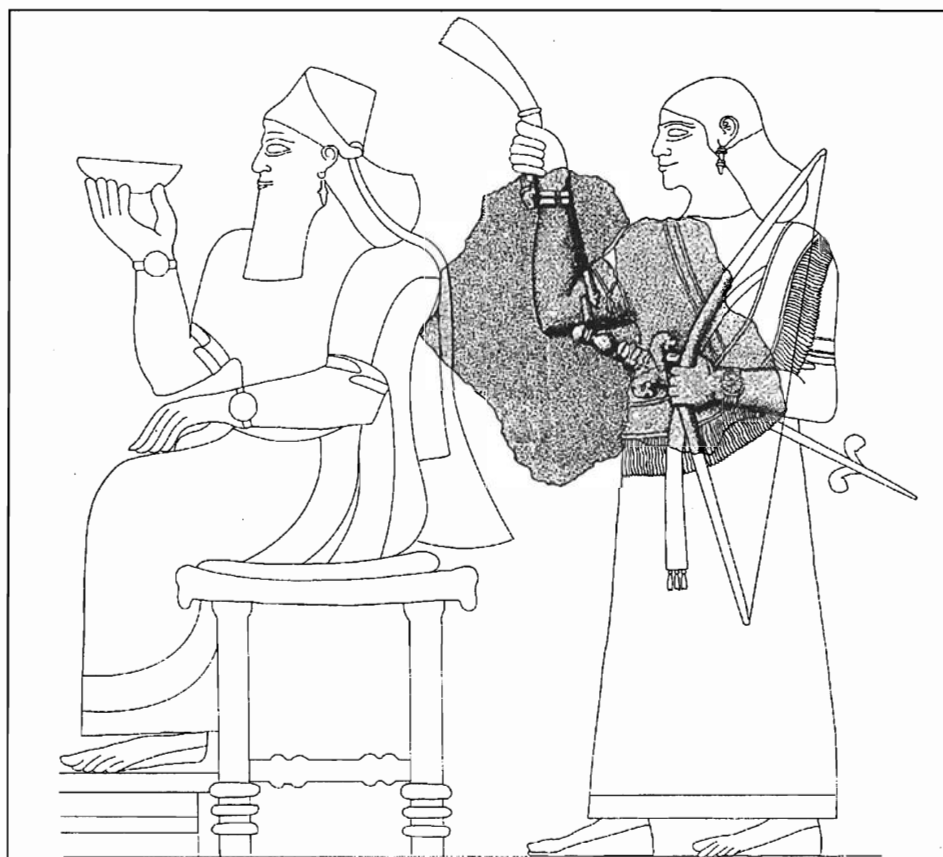


Pl. I. - The cylinder of Bēl-ereš, published by courtesy of the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul.

Plate II



Pl. IIa. - Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad/Dūr-katlimmu. Two fragments of a sculptured orthostate (65 x 65 cm), 9th century B.C., Museum Deir az-Zor.



Pl. IIb. - Reconstruction of the scene after slab G-3, room G, Northwest Palace of Nimrud.