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Dūr-Katlimmu 2008 and Beyond

Edited by Hartmut Kühne

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Editorial Foreword

This volume initiates a new series *Studia Chaburensia*. It will be devoted to the study of provincial regions with an emphasis on the development, change, and collapse of settlements, environment, economy, administration, and every day life in rural areas dependent on urban centres or not. Chronologically unlimited, the series will focus on the Assyrian and contemporary civilisations of the second and first millennia BCE. Geographically it will encompass Upper Mesopotamia as well as neighbouring regions.

January 2010-01-15

The Rural Hinterland of Dūr-Katlimmu*

Dedicated to Gernot Wilhelm on the occasion of his 65th birthday

This study attempts to assign a rural hinterland to the Assyrian city of Dūr-Katlimmu considering the archaeological evidence of thirty years of field work, Assyrian written sources, palaeo-environmental studies, and the Central Place Theory.

Dūr-Katlimmu in Middle- and Neo-Assyrian history

Excavated Middle-Assyrian tablets leave no doubt that Dūr-Katlimmu functioned as a seat of a governor (*bēl pāḫete*) who headed an administrative unit, a *pāḫutu*, which may be translated a district¹ during the thirteenth century BC. Beyond that it served as the seat of a high central official, a *sukallu rabīu*, which may be translated a grand vizier², who administrated the recently conquered western part of the empire. It has been assumed³ that this denomination of Dūr-Katlimmu was first introduced by king Salmanu-ashared I (1273-1244) who is the founder of the temple for the city god of Dūr-Katlimmu, Salmanu⁴. His throne name incorporates this god for the first time, to be followed by four more kings, the last being Salmanu-ašared V (726-722), who gave way to the Sargonids. Once the element Salmanu has betrayed its meaning, it demonstrates a remarkable continuity over more than 500 years of the royal significance of the city of Dūr-Katlimmu.

In the thirteenth century, the city covered an area of approximately 25 hectares⁵. During the ninth century BC the settlement area was enlarged by the foundation of the Lower Town II to about 60 hectares intra muros⁶. The city now functioned as a seat of a garrison and of military elite troops as well as of units of the secret service, possibly also as a provincial but certainly as an economic and administrative centre⁷.

The geographical and environmental setting

The site of Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad on the left bank of the Ḥābūr is situated about 80 kilometres beyond the dry-farming-belt of the 200 mm isohyets which must have been about the same four thousand years ago⁸. The ancient settlement ground lies on a spur between the mouth of two

* This study was prepared within the framework of the Excellence Cluster TOPOI: The Formation and Transformation of Space and Knowledge in Ancient Civilizations. Research Area A-I: Central Places and their Environment.

1 Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996:25.

2 Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 25-29.

3 Kühne 2006-2008: 546.

4 Radner 1998; Kühne/Radner 2008: 34.

5 Kühne 2006-2008: 545 Abb. 2b.

6 Kühne 2006-2008: 546-549 Abb. 2c.

7 Kühne 2006-2008: 549; Radner 2002:8-11.

8 Kühne 2008a: 216.



Fig. 01: The water shed between the Lower Ḥābūr basin and the Wādī ʿAḡṣ; Photo: Arne Weiser 2008.

Wādīs, Wādī Saʿīb Ḥamad in the north and Wādī Ḡaribe in the south. They are draining a thirty kilometre wide stripe of the slowly rising steppe up to the water shed between the Ḥābūr and the Wādī ʿAḡṣ, a ridge (fig. 01), which is a prominent marker in the landscape⁹. This particular environmental setting of the site implies a permanent abundance of water which is confirmed by palaeo-environmental data. Swamps and gallery-woods with dense undergrowth would create the biotope in which beavers lived as assured by bones found in the excavation¹⁰. At times of flood the spur might have been surrounded by water completely forming an island or a peninsula. This natural setting was a significant feature of the initial centre of Dūr-Katlimmu and probably the reason why the site was selected to be converted to a provincial centre and a “royal city”¹¹ during the 13th century BC. Thus, Dūr-Katlimmu provided a number of economic and military advantages and highlighted an exceptional environment, which prompted a flare of exclusiveness¹², as opposed to the natural environment north and south of it. Beyond this exceptional situation the water supply apparently supported a rather sparse settlement pattern (fig. 02)¹³ which seems to have encouraged the Assyrians to improve the economical situation by constructing a regional canal almost certainly already during the 13th century which ended at Dūr-Katlimmu¹⁴.

9 Syria Space Image Atlas 1996: 58/59.

10 Becker 2008: 107-108.

11 Kühne 2006: 13 „Koenigspfalz“.

12 Kühne 2008a: 219-220.

13 Kühne in press.

14 Ergenzinger / Kühne 1991: 176-186; Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 132; M. Pucci 2010.

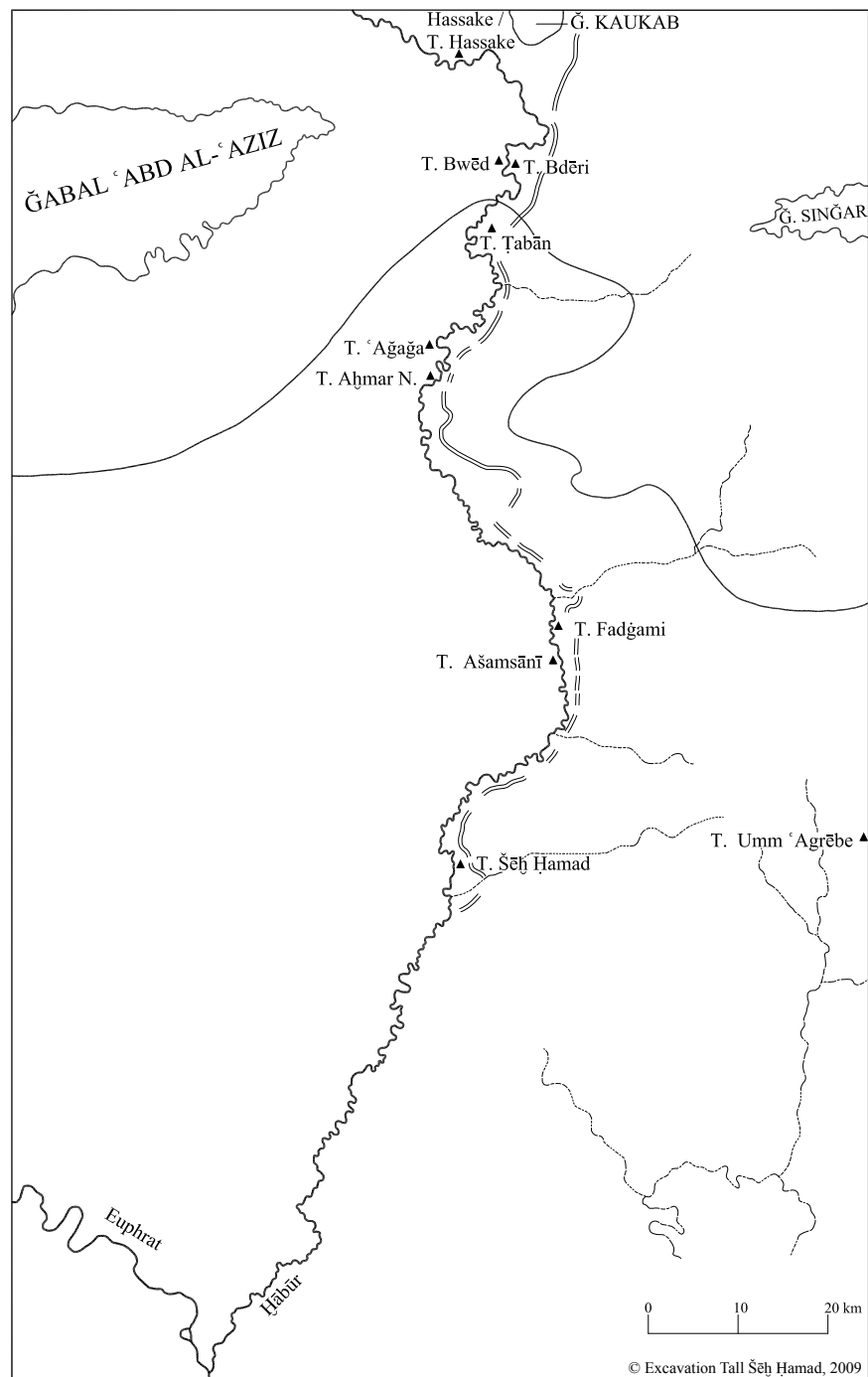


Fig. 02: Settlement pattern of the Lower Ḥabūr during the Middle-Assyrian Period (13th century BC).

From about 1150 to 950 BC the region suffered from drought. But with the improvement of the precipitation after about 950 BC, as reported by the annals of king Ashur-dan II (955-912), a growing anthropogenic impact began to transform the natural environment culminating in the settlement pattern of the 8th and 7th century (fig. 03). The construction of the regional canals¹⁵ on both banks of the Lower Ḫābūr and of the king's road network¹⁶ destroyed a great deal of the natural vegetation and fauna of the valley and of the steppe. It is this anthropogenic impact which started the sustainable process of degradation which led to the present situation.

Settlement administration

During the 13th century the Middle-Assyrian kings Salmanu-ašared I and Tukulti-ninurta I undertook fundamental steps to change the mechanism of the empire from a network organisation¹⁷ to a system of provincial administration¹⁸. However, the earliest documented materialization into 27 (+) provinces is provided by a list of the archive of the Aššur temple during the reign of Tiglat-pileser I (1115-1077)¹⁹.

The settlement pattern of the Lower Ḫābūr region (fig. 02) seems to suggest that dispersed settlements of former periods may have been discontinued to achieve a clearance for the planned re-organisation²⁰. The newly introduced provincial districts (*pāḫutu*) consisted as yet merely of an administration centre, a city or town, that controlled a surrounding rural hinterland²¹ which was probably limited to a day's walking distance and did not necessitate a structure of villages. Between two district centres large intermediate spaces remained void of settlements and administration simply because they were uninhabited and the borders of a district did not need to be defined as yet. Thus, in spite of the inauguration of the district centres (fig. 02) the overall system remained that of a network organisation; road stations like Tall Umm ʿAqrēbe²² underline this situation but may also be interpreted as first steps to colonize the steppe. However, the idea to administrate rural areas spatially by means of provincial units was born and partially materialized during the 13th century BC.

The implementation of the *pāḫutu*-system in the Lower Ḫābūr region suffered a severe setback by the above mentioned period of drought and perhaps also by the threat of the Aramean migrations. The ties of the central Assyrian government loosened to allow local potentates spring up during the 12th to the early 10th century that kept their loyalty to Assyria and seem to have functioned as a buffer zone against the Arameans²³. With the improved climatic situation king Ashur-dan II (955-912) launched a military and administrative reform that was the prelude to the western expansion starting under Adad-nīrārī II (911-891). The Lower Ḫābūr returned under the direct control of the central Assyrian government and became part of the provinces of Raṣappa and Lāqê²⁴. Dūr-Katlimmu was situated geographically in the province

15 Ergenzinger / Kühne 1991: 186.

16 Radner 2002: 3-4.

17 Liverani 1988; Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 25.

18 Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 25-26; Radner 2006-2008: 42-43.

19 Radner 2006-2008: 43.

20 Kühne in press.

21 Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 25.

22 Pfälzner 1993; Pfälzner 1995: 172-173.

23 Kühne 2009: 46.

24 Radner 2006-2008: 50 Karte 2.

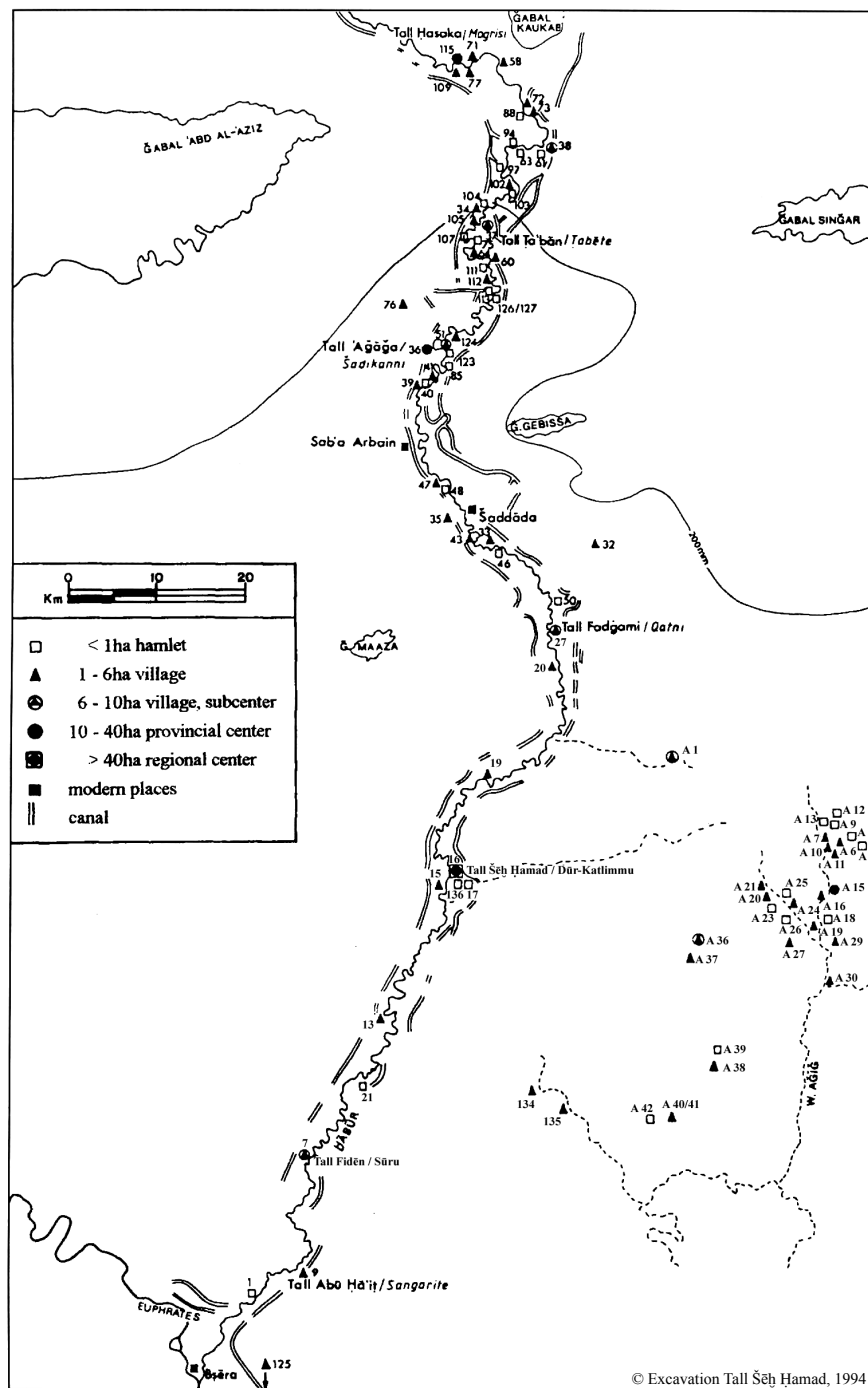


Fig. 03: Settlement pattern of the Lower Hābūr during the Neo-Assyrian Period (8th and 7th century BC).

of Lāqê which was part of the province of Rašappa during the late ninth century BC when Nergal-ereš was governor (ca. 803-775)²⁵. More recently, a witness of this governor has been found in Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad²⁶. For the reconstruction of the rural hinterland of Dūr-Katlimmu and the settlement system by which it was structured he is of utmost importance.

The stele of Adad-nīrārī III from Tall Rimah / Zamaḫu (fig. 04) and the survey of the Wādī ‘Ağğ

Once the Lower Ḥābūr had returned to the central administration of the Assyrian government during the early 9th century the colonisation of the steppe between the Ḥābūr and the Tigris, the southern slopes of the Sinḡar Mountains and the Middle Euphrates, was a logical political process, inherent to the overall aim of spatial control and administration. Indeed, for once there is a well known document providing precise information about this activity. It is the erased part of the inscription on the stele of king Adad-nīrārī III excavated in Tall Rimah / Zamaḫu (fig. 04)²⁷ which I quote fully in the translation by A. Kirk Grayson²⁸ (bold emphasis by the author):

*“At the same time I decreed for Nergal-ēriš, governor of the lands Rašappa, Laqê, Ḥindānu, Anat, Suḫi, the city (Ana)-Aššur-(utēr)-ašbat, my courtier: the city of Dūr-Ištar with its 12 villages, the city Kār-Sin with its 10 villages, **the city Dūrduklimmu with its 33 villages**, the city Dūr-Aššur with its 20 villages, the city Dūr-Nergal-ēriš with its 33 villages, the city of Dūr-Marduk with its 40 villages, the city Kār-Adad-nārārī with its 126 villages in (the area of) Mount Sangar, 28 villages in (the area of) Mount Azallu, the city of Dūr-Adad-nārārī with its 15 villages in the land of Laqê, the city Adad with its 14 villages in the land Qatnu – altogether 331 small cities, which Nergal-ēriš undertook to rebuild by the decree of his lord.”*

The inscription first numbers the lands and one city under the control of the governor Nergal-ereš which can be associated fairly well with the steppe region east of the Lower Ḥābūr, the junction of the Ḥābūr with the Euphrates, and the middle Euphrates in modern east Syria and west Iraq. Then it enumerates nine cities to which a changing number of villages are affiliated. Out of these only one city can be identified with certainty: *Dūrduklimmu*, which is a variant writing of *Dur-Katlimmu*²⁹. A geographical location is given in two other cases: The city of Adad with its 14 villages is said to be in the land of Qatnu; the land of Qatnu should be identical with the city of Qatun or Qatni³⁰ about 37 km north of Dūr-Katlimmu, if identified with Tall Fadḡami³¹; these two cities are to be located on the Lower Ḥābūr with certainty. The city of Kār-Adad-nārārī with the largest number of villages associated is described as being situated in the region of the Sinḡar mountains. Finally, the correct sum of the villages is given, 331 ones, which Nergal-ereš “*undertook to rebuild by the decree of his lord.*”

25 Radner 2002: 4-7.

26 Kühne/Radner 2008.

27 Oates 1968; Oates 1982.

28 Grayson 1996:211 with older literature; to be added: Weippert 1992.

29 Parpola 1970: 108; Röllig 1978; Nashef 1982: 92.

30 Nashef 1982: 221; Parpola 1970: 285.

31 Charpin 2010: 38 note 28.

This sum excludes the cities to which the “small cities” or villages were affiliated. As opposed to many other scholars this clear distinction indicates in my opinion that the cities did exist already, as is undoubtedly the case with Dūr-Katlimmu and the “land Qatnu”, and that the villages were a deliberate addition to them. Having stated this, one can certainly go a step further and assume that these cities had functioned already as central places. Thus, the existing pattern was stepped up by the villages. It may further be assumed that the addition of the villages was based on economic conditions. This allows concluding that the inscription documents the inauguration of nine settlement systems according to the Central Place Theory³².

The ‘Ağğ survey has been analysed by Bernbeck³³. His arguments remain valid and are not questioned here. However, he used the then available translations of the Rimaḥ inscription by Page and Weippert that did not include the reading of *Dūrduklimmu*. Thus he was not able to identify any site and associate any relationship of the Wādī ‘Ağğ settlements with Dūr-Katlimmu with certainty. Further more, any clear reference to Nergal-ereš from Tall Šeḥ Ḥamad / Dūr-Katlimmu was missing at the time and only established during the excavation season of 2003³⁴. It therefore seems to be appropriate to reconsider the ‘Ağğ evidence in the light of these new facts.

Bernbeck differentiated three phases A – C according to the ceramic evidence which are roughly contemporary with the 9th, 8th, and 7th centuries. He argued that the settlement pattern in the ninth century (Period A) still resembled the Middle-Assyrian net work system, that the eighth century (Period B) sees the inauguration of a settlement system by a centralised government, and that the Period C system is the most elaborated and populated one. He sees an abrupt end of Period C which he correlates with the collapse of the Assyrian empire³⁵.



Fig. 04: Stele of Adad-nīrārī III of Tall Rimaḥ / Zamaḥu.
Photo: Seton Williams 1981:Abb. 109.

32 Weippert 1992: 62 is using the term ‘Zentraler Ort’ without referring to the theory.

33 Bernbeck 1993.

34 Kühne/Radner 2008: 32-34, 43-44.

35 Bernbeck 1993: 134-141, 174-175.

However, the ceramic evidence for the eighth centuries is not very reliable yet. This is the main reason for pulling the evidence of the Periods B and C together and analysing the settlement situation of the eighth and seventh century as a whole³⁶. Concerning the end of Period C, the excavation of the “Red House” in Dūr-Katlimmu has demonstrated more recently by the evidence of unique cuneiform texts that this city survived the collapse of the empire more or less unchanged and went on as before implying that the occupation of the ʿAḡṭṭ continued also. The ceramic evidence of the Red House offers new criteria³⁷ by which the Post-Assyrian period might be detected in the ʿAḡṭṭ material also³⁸.

In search for the 33 villages of *Dūrduklammu* the Ḫābūr-Survey leaves no doubt that these may not be looked for within the realm of the river valley³⁹. The survey only furnished one small site in the vicinity of Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad (16), Ḫirbet al-Humra (17), which may be contemporary to late Neo-Assyrian Dūr-Katlimmu (fig. 03). Another small Neo-Assyrian settlement, Tall Ḡaribe (136), was discovered later, being situated underneath the modern village of Ḡaribe. Archaeological sites in the adjoining steppe up to the watershed between the river Ḫābūr and the Wādī ʿAḡṭṭ are rare but have not been looked for systematically (nos. A1, 134, 135 on fig. 03). The site of Tall Abū Šuwēl (A 01) has been discovered during the ʿAḡṭṭ-survey, the sites Ḡilṭb al-Adad (134) and Ḡidad (135) were only visited. These sites are surprisingly large which nourish the expectation that there should be smaller dependent sites belonging to the pattern which remain to be discovered⁴⁰. However, the survey in the Wādī ʿAḡṭṭ region⁴¹ has provided 31 settlements to be dated to the 8th and 7th century BC (fig. 03). By sheer number then, there would be an equivalence of 33 archaeological sites occupied in the 8th and 7th century to be affiliated with Dūr-Katlimmu. This numerical coincidence with the settlements mentioned in the inscription may be accidental but it demonstrates generally that the numbers given in the inscription should be taken seriously. Referring to the 126 villages of Kār-Adad-nārārī in the region of Singār, one is reminded to David Oates’ remark: “...and in the course of travelling between Tall ʿAfar and Tall al Rimah, 13 km. to the south, we found more than 120 sites in an area some 15 by 10 km.”⁴² I do not consider the sites of the “North Jazira Survey” to be relevant to this inscription⁴³ because they are situated too far north in the province of Tillê⁴⁴.

Settlement system and rural hinterland

As stated above, the inscription itself indicates the installation of nine settlement systems within the lands quoted at its beginning. Two of them can be located at the east bank of the Lower Ḫābūr. The joint archaeological and written evidence suggests strongly associating the ʿAḡṭṭ settlements with the villages of *Dūrduklammu* mentioned in the Rimah inscription. However, the ʿAḡṭṭ evidence allows structuring the settlement system further.

36 Cf. Bernbeck 1993:135 for a similar notion.

37 Kreppner 2006.

38 Bernbeck 1993: 140, 175 argues for an abrupt end of Phase C because of the collapse of the Assyrian empire; on page 145 he dates the disappearance of the whole system to the first half of the 6th century BC.

39 Kühne in press.

40 Bernbeck 1993: 137 note 185.

41 Bernbeck 1993.

42 D. Oates in: Curtis 1982:86.

43 Wilkinson/Tucker 1995: 58-62; Wilkinson 2003: 131 Fig. 7:2.

44 Radner 2006-2008: 44 Karte 1.

The hierarchy of the settlements as displayed in figs. 5-6 has been established according to the settlement size and geographical position. Five categories have been differentiated:

1. Categories 1 are hamlets covering less than one hectare (11 settlements).
2. Categories 2 are villages covering between one and three hectares (17 settlements).
3. Categories 3 are sub centres II covering between three and five hectares. They are represented in the Wādī ‘Ağtīg only by one settlement, Ġilīb al-‘Amah; three more settlements of this type are situated on the terrace, i.e. Tall Abū Šuwēl, Ġilīb al-Adad, and Ġidad.
4. Category 4 (sub centre I) is represented by one settlement only, Tall Umm ‘Aqrubba, covering 11.72 hectares.
5. Category 5 is the provincial centre of Dūr-Katlimmu, covering ca. 60 hectares.

The guiding principles for the application of the Central Place Theory have been least effort considerations “that influence the spatial organization of the production and distribution of goods and services”⁴⁵ and the disregard of strict market economy rules that were central to Christaller⁴⁶. The evolving pattern (figs. 5-6) is rather different from Bernbeck’s results. First, it seems necessary to differentiate between the sites in the ‘Ağtīg-valley and the sites on the steppe terrace. By doing so, only two sub centres remain in the valley, one of category 3 and the other one of category 4. The category 4 sub centre I, Tall Umm ‘Aqrubba (A 15), is geographically centring a cluster of 12 villages and 9 hamlets while settlements of the sub centre II-type in this arrangement are missing. The only settlement of this type, Ġilīb el-‘Amah (A 36), rather seems to head a smaller system of three villages and two hamlets.

In this arrangement the size ratio of the sub centre Tall Umm ‘Aqrubba to its villages and hamlets is the same factor 4 as the ratio of the provincial centre of Dūr-Katlimmu to the sub centre Tall Umm ‘Aqrubba. This is rather conspicuous if looking for an explanation. It betrays the same bloated bureaucracy that Bernbeck⁴⁷ underscores to the system as a whole. The Tall Umm ‘Aqrubba cluster is thus what I would suggest to call ‘a closed system’ consisting of a sufficient number of dependent smaller settlements to generate local elites that were handling and administrating the products of the villages / hamlets and in turn serving the provincial elites of Dūr-Katlimmu.

The smaller cluster is headed by Ġilīb el-‘Amah (A 36). It could be interpreted as a developing system being on the way to reach the status of the sub centre I site of Tall Umm ‘Aqrubba. An archaeological argument in favour of that would be that the site appears as one of the three tall (next to Tall Umm ‘Aqrubba and Tall Umm ‘Aqrēbe) while all the other settlements are flat sites. The other three sites of the category 3 sub centre II, i.e. Tall Abū Šuwēl (A 01), Ġilīb al-Adad (134), and Ġidad (135), are situated on the terrace and might reflect a similar status⁴⁸. The only function that the entire sub centres I and II sites have in common is that they were directly dependent from and responsible to Dūr-Katlimmu.

45 Johnson 1973 :14; The Central Place Theory has been widely accepted in archaeology, cf. Renfrew / Bahn³ 2000: 178-181; Bernbeck 1997: 169-174 with a critical review.

46 Christaller 1933 / 1968².

47 Bernbeck 1993: 175.

48 As stated above, the steppe terrace has not been surveyed systematically and therefore no further comment can be made.

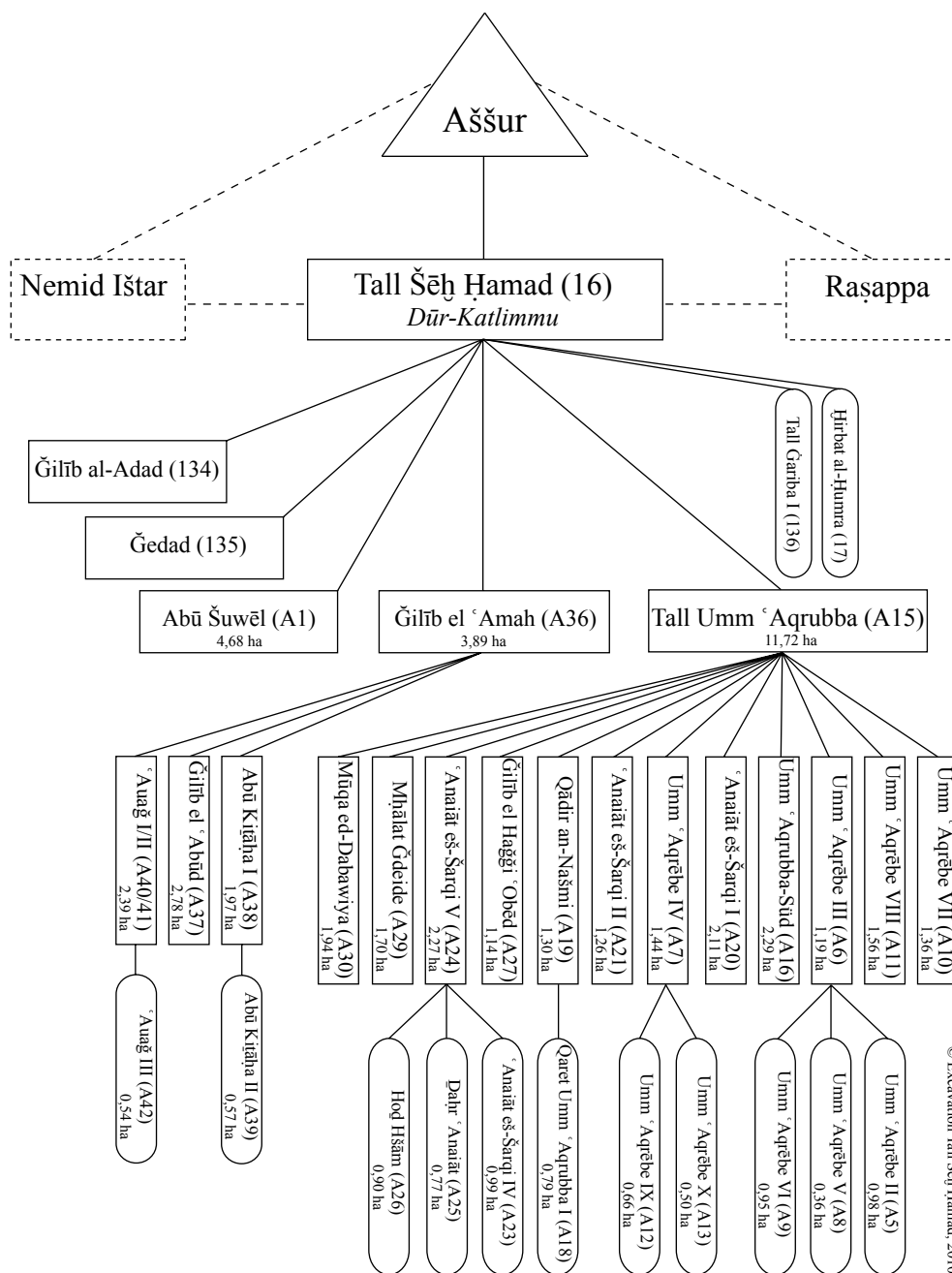


Fig. 05: Structure of the four tiered settlement system of Dūr-Katlimmu.

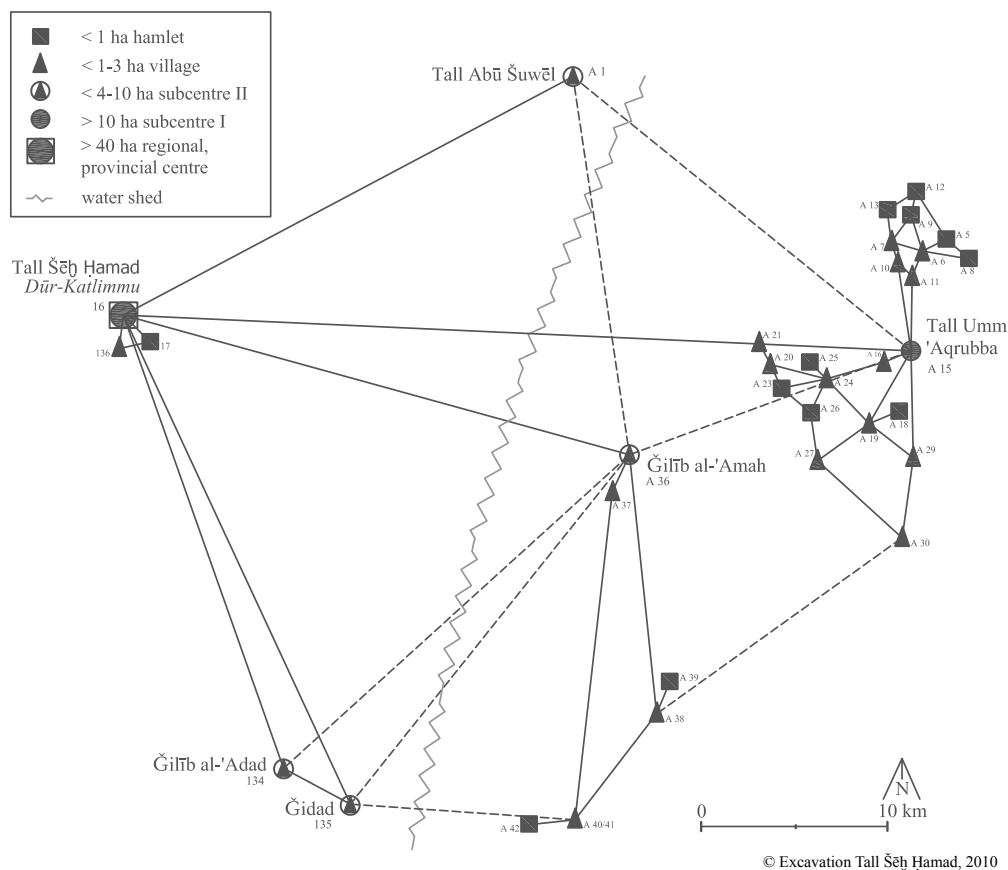


Fig. 06: Mapping of the four tiered settlement system of Dūr-Katlimmu according to the Central Place Theory.

The existence of the ‘bloated’ central places of Tall Umm ‘Aqrubba and Dūr-Katlimmu and the lack of medium sized settlements within the range of 5 and 12 hectares and 12 and 60 hectares generates a convex curve in a rank size diagram⁴⁹. In economic terms it definitely favours an explanation pointing to an exaggerated centralization “... in which competitive forces, ..., are minimized”⁵⁰. Having stated this one may start speculating which social status the people had living and working in the villages and hamlets. It seems that the idea that these were deportees might be quite appropriate⁵¹.

49 Bernbeck 1993: 133 Tab. 69; Bernbeck argues that the survey may have uncovered only a part of a larger system. This cannot not be ruled out but in statistical terms the number of surveyed sites is representative. Medium sized sites do not exist, because they would have been discovered by now. It is therefore unlikely that more sites would change the structural pattern.

50 Smith 1976: 32 as quoted by Bernbeck 1993: 134.

51 Bernbeck 1993: 136; Heltzer 1994: 115-116.

Results

The inscription on the stele of Tall Rimaḥ / Zamaḥu is remarkable in that it documents the very systematic approach of the central Neo-Assyrian government to create nine settlement systems according to the principles of the Central Place Theory in the eastern Ġazira at the beginning of the 8th century BC. One of them can be identified with the Middle- and Neo-Assyrian central place of Dūr-Katlimmu / Tall Šēḥ Ḥamad and according to the archaeological evidence of the Wādī ‘Aḡṭṭ survey. Thus, a four tiered settlement system emerges which is subordinated to the capitals of Aššur, Nimrud and Niniveh (fig. 05). It demonstrates how the Assyrians managed the establishment of administrative units by which they were able to perform territorial control. The ‘Aḡṭṭ settlements then are the rural hinterland of the central place of Dūr-Katlimmu.

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