

# UNDERSTANDING HEGEMONIC PRACTICES OF THE EARLY ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

ESSAYS DEDICATED TO FRANS WIGGERMANN

*edited by*

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*Frans A.M. Wiggermann studying a tablet in the excavation house of the Tell Sabi Abyad Project at Hammam et-Turkman, Syria. Photo taken by Peter M. M. G. Akkermans in 1993.*



CONSOLIDATING EMPIRES PROJECT I

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## **A Note on Spelling**

Most contributors to this volume have clear preferences for spelling Akkadian, Hurrian, or Arabic words in one way or another. In the absence of clear conventions on these matters I have not tried to standardize spelling in this volume and respected the preferences of individual authors.

## Introduction

*Bleda Düring*

The Middle Assyrian Empire, to be dated between about 1350 and 1200 BC, is simultaneously inadequately understood and investigated and of enormous significance to our culture historical understanding of the Ancient Near East. Rising from a rather inconspicuous small town that was known for its commercial trading activities in the Middle Bronze Age, the small polity of Assur managed to transform itself into one of the main powers of the Amarna age in the final centuries of the Late Bronze Age. While the Middle Assyrian Empire was a modest sized state compared to its competitors, such as the Hittites and New Kingdom Egypt, the rise of Assyria was clearly a development that worried these states, as reflected in their correspondence (Moran 1992). It appears that these fears were not without substance. Briefly, under the rule of Tukulti-Ninurta (1243-1207 BC), Assyria managed to control the entirety of Mesopotamia, by defeating and annexing the Kassite state (Van de Mieroop 2004). Subsequently, this expanded Assyrian Empire quickly unraveled, with the murder of Tukulti-Ninurta and the succession wars that ensued. Nonetheless, the Assyrian state was the only one of the Late Bronze Age powers that survived the tumultuous period of the early twelfth century BC, often referred to as the ‘Sea Peoples’ period (Sandars 1978; Cline 2014). In the Iron Age Assyria gradually rebuilt its former territories in northern Mesopotamia overcoming considerable opposition in the process. After the consolidation of these regions, Assyria expanded far beyond, eventually encompassing almost the entire Near East, and in effect became the first ‘world empire’, that is a state without peers. Although the Assyrian state finally ‘collapsed’ in 612 BC (Liverani 2001), after an impressive run of some 700 years, its legacy of empire was taken over first by the Babylonians, then by the Achaemenids, the Seleucids, the Parthians and finally, the Sasanians.

Thus, in historical retrospect the Middle Assyrian Empire was of profound significance in the historical development of Mesopotamia. The pertinent question then is, whether this state differed in its hegemonic practices, that is the techniques and strategies used to achieve domination other than the use of force, from earlier and contemporary imperial states in the ancient Near East, such as the Mittani, New Kingdom Egypt, the Hittites and the Kassites. The alternative, in which Assyria was simply ‘lucky’ to survive the transition from Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age and to achieve domination over the entire Near East, is implausible in my mind. On the other hand, it is a distinct possibility that the Assyrian state transformed itself profoundly over the course of time, and that some of the key hegemonic practices evolved only during the existence of this state.

It is to investigate this issue that a research project was set up at Leiden University which is funded with a European Research Council Starting Grant.<sup>1</sup> This research project focusses on the rich dataset of the Middle Assyrian *dunnu* at Tell Sabi Abyad, a small fortified farming estate in northern Syria that was systematically excavated between 1986 and 2010. The explicit aim of this research project is to embed this case study into the broader context of the Assyrian Empire, and especially how the Assyrians dealt with the newly conquered territories in the west.

The tragedy of the Syrian civil war which unfolded from the spring of 2011 onwards, brought all archaeological fieldwork to an end. Simultaneously, rescue excavations in the Upper Tigris Region in Turkey ended in 2012. Thus, this is an opportune moment to reflect on the new data that have been obtained in Syria and Turkey in the last decades.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Grant no. 282785: “Consolidating Empire: Reconstructing Hegemonic Practices of the Middle Assyrian Empire at the Late Bronze Age Fortified Estate of Tell Sabi Abyad, Syria, ca. 1230-1180 BC”. See [www.dunnu.nl](http://www.dunnu.nl) for more information.

<sup>2</sup> Although a series of new regional survey projects have since been set up in the Assyrian heartland since 2011, the data from these investigations have not yet become available for analysis to any meaningful degree.

With the aim of assessing the hegemonic practices of the Middle Assyrian Empire in the west a conference was organized on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2013 in Leiden, in which key scholars from Germany, Great Britain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and the USA participated. The speakers included both assyriologists and archaeologists, in alphabetical order: Anacleto D'Agostino; Peter V. Bartl; Rémi Berthon; Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum; Bleda Düring; Jesper Eidem; Federica Fantone; Stefan Jakob; Victor Klinkenberg; Rafal Koliński; Hartmut Kühne; Tijm Lanjouw; Jaume Llop-Radua; Simone Mühl; Bradley J. Parker; Nicholas Postgate; Karen Radner; Hervé Reculeau; Aline Tenu; Daisuke Shibata; and, Frans Wiggermann. The symposium was a highly stimulating and interactive event. The current volume represent the outcome of this symposium: almost all of the participants contributed towards the volume, and we were able to include an extra paper by Kim Duistermaat.

The current volume does not constitute a coherent set of paper by scholars who share a similar theoretical or programmatic perspective on the early Assyrian Empire. The diversity of perspectives among the participating scholars is too large to unite them in one project. The papers range from theoretically informed anthropological archaeology to empirical presentations of archaeological and textual datasets. However, the volume does bring together a wealth of textual and archaeological data, as well as interpretations of these data, that bear directly on the assessment on what Middle Assyrian Hegemonic practices were, how they might have varied from one region to the next, and how they can be compared to the hegemonic practices of other empires.

The book has been organized in a series of themes, in order to facilitate scholars consulting this volume. However, it should be borne in mind that many of the papers would fit into various themes, and thus the organization of the volume is to some degree an arbitrary one, but this is only to be expected in a thematically focused volume such as this.

The first theme concerns the transition from the Mittani to the Middle Assyrian period in the western provinces of the Middle Assyrian Empire. The relation between the two states remains difficult to reconstruct. There are certainly elements in the Middle Assyrian states that were inherited from the Mittani, such as the provincial structure, the organization of the army in 'ten-groups' and the *ilku* system, and Postgate (2011) has qualified the Middle Assyrian as a 'Nachfolgerstaat' (successor-state). At the same time, there are clearly other elements in which Assyria differs from its predecessor. For example, Middle Assyrian administrative practices seem to derive from the format of pre-existing private commercial correspondence, rather than a Mittani administration (Postgate, this volume).

Any assessment of the Mittani – Assyrian transition is hampered by our limited understanding of both the history and archaeology of the Mittani state. Unlike the Assyrian state, the Mittani do not seem to have a distinct ceramic repertoire, burial tradition, house form, or administrative traditions, which can be studied in order to assess their presence and how they changed the preexisting situation (Otto 2014; Schwartz 2014; Postgate, this volume). The Mittani state has proven to be a very elusive entity for both historians and archaeologists, in contrast to that of the Assyrians, which can be readily identified by the relatively uniform ceramic assemblages (Tenu 2013; Duistermaat, this volume), the foundation of new colonies, and particular building and burial practices (Düring *et al.* in press; Koliński, this volume).

Equally, however, it has become clear that distinguishing between 'Mittani' and 'Assyrian' settlements is far from straightforward. Whereas new settlements and those linked to the Assyrian administration are often relatively easy to identify, it is possible that other contemporaneous settlements that were continuously occupied, were using ceramics and material culture that is not 'Assyrian' in style. Anacleto D'Agostino (this volume) argues for a temporal coexistence of Middle Assyrian pottery with 'Mittani' pottery and grooved wares traditionally dated to the Iron Age and sometimes even linked to Arameans (Szuchman 2007). Stefan Jakob (this volume) postulates that the so-called 'Mittani' settlement at Tell Chuera / Harbe, could in fact be

contemporary with the 'Assyrian' palace at the site, in which case different types of pottery might have been used in private and in public contexts.

To complicate matters further, many of the ceramic types considered to be typical for the Middle Assyrian period have clear antecedents in the preceding Late Bronze Age, and the distinction between ceramics from the Mittani and Middle Assyrian periods is not always straightforward in excavated contexts (Duistermaat 2008; this volume), let alone in survey material (Ur 2010).

In his assessment of the transition from the Mittani to the Middle Assyrian period, Kolinski (this volume) suggests a variegated development: in some regions we are dealing with a transformation of the settlement system and agricultural development, whereas in others, the changes are much more subtle. A similar reconstruction of a variegated transition is proposed by Tenu and D'Agostino (this volume). Thus, a first conclusion that can be drawn from the contents of this volume is that while in some areas of Upper Mesopotamia the transformation from the Mittani to the Middle Assyrian period was a profound one, this is not true for all regions, and we see a very diverse pattern of changes, from one region to the next, and from one site to the other.

A second theme addressed in this volume concerns the nature of Middle Assyrian landscapes and settlements, and to what degree the settlement systems in various regions are comparable to each other. It has been postulated on the basis of textual evidence that the Assyrian Empire had a more or less homogenous provincial organization from the Middle Assyrian period onwards (Postgate 1992; Jakob 2003), and one expectation could be that there was an effort to create a more or less standardized settlement systems in these provinces. Indeed, in some parts of the empire there is substantial evidence for a restructuring of settlement systems and the development of agricultural landscapes.

Simone Mühl discusses the earliest Assyrian transformation of landscape in the direct hinterlands of Assur itself. She documents how Assyria wrested control of existing settlements from neighbouring polities such as Arrapha, founded new settlements, and implemented deportation practices (also Miglus 2011). Moreover, she links the development of new settlements with the construction of new irrigation canals and agricultural development, and this is paralleled by the agricultural development of the Wadi Thathar Region in the Middle Assyrian period (Ibrahim 1986).

A similar transformation of landscape is discussed by Hartmut Kühne for the Southern Habur Region. In this region there is a clustering of settlement in the Middle Assyrian period, and Kühne argues, substantial investment in the construction of a road system and the creation of a canal running along the east bank of the Habur up to Dur-Katlimmu. This interpretation is debated, given that the main increase of settlements in the Southern Habur Region dates to the Neo-Assyrian period (Morandi Bonacossi 2000: 368; 2008: 199). On the other hand, there is evidence for a canal in the period of the Hana kings, that is pre-dating the Middle Assyrian presence in the Southern Habur Region (Reculeau, this volume). Whatever the case, it is clear that the landscape of the Lower Habur is transformed significantly in the Middle Assyrian period, which according to Kühne was implemented in order to develop the area and transform it into Assyria proper.

Looking beyond the Lower Habur, we can document very diverse trajectories of settlement development in regions under Assyrian control (Morandi Bonacossi 2000; Szuchman 2007; Kolinski 2014). Aline Tenu (this volume) demonstrates that across the western territories many cities remained important from the Mittani into the Middle Assyrian period, whereas smaller settlements were in part abandoned (or alternatively: continued but their inhabitants did not use Middle Assyrian ceramics); some new centres were created (Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta; Dur-Katlimmu; Kulishinas), and small agricultural centres and forts were constructed in places of strategic interest. The important point, however, is that there was no standard restructuring policy by the Assyrian state once it took over the administration of a region, nor were the settlement systems of the provinces interchangeable or modified to an ideal format.

The third theme taken up in this volume is how we can reconstruct the Middle Assyrian Empire in its westernmost provinces / peripheries: in the Balikh Valley and in the Tell Chuera Region. In contrast to the Habur Triangle, this was a relatively marginal area that would have seen regular military activities and raids by other states and groups outside the control of the Assyrian state. The question is how effective the domination of the region by Assyria was, and whether it was incorporated merely as a buffer to protect the rich territories of the Upper Habur, or was envisaged as an area to be fully incorporated into the Assyrian state. In other words, can we envision a ‘Grand Strategy’ of the Assyrian Empire, in which the westernmost provinces fulfilled their clearly defined role, or are we dealing with the unintended outcome of a series of historical events.

The reconstruction by Stefan Jakob (this volume) would suggest the latter. In his description, the annexation of Hanigalbat was a reluctant one, and occurred only after various other methods, namely vassalage augmented with periodic army campaigns to cement this relationship, failed to achieve the desired results over the course of a few decennia. Finally, the annexation was performed, but this did not mean that the Assyrians were in control of the situation. The Middle Assyrian presence at Tell Chuera is best described as a thin veneer with relatively little impact on the local population, and trading caravans and settlements were regularly raided by groups from the Kasijari / Tur Abdin Mountains.

This reconstruction may appear to be at odds with the picture at Tell Sabi Abyad on the Balikh, located slightly further west. Here a large *dunnu* estate was established in which large scale subsistence farming took place by a community of about a thousand, consisting of both free Assyrian farmers, and unfree *siluhlu* farmers (Wiggermann 2000), and large surpluses of ca. 200.000 kilos of grain were obtained each year in an area previously little cultivated, possibly with the aid of small scale irrigation devices. Peter Akkermans and Frans Wiggermann describe in detail the stratigraphic sequence of this Middle Assyrian *dunnu* settlement and provide the broad outline of the buildings, features, and artefacts found there, all of which will be published in further detail in the years ahead. On this basis Kim Duistermaat reconstructs pottery production practices at this site, and Tijm Lanjouw and Victor Klinkenberg reconstruct the functions and use of the central building at the *dunnu*.

The central building, which has previously been interpreted as a tower, fortress, and prison, is best understood, they argue as a granary with important redistributive and administrative functions, although the further uses to which this building is put change somewhat over time. In the upper storey of this structure the entire harvest of the *dunnu* estate could be stored, and from here it could be distributed to dependents and state personnel and the army travelling through the region. This granary would have constituted a key resource for the Assyrian army, a point further strengthened by the new interpretation of the barley economy provided by Fantone in this volume (see below), and links up with the idea put forward elsewhere (Düring 2014), that the main function of this estate was to serve the needs of the military, given that the surpluses produced were not used in other ways. Thus, in this light, we could interpret the extraordinary investment of resources and personnel into the Tell Sabi Abyad *dunnu* as underlining the idea that the Assyrian control over the westernmost territories was tenacious and needed such institutions as this *dunnu* to insure its survival.

The paper by Kim Duistermaat (this volume) discusses the nature and scale of pottery production at Tell Sabi Abyad, which given the completely excavated settlement which included several kilns and workshops, constitutes an ideal dataset to evaluate the idea that Middle Assyrian ceramics were produced in manufactories to comply with strict standards (Pfälzner 1997). By carefully evaluating the dataset at Tell Sabi Abyad she is able to demonstrate that production took place in fairly small workshops by potters working more or less independently, and that while pots were uniform in shapes and sizes, they are far from standardized and there is no reason to assume that production was controlled by state in any way. Instead, the relatively uniform pottery of Tell Sabi Abyad, and of other Middle Assyrian sites, is perhaps best understood as being produced to comply with expectations by consumers, and might have been tied up with identity issues or



cuisine (Schwartz 2014: 268). Again, this interpretation by Duistermaat suggests that the Middle Assyrian state was much less directive and in control of society than was thought a decade or so ago.

The fourth theme addressed in this volume concerns changes in agriculture and subsistence that could have impacted on the success of the Assyrian Empire. It is well known that in the Neo-Assyrian period large scale irrigation schemes were implemented that substantially increased agricultural output and population densities in the Assyrian heartland, the Lower Habur (Bagg 2000; Morandi Bonacossi 2000; Wilkinson *et al.* 2005), and that agricultural development occurred in the Upper Tigris and even in the Wadi ‘Ajj Region (Bernbeck 1993; Parker 2001). There are arguments that this ‘green revolution’ had antecedents in the Middle Assyrian period, with the construction of canals and irrigated field systems near Assur (Mühl, this volume), in the Wadi Tharthar Region (Ibrahim 1986), and in the Lower Habur (Kühne 2011). On the other hand, population densities in some of these landscapes appear to remain low, and yields appear unimpressive (Reculeau 2011, this volume). The question whether agricultural reforms were important to the success of the Middle Assyrian Empire thus remains open.

The evaluation of the use of animal resources in the Middle Assyrian period (Berthon, this volume) does not suggest a standardized strategy to animal management, or a particular prevailing set of food preferences across the empire. Instead the local availability of animals and the class of the consumers probably best explain what is a highly diverse pattern in the use of animal resources. Thus at Giricano deer skins were processed, but the meat was not consumed, instead domestic animals were eaten. By contrast, at Dur-Katlimmu, game meat was preferred as food.

In his careful and detailed assessment of agriculture in the Lower Habur Reculeau (this volume) documents a large degree of continuity from the preceding periods into the Middle Assyrian period, rather than a ‘green revolution’. Agriculture in the Middle Assyrian period is characterized by a more sustained execution of techniques and practices already in existence previously. Yields, especially in comparison to those from Mari, were very low.

This seems in contrast with the data from the Tell Sabi Abyad *dunnu*, where yields are much better than at the sites analysed by Reculeau. Federica Fantone discusses (this volume) the uses to which the barley yield obtained at this site might have been put. While traditionally barley has been interpreted as serving for beer production or as animal fodder (for both of which there is evidence at Tell Sabi Abyad), she argues that barley can also be used to produce bread that can be kept for long periods and be produced with a very efficient use of fuel. Fantone argues that this type of food would have served the needs of passing imperial armies exceedingly well.

Summarising, while there is clearly innovation in agriculture in the Middle Assyrian period, including the development of irrigation systems and other forms of agriculture development, the agricultural practices of the Assyrians do not set them apart from the broader context in which they operated, nor was agriculture on the whole a very productive exercise. Instead, the Assyrians frequently suffered from shortages, sometimes severe (Jakob, this volume).

The fifth theme of the volume concerns the nature and effectiveness of Middle Assyrian administrative practices. This is here defined in a very broad manner to include a range of governing strategies. As with other hegemonic practices, the pertinent question is to what degree such practices were standardized, and whether Assyrian practices differ from those of other states.

Nicholas Postgate (2013, this volume) discusses the phrasing of government recording practices in the Middle Assyrian state, arguing that they owe much to older traditions of commercial exchange in Assur, and do not derive from Mittani administrative practices. The Mittani state does not seem to have had standardized recording practices. It is all the more remarkably, therefore, the Assyrian developed a homogeneous set of recording practices from the start, perhaps indicating that this empire was more uniformly governed than that of the Mittani.

Foreign kings in the archival documentation of the Middle Assyrian Empire are treated in considerable detail in this volume by Jaume Llop-Radua. From the discussion it is clear that in general royals remained important to the Assyrians even if they were petty kings and spend their lives in Assyrian captivity. Such kings were usually treated well, and sometimes were important at the court. This suggests that even a defeated king was still regarded as belonging to a special category.

Daisuke Shibata (this volume) documents how the Assyrian court forged strategic alliances with client kings such as those from the Land of Mari, by marrying princesses to these kings and thus linking these kings to the royal house. It is plausible that Assur-iddin and Ili-pada, the Grand Viziers in the west, were also married to princesses, and there were dynastic marriages between the Assyrian royal house and that of Babylon.

It would appear, therefore, that whereas Assyrian recording practices stood out from those of other states because they were both unique and standardized, broader governing practices, such as how one dealt with other kings in Assyria, were not exceptional.

The final theme of the volume is equivalent to the overall theme of the symposium from which the book originates: that is whether Assyria differed in its hegemonic practices – the techniques and strategies used to achieve domination other than the use of force – from earlier and contemporary imperial states in the ancient Near East.

Bradley Parker (this volume) discusses the issue by focusing on the Neo-Assyrian period through the lens of empire theory. He argues that at a broad level we can use the concept of the territorial hegemonic model (Parker 2001: 254) to understand the Assyrian Empire, but that when we zoom in on particular landscapes and societies there will be many exceptions to this general model. In the end, Parker suggests that hegemony and force are co-joined methods of domination and that Assyrian military prowess was above all meant to impress subjected societies. The Assyrians, Parker argues, were very adept at making such impressions of power stick, by celebrating their invincibility in art, word, and text.

This celebration of military prowess, I argue in the final chapter, is one of the interesting exceptions in the overall continuity of hegemonic practices from the Middle Assyrian to the Neo-Assyrian periods. Whereas on the ground very similar things were happening in both periods, although at a much greater scale in the Neo-Assyrian period, it is above all the propaganda machine of Iron Age Assyria which sets it apart from its Late Bronze Age predecessor. I argue that the Middle Assyrians did not have a Grand Strategy with their empire, did not have a systematic set of hegemonic practices they applied, but were flexible in their approach in response to local circumstances and their own needs. Nonetheless, we can recognize various recurring practices in the Assyrian Empire, which start in the Middle Assyrian period and continue into the Neo-Assyrian period, which set it apart from earlier and contemporary empires. Very important among these, I would argue are the processes of social and landscape engineering upon which the Assyrians embarked. If anything sets the Assyrians apart, it is this. If anything can explain their long term success, it is this, or so I would argue.

Not all contributors to this volume will agree with me. If they did I would be worried. An argument which is not controversial is not an argument worth making. However, I do think all contributors feel this volume is an important contribution to the scholarship of the Middle Assyrian Empire, and that it has some thematic coherence. I hope this book will be of interest to Frans Wiggermann, to whom this book is dedicated and to all others interested in matters Assyrian.

# 1.

## **Making Mittani Assyrian**

*Rafał Koliński*  
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In this paper I will focus on how the Assyrians governed the western territories of the Middle Assyrian state after they were incorporated in the later part of the thirteenth century BC. This will be done by comparing what is known about the organization of the western territories of the Middle Assyrian state with what is known about the preexisting settlement history of the same territories, as revealed by surveys and excavations. An evaluation of the organization of the western provinces will be carried out on the basis of available cuneiform documents from Tell Sabi Abyad, Harbe, Dūr-Katlimmu, Uššukanni, Dunni-ša-Uzibi, Karāna, Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, and, of course, Aššur, as well as various studies based on this set of information. The study of the changes in settlement patterns will be presented in the form of two case studies, building on the results of archaeological surveys in the valleys of the Khabur and the Balih.

A similar analysis should be performed in the future for the eastern part of Assyria, that is the area located on the left bank of the Tigris. While the history of the Assyrian conquest of at least part of this territory has recently been studied (Jakob 2011; Maidman 2012), the archaeological surveys of the area have only just begun, and it will take several years before archaeological maps of the eastern part of the Middle Assyrian state become available.<sup>1</sup>

### **1.1 The Assyrian Conquest of Mittani<sup>2</sup>**

One of the historical consequences of the collapse of North Mesopotamian political networks of the Middle Bronze Age, caused by the destruction of Yamhad and its capital, Ḫalab, by Mursili's I in 1595 BC, and his subsequent raid on Babylon, was the rise of a new power: the Mittani. Towards the end of the fifteenth century BC Mittani controlled a vast area of North Mesopotamia, from Arrapḫe in the far East (as attested by the royal letter HSS IX, 1, sealed by the dynastic seal of the Mittani kings), to the northern part of the Levantine coast and Cilicia in the west. Assyria was conquered by the Mittani as well, probably between 1440-20 BC (Helck 1965: 65, 169, 173), and reduced to a vassal state status (Lion 2011).

The period of political dependence ended during the kingship of Aššur-uballiṭ I (1353-18 BC), the first Assyrian ruler to pursue an active international policy, including: first, a correspondence with Egypt (Amarna letters EA 15 and 16, addressed most likely to Amenhotep IV/Achenaton (1353-36 BC, date according to Hornung *et al.* 2006)); second, the marriage of his daughter, Muballiṭat-Šeru'a, to Burnaburiaš II of Babylon (1359-33 BC) mentioned in the Synchronistic Chronicle (col. I, lines 8'-11')(Glassner 2004: 179); third, major building activities in the city of Aššur (Grayson 1987: text A.O.73.1-5); and, finally, successful military campaigns in the east, against Arrapḫe (Maidman 2012) and in the south.

All this was possible only because of the apparent crisis which struck Mittani towards the end of a long rule of Tušratta (ca. 1360-30 BC). Hittite military campaigns against Mittani led to the conquest of Syria and the capture and looting of Wašuganni, its capital. Tušratta escaped the battle only to be assassinated in a court plot and his throne was taken by Artatama II, who was in turn replaced before long by his son, Šutarna III. It seems likely that Aššur-uballiṭ supported the Artatama conspiracy, and the new king and later his son repaid him for the support by maintaining friendly relations. As we know from the introduction to the treaty between Tušratta and

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<sup>1</sup> The first study of this kind appeared immediately prior to the submission of this paper (Mühl 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the most recent review of the written and archaeological evidence in Llop 2012a.

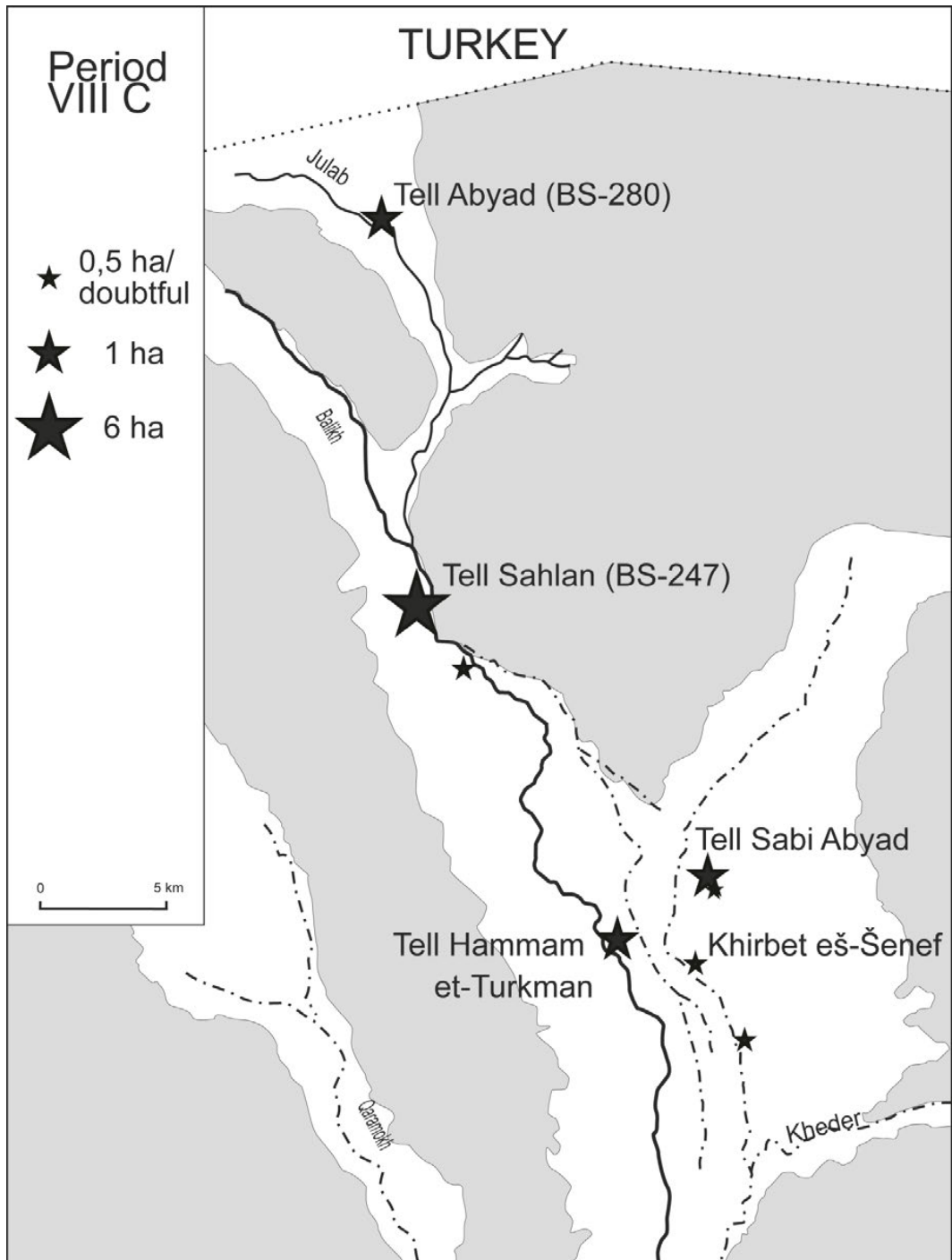


Figure 1.4: Middle Assyrian period settlement pattern in the Upper Baliḥ valley (drawing by R. Koliński based on Lyon 2000, Fig. 4 and 7).

## 2.

### **The Rise and Consolidation of Assyrian Control on the Northwestern Territories**

*Anacleto D'Agostino*

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Flanking the western and northwestern boundaries of the territorial nucleus of Assyria, the Khabur Triangle in northeastern Syria and the Upper Tigris River Valley in southeastern Turkey represented areas of great value for the Assyrians, and were targeted in the expansion that took place in the Late Bronze Age. The strategic position of the Khabur Triangle and the territories beyond the Tur Abdin mountains, which controlled the routes leading to the west and into the Anatolian mountains, and the fertility of these regions were what triggered Assyrian interest and motivated their conquest.

These territories were part of the area known as Hanigalbat in Assyrian sources, and constituted the heartland of the Mittani kingdom. The weakening of the Mittani state as a consequence of Hittite expansionism, allowed the Assyrian kings to take control over the eastern territories, to reduce Mittani to a dependent regional kingdom, and subsequently, to annex the Jazirah territories, from the Khabur triangle to the Balikh valley, incorporating them in the Assyrian system (Harrak 1987; Novak 2013).

To understand the nature and meaning of the Assyrian impact, as well as the ways in which territorial and hegemonic control was exercised over the subjugated lands, we need to analyse changes in settlement systems and material culture. In previous articles (D'Agostino 2009; 2011; 2014; in press), I have taken this approach on the basis of recent archaeological evidence from the Upper Tigris and Khabur valleys (figure 2.1). In this paper, I would like to build on the results of those analyses, and I will on occasion discuss relevant sites and data. The aim is to highlight what archaeological evidence may tell us about the rise of Assyrian power in the territories beyond the steppes.

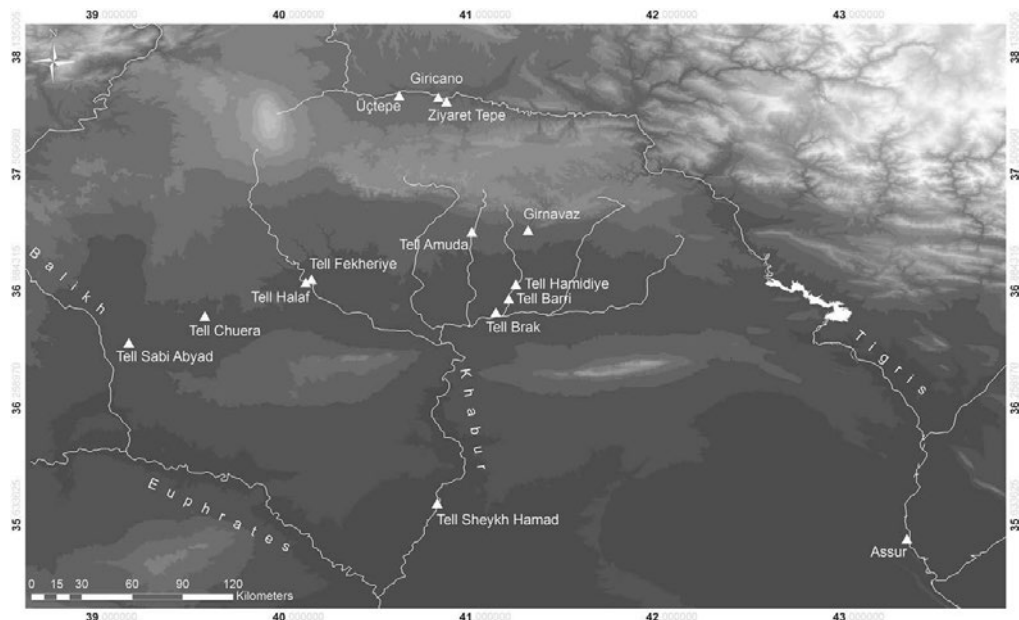


Figure 2.1: The valleys of the Upper Khabur and the Upper Tigris rivers with location of some sites mentioned in the text (by M. Raccidi).

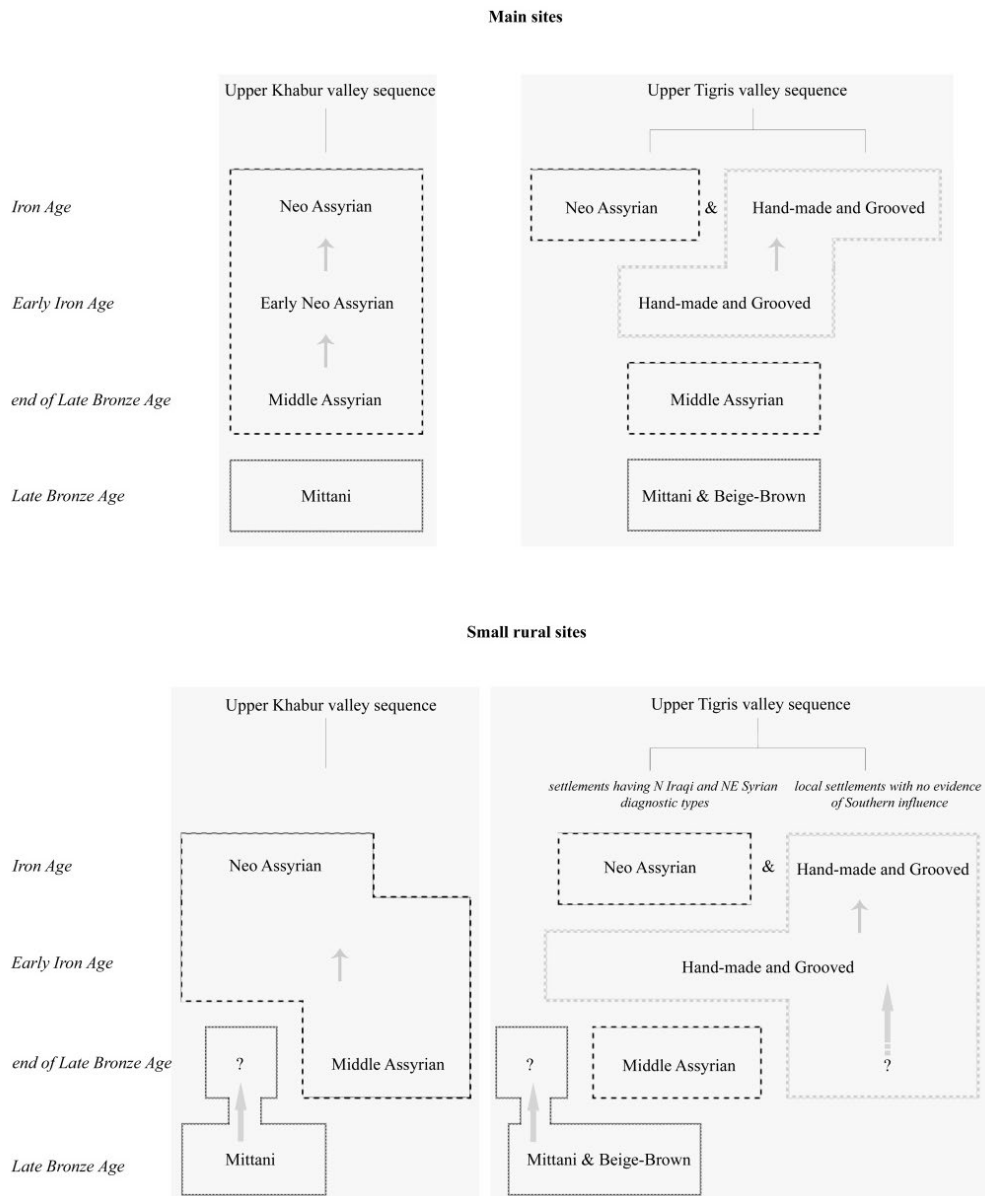


Figure 2.2: Schematic representation of the sequences of various ceramic assemblages and their possible periods of use in the eastern part of the Khabur Triangle and in the Upper Tigris Valley.

### 2.3 The Archaeological Footprint of the Middle Assyrians in the Conquered Territories

Our reconstruction of the settlement pattern for the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC is inevitably incomplete. The surveys, although providing a wealth of data, do not provide clear evidence to analyse the fluctuations in settlements with the arrival of the Middle Assyrians. A preliminary examination of the evidence reveals that we only have a small corpus of data from a limited number of multi-period sites. This is the case particularly for the Upper Khabur, but applies also to the Upper Tigris, where the excavations undertaken to date have been mainly of urban centres

### 3.

## Middle Assyrian Territorial Practices in the Region of Ashur

*Simone Mühl*

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Throughout its history, the inner structure of the Assyrian empire was never static or stable. This state is often portrayed as a successor to Shamshi-Adad I's Northern Mesopotamian kingdom. This reconstruction is largely based on Assyrian royal inscriptions that refer to Shamshi-Adad I as an ancestor in the line of kings of Ashur. Nevertheless, the textual and archaeological sources suggest that the line of succession was broken. The term 'son of a nobody' (Glassner 1993) was chosen to emphasise a clear dynastic break, but at the same time it also indicated a period of political instability in the city of Ashur. The city shrank back to its core, presumably only in control of its direct hinterland with its adjacent agricultural resource areas and local villages. Although there are no reports of building activities during this period, smaller restorations of temples and administrative buildings may still be assumed. Puzur-Ashur III is the first Assyrian king of whom we know that he undertook major building activities, which included work on the fortifications of Ashur and also the rebuilding of settlements near the confluence of the Lesser Zab south of Ashur (Miglus 2010; 2011). These activities attest to the growing economic strength of the city state and its efforts to expand its influence in the south-east, where the kingdom of Arrapha claimed control over territories not far distant from Ashur (Müller 1994).

#### 3.1.1 Environmental Settings

At the present the region of Ashur lies in the transitional area between the climatic zones of the Syrian steppe to the west and of the piedmont to the east with precipitation rates increasing eastwards. In order to describe the relevance of the climate for the economic capabilities of the city's hinterland, the lands of Ashur can be classified into three zones (figure 3.1):

1. The grassland zone, which is not suitable for agriculture apart from the lower river terraces of the Tigris;
2. The high risk zone, in which agriculture is restricted to hydrologically active wadis and where crop cultivation is possible to some extent, but not on a sustainable basis due to the substantial monthly and annual fluctuation of precipitation;
3. A zone in which sustainable rain-fed agriculture is possible.

The soils in large areas east and south-east of Ashur (i.e. the Makhmur Plain and the Jubbur Plain at the junction of the Lesser Zab and the Tigris River) are well-suited for crop cultivation, but in these regions there is insufficient precipitation. The landscape close to Ashur itself is very diverse. The Makhul range, the north-western extension of the Hamrin Mountains, forms a natural barrier to the open lands in the west. The site itself lies on an outcrop of conglomerate at the base of which there are islands and areas formed from sediments brought down by the river. The shape and accessibility of these fertile areas are subject to seasonal or annual changes. However, the lower river terraces provide a fairly reliable possibility to cultivate crops, even though the fields may need to be abandoned occasionally when the water cuts their connections to the river bank or they are eroded by the river. At the same time, however, the silicates in these lower terrace soils make them fertile and soil humidity is higher than in the upper river terraces and in the adjacent plains (for a detailed analysis of the riverine system near Ashur and the possibilities for crop cultivation see Arnold 2004).

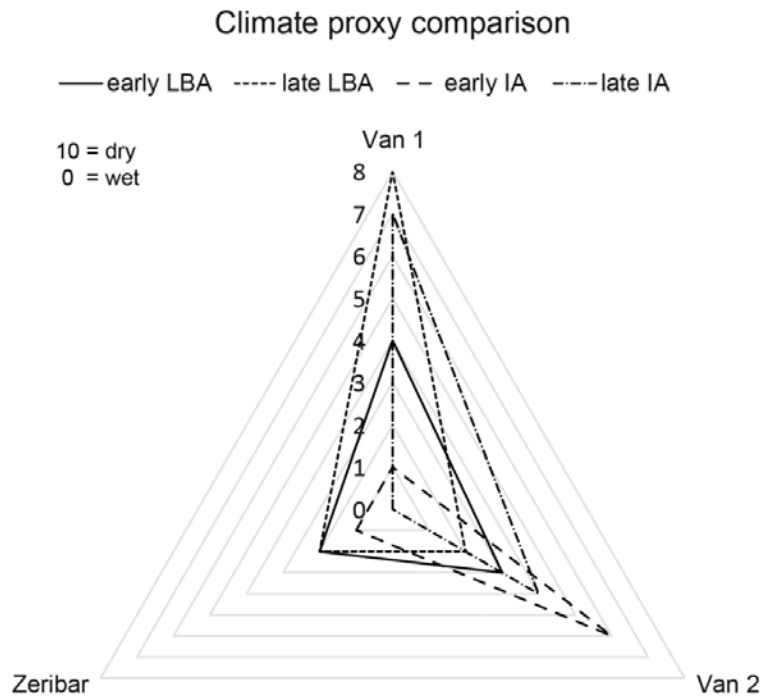


Figure 3.2: Comparison of climate proxy data from Lakes Van and Zeribar.

### 3.2.1 Settlement Systems

An analysis of available archaeological site records derived from excavations and surveys in the wider region of Ashur (figure 3.3) (Directorate General of Antiquities Baghdad 1970; Sulaiman 2010; Mühl and Sulaiman 2011) combined with the detection and mapping of ancient tell and flat settlements through a study of satellite imagery (CORONA from 1968, ASTER and Quickbird from 2001) can show general trends within settlement systems in the Tigris region (Mühl 2013). The conurbation zones of the Old Assyrian period are strongly connected to regional centres like Ashur and Tell Akrah (ancient name unknown; for a discussion see Dittmann 1995; Ziegler 2011: 154), as well as Arrapha, Nuzi and Lubdu.

While no Old Assyrian site was detected amongst the 64 sites investigated in the Makhul area, the situation is different for the Middle Assyrian period. Settlements were newly founded and established by the Assyrian state that was expanding beyond the borders of a city state. Taking direct control over the wider region reflected not only the Assyrian economic capability to do so, but also the political need to keep neighbouring entities, such as the kingdom of Arrapha and Kassite Babylonia, at a secure distance. There are numerous reports of conflicts over disputed areas in this period (Müller 1994; Jakob 2011) that describe the unstable and insecure conditions along the borders of the growing Assyrian territories (Jakob 2011). One of the settlements that changed its allegiance to Assyria was Ḫabūba, which can be identified with Tell Farha, situated on the northern bank of the Lesser Zab confluence (Müller 1994: 202; Sulaiman 2010: 23-37; Miglus 2011: 223-5; Mühl 2013: 181-3).



## 4.

### **Core and Periphery in the Assyrian State The View from Dūr-Katlimmu**

*Hartmut Kühne*

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Assyria has always been evaluated through the lens of its glamorous capitals. Attempts to view Assyria from a rural perspective have been made mainly on the basis of textual data (Fales 1990) but lacked material evidence. This was due to the fact that no rural centers or settlements had been excavated to a considerable extent. Fortunately, this situation has changed during the past twenty years. Next to the excavations of Tell Sabi Abyad (Akkermans 2006-2008), Tell Fecheriye (Bonatz 2013), Tell Halaf (Novak 2013), Til Barsip (Bunnens 1997) in Syria, Assyrian provincial or peripheral sites have also been excavated in Turkey and in the Levant, for example at the sites of Giricano (Schachner 2002), Ziyaret Tepe (Matney *et al.* 2011) and Tel 'Aroer in the Negev (Thareani 2011). Tell Sheikh Hamad on the Lower Habur in Syria (Kühne 2006-2008, 2013b), 200 kilometers west of the capital *Aššur*, has been investigated with the explicit aim of exploring the urban layout and function of the Assyrian provincial capital of *Dūr-Katlimmu*, with which this site has been convincingly identified (Röllig 1978; Kühne 2013b).

This paper intends to test the archaeological data obtained in recent fieldwork against theories and hypotheses on the relationship between the imperial core and the periphery of the Assyrian state and empire. The chronological scope extends from the Middle Assyrian state in the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC to the end of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in 612 BC. Geographically, the focus is on the Jazira extending up to the fringes of the Taurus Mountains, to be equated more or less with Upper Mesopotamia.

#### **4.1 The Assyrian State, Empire and World Empire**

In this paper I use the terms state and empire in a definition that deviates from the one recently provided by Postgate (2010). A state is a polity with a unified system of government which controls and administrates its state territory by means of governmental structure, e.g. by implementing a governmental system run by an administration apparatus liable to the central government. We may speak of an empire when this state 'extends its dominion over other polities without attempting to integrate their separate power structures or to control their internal political order' (Postgate 2010: 20), that is when it hegemonizes other polities which become vassals but keep their governmental and social formats. But the moment these hegemonized polities are integrated into the state, i.e. transformed to its governmental system, the state grows but nevertheless remains a state. In other words, an empire consists of a state and hegemonized vassals; a state without vassals remains a state regardless how large a territory it controls.

A 'world empire' is a polity which controls an extremely large state territory and hegemonizes in addition a large number of other polities to the effect that it has no equivalent rivals anywhere: it dominates the contemporaneous 'world' (Münkler 2008). According to this definition the succeeding Late Babylonian empire was not a 'world empire' because it was rivaled by the Median and to a certain extent by the Egyptian empires. By contrast, the Achaemenid empire was a world empire and so was the empire of Alexander whereas it is debatable whether the Roman empire was a world empire because it was rivaled by the Parthian and the Sasanian empires which are regrettably marginalized by historians.

The Assyrian state is considered to have taken shape (again) in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC during the reign of Aššur-uballiṭ I (1353-1318 BC), who first adopted the title 'King of the Land of Aššur' (Postgate 1992; Jakob 2003: 6-7). During the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC three powerful kings: Adad-nirai I (1295-1264 BC), Salmanu-ashared I (1263-1234 BC), and Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233-1197 BC) successfully expanded the Assyrian state to an empire covering almost all of

remaining population apparently lived outside the walls in the suburban areas. Obviously, by this change of urban structure Dür-Katlimmu met the standards of the newly defined super-regional centers (figure 4.4).

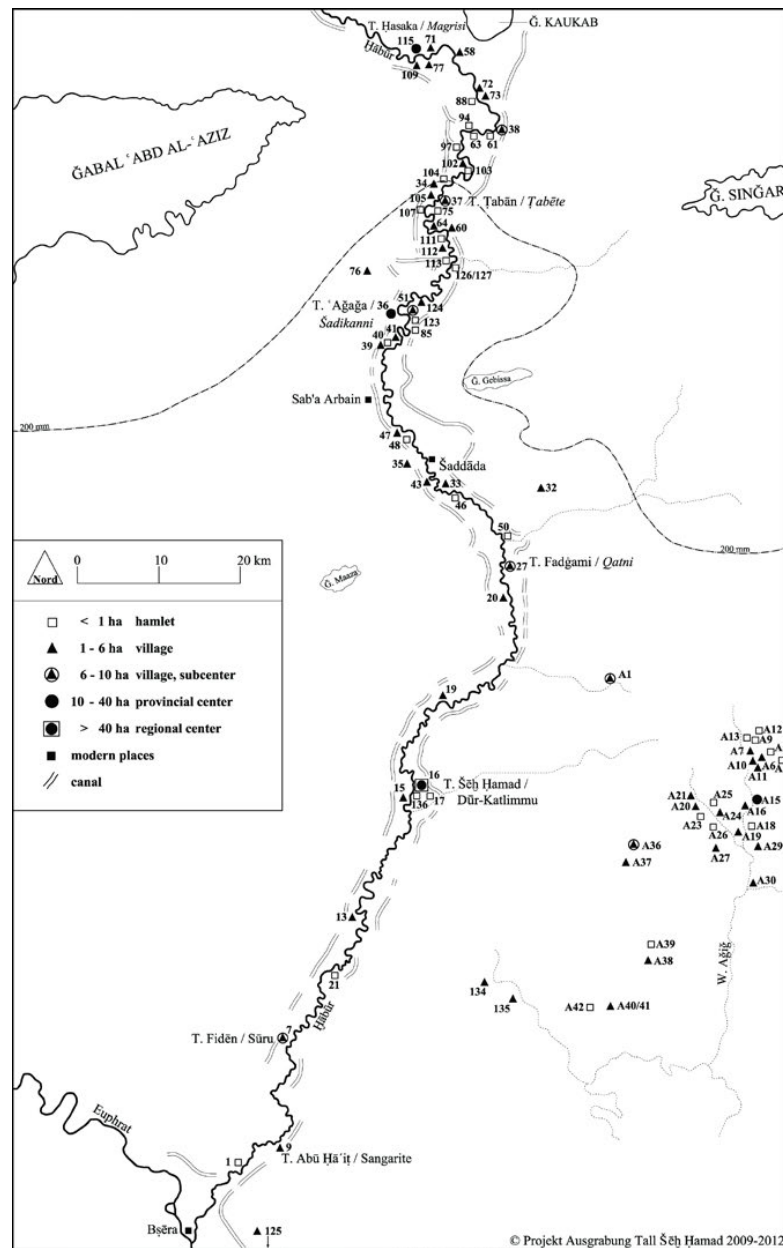


Figure 4.3: Settlements of the Neo-Assyrian period (8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) along the Lower Habur according to the survey of the *Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients* (Kühne 2010: 119 fig. 3).

Please note that the legend applies on the sites of the Habur only, for the legend of the Ajjī-sites cf. Kühne (2010: 125 fig. 6). For site names see endnote.<sup>1</sup>

## 5. **Building the Empire** **Settlement Patterns in the Middle Assyrian Empire**

Aline Tenu

CNRS, Maison René-Ginouvès, Nanterre

The creation of a territorial state by the Assyrians from the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards has been an undeniable success in its political, military, and geographic dimensions. The territorial structure of the Middle Assyrian state has been a long-standing issue mainly discussed on the basis of two different models of control and dominion: that of the ‘network’ (Liverani 1984); and that of the ‘oil stain’ (Postgate 1992), and the accuracy of the term ‘empire’ to characterize the Middle Assyrian State is also still much debated (see Kühne, this volume).

I (see also Tenu 2009: 25-7) subscribe to the definition given by Carla Sinopoli (1994: 160) who conceives an empire as an: ‘expansive and incorporative kind of state, involving relationships in which one state exercises control over other socio-political entities (e.g. states, chiefdoms, non-stratified societies)’, and imperialism as: ‘the process of creating and maintaining empires’, even if as Frédéric Hurlet (2011: 133) reminds us:

*“L’empire est une notion qui apparaît familière aux historiens, mais qui se dérobe très vite dès qu’il faut s’entendre sur une définition minimale valable pour les innombrables expériences impériales qu’a connues l’histoire universelle”.*

Data stemming from new excavations, mostly in Syria, on the one hand, and from recent cuneiform text publications on the other, shed new light on the Middle Assyrian state. These new data facilitate a more precise synthesis of the settlement patterns and the spatial organization of the Middle Assyrian state.

The aim of this paper is to address the hegemonic practices of the Assyrian state, and in particular their territorial aspects, and to provide new elements to augment existing models in order to understand how the Assyrians controlled and ruled the various territories they conquered, and to what extent they adapted to local situations. First I will analyze how the Assyrians integrated or disregarded the preexisting Mittani period settlement systems when they became the sole masters of North Mesopotamia. Subsequently I will consider the role and importance of new settlements intended to replace and alter the pre-existing urban system. Finally I will examine the role of new small settlements, whether they were fortified or not.

### **5.1 The Mittani Legacy**

When the Assyrians conquered North Mesopotamia they inherited the settlement system of the preceding Mittani state. We can ask to what extent they maintained or altered this settlement system. This question involves what are actually two separate issues: first, did the Assyrians continue occupying Mittani sites; and, second, if so, did they maintain their settlement hierarchy. Answering these questions is not an easy task for various reasons.

First archaeological documentation is scarce and uneven. Assyrian pottery of the last part of the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC and of the first part one of the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC remains widely unknown. The transition between Mittani and Middle Assyrian levels is, in fact, not always discernible (Duistermaat, this volume). This confusion is aggravated by the poor knowledge we still have of the Mittani common ware despite Pfälzner’s important work (1995). Moreover most sites have been excavated only over a rather limited area and accordingly it is often not possible to deduce much from the archaeological results about the nature of occupation with such limited exposures. Therefore, we should also take into account epigraphic data, in order to try and obtain a better understanding of the way in which the Assyrians assimilated or transformed the Mittani legacy.

## 6.

### **West of Aššur: The Life and Times of the Middle Assyrian *Dunnu* at Tell Sabi Abyad, Syria<sup>1</sup>**

*Peter M. M. G. Akkermans and Frans A. M. Wiggermann*

Leiden University

During the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233-1197 BC) and his three immediate successors,<sup>2</sup> the western part of the Middle Assyrian empire was administrated by the successive members of a secondary branch of the Assyrian royal house: Aššur-iddin, Šulmānu-muṣabši and Ilī-padā (see Cancik-Kirschbaum 1999). These officials bore the titles of ‘grand vizier’ (*sukkallu rabū*) and ‘king of Khanigalbat’. Their apparently semi-independent province stretched from the plains of the Khabur in the east to the valley of the Euphrates in the west and the south, and also included the newly conquered Hurrian territories to the north of the Jazirah.

The Middle Assyrian presence in the western province entailed the foundation of a number of *dunnus*, fortified farmsteads, one of which was located on the site of Tell Sabi Abyad on the Balikh in northern Syria (figure 6.1). An extensive programme of excavation in broad horizontal exposures since 1988 has revealed this Assyrian settlement almost in its entirety. A small yet heavily fortified Assyrian *dunnu* came to light, with ample finds in nearly every building, including masses of ceramics, rich inventories of grinding tools, bone implements, metal weaponry, jewellery, seals and sealings, and, perhaps most importantly, almost 400 cuneiform tablets. Dozens of burials have been uncovered as well, comprising simple inhumations, elaborate tombs, children's graves in ceramic vessels, and cremations (see below).

From its foundation early in the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, the *dunnu* at Tell Sabi Abyad was owned and operated by the ‘grand vizier’ and ‘king of Khanigalbat’, first Aššur-iddin, then Šulmānu-muṣabši and finally Ilī-padā. In the absence of the proprietor, a steward (*abarakku* or *masennu*) supervised the daily affairs in the *dunnu*: Mannu-ki-Adad under Aššur-iddin and Šulmānu-muṣabši; Buriya and later Tammitte under Ilī-padā.

Most of the administrative documents found at Tell Sabi Abyad belong to Ilī-padā's period of office, which runs from late in the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I through those of his successors Aššur-nādin-apli (1196-1194 BC), Aššur-nīrārī III (1193-1188 BC) and Enlil-kudurri-usur (1187-1183 BC), which is approximately from 1197 to 1183 BC. This period is not covered by the archives of other western sites, viz. those of Tell Fekheriye (Uššukanni), Tell Sheikh Hamad (Dūr-Katlimmu) and Tell Chuera (Kharbe), which are all slightly older. Only the archive of Aba-lā-īde, the ‘overseer of the offerings’ in Aššur, covers the same period (Freydank 1991).

<sup>1</sup> This paper was submitted in 2006 and reflects the state of knowledge at that time. Given the importance of the content it was decided to include this paper in this volume, although it was not possible to substantially update the paper.

<sup>2</sup> Dates according to Boese and Wilhelm 1979; Boese 1982. See also Freydank 1991. On the Middle Assyrian period in general, see Harrak 1987; Mayer 1995; 1998; Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996; 1999; Faist 2001; Jakob 2003.



Figure 6.7: Toilet in a recessed niche in the eastern wing of the main residence, with the gutter and floor made of baked bricks.

In the southern part of the stronghold, behind the tower and residence, there were mostly small and irregular structures, their walls usually consisting of a single row of mud bricks. They were built abutting their neighbours, which resulted in an aggregation of contiguous rooms. Sometimes there were small, gravelled yards containing *tannurs* and mud-brick bins between the buildings. Many of these structures appear to have been in use for a limited period and saw rapid remodelling or complete rebuilding. In addition, it is doubtful whether these buildings were always roofed; at least some areas may have been working spaces open to the elements, bounded by low, ephemeral walls used for partitioning or as wind shields.



Figure 6.8: Unfinished cylinder seal, found in a jar in a potter's workshop. We see a kneeling archer aiming his arrow at a ferocious lion standing on its hind legs. Especially the archer is only partly cut out into the stone. Level 6, ca. 1200 BC.

Particularly interesting is the area to the east of the fortress, which seems to have been used primarily for the production of pottery. The area was accessible directly from the fortress by means of a small side-entrance in the eastern defensive wall, through the large 'barrack' in this spot. Immediately next to the moat stood a large building measuring about 30 by 4 m, which was

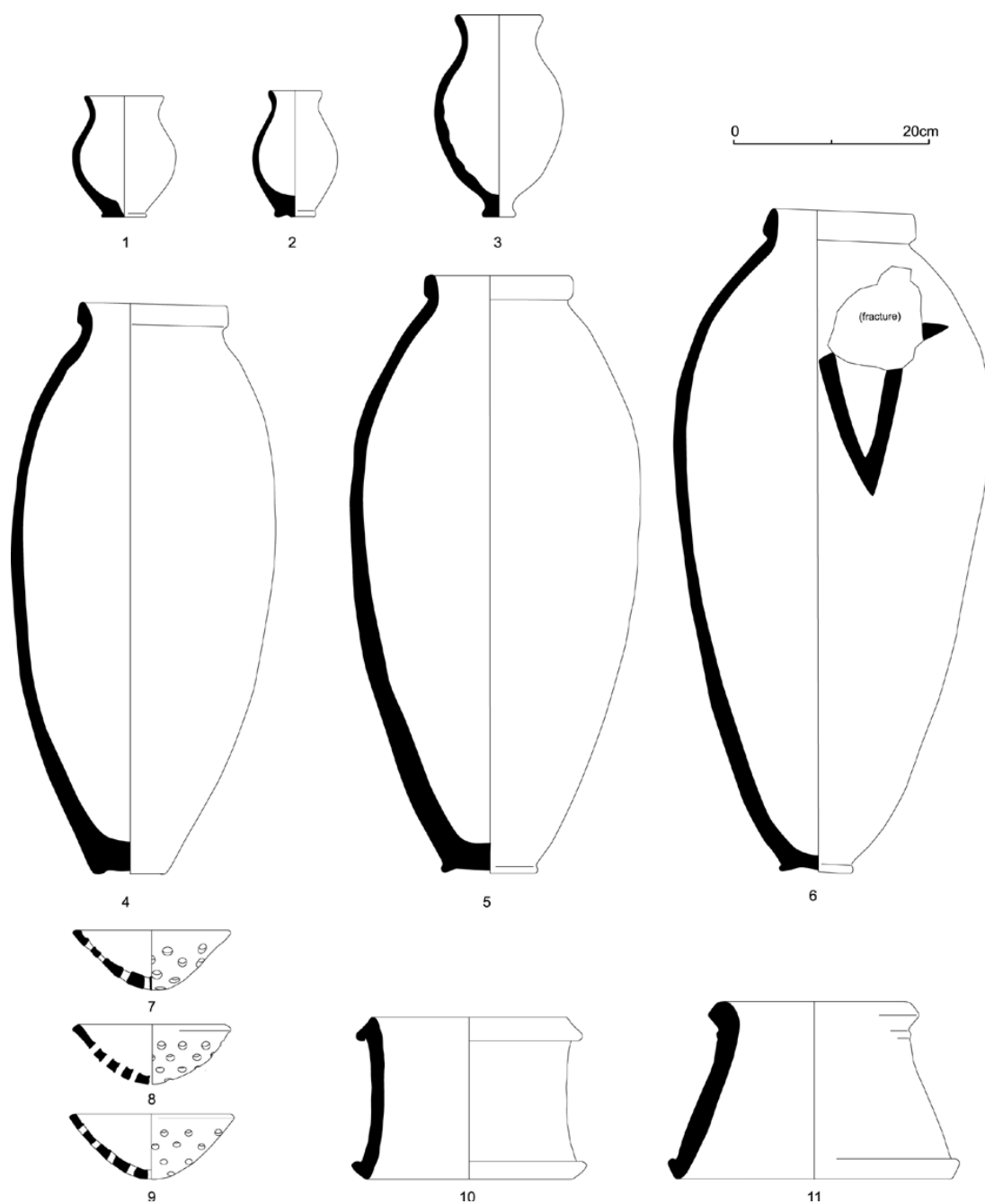


Figure 6.21: Jars (nos. 1-6); strainers (nos. 7-9); and pot stands (nos. 10-11).  
Levels 6-4 at Tell Sabi Abyad.

## 7.

# **The Pots of Assur in the Land of Hanigalbat – The Organization of Pottery Production in the Far West of the Middle Assyrian Empire**

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Leiden University

The expansion of the Middle Assyrian state into new territories and the attempts of the Assyrian administration to develop and ultimately integrate these areas and their populations into the Land of Assur, the process of creating empire, have been the focus of several recent studies (Szuchman 2009a; 2009b; Tenu 2009; Postgate 2010; Fales 2011; Brown 2013; Tenu 2013). This paper aims to contribute to this discussion from the micro-perspective of pottery production at the Middle Assyrian *dunnu* of Tell Sabi Abyad in the Balikh valley. Through a ceramic lens, I would like to look at two aspects of the Assyrian ‘hegemonic practices’ in the western province: first, how did the Assyrians organize their operations; and, second, what were their relations and interactions with the people around them. Where possible I will discuss chronological developments, linking pottery dynamics to our current understanding of the historical dynamics of the period.

### **7.1 Archaeological and Historical Background**

Tell Sabi Abyad is located in the Balikh valley, on the western frontier of the Middle Assyrian Empire. Cuneiform texts identify the site as a ‘*dunnu*’, or fortified farmstead. Agricultural exploitation of the land belonging to the *dunnu*, for the benefit of its owner, was one of the most important functions of the settlement. In a frontier region such as the Balikh valley, *dunnu*’s were also base camps for military operations and border patrols, and custom posts for passing trade and diplomatic caravans. The *dunnu* of Sabi Abyad was the property of three Grand Viziers, Kings of Hanigalbat, who were members of a side branch of the royal family in Assur (Wiggermann 2000; Akkermans 2006; Akkermans and Wiggermann, this volume).

The inhabitants of Sabi Abyad lived through two important phases in the history of the Assyrian expansion to the west. The first phase is generally seen as one of strength and development. Building on the groundwork of his father Shalmaneser, king Tukulti-Ninurta I consolidated Assyria’s hold over Hanigalbat and established administrative centres in the west. In the Balikh valley a series of *dunnu*’s was founded along the river, among them Sabi Abyad (e.g. Jakob 2003: 9). Middle Assyrian settlement at Sabi Abyad started in the first decade of the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. The builders partly re-used an earlier tower building (Level 7, Mittani period) that stood abandoned at the site. Level 6 (dated ca. 1233-1197 BC) was a well-planned and structured new settlement with a central tower, a residence, offices and working spaces, surrounded by a fortress wall and a dry moat. Workshops filled up the space between the wall and the moat. During Level 6 some renovations took place, and at the end of this period many buildings were abandoned or neglected, leading to their gradual decay. The Level 6 *dunnu* was the property of Grand Viziers Assur-Iddin and Shulmanu-mushabshi (Akkermans and Wiggermann, this volume).

The second phase, to be dated after the death of Tukulti-Ninurta I and before the renewed attempts at empire building by Tiglath-Pileser, is usually described as a period of slow and gradual decline and/or decentralization of Assyrian power in Hanigalbat (Fales 2011; Brown 2013; Bartl and Bonatz 2013: 271), but sometimes as a time of consolidation (Tenu 2009: 259). Elsewhere in the region, there are signs of turmoil (such as the fall of the Hittite empire and Ugarit). At Sabi Abyad, the first part of this phase seems to have been the *floruit* of the site, while the later part shows a dramatic reduction in size. In Level 5 (ca. 1197-1180 BC), when Ili-pada was Grand Vizier and the owner of the *dunnu*, extensive rebuilding took place and many spaces changed function. The settlement contracted within the fortress walls, while the space beyond the fortress

households or 680 people in the area. The two potters working at the start of Level 6 could together have sustained the pottery needs of more than 1200 people.

Shape	vessel volume (cc)	estimated no. of pots per household	total production time in minutes
small carinated bowl	90	20	22,54
Medium carinated bowl	310	15	45,89
large carinated bowl	1050	10	65,81
Goblet	280	10	28,52
small straight-sided bowl	1000	10	63,95
large straight-sided bowl	3820	5	67,89
small deep pot	2840	10	115,52
large deep pot	12500	5	127,39
small jar	1260	5	36,59
medium jar	6600	5	91,02
large ribbon-rimmed jar	29530	5	198,84
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>863,96</b>

Table 7.2: The total time needed to produce an imaginary set of 100 Middle Assyrian vessels.

Another approach to assess output is to look at kiln sizes. Potters usually do not build kilns that are too big for the number of vessels they want to fire. A kiln that is not fully packed does not fire properly and the heat does not distribute evenly. Moreover, it is a waste of building material and fuel. At Sabi Abyad, there are two types of kilns: small and large. The estimated average volume of the pottery chamber is ca. 1 m<sup>3</sup> for smaller kilns and 5-8 m<sup>3</sup> for the larger ones. If we look at the measurements of two of the most ubiquitous forms in the pottery corpus, the medium sized carinated bowl and the large ribbon-rim jar, we can make some very general estimates of the size of a kiln load, not taking into account the fact that in reality the mix of different vessels can be stacked and nested in various smart ways. A small kiln would have been able to hold about 15 large jars or 1000 medium sized un-stacked bowls in one load, while a large kiln would hold about 110 jars or 8000 bowls. The potters produced many more bowls and other small shapes than large jars, and I don't think it would be unreasonable to suggest that a kiln load could have held a mixed load of 250 (small kiln) or 1500 (large kiln) vessels (see also Akkermans and Duistermaat 2001). If the potters were producing full-time, again excluding the winter months, and firing a kiln load every month, a small kiln could have yielded 2250 vessels and a large one 13.500 vessels per year.

Whatever approach we take to assess the output, it is clear that the possible output of fulltime potters far exceeds the needs of the residents at the *dunnu* itself, estimated at only 60 people. Either the potters were working part time, or they were producing vessels for other nearby settlements as well. It is interesting to compare these rough figures to the estimates of about 400 *shiluhlu*-workers and 450 free *alaju* villagers who are thought to have been present in the area and dependent on the administration at Sabi Abyad during Level 5 (Wiggermann 2000: 174, 181; there are no figures for the number of dependents in Level 6). We have seen that production output was most variable in Level 5, with more kilns being used (either alternately or at the same time), and with both large and small kilns in use. This fluctuating output (and therefore demand) indicates that the number of people depending on the pottery from Sabi Abyad may have varied throughout Level 5. The huge kiln capacity in Level 4, compared to the now decimated inhabited surface, is hard to explain without assuming that the potter was also producing for people settled in the immediate surroundings.

Given that at most archaeological sites direct evidence for pottery production (such as workshops and kilns) is generally absent and only the vessels and sherds remain, the variability or uniformity of vessel attributes is one of the aspects most often looked at in the study of the organization of production. Middle Assyrian pottery is generally believed to be 'uniform' or



‘King of Hanigalbat’. The men who successively carried this position were Assur-Iddin, Sulmanu-Musabsi and Ili-Pada. Tentatively, the chronology of the main architectural phases of the *dunnu* is correlated with the accomplishments of these important political figures (§6.4.2, this volume).

### 8.3.1 The Central Building

Within the *dunnu* complex, the central building is without doubt the most prominent architectural element. The building was first discovered in a trial trench in 1988 (Akkermans and Rossmesl 1990), and completely excavated during the 1991 to 1993 seasons (Akkermans *et al.* 1993). Subsequent research has focused on the detailed stratigraphy and architectural modifications of each room (Spoor, unpublished report).

The striking layout of the building, with thick walls and small doorways has led to many interpretations of (rooms within) the building. Wiggermann for instance identifies a jail (2000: 175), a workroom for prostitutes (2010: 55), a storage room, and a treasury (2000: 175) on the basis of textual and archaeological data. Furthermore, he has proposed that the building may have been called *bit halani*, a ‘workhouse’, which has been mentioned in several texts from the site (personal comment). Other possible functions might include that of a watchtower, a tablet archive (Akkermans *et al.* 1993: 9) and a sanctuary (excavation archives). It is plausible that the building fulfilled multiple functions at the same time, and that the purpose of the building changed during its existence.

The present study combines the previously published information with a more in-depth analysis of the original data found in the excavation notes, forms and database, using the approach described above. This is also the first time that all artefact are systematically studied and included in the analysis. Our analyses have led to a more detailed understanding of the architecture and the function of the building through time.

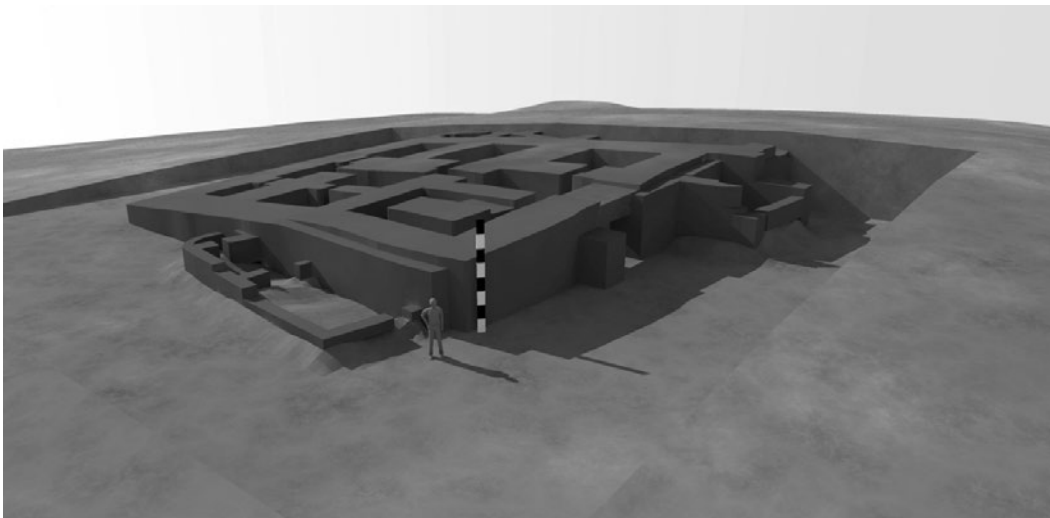


Figure 8.1: Reconstruction of the state of preservation of the walls of the central building, based on excavation data. The Level 4 blocking of the main entrance is also shown. The rod is 4 meters long with 0,5 meter increments (produced by authors).

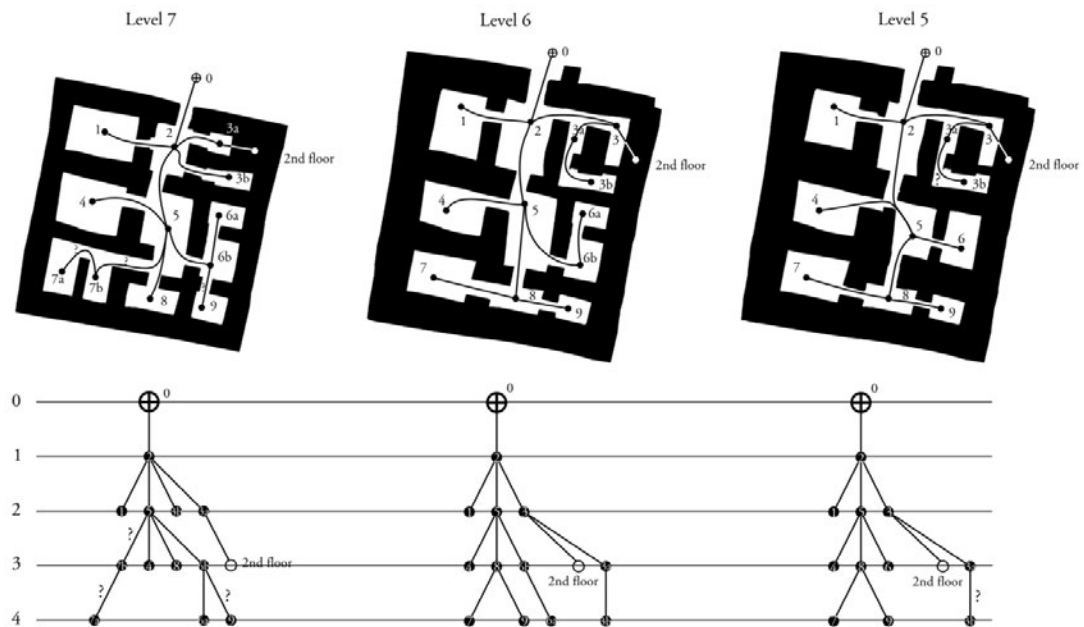
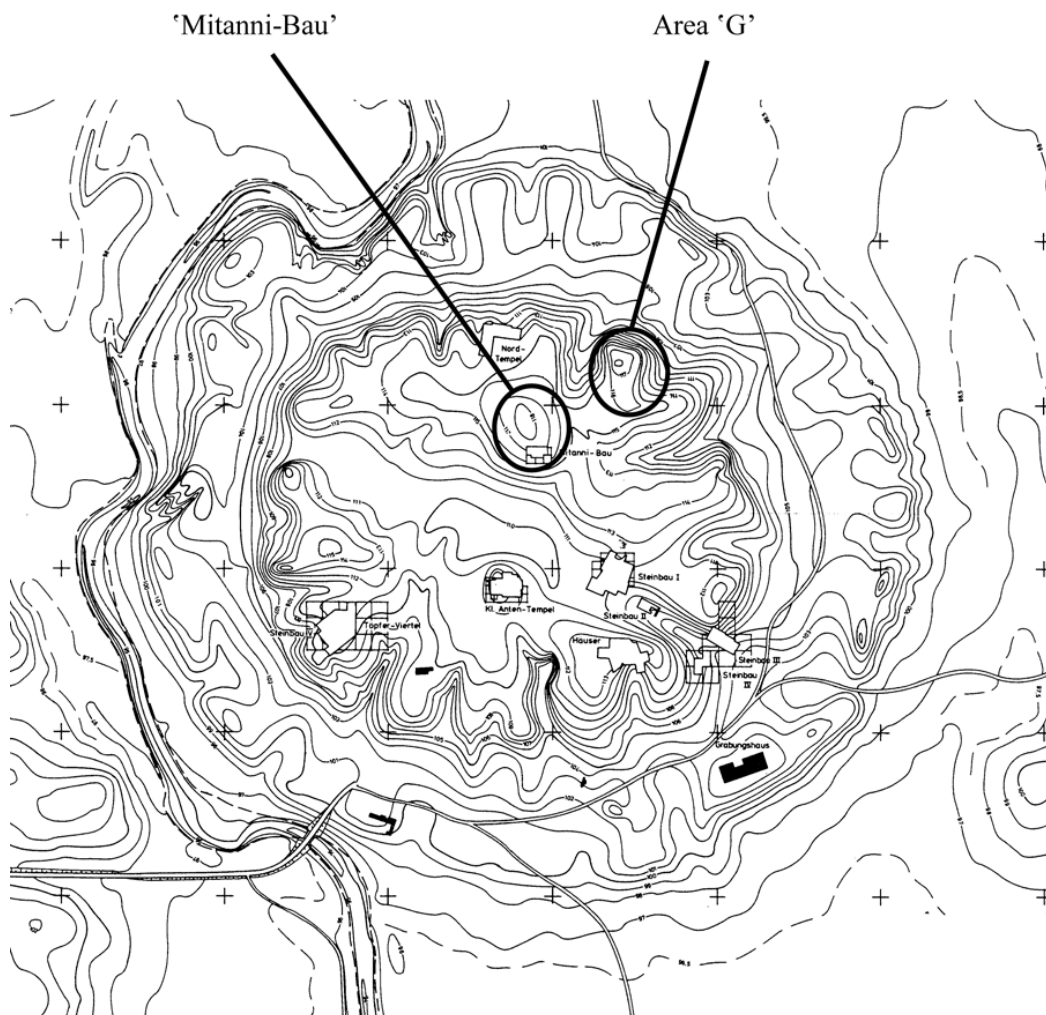


Figure 8.2: Top: access lines projected on the central building. Bottom: justified access graphs showing the depth of each room, measured from the entrance (produced by authors).

#### 8.3.2.1 Level 7: General Layout and Architecture

Despite some uncertainty about the plan of the earliest building, the general layout of the central building in Level 7 can be reconstructed with some confidence. The building, approximately a square with sides of 20 meter, encompassed 12 spaces (figure 8.3: the numbering of rooms follows the generic layout of the building into nine rooms). The building was entered on the north side into room / hallway 2 from where the rest of the building could be accessed. The north-eastern corner of the building functioned as a staircase leading to the roof or a second storey. The stairway rested on a vaulted construction, which created an elongated space below it (room 3b). The other rooms have probably been covered by a roof made up of wooden beams and reed mats. Apart from the passage between rooms 5 and 4, doorways were preserved to only a few brick courses. It is however likely that all doorways were arched like in later phases of the building.



gazelle) reflect the environmental surrounding of the city that were characterised by a gallery forest and a steppic landscape.

In the *dummu* of Tell Sabi Abyad, wild equids remains could not be distinguished from the domestic species. It is therefore difficult to precisely quantify the importance of wild mammals in the assemblage. Nevertheless, the amount of gazelle bones is significant (7% of the number of remains). At the moment, it is not possible to explain clearly the role of hunting in the *dummu* of Tell Sabi Abyad. Although the owner of this *dummu* was a viceroy (Wiggermann 2000), the relation between hunting and high social status is less evident there than in the citadel of Dür-Katlimmu. Considering the hunted species (gazelle and probably onager), the landscape surrounding the *dummu* of Tell Sabi Abyad appears as rather steppic.

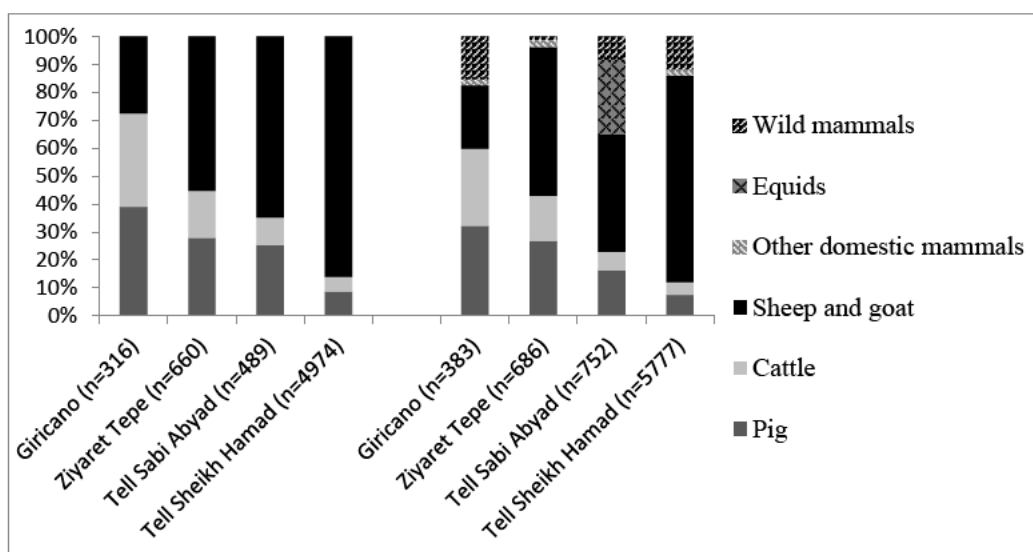


Figure 10.3: Relative representation of domestic and wild mammals in the Middle Assyrian assemblages at Giricano, Ziyaret Tepe, Tell Sabi Abyad (MA II) and Tell Sheikh Hamad. In percent of the number of identified remains. Ziyaret Tepe data from Greenfield-Jongsma and Greenfield (2013), Tell Sabi Abyad data from Cavallo (2002) and Tell Sheikh Hamad data from Becker (2008a).

Considering the exploitation of domestic mammals, there are statistically significant differences between these four settlements (figure 10.4). The weight of the remains has not been published for the assemblage from Tell Sabi Abyad and Ziyaret Tepe and therefore the comparison between the settlements will be made using the species counts (figure 10.3). The assemblage from Tušhu (Ziyaret Tepe) is dominated by sheep and goat. Cattle are not rare but outnumbered by pig (28 percent of the number of cattle, pig, sheep and goat remains). Sheep and goat remains are the most numerous in the assemblage from Dür-Katlimmu (Tell Sheikh Hamad) (86 percent of the number of cattle, pig, sheep and goat remains). The majority of these sheep and goats are juvenile (Becker 2008b). Pigs and cattle had a limited importance in the diet of this high social status population. Sheep and goat are numerous in the *dummu* of Tell Sabi Abyad (65 percent of the cattle, pig, sheep and goat remains). Pig remains are also numerous in this *dummu* (25 percent of the cattle, pig, sheep and goat remains). Such a high relative representation of this species is unusual in north Syrian assemblages dated to the second millennium BC (Clason and Buitenhuis 1998). Cattle had a limited importance in the economy of the *dummu* at Tell Sabi Abyad.

From the four examples described here above, it can be argued that the patterns of animal exploitation in the Middle Assyrian Empire were influenced by three main factors. First, the zooarchaeological assemblages certainly reflect the social status of the consumers. In Dūr-Katlimmu's citadel for instance, it is argued that the access to game meat was associated with an elite diet. These people also enjoyed tender meat from juvenile sheep and goat. On the contrary, pork was obviously not considered a delicacy. The *dunnu* at Tell Sabi Abyad differs from other *dunnus* due to the high rank his owner had in the imperial hierarchy (Wiggermann 2000). It is however difficult to evaluate the impact of this special status on the pattern of animal exploitation at the *dunnu* of Tell Sabi Abyad.

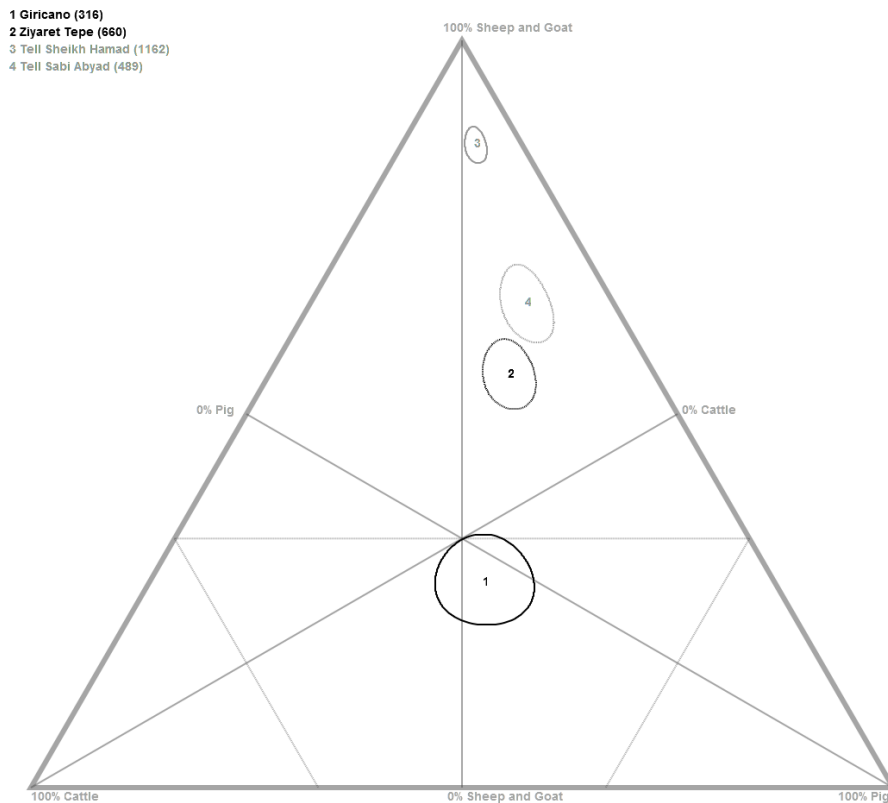


Figure 10.4: Relative representation of pig, cattle, sheep and goat in the Middle Assyrian assemblages from Giricano, Ziyaret Tepe, Tell Sabi Abyad and Tell Sheik Hamad. In percent of the number of pig, cattle, sheep and goat remains. Ziyaret Tepe data from Greenfield-Jongsma and Greenfield (2013), Tell Sabi Abyad data from Cavallo (2002) and Tell Sheikh Hamad data from Becker (2008a). Circles correspond to 95 percent likelihood confidence intervals (Weaver *et al.* 2011). Because the software doesn't allow numbers above one thousand for each variable, the numbers from Tell Sheikh Hamad had to be reduced proportionally.

Environmental conditions are the second factor that influence the composition of the zooarchaeological assemblages under consideration. The wild mammal spectra reflect different environments from a steppic landscape (gazelle, onager) to gallery forests (deer species). It is proposed here that environmental conditions also influenced the exploitation of domestic mammals. Cattle are mentioned in texts from the *dunnu* at Tell Sabi Abyad (Wiggermann 2000)

# 11. Middle Assyrian Agrarian Management in the West in the Light of its Forerunners

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The 14<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries BC saw the expansion to the north and west of Assyrian political and administrative control, resulting around 1250 BC in the integration of the entire *Ġazīra* and the Upper Tigridian region north of the *Tūr 'Ābdīn* into the Middle Assyrian kingdom. One of the reasons for this expansion (alongside politics) seems to have been the need for arable land, which became all the more important in the context of an aridification phase impacting the whole Near East from at least the beginning of the Late Bronze Age (Kühne 2010; Reculeau 2011).

Middle Assyrian legal and administrative texts have been found in several places (figure 11.1), ranging from the imperial capitals of Aššur and Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, to provincial headquarters like Dūr-Katlimmu and Ḥarbe, down to rural towns like Qaṭṭarā and fortified agricultural production centers (*dunnu*) like Dunnu-ša-uzibi and Tall Šabī 'Abyad (Pedersén 1998: 80-103; Radner 2004). Many of these sites yielded texts dealing with the administration of arable land and/or agricultural products, offering insights into rural management at different levels, from the administration of crown-land at a central or provincial scale to the management of agricultural estates belonging or granted to members of Assyria's upper class. The recent publication of texts and archives from the western part of the kingdom (Wiggermann 2000; Röllig 2008a; Jakob 2009) significantly increased our knowledge of rural management, previously based mostly on archives from the Assyrian core (eg. Postgate 1984; 1988; 1990; Freydank 1994).

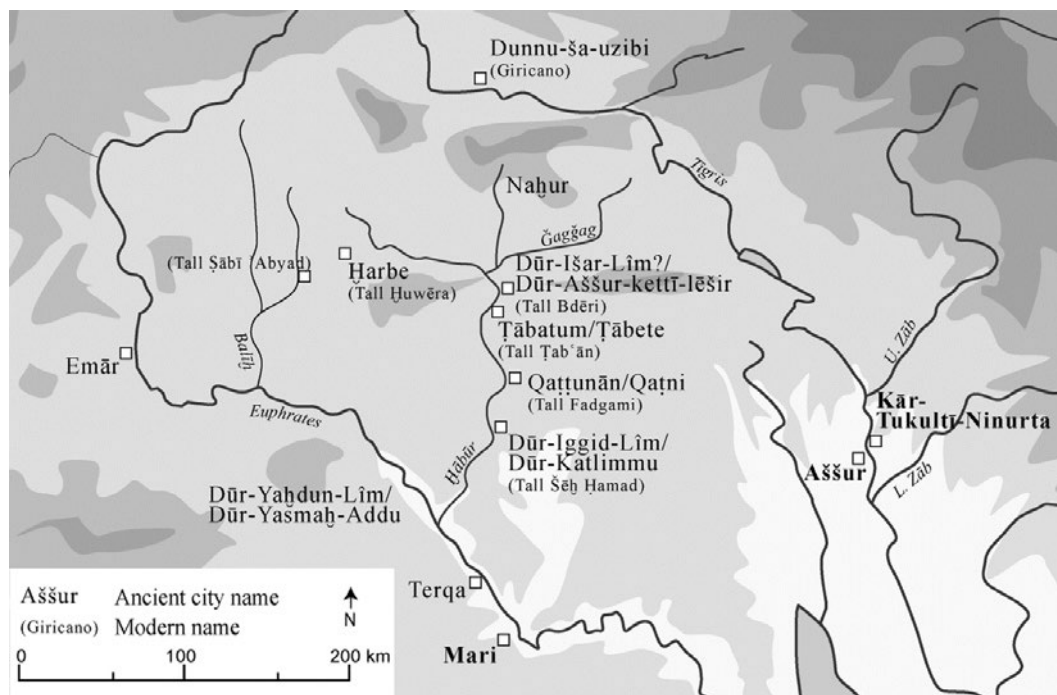


Figure 11.1: Map showing the sites mentioned in this paper. Produced by H. Reculeau.

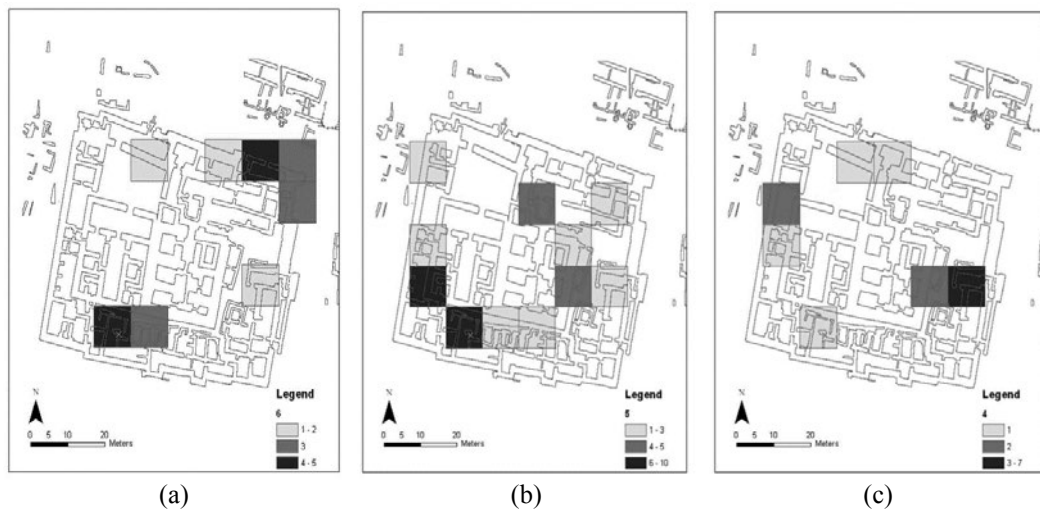


Figure 12.1: Quantitative analysis of oven distribution for levels 6(a), 5(b) and 4(c) at the Tell Sabi Abyad *dunnu*.

In level 6 the total number of ovens within walled area is 23 (figure 12.1a). Concentrations of ovens do not overcome 4/5 features per square (10x10 m). These are found in the working places located east and south of the tower mostly in graveled courtyards which were seemingly used for domestic purposes. In level 5 the total number of ovens rises to 42 (figure 12.1b). In this phase concentrations reach 6 up to 10 ovens per square. Ovens are more widespread distributed inside the fortress in comparison to the previous phase. But a few concentrations are found in the southern area that has been identified as bakery, of which a more detailed analysis is presented below, and in the western quarters. Of special interest is a conspicuous installation of ovens set in two rows along the opposite walls of a single room (4.5 x 3 m). The installation is located nearby the so-called silo (4 x 3.5 m), a closed structure, partly found filled with barley which could contain some 40 cubic meters of grains. In level 4 the number of ovens decreases to 15 features inside the walls (figure 12.1c). Concentrations do not exceed 3/7 ovens per square and are found to the east of the tower. In this period, it is not clear if the settlement was still in operation in its southern part. However, oven distribution in this period seems to show a contraction.

The increase in level 5B, the so-called Tamitte phase, which corresponds to the floruit of the settlement, is striking (figure 12.2). Such evidence seems to find a correlation with the frequency of grinding slabs by square with a concentration especially in the southwestern sector (figure 12.3a). An area of considerable importance for ovens is that the southern quarter (SQ I12) that seems to have been part of a 'bakery' in the hands of the baker *Paia*. This was suggested by the ca. 25 tablets found here mentioning the distribution of cereals, flour and bread to both local people and to representatives of settlements elsewhere under the supervision of *Paia* (Akkermans 2006: 208).

while in 6-row barley all three spikelets are fertile and can produce a grain kernel. The potential yield does not necessarily coincide with the actual one, however. This may be mostly due to the availability of mineral nutrients and the number of grain kernels for which nutrients are needed. As in the case of 6-row barley nutrients have to be shared among a larger number of grain kernels per spike this may result in less dense fields or in a lower number of fruiting culms in 6-row barley than in 2-row barley fields (René Cappers, pers. comm.). Threshing remains of hulled barley consist of culm and rachis fragments, broken awns and glumes and, in the case of 2-row barley, of sterile florets / spikelets (Cappers *et al.* 2014).

Barley can be stored in different forms such as complete spikes, grain kernels (including dry malted grain kernels), and prepared food (including porridge and bread). When stored in grains, hulled barley occupies a relatively small volume in compare, for example, to hulled wheats whose storage units, mostly represented by spikelets, include more vegetative parts. Furthermore, during storage a good protection against humidity and pests is offered by the chaff tightly attached to the grain kernels. These characteristics make the processing and storage in bulk of hulled barley grain kernels advantageous. Bulk processing and the communal storage would have improved efficiency by making available at once large quantities of processed cereals for food preparation. For example, this was noticed in the southern steppe of the Khabur River where an increasing of Barley in the botanical record during the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC was correlated with the appearance of a new storage architecture (McCorriston 2002). However, in that instance, the increased emphasis on communal storage of barley was explained by its use as fodder (Van Lerberghe 1996: 121).

#### 12.4.2 Barley Bread

It is suggested here that the preparation of large quantity of bread could have served to feed people for a relatively long time due to the durability of barley bread. When stored in the form of bread barley presents distinct advantages because from its flour (probably mixed to some extent with wheat flour) a dry bread (baked twice) can be made that can be kept and consumed for months after moistening immediately prior to consumption (figure 12.4). Flat barley bread can be efficiently stored in piles (personal observation). Alternatively, the dough is made in a circular shape with a central hole and the resulting breads are passed through a stick or a rope to facilitate both their storage and the transport. The availability of a staple food edible for a long time and easy to transport seems to be related to the necessity of travelling people such as soldiers or shepherds. For example, until the 1940s flat barley bread was made twice per year in central and southern Italy as food for shepherds during the periodical migrations of sheep and cows from the highlands to the lowlands and *vice versa*. In the Middle Ages dry barley bread was prepared in order to feed Crusaders during their trip to the Holy Land. The possibility to keep the bread for a relatively long time depends on its quality and, in turn, on the skills required to make it and the investment in labour.

After the harvesting and post-harvest processing, the labour necessary for the preparation of barley bread includes a number of stages and involves several people performing different specialized activities at the same time. These include grinding, flour purification by sieving, two stages of dough kneading, dough rolling out, and two stages of baking. The florets of hulled barley can be soaked before grinding. As grinding results in the fragmentation of the chaff (*palea* and *lemma*) parching is not necessary (Cappers *et al.* 2014). In a dry or semi-dry environments grains can be dried in the sun or, in alternative, located in warm rooms where ovens or hearths are present or disposed in the upper part of ovens (secondary use of ovens).

A grinding experiment performed with an original grinding slab fixed in a replica of a Second Intermediate Period grinding installation in the site of Umm-Mawagir (Kharga Oasis) has shown that hulled barley grains are relatively easy to grind because of their hardness. The removal of the larger chaff particles can be done after grinding by (re)sieving. An edible bread can be prepared without dehulling (Cappers *et al.* 2014). A barley bread rich in hull remains is also made nowadays (figure 12.5).



including those who ascended the throne, are called by their personal names but *never* as *mār šarri*, ‘son of the king’.

By contrast, the Assyrian kings are designated simply as ‘king’ (*šarru*) without name in the archival texts from Tell Taban,<sup>6</sup> as is the case of other Middle Assyrian texts. Therefore, it is highly probable that the enigmatic ‘daughter of king’ refers to a daughter of an Assyrian king, i.e. an Assyrian princess. We might suggest that such an indirect designation was applied to keep a ‘respectful distance’ from her.

### 13.3 Dynastic Marriages between the Assyrian Royal House and the Local Dynasty of the Land of Māri

The archival texts from Ṭābetu suggest that the Assyrian princess did not briefly visit Ṭābetu, but resided in the city. Her long-term presence in Ṭābetu is revealed by texts containing date formula (table 13.3). Why did the princess live in such a regional city? It is most plausible that she was married with a local ruler or possibly his son, i.e. the local prince. It is argued, then, that the local dynasty was related with the Assyrian royal house through dynastic marriage.

The daughter of the king obviously was a person of high status in the local palace of Ṭābetu, corresponding to her prestige. The Ṭābetu government was of a small size and retained various household characteristics (Shibata 2007: 72). However, it is possible that the princess under consideration kept her own distinct ‘administration’ in the local palace of Ṭābetu, which would explain the lists and the notes of materials and commodities possessed by her (table 13.1), although it is not verbalized, i.e., an expression such as ‘sphere of administration (*pittu*) of the princess’ is not attested so far. In this respect it is suggestive for instance that a list, Tab T05A-177, records materials (textile, wood and stone) belonging to the princess and those belonging to a local ruler, Aššur-ketta-lēšir I, separately.

There is one serious but intriguing problem concerning the daughter of the king, that is, the dating of the texts that attest to this person. Fortunately the six documents contain date formula’s (table 13.3). The earliest of them, from the eponymate of Aššur-nādin-šumē, dates to the early or mid reign of Shalmaneser I (8<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> year?). Four of them, the eponymates of Ittabši-dēn-Aššur (Sa 29), Adad-bēl-gabbe (TN 4), Urad-ilāni (TN 8?) and Adad-uma’i (TN 9?), date to around the late reign of Shalmaneser I to the early reign of Tukultī-Ninurta I (Freydank 2005). The last one, the eponymate of Saggi’u, presumably dates to the reign of Ninurta-apil-Ekur.<sup>7</sup>

Order of Eponyms (provisional)	Attestations of princess	Regnal year of Assyrian kings <sup>8</sup>	Possible absolute date (BC)
Aššur-nādin-šumē	Tab T05A-151	Sa 8 or 14 ?	1266/56 or 1260/50 ?
Ittabši-dēn-Aššur	Tab T05A-601+	Sa 29	1245/35
Adad-bēl-gabbe	Tab T05A-545	TN 4	1240/30
Urad-ilāni	Tab T05A-32+	TN 8 ?	1236/26 ?
Adad-uma’i	Tab T05A-241	TN 9 ?	1235/25 ?
Saggi’u	Tab T05A-11	The reign of Nae	1191-79/1181-69

Table 13.3: Eponyms that occur on texts attesting the daughter of the king.<sup>9</sup>

The Assyrian princess attested in texts dating to the late reign of Shalmaneser I and the early reign of Tukultī-Ninurta I, probably refer to one-and-the-same person. More problematic are

<sup>6</sup> Tab T05A-151 (Shibata 2012: 494-8); Tab T05A-609.

<sup>7</sup> Freydank 1991: 73-8. On the order of eponyms in the early 12th century B.C. see also Llop 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Royal names are abbreviated as follows: Sa = Shalmaneser I, TN = Tukultī-Ninurta I, NaE = Ninurta-apil-Ekur.

<sup>9</sup> On the order of the eponyms see Freydank 2005, Röllig 2008: 4, Bloch 2008; 2010.

## 14.

### **Foreign Kings in the Middle Assyrian Archival Documentation<sup>1</sup>**

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The history of the Middle Assyrian Empire has usually been based on the royal inscriptions and the chronicles (Munn-Rankin 1975; Kuhrt 1995: 348-65; Mayer 1995: 168-257; Veenhof 2001: 176-83; Edzard 2004: 163-73; Van de Mieroop 2007: 179-84). Archival texts, defined as ‘a group of texts of administrative, economic, juridical and similar types, including letters’ (Pedersén 1985: 20) have been little used in the reconstructions of the period (Weidner 1935-36; Freydank 1982a; Harrak 1987; 1989). Various factors have prevented the use of this kind of documentation. First, many of the Middle Assyrian documents have not been published until recently (Freydank and Feller 2004-2010; Frahm 2009; Prechel and Freydank 2011), and many of the ones that are important for this historical reconstruction, remain unpublished. However, in many cases the contents of these texts has been partially communicated. Second, an important part of these archival documents have only been published in cuneiform copy or in scattered articles which makes their consultation difficult.

The use of archival material for historical purposes is not without problems. The first problem concerns chronology. Many archival documents carry a date with an eponym, but a complete list of these officials is still lacking for the Middle Assyrian period (Freydank 1982a: 41), although significant progress has recently been made for the 13<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (Freydank 2005; Bloch 2012b). Given that many interesting documents lack a date (or their date is broken), we cannot place them in a precise chronological context. The second problem is the nature of these texts, which were designed for immediate administrative or economic purposes and obviously not for describing historical events (Lambert 1974: 103; Van de Mieroop 1999: 13-25).

A common feature of the royal inscriptions and the official administrative documentation is that the king is the protagonist in both. This is indisputable in the case of the former, and frequent in the case of the latter, where the king appears actively commanding, giving, receiving, travelling, and so forth. Both types of documentation were issued by the royal administration (Lambert 1974: 103). Due to the nature of these sources, histories of the Ancient Near East are often accounts of the feats of kings.

In the present paper, I will focus on the kings, but not on the Assyrian ones. Instead, I will concentrate on the attestations of foreign kings mentioned in the Middle Assyrian administrative documentation and compare them with the information from the royal inscriptions, chronicles, and other sources of historical information. A discussion of the foreign kings in the archival documentation can help to clarify obscure points in the political expansion of Assyria during the Middle Assyrian period. Some propagandistic statements of the royal inscriptions concerning the conquest of territories can be precised with the help of the more neutral economic and administrative documentation. Royal inscriptions and chronicles centre on military clashes, whereas archival documentation can shed light on other aspects of the relation between Assyrian and neighboring kingdoms, such as diplomatic or cooperative contacts. For the purpose of clarity, this analysis will follow a chronological arrangement.

I will not consider the Assyrian kings of Hanigalbat (i.e. the Grand Viziers) (Llop 2012: 96), who were Assyrian officials, as foreigners, nor the kings of Tābete (Tell Ṭaban) (Shibata 2011; 2012, this volume) nor the kings of Idu (Satu Qala) (Van Soldt 2008, Pappi 2012: 602-03; Van Soldt *et al.* 2013), mainly because their territories were integrated in the Assyrian kingdom and

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to dedicate this article to Frans Wiggermann with gratitude.

## 15. Government Recording Practices in Assyria and her Neighbours and Contemporaries

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This contribution is not designed as a general introduction to Middle Assyrian administrative documentation, many aspects of which were dealt with by a number of contributors in the course of the symposium, but will try to place the documentary practices observable in Assyria at this time in context by looking at (near-)con-temporary practices at Nuzi, Alalah and Ugarit.

This naturally means addressing documentary format (diplomats), including the use of seals and envelopes, but I will also try to confront some underlying broader issues. One is the public : private divide, both in terms of how the social context affects the nature of the documentation and in respect of the function of individual households within government administration. Another is the purpose of the documentary activity – is it purely a way of regulating mutual responsibilities, or does it have a positive function in the storage of information?

Comparing the different states and mini-states does throw up some interesting differences. Such comparisons make it apparent that Nuzi and Assur had a good deal in common, despite the obvious superficial differences, whereas Alalah and Ugarit belong to very different traditions.

### 15.1 Diplomats – Documentary Formats

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of Middle Assyrian government is its use of quasi-legal documents to regulate administrative transactions. The scribes made use of verbal formulae and non-verbal practices which are similar but not identical to formulae and practices in the private sector.

There are various ways in which documents from government administration can be differentiated from legal documents, or put another way, documents relating to public administration differ from those dealing with private business. There are no legal conveyances (sales of real estate or persons) in the administrative process, so to illustrate this we need to compare the contracts or, in the terminology I use, debt-notes.

legal debt-notes		administrative debt-notes	
KIŠIB PN <sub>1</sub> DUMU PN <sub>2</sub>	seal of PN <sub>1</sub> son of PN <sub>2</sub>	KIŠIB PN <sub>1</sub>	seal of PN <sub>1</sub>
(seal impression of PN <sub>1</sub> )		(seal impression of PN <sub>1</sub> )	
2 GÚ.UN AN.NA ša PN <sub>3</sub> DUMU PN <sub>4</sub>	2 talents of lead of PN <sub>3</sub> son of PN <sub>4</sub>	2 GÚ.UN AN.NA (ša É.GAL- <i>lim</i> ša ŠU PN <sub>2</sub> )	2 talents of lead of the palace) in the hands of PN <sub>2</sub>
ina UGU PN <sub>1</sub> DUMU PN <sub>2</sub>	on PN <sub>1</sub> son of PN <sub>2</sub>	ina UGU PN <sub>1</sub>	on PN <sub>1</sub>
(supplementary details) (witnesses) (date) (witnesses' seal captions)		(supplementary details)  (date)	

Table 15.1: Comparison of legal and administrative debt-notes.

The terminology of such bilateral documents is very simple and the distinction between a 'private' or 'legal' document and one which is 'administrative' is normally very easy to detect because it corresponds to the difference between items of which a creditor is the owner (*ša* PN) and those which are merely entrusted to his care (*ša qāt* PN) (table 15.1). Frequently the commodity is said to be both 'belonging to the palace' and 'in the charge of PN', explicitly acknowledging both the proprietorial rights of the state, and the responsibility of the state employee.

## 16.

### **Power, Hegemony, and the Use of Force in the Neo-Assyrian Empire**

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The stated goal of the symposium that led to the current volume was, among other things, to research how ‘Assyrian officials managed and controlled the territories of the state’ and to discuss ‘how Middle Assyrian hegemonic practices compare to those of the preceding and following periods.’ Integral to these goals is an understanding of the nature of hegemony. How was hegemonic power generated and maintained? What is the relationship between power, hegemony and force? And finally, what is the role of these forces in the consolidation and administration of empire? This chapter will address these questions by outlining a provisional framework for understanding power, hegemony, and the use of force in the Neo-Assyrian empire. This provisional framework focuses on the nature of power and how the Neo-Assyrian monarchs created and maintained sovereignty over such a large area. This discussion includes specific examples of the application of various types of power from the Neo-Assyrian archaeological and textual records. The goal of the provisional framework proposed in this paper is to lay the groundwork for research on the material and textual results of specific practices that were utilized by Assyrian officials to manage the human and material resources of the state. I must emphasize from the start that this paper will not focus on the Middle Assyrian period but will instead act as a later Neo-Assyrian example with which to compare and contrast the data from earlier periods.

#### **16.1 The Territorial Hegemonic Continuum**

More than a decade ago I borrowed some ideas from scholars working in the Andes (D’Altroy 1992; Schreiber 1992) in an attempt to describe territoriality in the Neo-Assyrian period by gauging the degree of control the Assyrians held over specific territories within their realm (Parker 2001). I illustrated this in a graph that I dubbed the ‘territorial-hegemonic continuum’ (figure 16.1).<sup>1</sup> In short, I suggested that the empire was not a monolithic political unit but was instead an imperial mosaic (Schreiber 1992) in which the Assyrians held varying degrees of control over conquered landscapes. The Assyrian empire only held direct territorial control in the imperial core and in relatively limited pockets that made up the Assyrian provinces. Assyrian provincial authorities held direct control over areas in and around provincial capitals and along important transportation corridors (Liverani 1988). In these areas Assyrian provincial officials implemented Assyrian taxation and corvée systems and Assyrian garrisons occupied and monitored strategic areas and corridors (Parker 1997). By contrast, in regions around and between Assyrian strongholds the empire held varying degrees of hegemonic control (cf. Postgate 1992).<sup>2</sup> In many cases the threat posed by the Assyrian military machine was enough to persuade local elites in these regions to bow to Assyrian pressure. Although this coercive system probably worked at the local level, as village elders and/or petty rulers pressured by Assyrian officials persuaded their constituents to shoulder Assyrian tribute demands, this practice is best exemplified by Assyria’s vassal state system. In the

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<sup>1</sup> Due to issues of space, I will refrain from conducting a thorough review of this topic here. For an in depth discussion see especially chapter 2 in D’Altroy 1992 and chapter 6 in Parker 2001. Also see Schreiber 1992, Sinopoli 1994 and 2001.

<sup>2</sup> An obvious parallel in the New World can be found in the Aztec Empire (see especially Berdan *et al.* 1996) but examples can also be made of the Inca (D’Altroy 2002 and 2001 among others) and other Andean empires (Schreiber 1987; 1992). Also see Sinopoli’s early work on Vijayanagara (Sinopoli and Morrison 1995) and Liverani 2005.

## 17. **The Hegemonic Practices of the Middle Assyrian Empire in Context**

*Bleda Düring*  
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In our long term perspective of Near Eastern history the Assyrian Empire appears to represent a decisive turning point: whereas earlier imperia were relatively short-lived, here a state emerge from humble origins that dominates much of the Near East for about seven centuries, and is the direct ancestor of the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Empires. The question then is: how could the Assyrian state become so successful and in what ways did it differ from other polities in the Ancient Near East.

Empire studies have by and large been dominated by approaches that focus on imperial elites and capitals and their archives. However, I will argue that the crux of the matter is how imperial hegemony is achieved and maintained in conquered territories, that is, in the provinces and peripheries. It can be argued that the success of the modest sized early Assyrian Empire depended to a significant degree on an unprecedented interference in conquered societies and landscapes, by implementing major changes in the cultural landscape. Strategies included reshuffling existing settlement systems; agricultural expansion into the steppe; deportation of populations; and the creation of military infrastructures. We know relatively little about how such strategies were implemented on the ground, however. Further, we should investigate how different the Assyrian policies really were from those of other states in the Near East, or whether the intrusive policies of the Assyrians – which might have contributed to their ultimate success – were simply born out of ecological and demographic necessities.

### **17.1 The Middle Assyrian Empire in History**

Notwithstanding the fact that the Near East constitutes one of few the cradles of empires that occur globally and that its empires are among the oldest documented, political unification came relatively late in this region. As has been argued by various scholars (eg. Marcus 1998; Matthews 2003), the default pattern of political organization in Mesopotamia was that of political fragmentation; that is the region was divided by a series of regional states competing for power and with relatively weakly developed states (Richardson 2012). After the emergence of complex urbanized state societies in the fourth millennium BC, it is only in the Late Bronze Age, with the rise of the Middle Assyrian state, that the efforts towards creating an empire were successful. This is not to diminish the significance of earlier imperial states in Mesopotamia and the Near East, such as those of Akkad, Ur III, and the Hittites. However, many of these existed for no more than one and a half century, and some, such as those of Hammurabi and Samsi-Adad, are best understood as short lived ‘conquest empires’, which barely outlived the death of their founder (Marcus 1998; van de Mieroop 2004; Barjamovic 2013; Eidem 2014), and were highly dependent on the diplomatic, charismatic, organizational and military qualities of specific rulers. By contrast, the Assyrian Empire proved much more durable, lasting for about 700 years. Further, it was the only one of the Late Bronze Age powers that withstood ‘the crisis years’ between 1200 and 1180 BC (Cline 2014). In addition, the Assyrian Empire was the ancestor of the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Empires. So from a long term perspective, one could argue the modest sized Middle Assyrian Empire marks a watershed in the history of the ancient Near East, from a situation in which Mesopotamia was by default fragmented into regional states, to a situation where the region and its populations were transformed into enduring building blocks of empire.

This characterization of the data can be challenged, of course, on several grounds. One could ask, for example, to what degree the Middle Assyrian state differed from the preceding Mittani Empire. In a recent study, Postgate (2011) has characterized the Middle Assyrian state as a

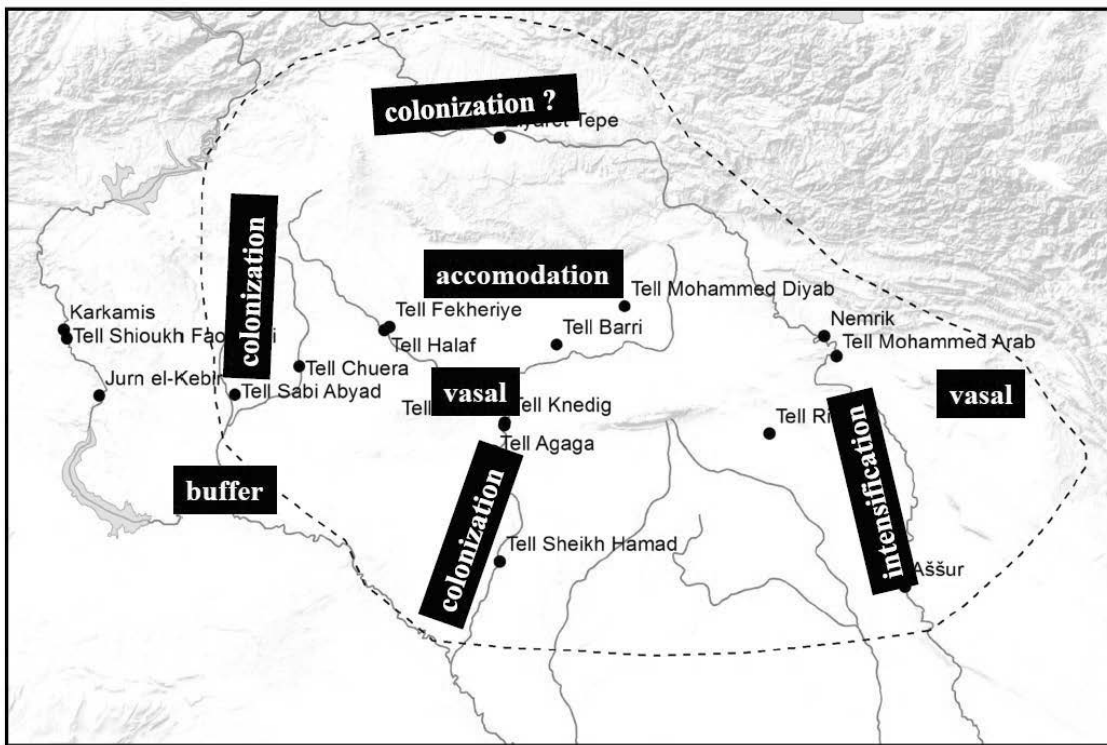


Figure 17.1: Map of the Middle Assyrian Empire with various hegemonic strategies used by Assyria indicated.

This flexible approach was one in which the strategic importance and position of regions and the nature of pre-existing settlements and agricultural production determined which policies were implemented, for example creating a buffer zone, developing large-scale farming in previously uncultivated landscapes, or creating an urban administration controlling a pre-existing settlement and farming system. For example, the efforts that the Middle Assyrians undertook along the Balikh were necessitated by a collapse of farming and settled society in the area prior to their activities in this region, and the region was developed because of its strategic importance and agricultural potential. This argument also throws a new light on the image of ‘the brutal Assyrians’ who ruthlessly uprooted populations and deported them wholesale, while using the army to keep everyone in check. It appears that these practices were to a large degree born out of necessity. In this respect, the more benign imperialism of the Egyptians and the Hittites further to the west could reflect the fact that the territories they conquered were more productive and more densely populated, and did not necessitate state intervention to the same degree as in Hanigalbat.

### 17.3 Conclusions

Can we substantiate the argument that the Assyrian Empire was more successful and longer lived than other empires of the ancient Near East due to a particular set of hegemonic practices that made this empire more stable than its competitors? In this paper I have evaluated the hegemonic practices of the Middle Assyrian Empire and compared these practices to those preceding Mesopotamian Empires, the Hittite Empire and the Egyptian Empire, and I have compared the hegemonic practices of the Middle Assyrian period with those of the Neo-Assyrian period.

I argue that the hegemonic practices of the Middle Assyrian period are completely different from those of the Mittani Empire, and have only limited overlap with those of the Hittites, Kassites