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Building the Empire. Settlement Patterns in the Middle Assyrian Empire

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UNDERSTANDING HEGEMONIC PRACTICES OF THE EARLY ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

ESSAYS DEDICATED TO FRANS WIGGERMANN

edited by

Bleda S. DÜRING



NEDERLANDS INSTITUUT VOOR HET NABIJE OOSTEN

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Table of contents

Introduction	1
<i>Bleda Düring</i>	
I. Mittanians and Middle Assyrians	
1. Making Mittani Assyrian	9
<i>Rafał Koliński</i>	
2. The Rise and Consolidation of Assyrian Control on the Northwestern Territories	33
<i>Anacleto D'Agostino</i>	
II. Middle Assyrian Landscapes and Settlements	
3. Middle Assyrian Territorial Practices in the Region of Ashur	45
<i>Simone Mühl</i>	
4. Core and Periphery in the Assyrian State: The View from Dūr-Katlimmu.	59
<i>Hartmut Kühne</i>	
5. Building the Empire: Settlement Patterns in the Middle Assyrian Empire.	75
<i>Aline Tenu</i>	
III. The Western Periphery	
6. West of Aššur: The Life and Times of the Middle Assyrian <i>Dunnu</i> at Tell Sabi Abyad	89
<i>Peter M. M. G. Akkermans and Frans A. M. Wiggermann</i>	
7. The Pots of Assur in the Land of Hanigalbat – The Organization of Pottery Production in the Far West of the Middle Assyrian Empire	125
<i>Kim Duistermaat</i>	
8. The Central Building of the Tell Sabi Abyad <i>Dunnu</i>	153
<i>Victor Klinkenberg and Tijm Lanjouw</i>	
9. Daily Life in the Wild West of Assyria	177
<i>Stefan Jakob</i>	
IV. Feeding the Empire	
10. Middle Assyrian Herding Practices in the North of the Empire: A View from <i>Dunnu-ša-Uzibi</i>	189
<i>Rémi Berthon</i>	
11. Middle Assyrian Agrarian Management in the West in the Light of its Forerunners	199
<i>Hervé Reculeau</i>	
12. Agriculture on the Fringe: Reconsidering the Role of Barley in Middle Assyrian Agriculture	221
<i>Federica Fantone</i>	
V. Middle Assyrian Administrative Practices	
13. Dynastic Marriages in Assyria during the Late Second Millenium BC	235
<i>Daisuke Shibata</i>	
14. Foreign Kings in the Middle Assyrian Archival Documentation	243
<i>Jaume Llop-Raduà</i>	
15. Government Recording Practices in Assyria and her Neighbours and Contemporaries	275
<i>J. Nicholas Postgate</i>	
VI. Understanding Assyrian Imperialism	
16. Power, Hegemony, and the Use of Force in the Neo-Assyrian Empire	287
<i>Bradley Parker</i>	
17. The Hegemonic Practices of the Middle Assyrian Empire in Context.	299
<i>Bleda Düring</i>	

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

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The creation of a territorial state by the Assyrians from the middle of the 14th 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 Hurllet (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 14th century BC and of the first part one of the 13th 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.

excavated in part on the top of the high mound. This building was occupied continuously from the Mittani to the Middle Assyrian periods (Eichler *et al.* 1990: 241-54; Eichler and Wäfler 1989-1990: 249-50). The other identification of Taidu is with Üçtepe, which was also proposed by Kessler (Kessler 1980: 119). At these sites, Mittani, Middle, and Neo-Assyrian levels have been excavated (Sevin 1989: 106-7; Eichler *et al.* 1990: 241; Tenu 2009: 216), but their chronology is not well known. So the extant archaeological data cannot really help resolve the problem of the identification of Üçtepe.

For *Waššuganni* the ‘historical’ candidate is Tell Fekheriye. This hypothesis has been much discussed, especially because until recently traces of the Mittani occupation were rather limited. Excavations conducted by Dominik Bonatz since 2005 have changed our understanding of the site. Mittani architectural structures have been excavated especially in Area C (<http://www.fekheriye.de>), and new petrographic analysis of the Tell el-Amarna tablets confirm they are made of clay from an area with geological properties similar to those near Tell Fekheriye (Bonatz *et al.* 2008: 92). In addition a recently discovered very fragmentary tablet may give a new hint to support the identification (Bonatz *et al.* 2008: 130-31). Middle Assyrian tablets found in 2009 and 2010, dated to the reign of Shalmaneser I, confirm the role of the city in the Assyrian administrative network (www.fekheriye.de).

Similar issues pertain to other cities mentioned in annals: *Amašaki*, *Kahat*, *Šuru*, *Nabula*, *Hurra* and *Šuduhu*. Only two of them are more or less securely localized: *Nabula* and *Kahat*. *Nabula* has been identified with Girnavaž and was briefly excavated by Hayat Erkanal in the 1980s. Middle Assyrian layers and a Middle Assyrian tablet dated to the reign of Tiglath-pileser I have been found there (Erkanal 1989: 261), but the publication of this text is not available.

Kahat is to be located at Tell Barri. This site has yielded several Mittani levels separated from the Middle Assyrian occupation by a hiatus (Pecorella 1994: 7; 1998). A large corpus of Middle Assyrian pottery (Anastasio 1998, D’Agostino, this volume) as well as Middle Assyrian tablets (Salvini 1998; 2004; 2005) were found.

Thus, in so far as we have archaeological documentation of these important Mittani cities, they continue to be occupied after the Assyrian conquest, and to my knowledge traces of violent destruction were not discovered on any of them.

The second point is assess archaeological data to investigate whether the royal cities retained a significant position in the new administrative structure. Texts discovered in Aššur indicate that Taidu (Jakob 2003: 116) and *Waššuganni* (Freydank 2006: 13; Freydank and Feller 2007: 13) became provincial capitals, and were thus integrated into the new Assyrian provincial administration.

Generally speaking, we can observe the same ‘fate’ for other cities. *Bēl pāhete* are attested at Ahurra, *Amašaki* as well as at *Šuduhu* (Jakob 2003: 112-6). *Amašaki* and *Šuduhu* are also quoted in lists of (regular) *gina’u* offerings to the temple of Aššur dated to the reigns of Enlil-kuduri-ušur (Freydank 2006: 15) and Tiglath-pileser I (Postgate 1985: 96). *Nabula* appears also in an administrative text of Aššur dated to the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (Freydank 1994: 12) and pertaining to the *gina’u* offerings in Aššur, but the status of the city is not clear. This trend, of transforming previous royal cities into provincial capitals, has two important exceptions: *Kahat*, which does not appear in textual sources after the destruction of Mittani; and *Šuru*. The latter city is probably mentioned in texts from Tell Amuda published by Aynard and Durand (1980: 46-7) but no longer in the central record of Assyria. It perhaps lost its privileged status even if it was still occupied.

Secondary sites are also known. Tell Brak, Tell Mohammed Diyab, Tell Hammam et-Turkman for instance were occupied both in the Mittani and in the Middle Assyrian periods. Archaeologists observed a gap of occupation after the Assyrian conquest, which was accompanied by destructions at Tell Brak (Oates 1990; Oates *et al.* 1997) and Tell Mohammed Diyab (Sauvage 1997). Both were subsequently reoccupied after a hiatus. At Tell Hammam et-Turkman the situation is different: the palace was deliberately abandoned after being completely emptied.

Eventually the abandonment was longer than expected and the inhabitants had to erect a new building (Meijer 1988).

Two other sites warrant discussion. Tell Chuera (ancient Harbe) was a seat of an Assyrian province at least in the 13th century.¹ Two Mittani buildings (*Knicksachstempel* and *Mittani-Bau*) were excavated by Anton Moortgat (Moortgat 1962: 17-22; Moortgat and Moortgat-Correns 1976: 35-68) and the name of the site appears in a text from Alalah (Belmonte Marin 2001: 117). Tell Chuera is occupied during both periods but we do not have any data concerning the actual continuity between them (see also Jakob, this volume). The second site, Nahur, a Mittani city situated near the Habur sources, has been sacked by Adad-nārārī I (Grayson 1987: 159-60 (RIMA 1, A.O. 76.25)), and became the center of a province at least in the 13th century BC (Kupper 1998: 86-7; Jakob 2003: 115) but unfortunately no mention to the status of the city in the Mittani empire is made in the Assyrian inscription.

Finally we may also consider the situation of the smallest sites and villages, even if the data are rather scant. A very small number of villages have been excavated and in surveys Mittani and Middle Assyrian pottery are often discussed together.² Given that only a very small number of surveys deal with Mittani and Middle Assyrian pottery separately, changes in settlement patterns are difficult to assess. There is however a general trend toward a reduction of the number of sites. In the Balikh Valley, 80% of sites were abandoned after the Mittani period (Lyon 2000: 224-5), and in the Habur area, small rural sites were deserted, and replaced by larger settlements less numerous (Pfälzner 1995: 225). Daniele Morandi Bonacossi however demonstrated that even if the number of sites declines from the Mittani to the Middle Assyrian period (from 24 to 9), the population in the Habur Valley might have increased (Morandi Bonacossi 2008: 198-9, see also Abb. 12:6 and 12:7). Northern Mesopotamia was thus less densely occupied, even if perhaps more populated than before.

In addition to the limited corpus of data available, another important limitation complicates the analysis of the transition from the Mittani to the Middle Assyrian period. Our reconstructions rely mainly on the presence of the Middle Assyrian pottery assemblage as defined by Pfälzner (1995), but the corpus of the first part of the Middle Assyrian domination is still unknown and one may discuss if we are able to correctly assign to the Middle Assyrian period all the material used in the Empire (Tenu 2007; 2013: 567-9; also Duistermaat, this volume).

Putting aside all these reservations, a general tendency comes to the fore: the fate of the Mittani sites might have depended on their importance: villages were abandoned for the benefit of larger cities, and ancient urban centres kept a significant administrative place in the new network. Provincial capitals have strong continuities with the preceding Mittani administrative system, and might have been modelled after older administrative divisions. The territorial organization was not re-engineered, and this might have been the most efficient for exploiting these territories and to recover from ravages of war.

5.2 New Creations

The Mittani urban structure, partly kept, was complemented by new foundations. The most famous is Kār-Tukulī-Ninurta. Due to the low number of campaigns undertaken at the site, the town planning is still only partially known, but German archaeologists found at least a palace finely decorated with wall paintings and a temple dedicated to the god Aššur (Eickhoff 1985). The presence of this temple is in itself very significant because even in Kalhu or in Nineveh in the first Millennium no temple to Aššur was ever erected. This temple was to remain in the city of Aššur.

¹ Texts from Tell Chuera have been published firstly by Cord Kühne (1995). A new edition has been recently made by Stefan Jakob (2008).

² This is for instance the case of the recent survey conducted by Mark Altaweel in the Iraqi Jazira. Mittanian material was not diagnostic enough to be mentioned separately (Altaweel 2006: 157; 2007: 118).

The fact that Tukultī-Ninurta I built such a temple in his new city may betray an actual desire to abandon nearby Aššur and to settle there.

Various scholars have stressed the importance of the foundation of an imperial capital in the consolidation of empires, *eg.*: as ‘an affirmation of power and charismatic identity by a specific ruler’ (Matthews 2003: 135). The ideological aspects of this creation are so predominant that we cannot easily understand what the role of this city might have been in the general administrative system of the state, even if *bēl pāhete* are attested (Jakob 2003: 114). One of the most important advances of the excavations conducted by Reinhard Dittmann in the 1980s, was that Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta was not abandoned after its founder’s tragic death but remained occupied until the Neo Assyrian period (Dittmann 1990; Bastert and Dittmann 1995).

For various reasons, Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta is the most well-known of the royal creations, but it is not the only city founded by a king in the Middle Assyrian period. That Tukultī-Ninurta’s father preceded him with the erection of Kalhu we learn only through the Annals of Aššurnāširpal II (Grayson 1991: 227 (RIMA 2, A.O. 101.2)). The archaeological remains of the Middle Assyrian occupation are very scant (see Tenu 2009: 91 with bibliography), and from an archaeological point of view, evidence is too limited to infer a possible ‘royal’ status of the city, but in texts Kalhu seems to be a town like any other, even if it was a provincial capital of some importance (Postgate and Reade 1980: 320). Why did Shalmaneser I build a new city in this area? Although, he never mentioned this foundation among his own achievements, this creation was maybe not a matter of prestige, but might have been linked to geostrategic or economic needs.

The other important site we may think about is Dūr-Katlimmu (modern Tell Sheikh Hamad). The city was not in itself a true ‘new creation’ because a Mittani occupation has been found in the sector of the Building P Room C (Kühne 1990: 157). However, even if remains from the Mittani period are documented, it is clear that the city became far more important in the Middle Assyrian time than before, when chosen by Shalmaneser I to be the seat of the Grand Vizier, King of Hanigalbat.³ The city was ruled by a *bēl pāhete* (Jakob 2003: 113), but its place in the administrative structure of the Empire is far more significant, because it controlled the western part of the Empire.

Beside these city creations, which may have been exceptional, we also have many instances of ‘normal’ new sites. In tablets there appear a lot of new toponyms, which were probably integrated in the Assyrian administration. However, because their location is often unknown, we cannot establish whether they designate new towns or whether they are only new names for already existent settlements.

Although we have limited information to study the administrative division of the previous Mittani core region, new settlements seem rather rare there. The best example of a new foundation is certainly Tell Amuda, where archaeological and textual data provide a similar picture. The name of the site, Kulišhinaš, is not attested in the Mittani documentation, and no level prior to the Middle Assyrian period has been found there (Bunnens and Roobaert-Bunnens 1988; Faivre 1992). The thickness of the Middle Assyrian deposits as well as the discovery of large walls belonging to substantial buildings confirm the importance of this city which was a provincial capital.⁴ This case is almost unique, and Daisuke Shibata (2012: 496), on the basis of a text found at Tell Taban, has now expressed doubts concerning the identification of Kulišhinaš with Tell

³ The literature concerning the place of Dūr-Katlimmu in the Assyrian Empire is too vast to be wholly quoted: see *inter alia* Cancik-Kirschbaum (1996; 2000), and H. Kühne (1994; 1995; 2000; 2009; 2013; this volume).

⁴ Texts supposedly from Kulišhinaš have been published by Aynard and Durand (1980) and by Machinist (1982). Its name is mentioned in different administrative texts from Aššur and Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta (Weidner 1935-1936: 41; Freydank 1982: 26; 2001: 26; 2004: 15; 2005: 13; 2006: 15; Freydank and Feller 2010: 13; Prechel and Freydank 2011: 13).

Amuda. Thus data pertaining to new cities erected to be provincial capitals is rather meagre, and we may wonder in what extent Kalhu constitutes a special case. It is also possible that this observation, that we have little evidence for new provincial capitals, is a function of the nature of written and archaeological sources which do not facilitate comparisons.

5.3 Small (fortified) Sites and *Dunnu*

Beside major cities, villages and smaller sites – sometimes fortified – were also founded and even if they were maybe far less important in the administrative fabric they however had a significant role to play in the control of territory. These settlements present differences in their shape, in their location but also in their functions. Some belong to the administrative category of *dunnu*. The best known is Tell Sabi Abyad, which was strongly fortified: a large wall defended the top of the tell, where a tower stood (Akkermans 2006: 203; Akkermans and Wiggermann, this volume). However, as Andreas Schachner has recently recalled after the excavations at Giricano the term *dunnu* designated only an administrative class, which cannot be associated with a special kind of settlement (Schachner 2004: 5). Some were mainly devoted to agricultural production: Tell Sabi Abyad according to Frans Wiggermann (2000: 172); or Giricano (ancient Dunnu-ša-Uzibi) where important pits intended for crops storage were excavated (Schachner 2002; 2004). Other small settlements were rather outposts controlling margins or roads.

The most well-known road station is Tell Umm Aqrebe, a site discovered during the *Wadi Agig Survey* in the 1980s. No excavations took place after this first reconnaissance so the actual shape and town planning of the site remain unclear, but the significant quantity of pottery as well as its typology combined with its location indicate that it was very likely a road station on the route between Aššur and Dūr Katlimmu. The existence of similar sites evenly spaced out along the road has been assumed by Reinhard Bernbeck and Peter Pfälzner (1994) from the original idea of Hartmut Kühne published in the *Festschrift Bittel* in 1983. Recently we proposed with Juan Luis Montero Fenollós and Francisco Caramelo (Tenu *et al.*, in press) the route continued towards west to Tuttul, Tell Fray and Emar via Qabr Abu al-‘Atiq. The latter site has first been identified by Berthold Einwag, Kai Kohlmeyer and Adelheid Otto in the 1990s (1995: 102). It has been excavated between 2008 and 2010 by a team led by Juan Luis Montero Fenollós (Montero Fenollós *et al.* 2009; 2010; 2011). The Middle Assyrian building has been discovered on the top of a small hill more than 3 m high, measuring 58 m x 45 m. Only 5 rooms have been partly unearthed, they have yielded the complete Middle Assyrian ‘official’ assemblage and two tablets, one of which dated to Abattu son of Adad-šumu-lēšir: the eponym the 11th year of Tukultī-Ninurta I. The building has been violently destroyed by a fire after this date. Because of the limited size of the settlement which is reminiscent of the *dunnu* of Tell Sabi Abyad (*ca.* 60 m x 60 m) and of the dimensions of the rooms which are very similar to those of the Building P of Dūr-Katlimmu, Montero Fenollós proposed Tell Qabr Abu al-‘Atiq may have been a *dunnu* built and owned by a high ranking official of Dur Katlimmu (Montero Fenollós *et al.* 2011: 270; Tenu *et al.* 2012: 148). Several *dunnu* (Tell Sabi Abyad and Dunnu-Aššur for instance)⁵ were given by the king to his dignitaries certainly to increase their revenues, and to secure and reward their loyalty. Directly after the conquest of the Upper Tigris Valley, a man called Uzibi received from Shalmaneser I a *dunnu* which was named after him (Dunnu-ša-Uzibi) (Radner 2004: 70-1). Agricultural land management seems to be the main activity of the *dunnu*, but the location of Tell Qabr Abu al-‘Atiq in an area ill-suited for farming might suggest that *dunnu* could also have been erected solely for military or security reasons.

The quadrangular fortress of Haradu (modern Khirbet ed-Diniyeh), explored by Christine Kepinski between 1981 and 1985, differs considerably. It was erected on the remains of the

⁵ Tell Sabi Abyad was the property of the *sukkalu rabiu* (Wiggermann 2000: 172) and Šîn-mudammīq writes about Dunni-Aššur as his *dunnu* (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 95-7).

previous Old Babylonian city, deserted around 1629 BC. In its last stage the enclosure wall was 150 m square, more than 30 m thick, and in places stood 4 m high (Kepinski 2009; 2012). The space delimited by the rampart remained free of structures, and might have been intended to accommodate tents, and temporary camps. Haradu belongs to a net of military sites mostly occupied during the first centuries of the first millennium BC, but which dated back to the end of the second millennium BC. It is constituted by different types of settlements: strongholds, citadels, small forts, watch towers, fortresses, and temporary tents camps (Tenu 2008). Haradu may have been one of the first fortresses of this area built at the very end of the 13th century or more probably at the beginning of the 12th century BC during the reign of Aššur-dān I, as suggested by the two tablets found there (Clancier 2012) and by mentions of campaigns attributed to this king against Karduniaš, Suhu and Mari (Tenu and Clancier 2012: 249-50; Tenu, in press).

We might add to these sites located in the Middle Euphrates Valley Tell Hariri es-Srir explored by Jean-Claude Margueron in 1979. It is a huge mass of mud, still 8 m high, found against the rampart but not connected to it (Margueron 1982: 29-30; 2004: 536). Almost no sherd was found but about 50 sling bullets. Margueron suggested it might have been the supporting terrace of a Middle Assyrian stronghold measuring 50 m square, and Montero Fenollós proposed recently it could have been the location of a *dunnu*, similar in size to those of Tell Sabi Abyad or Tell Qabr Abu al-‘Atiq which controlled the Euphrates and the cliffs of Baghuz (Montero Fenollós *et al.* 2011: 271; Tenu *et al.* 2012: 148). Hints to reconstruct such a fortress may also be found in the people buried in the graves discovered elsewhere on the site. Indeed the presence of two bowmen among them is related, according to Montero Fenollós (2004: 17), to the military presence of Assyria in the Middle Euphrates valley.

Tell Qabr Abu al-‘Atiq, Tell Hariri es-Srir, Khirbet ed-Diniyeh and other fortresses downstream were certainly built to control both the roads and the Euphrates frontier. They were also likely nodes of dominion where tax and tribute were collected. The possible similarities we may identify in their shape, their dimensions or their location do not necessarily reflect a similar ‘administrative’ status, or a similar type of occupation. On the contrary Tell Qabr Abu al-‘Atiq and Khirbet ed-Diniyeh, for instance, are very different especially when considering the material culture. At Tell Qabr Abu al-‘Atiq, the pottery belongs wholly to the Assyrian official corpus (Montero Fenollós *et al.* 2011: 271) whereas at Khirbet ed-Diniyeh the material culture is marked by the continuity of local traditions in which Babylonian influence remains significant. More precisely, standard shapes of Assyrian pottery are rare at this site, some standard bottles were found but carinated bowls and cups were almost completely absent (Tenu 2012: 104-5). However in one functional class Assyrian shapes massively predominate: goblets are indeed clearly related to the Assyrian corpus. This fact is meaningful because it may reveal that Assyrian social behaviour may have been widely adopted by local elites who played a central role in the Assyrian hegemonic practices. They swore loyalty to the Assyrian king and ruled in his name. Even if the reasons why the Assyrians built fortresses in the Euphrates valley may have been very similar, the way they occupied them differed and certainly depended widely on the situation they encountered locally.⁶

The ancient name and the administrative status of Qabr Abu al-‘Atiq are as-yet unknown. The belonging of the site to the *dunnu* category remains thus hypothetical, but Montero Fenollós’s arguments are very convincing: the dimensions of the building newly founded, the similarity with the rooms of Building P in Tell Sheikh Hamad, and I would add the complete Middle Assyrian assemblage which is unique so far away from Aššur. The situation of Khirbet ed-Diniyeh is different. Until recently the name of the site, Haradu (and its different spellings), was only attested in the Old Babylonian (Joannès 2006) and in the Neo-Assyrian texts (Grayson 1991: 175), but not in written sources dated to the second part of the second millennium BC. A royal inscription of the

⁶ A more detailed presentation of these aspects has been given in Tenu *et al.* 2012; Tenu, in press.

reign of Tiglat-pileser I now fills the gap: the town was conquered by the king on his return from the campaign he conducted in Babylonia (Frame 2011: 131-9). In this text, Haradu is mentioned as a city of the land of Sūhu, without any reference to its administrative status, and we cannot definitely infer it from this sole attestation. Usually *dunnu*s are named after a person, and subsequently their names are easily identifiable. This argument is relevant to the consideration whether Haradu was a *dunnu*, which it might not have been despite its fortified character. The material culture, which reflects multiple influences in a widely non-Assyrian context, may also be additional evidence.

5.4 Discussion and Conclusion

Understanding the Assyrian domination in their territories raises several methodological difficulties. The identification of the Assyrian sites is still closely linked to the presence of the shapes of the standard corpus of the Middle Assyrian pottery dated to between the 13th century to the first part of the 11th century BC, and the available data often precludes relevant comparisons between Mittani and Assyrian territorial organization. Further, textual sources do not always shed light on aspects documented by archeological evidence and *vice versa*, and as a result combining both approaches is rarely possible.

Notwithstanding these limitations changes in settlement patterns are discernible in the Middle Assyrian Empire which suggest complex and intricate developments. Indeed the material consequences of the Middle Assyrian Empire are various, and do not depend systematically on the administrative status of the site. For instance, in Tuttul (modern Tell Bia) which was ruled by a *bēl pāhete* not a single Assyrian sherd has been found as-yet (Tenu *et al.* 2012: 146 with bibliography), and on the contrary at Tābetu (Tell Taban) which was officially a vassal kingdom governed by the King of the Land of Mari, the complete assemblage of the material culture is Assyrian.⁷ Thus, the status and the function of the site in the Assyrian network did not necessarily involve a specific type of material culture. They reflect the various strategies Assyrians employed to impose and maintain their domination.

The yoke of Aššur has been mainly conceived in an administrative framework, based on a provincial division of Assyria, and the image we have of the Assyrian rule is closely linked to this provincial administration. But this appraisal of Assyria organised in a binary structure in which the core divided in provinces was surrounded by vassal states is now challenged by a large array of new data. Hegemonic practices of the Assyrian empire are not limited to a single form of domination and exploitation. Different strategies were used to adapt to local condition, which varied greatly

The role of new fortified sites is not unequivocal because only a few of them are known but they probably were of great significance in the territorial organization. This was certainly the case for the transformation of key Mittani cities into provincial capitals, and the erection of Dūr-Katlimmu as a supra regional centre. The transformation of an already existing Mittani urban structure suggests a well-thought-out plan intended to impose Assyrian rule over the new territories as quickly and efficiently as possible. The implementation of this territorial organization certainly took time but different hints indicate that the reign of Shalmaneser I was crucial. Jaume Llop (2011: 602-3) argues that the creation of the Middle Assyrian provinces is not older than the 13th century BC, and takes place during the reigns of Adad-nārārī I or Shalmaneser I. Shalmaneser I also erected Kalhu as a new provincial seat and Dūr-Katlimmu as the ‘western capital’ of the Empire. The building of *dunnu* in the Balikh area, near Fekheriye, and in the Upper Tigris Valley, perhaps dated back to his reign too.

⁷ For the presentation of the archaeological data, see Tenu (2009: 120-29). For textual evidence see Shibata, this volume.

Whatever the date, and the concrete conditions of these achievements, the Assyrian system was apparently efficient because it allowed them, even if they were not very numerous, to control vast regions, sometimes remote from Assyria. To gain and consolidate the rule of Aššur, the Assyrians privileged realism and pragmatism. The diversity of the strategies used is in fact not that surprising because they reflect the different aspects of the imperial domination: Assyrians needed to occupy, to hold, to control, to develop, and to defend the territorial state they conquered. This complexity, observed even within the core of Assyria, makes it difficult to use of general models of empires (Sinopoli 1994: 160) to explain and classify Assyrian imperial organization and demonstrate the value of detailed and comparative studies.

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