

Subartu

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Textes réunis par
Olivier ROUAULT et Markus WÄFLER

LA DJÉZIRÉ ET L'EUPHRATE SYRIENS
DE LA PROTOHISTOIRE À LA FIN DU II^e MILLÉNAIRE AV. J.-C.
TENDANCES DANS L'INTERPRÉTATION HISTORIQUE
DES DONNÉES NOUVELLES



BREPOLS

(2000)

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Dūr-katlimmu and the Middle-Assyrian Empire

Hartmut Kühne

1. Scope

The aim of this paper is to deal with the geopolitical position and significance of Dūr-katlimmu in the middle-Assyrian empire of the 13th century BC with an outlook on the 12th and the 11th century. It may be remembered that the cuneiform sources mentioning and dealing with Dūr-katlimmu in the 13th cent. BC are supplied by Dūr-katlimmu itself and not - as could be expected - by Aššur. Most recently Dūr-katlimmu is also mentioned in the middle-Assyrian archive of Tall Ḥuwēra (pers. com. by W. Orthmann and C. Kühne). The oldest text outside of this framework dealing with Dūr-katlimmu is the 'broken obelisk' from Niniveh which is to be dated to the end of the middle-Assyrian empire, to the time of Aššur-bēl-kala.

The tablets were discovered in modern Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad and allowed this site to be identified with Dūr-katlimmu (Kühne 1974-77; Röllig 1978). The archive consists of about 550 units, mostly lists of goods and animals, receipts, contracts and the like (Röllig 1984), all dated by numerous limus to the kings Tukulti-Ninurta I. and Salmanassar I (Freydank 1991: 40-43). Historically most elucidating are a group of about 35 letters which have been dealt with by Eva Cancik (1994) in a PhD-dissertation.

The findspot of the archive, room A in building P (fig. 1) is to be identified most probably with a wing of the middle-Assyrian palace mentioned in the tablets as the residence of a governor, a *bēl paḫēte*. Thus, Dūr-katlimmu has been the center of a larger administrative unit, a *paḫūtu*. Other *paḫūtu* called units of the middle-Assyrian empire are Amasakku, Naḫur, Šuduḫu and Ta'idu (Nashef 1982, 1983; Postgate 1985). A bit doubtful and in any case belonging to the late middle-Assyrian empire of the 12th to the 11th cent. BC are Šadikanni and Qatni (Millard 1970).

In addition to this basic information, the letters provide an idea of a more central function of Dūr-katlimmu. One of them is a royal letter, sent by the king Tukulti-Ninurta I and addressed to a certain Aššur-idin. In other texts of the archive this man's title is mentioned: he is called a *sukallu rabū*. As an addressee of a number of letters by officials of the western empire, he must have resided in Dūr-katlimmu at least for a certain period of time. Another *sukallu rabū* recorded in the archive is Šulmanu-muṣabši, but he does not seem to have resided in Dūr-katlimmu. This man is now reported in the middle-Assyrian archive of Tall Ḥuwēra, too, which can be identified with the ancient town of Ḥarbe, also mentioned in the archive of Dūr-katlimmu (pers. com. W. Orthmann / C. Kühne).

2. Some geographical considerations

The heartland of Assyria (fig. 2) is but a small entity. To the southeast, towards Babylonia, two natural barriers, the Ḥamrin mountain chain and the lower Zab, and to the north and the northeast another natural barrier, the Zagros mountains, mark its borders. From the Babylonian point of view, Aššur was the gateway to the north, to Subartu or to the land of Aššur (Hallo 1971: 114). To the west, the heartland of Assyria is flanking the flat tableland of the steppe or Ḡazira, and in the northwest it is touching the slopes of the Singar mountains.

Thus the heartland of Assyria is receiving the shape of a heart, its point being the capital Aššur. It is perhaps of some significance that its western borderline is about matching the line of the dry-farming-belt. However, the steppe like landscape of the western heartland continues to the west, the first natural barrier in the west being the perennial stream of the Ḥabur, more exactly the lower part of it.

From a geographical point of view, the Ḡazira is a uniform landscape extending from the Tigris in the east to the Euphrates in the west and south. In the north it is ultimately limited by the rising slopes of the Taurus mountains but already undulated by the low mountain chains of the Ḡabal Singar and the Ḡabal 'Abd al-'Azīz. This tableland is divided by two perennial streams, the Ḥabur and the Baliḫ, into three sections, the eastern one, the middle one between the two tributaries, and the western one. Further more, the dry-farming-belt is cutting the region into two parts, one in the north and the other one in the south. The dividing line is the 200 mm isohyet which is usually associated with the dry-farming-belt. This line is extending south of the Ḡabal Singar and the Ḡabal 'Abd al-'Azīz. The northern part is receiving enough precipitation to allow dry-farming and is thereby favouring a sedentary way of life. The southern part is

getting less than 200 mm per annum and is allowing only stockbreeding, thus favouring a nomadic or transhumant way of life. In reality the dividing line is a broad strip of risky economic conditions for dry farming depending on the right moment of rainfall when the crops are needing it. Therefore, irrigation is a major device even in dry-farming-areas to guarantee a harvest (Ergenzinger et al. 1988; Ergenzinger - Kühne 1991).

The capital Aššur is the only one of the four Assyrian capitals situated on the west bank of the Tigris; it is also by far the smallest, covering only 70 hectares. Leaving aside the old-Assyrian residence of Šamši-Adad I. in Šubat Enlil, modern Tall Leilan, the new capitals and residences were all founded on the eastern bank of the Tigris, beginning in middle-Assyrian times with the foundation of Kalḫu/Nimrud and Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta. This policy continued in neo-Assyrian times with the refoundation of Kalḫu, the new foundation of Dūr-Šarrukin and the refoundation of Niniveh (Kühne 1994).

The explanations for this development have been various, ranging from the excentricism of Tukulti-Ninurta I to Aššurnāṣirpal II's passion for splendour and expression of his ideology of kingship. On the whole, they do not satisfy. An ecological argument has rarely been discussed: the water supplies and the problem of subsistence of the old capital of Aššur.

The geo-climatical position of Aššur quite clearly is a critical one. Its hinterland is consisting of a small area at the edge of the dry-farming-belt, being part of the risky zone described above. For an urban population to subsist upon its harvests alone would be more than hazardous. This may explain why provincial centers like Dūr-katlimmu were liable to grainrates, which were devoted to the god of Aššur but needed for subsistence. It seems that water was difficult to be drained off the Tigris for irrigation purposes - no canal system was as yet discovered. Further more, since the city of Aššur was situated on a natural spur, water had to be lifted to be used in the city; in lack of any more sophisticated lifting devices, this means that it had to be carried to the palaces, temples, and houses. In contrast to these unfavourable conditions, the other capitals were well situated in the dry-farming-zone, and water was drained off from the Zagros mountains and was lead, following the rules of gravitation, right into the palaces, temples, and houses. As is well known, Sanherib is boasting of having irrigated and created the gardens of Niniveh, and he is best known of all of the Assyrian kings to have supported water engineering. But it seems that the Assyrian kings were concerned seriously about this problem ever since the middle-Assyrian period (Simonet 1977; Ergenzinger - Kühne 1991).

One may ask why Aššur was founded on this unfavourable geographical spot. Originally, it did have a significant position controlling the trade route to and from Anatolia and Babylonia. "By nature, Aššur was an exposed road station ..." as David Oates put it in 1972: 802. Once the Assyrians tried to extend to a territorial power, starting as early as the old-Assyrian period, Aššur lost this significance, but was not able to meet the needs of a capital. But since it was the germ cell of the Assyrians no king dared to deprive it of its traditional rights. Thus it became part of the ideology of the empire, sanctifying and glorifying the provenance of the Assyrians, it became a sacred city (Lambert 1983: 85-86).

Finally, it is important to evaluate the relation of the Assyrian capitals and the steppe. Aššur, being the only capital situated on the west bank of the Tigris, is by far the most exposed one. Its natural hinterland was the worse part of the steppe with little farming, little water, and frequented by not always peaceful nomads. Yet, it had a rich vegetation of dwarf-shrublands of the type *Artemisietea herbae-albae* mesopotamica providing the habitat for an equally rich fauna of lions, elephants, and numerous gazelles (Frey - Kürschner 1991, Becker 1991). As mentioned above, the first natural barrier limiting this hinterland was the lower Ḫabur, about 230 kilometers west of Aššur. The other capitals were situated east of the Tigris in rain fed agriculture land, so that they did not have any immediate contact to the Ḫazira-steppe. Their geo-political flank were the Zagros mountains, they were threatened by any enemy living there. History shows that it was this region where the final enemy came from to sack the Assyrian capitals.

3. Dūr-katlimmu and Aššur

Dūr-katlimmu and Aššur are commonly situated on about the same latitude (fig. 2). The geo-climatical situation of Dūr-katlimmu is definitely worse than that of Aššur. Dūr-katlimmu is situated almost 100 kilometers south of the dry-farming-belt. Its subsistence is entirely relying on irrigation. Even considering the oscillating conditions of the climate, Dūr-katlimmu would never move into the range of the dry-farming-belt and never has done so in the late Holocene (Gremmen - Bottema 1991).

Similar to Aššur, Dūr-katlimmu is situated alongside a perennial stream. But in contrast to Aššur, there is no major traffic or trade route, which could have been the subject of control or of levying taxes, nor does the geographical position offer any obvious strategic advantage. What then were the reasons for the middle-Assyrian kings to upgrade Dūr-katlimmu to a provincial center with the seat of a *bēl paḫēte*?

First, it seems to be of some relevance, that the middle-Assyrian kings were still residing in Aššur. The conditions and problems of the Ġazira-steppe must have been a matter of major concern to them. From this geo-political position it seems natural, that any thought of expansion was directed westward - the east-Tigris-land was more remote for them. But to erect territorial control over this vast nomad's- and no man's-land was a major problem and required more than just military campaigning. It necessitated the establishment of permanence, administration, traffic routes, subsistence means, and to enact all this, funds had to be available and the central government had to be powerful.

There is no notification in the middle-Assyrian cuneiform sources that such a program of 'colonization' was laid out as a conscious political act towards the territorial control of the Ġazira. The question is however, whether expecting such an act is not asking in a wrong direction. In view of the above explained geo-climatic situation of Aššur, I suggest that it is to be understood rather and basically as a strategy of survival, if the policy of Aššur turns towards the west, and only later it becomes a conscious political act of expansion, then to be called Assyrian policy. The only answer to be expected from the texts may be an explanation of the administrative system which would allow certain conclusions on the intensity of the territorial coverage of it. However, the understanding of the administrative system is still creating problems, we are far from knowing what the exact status of a *bēl paḥēte* in the administrative hierarchy was and how large a territorium a *paḥūtu* could cover, how many of them there were in the 13th cent. BC, or - to bring it to the point - what the provincial system of the middle-Assyrian empire was like (Machinist 1982; Postgate 1992).

It seems though, that new archaeological evidence may shed some light on this problem by evaluating the relationship between the capital Aššur and the provincial center of Dūr-katlimmu. The steps taken by the central government to strengthen the position of Dūr-katlimmu significantly were the following:

1. Dūr-katlimmu became the center of a *paḥūtu* (Röllig 1978: 428).
2. Dūr-katlimmu became - at least temporarily - the center of far ranging political activities (Cancik 1994).
3. The economical situation of Dūr-katlimmu was stabilized considerably by the construction of a regional canal on the east bank of the Ḥabur (Ergenzinger - Kühne 1991).
4. Dūr-katlimmu was connected to the capital by a steppe route and by regular road stations (Pfälzner in Bernbeck 1994).

The archaeological evidence to be discussed here is the steppe route (fig. 2). Normally it is difficult to verify and to date traffic routes archaeologically (Wilkinson 1993). In the region of concern little archaeological activity can be mentioned. More over, scholars have been prejudice as to whether the steppe was penetrable, due to the lack of water and other supplies and the danger of wild animals. Consequently, historians rarely coped with the steppe south of the dry-farming-belt as an area of any political, economic or cultural significance more than being nomad's land. A recently published map (Roaf 1991: 140) is cutting out the area of concern from any political control by the middle-Assyrians thus implying that no direct connection could have existed between Aššur and Dūr-katlimmu.

One major archaeological activity to be mentioned here is the archaeological survey of the Wadi 'Aḡiḡ on Syrian territory. This was a joint venture of the mission of Tall Šēḡ Ḥamad and the *Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients* in 1983-84. A preliminary report was published by Peter Pfälzner (1984), the final publication by Reinhard Bernbeck (1994) has just appeared.

During this survey a middle-Assyrian site, Tall Umm 'Aqrēbe (fig. 3), was discovered, situated alongside the Wadi Umm 'Aqrēbe, a tributary of the Wadi 'Aḡiḡ, about 45 kilometers east of Tall Šēḡ Ḥamad, next to the Syrian/Iraqi border. A low tall of one quarter of a hectare is controlling - like a small citadel - a flat settlement of considerable dimensions of about 13 hectares. The pottery is adding functionally to the middle-Assyrian pottery from the archive building in Dūr-katlimmu so well that there must have been a dependency between the two sites (Pfälzner in Bernbeck 1993: 89 ff.). The significance of this site becomes obvious if its occupation area is compared with the administrative center of Dūr-katlimmu which was covering about 15 to 20 hectares then.

Of the 42 sites surveyed in the region, Tall Umm 'Aqrēbe is the only one occupied in the middle-Assyrian period. It is therefore definitely not functioning as a central place because no settlement system is connected with it. But being a permanent settlement in the middle of what is today virtually nothing it must have had a special function. Looking at the map, it becomes obvious that Tall Umm 'Aqrēbe is situated on a direct line between Dūr-katlimmu and Aššur. It ought to have functioned as a road station then!

Following a line which was laid out for a different period (Kühne 1983) Pfälzner (in Bernbeck 1993: 92 ff.) has now elaborated this suggestion for the middle-Assyrian period. By mapping wells and water-holes during the survey and using all the informations available from Iraqi maps he is able to

demonstrate that even today wells are lined up in a regular distance of about 40 kilometers which would confirm a reconstruction of a route connecting Dūr-katlimmu and Aššur. During the survey, the staff members were relying partially on this water; it is clean and clear, many times bitter in taste but in rare instances also sweet.

The historical geography is more difficult to deal with. Of the overall distance of 230 kilometers between Aššur and Dūr-katlimmu, the first étape to Tall Umm 'Aqrēbe, 45 km, is almost exactly one fifth of it. On the other end, the distance between Aššur and Ḥatra is about the same, 45 kilometers. Some texts of the 14th century from Aššur are indicating that the area of Ḥatra was occupied during this period (Nissen 1967: 116). As was mentioned above there is little archaeological evidence on the Iraqian side of the region. The only settlement of the late Bronze Age listed by the archaeological survey of Iraq in this region, Ḥirbat Dibšiya, is situated exactly at the end of the next fifth, or the next étape. The other two road stations are missing, possibly due to the lack of surveying, but wells are indicating their hypothetical positions.

There can be little doubt that such a traffic axis existed during the 13th century BC. If so, this would explain why Dūr-katlimmu became so important for the central government and why - on the other hand - its position had to be strengthened. Dūr-katlimmu was situated at the nearest point of the next natural barrier in the west of the capital Aššur, at the Ḥabur. A direct route connecting both places, with large stations alongside the road, gave territorial control to Aššur over the eastern third of the steppe. At the same time Dūr-katlimmu was supplying control over the lower Ḥabur which was elaborated by the construction of the canal, for the maintenance of which more centers in regular distance were necessary. Thus, Dūr-katlimmu became a strategic center, guarding the southern flank of the steppe towards the Euphrates, the population of which always has defended its independence and was difficult to control, and at the same time guarding the lower Ḥabur. The *paḥūtu* of Dūr-katlimmu in the 13th cent. BC may have comprised much the same territory as the later province of Rašappa, that is the steppe area between the southern flanks of the Singār mountains in the north, the Euphrates in the south, and the Ḥabur in the west.

It is tempting to summarize the evidence of the localization of the other known *paḥūtu* which formed the middle-Assyrian empire in the 13th cent. BC (fig. 2; for a different arrangement see the maps by Postgate 1985: 97 and 1992: 249). It seems at the moment that the *paḥūtu* of Dūr-katlimmu controlled most of the lower Ḥabur bordering in the north on the *paḥūtu* of Amasakku, Ta'idu, Šuduḥu, and Naḥur. The localization of these units has been disputed by Nashef (1982; 1983) and by Postgate (1985). Postgate has suggested that Ta'idu should be the southern most *paḥūtu*. It would therefore border the *paḥūtu* of Dūr-katlimmu if the above made assumption is correct. The itinerary of Dūr-katlimmu (Röllig 1983) is placing the city Ta'idu two marches away from Makrisi and on the bank of the Marirtu. I have argued (Kühne 1980) that Makrisi should be identified with Tall Hasaka; if - as Röllig suggests - the river Marirtu should be identified with the neo-Assyrian HAR.MIŠ and modern Ġaġġaġ, Ta'idu could be equated with Tall Ḥamīdiya, as was suggested by Wäfler (1992). In any case, Tall Brak would be too close to be identified with Ta'idu, as was suggested by Oates (1985: 169-172). Since Tall Ḥamīdiya is situated on the east bank of the Ġaġġaġ - as is Tall Barri/Kaḥat - I would suggest that the *paḥūtu* of Ta'idu is comprising most of the eastern most part of the Ḥabur triangle, the Ġaġġaġ possibly being its western border. Thus, the *paḥūtu* of Amasakku may extend from Hasaka to Nusaibin, including Tall Barri/Kaḥat (Postgate 1985: 98), covering an area between the Ġaġġaġ and about the Wadi Auwil, possibly including Marirtu in the south and Kulišhinaš in the north. The *paḥūtu* of Šuduḥu would have to be looked for west of it, since it is mentioned between Hurra and Waššukanni in the famous inscription of Adad-nirari I (Grayson 1987: 131). West of it, the *paḥūtu* of Naḥur has to be located since it is still associated with Waššukanni (Nashef 1982: 201). This is implying that Tall Fahariya should be identified with Waššukanni or Uššukanni, as it is called in the texts from Dūr-katlimmu. The position of the newly discovered middle-Assyrian settlement of Tall Ḥuwēra/Ḥarbe is important for two reasons: it could indicate another *paḥūtu* west of Naḥur, and it may be situated on an east-west route comparable to the neo-Assyrian *ḥarran šarri* (Kessler 1980, 235).

The situation is changing after the death of Tukulti-Ninurta I, that is in the 12th cent. BC. The central government was weakened; according to the pottery (Pfälzner in Bernbeck 1993: 80) the settlement of Tall Umm 'Aqrēbe and consequently the direct traffic route between Dūr-katlimmu and Aššur still functioned, but apparently lost its significance during the 12th century. It is suggested that only then other *paḥūtu* along the lower Ḥabur, north of Dūr-katlimmu, came into existence, the ones in Qatni and in Šadikanni (Millard 1970: 172-173). It seems that by the end of the 12th century the governors had become rather independent local rulers, calling themselves 'king', as is demonstrated in the texts from Tall Bderi (Maul 1992), and that the reerection of the middle-Assyrian empire under Tiglat-pileasar I was only a short interlude in reassessing local potentates to their original functions (Postgate 1985: 100-101). However, it seems to be evident also, that these local rulers continued to regard themselves as vassals of the Assyrian central government throughout these centuries (Kühne in press).

4. Dūr-katlimmu and the western part of the middle-Assyrian empire

As was mentioned above, Dūr-katlimmu was - temporarily - the seat of a *sukallu rabū*, called Aššur-idin, who is receiving letters and reports from most of the western part of the empire, including names like Tuttul, Carcemiš and Waššukanni. The details are discussed by E. Cancik (1994). It seems that it was some special event that made him stay here for some time. Apart of the actual occasion, the implication is that Dūr-katlimmu was a place fairly well accessible also from other parts of the empire.

The first direction would be from the north. Following the lower Ḥabur upstream, the lava fields of the vulcano Kaukab are requesting a decision whether to continue to the northeast or to the northwest. The northeastern route is confirmed by the middle-Assyrian itinerary from Dūr-katlimmu (Röllig 1983). A northwestern route is now indicated by the affinities which seem to emerge from the middle-Assyrian texts from Tall Ḥuwēra/Ḥarbe in comparison to the texts from Dūr-katlimmu.

A western route from Dūr-katlimmu would imply the continuation of the steppe route from Aššur. There are two indications that this reconstruction may be of some relevance. The first is the site of Tall Malḥat eḏ-Ḍērū (Kühne 1983), which is situated within the distance of a road station from Dūr-katlimmu. The site had a major occupation in the Early Bronze Age and belongs to the type of the "Kranzhügel". However, in contrast to other sites of this type, the occupation did not cease completely but apparently lingered on throughout the whole second millennium. The evidence for the Late Bronze Age is meager (Kühne 1983: 303 Abb. 3m) and needs to be reconfirmed, and nothing can be said about the size or type of a possible occupation. Additional evidence is the water, which is recorded even nowadays as being present in wells and sources.

The second indication is the middle-Assyrian archive of the 13th century BC which was found recently in Tall Sabi Abyad on the east bank of the Baliḥ (Akkermans 1993; pers. com. by P. Akkermans). This Assyrian settlement was a small center with depending hamlets like Ḥirbat aš-Šanaf (Bartl 1990) surrounding it. It was situated near the large east-west route, the later *ḥarran šarri* (Kessler 1980: 235). It could also have been one of the destinations of a steppe route itself. This steppe route would have to be reconstructed along the water resources. Leaving Tall Malḥat eḏ-Ḍērū to the west, three wells are situated within a distance of less than 50 kilometers (map 1945): 'Bīr Fannaḡina', turning northwest 'Bīr Boutmane', and continuing that direction and crossing the undulating hills of the Tual 'Abba, 'Bīr Qantari'. From there, the distance to Tall Sabi Abyad is about 25 kilometers. It may be of some interest that I have travelled this route in 1981 and saw the wells still functioning.

Somewhere west beyond the Baliḥ, the distribution of middle-Assyrian material culture ceased, as the pottery is demonstrating clearly. The Euphrates valley proper is characterized by a different material culture (Pfälzner in preparation). The middle-Assyrian sites of Tall Sabi Abyad and Ḥirbat aš-Šanaf are probably marking the western periphery of the territorial extension of the middle-Assyrian empire in the 13th century BC.

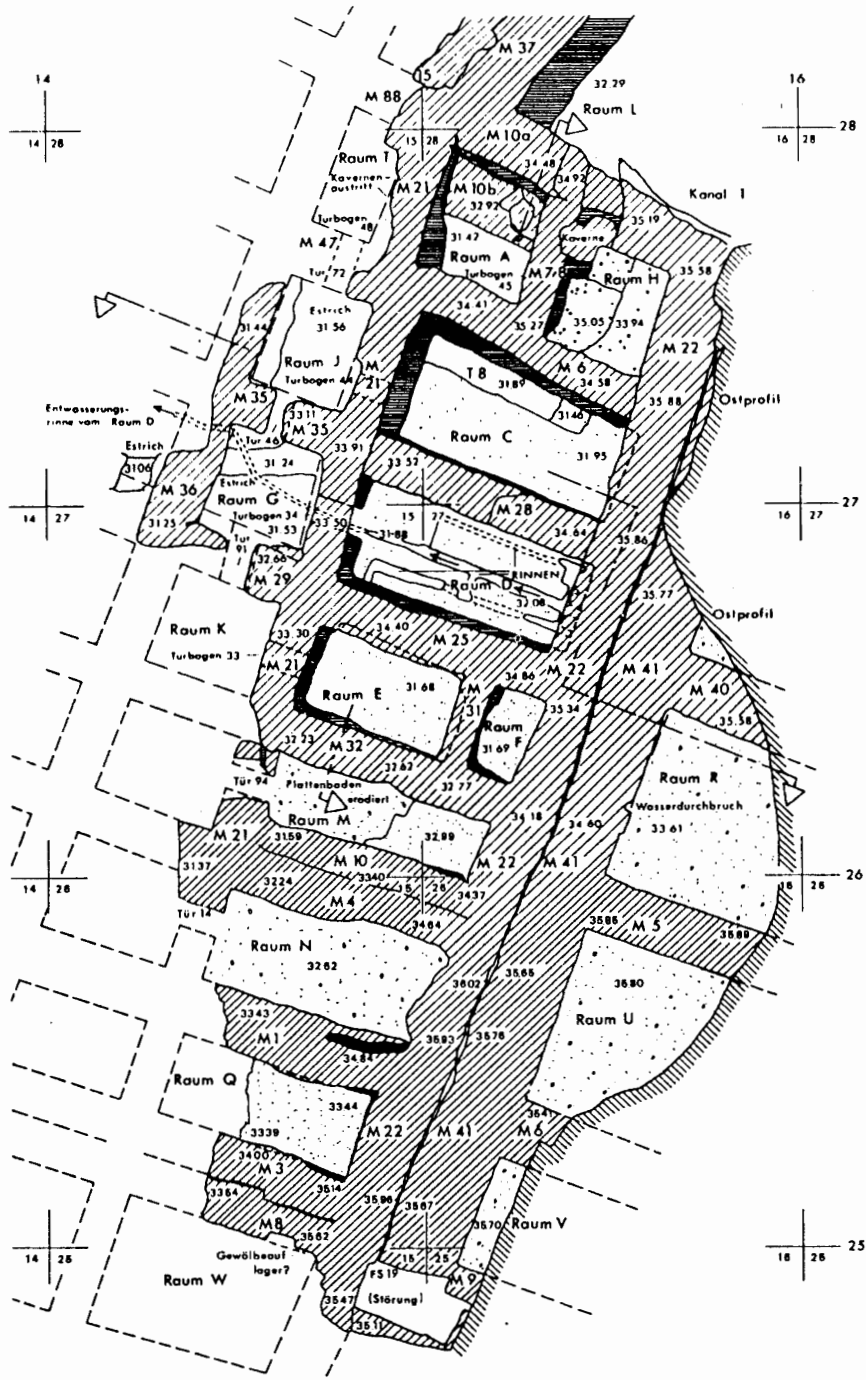
The middle-Assyrian empire was to a greater extent 'steppe bound' than historians so far realized. Since larger areas of it were unoccupied, it was to be controlled only by a well functioning communication system. The archaeological investigations of the Wadi 'Aḡiḡ region does seem to offer the first evidence of such a system, consisting of large road stations. On first glance, this seems to prove materially Liverani's (1988) idea of a 'network-empire'. But giving it a second thought, the idea of colonization and territorial occupation may have gained some ground already in sites like Tall Umm 'Aqrēbe and Tall Sabi Abyad. Within this system, Dūr-katlimmu was an important center of communication and at the same time it was guarding the southern flank of the middle-Assyrian empire.

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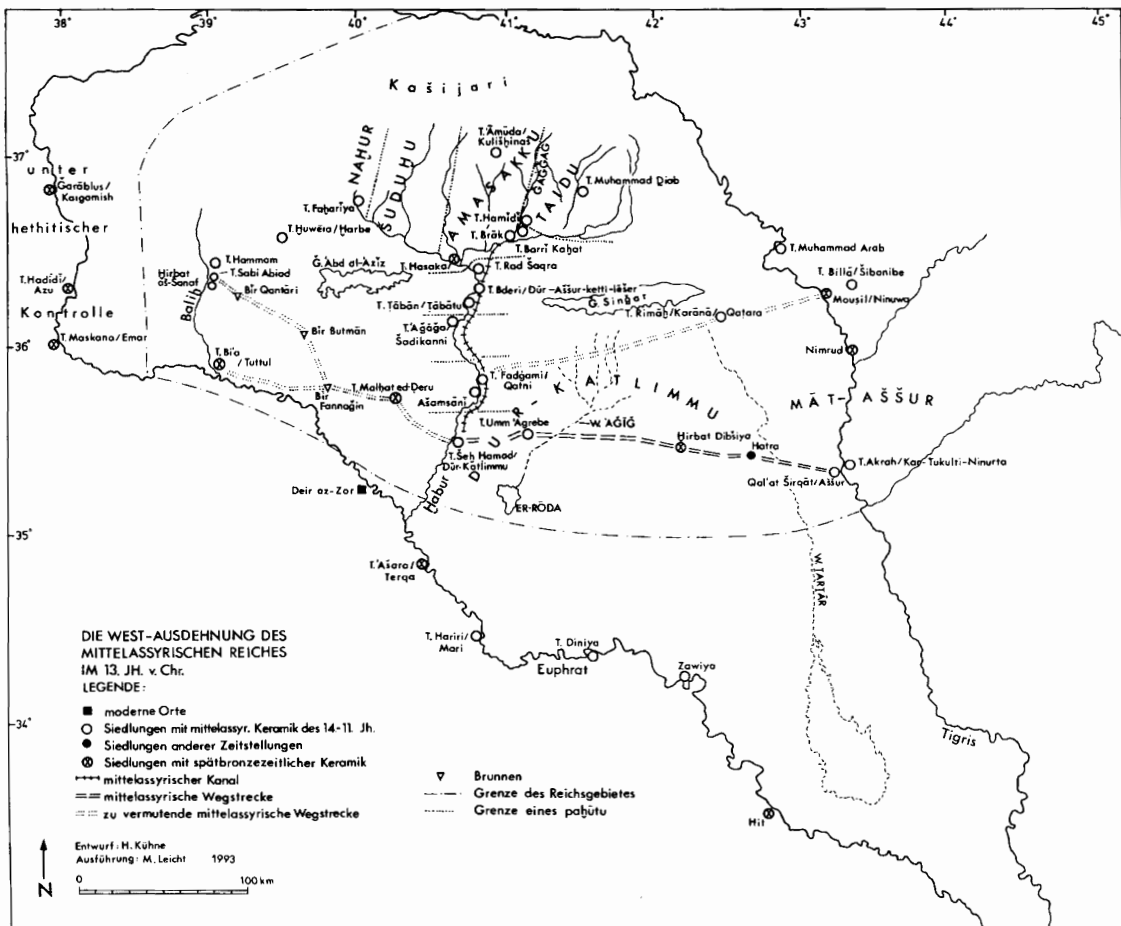
- GEWÖLBEREST
- LEHMZIEGELMAUER
- VERKIPPTLE LEHMZIEGELMAUER
- LEHMZIEGEL-PLATTEN-FUSSBODEN
- FULLMATERIAL

TALL ŠĚH ḤAMAD
 DŪR KATLIMMU
 GEBÄUDE P, SCHICHT 28
 AREALE 1529, 1527, 1525

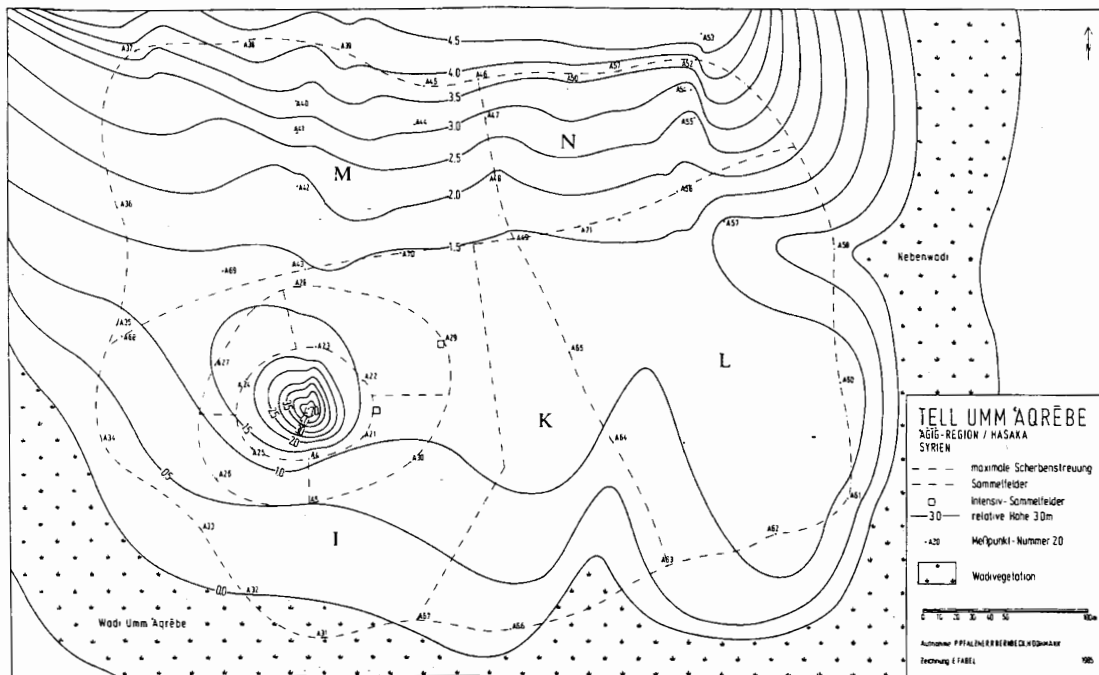


ZEICHNUNG: A. KREKELER, HANNOVER 1984
 J. WEIKER, BERLIN 1984

- Fig. 1: Building P.



- Fig. 2: General map.



- Fig. 3: Umm 'Aqrēbe.