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## Introduction

This volume presents the proceedings of an international workshop entitled *The Archaeology of the Upper Mesopotamian Piedmont in the Second Millennium BC*, which was held from 21 to 22 January 2010 within the framework of the Topoi Excellence Cluster at the Freie Universität Berlin. One of the main goals in organizing this workshop was to privilege discussions in which scholars could exchange and confront results of recent archaeological research in the upper Mesopotamian piedmont regions. When the outcomes of the discussion were summarized, the question of political space(s) arose as a central topic for almost all of the papers collected here. This introductory piece therefore has the two-fold aim of describing the background of archaeological research in the upper Mesopotamian piedmont and providing a starting point for further discussion of the creation of political space(s) in this area and beyond.

# The landscape

Visitors to the old city of Mardin, situated on the high ridge of the Tur Abdin Mountain in south-eastern Anatolia, are inevitably attracted to the spectacular views of the broad panorama of the upper Mesopotamian piedmont. They are enchanted by the abrupt changes in the landscape and realize that a new geographical horizon is opening before their very eyes. Here lies the gateway to Greater Mesopotamia, the millennia-old heartland of agriculture, cities, and political changes.

The scenic character of the upper Mesopotamian plain immediately south of the Tur Abdin/Mazı Dağı mountain range changes throughout the year: it is sprinkled with snow in winter, a lush green in spring, and finally a dusty yellow in summer. Climatic conditions in this area are very favourable for human life. Annual precipitation is usually sufficient to ensure agriculture without irrigation, and the many karst springs guarantee a year round supply of water. Several small tributaries emerging from these springs create the triangular-shaped catchment area of the upper Khabur (hence Khabur Triangle), which covers most of the eastern part of the upper Syrian Jazirah. This region is currently divided by the Turkish-Syrian border, but in the past it formed a single geographic zone in which one of the longest and most dynamic cultural sequences of the Ancient Near East developed.

When weather conditions are clear, the steep mountains of Tur Abdin/Mazı Dağı which form a distinct geographic barrier in the direction of the Anatolian highlands can be viewed from many mounds in the Khabur headwater region. From a Mesopotamian perspective, however, this mountain range has apparently never been perceived as the world's end. Instead, it was seen as an invitation to cross the border and explore the richness of resources hidden beyond. As early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC, Assyrian sources mention the Kašiyari Mountains – identical with the Tur Abdin – and provide a vivid glimpse of the efforts to gain access to this region (Radner 2006). One of the most convenient routes, still used today, runs along the Jaghjagh River and across the eastern slopes of the Tur Abdin, ultimately leading to the upper Tigris valley, which actually forms another piedmont zone sandwiched between the northern slopes of the Tur Abdin and the foothills of the eastern Tauros.

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The upper Tigris valley also offered good conditions for settlement. A narrow plain along the river held potential for agriculture on a regional scale. The foothills north and south of the valley, i.e., the ancient land of Šubria, were a perfect natural environment for the cultivation of fruit trees and viniculture, the hunting of wild animals, and animal breeding. Last but not least, both regions – the upper Tigris valley and the Khabur Triangle – were on the crossroads of the routes connecting the Anatolian mountains with the Mesopotamian plains. They were highly important for early trade networks and drew larger polities which aimed to extend their economic resources and political power.

## Political space(s)

The geostrategic importance of two key regions in the upper Mesopotamian piedmont leads us to the question of the political space(s) created therein. Essentially, during the second millennium BC, the regional developments in the upper Mesopotamian piedmont underwent rapid change due to the expansion of new territorial states. Changes in the political and social structures of the communities on both sites of the Tur Abdin/Mazı Dağı mountain range are apparent from texts, settlement patterns and material culture developments and attest to the activities of different polities in this area such as the Samsi-Addu Kingdom at the beginning of the second millennium, the Mittani state in the middle, and the Middle Assyrian state at the end.

However, historical records tend to be fuzzy and imprecise when they are used to identify the concrete limits of political spaces. A well-known example is the Middle Assyrian designation "Land of Ḥanigalbat" (mātḤanigalbat), apparently applied to those territories that were conquered within the Mittani realm in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but the geographical scope of this desigantion is hard to determine (Harrak 1987; Szuchman 2009). Although administrative texts found in the capital Assur and some provincial sites show that this huge western part of the 'empire' was organized into numerous districts (paḥutu), it is impossible to describe the size of the individual districts and their overall pattern in the landscape (Jacob 2003). As a result, two further approaches are required – one heuristic and the other empirical – in order to identify the political spaces in these distinct geographic areas. The methodology must take into account the archaeological data or 'hard facts' which primarily originate from the area under investigation.

To start with the heuristic approach, one important question is what distinguishes 'political space' from 'political landscape'. In *The Political Landscape* (2003) Adam T. Smith has cogently disentangled the oft-conflated concepts of space, place, and landscape. He defines landscape as a concept arising in the historically rooted production of ties that bind together spaces, places, and representations (Smith 2003, II). The 'political' within this concept is described as a set of relationships central to the production, maintenance, and overthrow of sovereign authority (*ibid.*). Hence, 'political' and 'landscape' mainly relate to each other in sociological terms. Within the concept of 'space', however, the meaning of the political lies in its specific forms of delimiting physical experience. Subjects are bound to the interests of political regimes through spatial relations that cannot be infinite but need to be framed by ideologies and their materializations (DeMarrais / Castillo / Earle 1996).

Political space is articulated in many different ways. It can be "characterized in terms of the actual patterns of provision of governance in areas of widespread interest and salience" (Jones 2002, 228). This has been termed the 'supply side' of political governance in which we locate any exercise of political

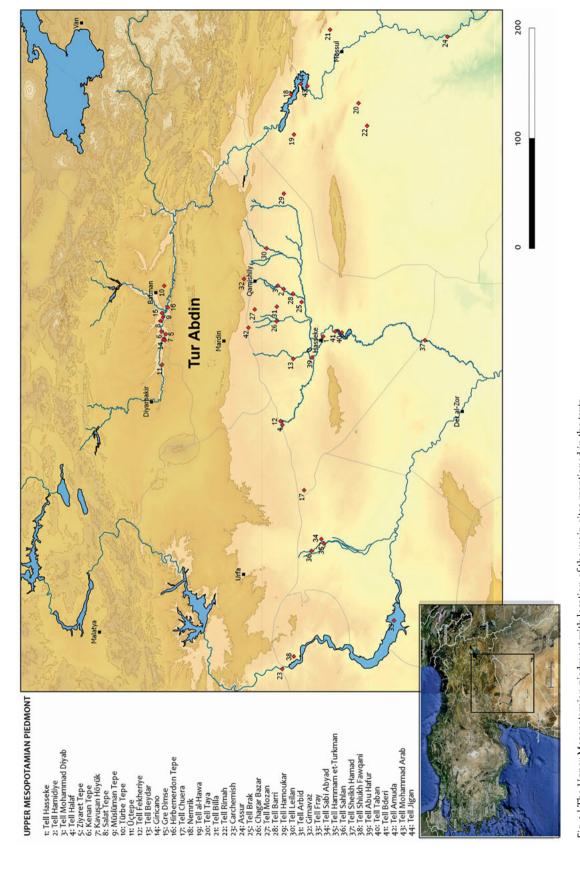


Fig. 1 | The Upper Mesopotamian piedmont with location of the main sites mentioned in the texts. (Base map: Nasa SRTM DEM, made in QGIS by Simone Bonzano, minmap base map: Google Earth).

power such as communication networks, technologies, and built environments. For archaeologists, it seems that the 'supply side' provides a good starting point for investigations into the structures of political governance in ancient civilizations. As for the analytic equation, the 'demand side' – which refers to patterns in the need forgovernance (*ibid.*) – is ultimately hard for archaeologists to identify. Furthermore, it should be stressed that political space need not necessarily be connected to the authority of a state since the existence of autonomous political space formed in the absence of a state is a rather common occurrence in the history of political space(s) (Dark 2002, 62–65). Hence the shifting relationships between politically active groups, geographic environments, and territories may provide another clue for understanding the formation of political space(s) in the past. What contribution can archaeology make to such an approach?

If one assumes that a political space can also be defined in a manner that acknowledges the close connection between politics and culture, archaeology indeed offers several possibilities for investigating the history of political space(s). Both cultural and politic expressions are always embedded in a complex web of time and context. Within this time-context web, political presence (manifestations) may become materialized in culture. This means that rituals and objects come to be associated with politically salient groups and their institutions. However, this process is rarely unilaterally or goal-directed. Political structures may shape the repertoire of cultural expressions but they are also influenced by the presence and sometimes by contingences in the diffusion of cultural traits and practices.

## Charting the archaeology of political space(s) in this volume

The eleven individual papers collected in this volume focus on settlement structures, developments in material culture, architecture, as well as written documents and environmental contexts. Various methodological approaches underpin the progress archaeologists made in analyzing and classifying these data, but also make clear the continuing difficulties we face in using them to draw historical inferences However, the approach definitively avoids a biased historical perspective based on which the targets and limits of political governance can be clearly defined. Instead, it asks to what extent the set of archaeological data reflect or point to the creation or re-creation of political space(s) within a particular geographical area, an area that exhibits very different patterns of governance throughout time. In this context, mapping political space in terms of patterns of governance entails understanding the ways in which politics, territoriality, and material culture relate to one another.

The editor is perfectly aware that due to the difficult nature of the archaeological data and the work still in progress at most of the sites presented in this book, most of the contributions are more concerned with setting out the prolegomena for such a discussion. However, since the reactions to the papers presented during the Topoi workshop in Berlin proved highly illuminating for an archaeological approach to the definition of political space, the editor decided to place this topic on the volume's agenda. The hope is that within the thematic and methodological framework of this book the potentials of archaeological data for reconstructing political space(s) will become visible and understandable for future research.

Two recent publications relate and, in a certain way, add to these goals. The first, entitled *Entre les fleuves* (Cancik-Kirschbaum / Ziegler 2009), is devoted to the historical geography of upper Mesopotamia in the second millennium BC. Above and beyond questions of localization and identification, the contributions in this book stress the aim of historical geography in describing space through the inter-

play of written sources, archaeological evidence and questions of environmental reconstructions as a constituent condition for culture. The second book by Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, Nicole Brisch and Jesper Eidem (2013), entitled *Constituent, Confederate, and Conquered Space: The Emergence of the Mittani State,* collects the papers of another Topoi workshop, which preceded the Piedmont workshop, and in doing so provides several stimuli for the discussion that is continued here.

The complementary yet still different view presented in this volume lies in the conscious choice of the question of political governance as applied to two distinct key regions in the geographically and culturally diverse landscape of upper Mesopotamia. Here, the concentration of current archaeological research has yielded substantial new evidence in the pursuit of an in-depth analysis of the relationship between geographic boundaries, the built environment, the material culture, and political governance. Thus this book offers for the first time a comprehensive comparative archaeological study of the piedmont regions north and south of the Tur Abdin. The geographic bipartition is reflected in the book's subdivision into two main sections dealing with the development and transformation of settlements and settlement systems – the one in the Khabur headwater region, the other in the upper Tigris valley. Both regions, however, testify to several cultural links during the period under consideration. Such links, for example, became clearly visible not only in the distribution of pottery types and styles, but also in the written sources, which suggest the great reach of political control. The third section, 'Across the Mountains', specifically addresses the validity of this kind of material for the reconstruction of supraregional developments or hegemonic perspectives.

The seven papers in section I of this collection offer us various perspectives onsettlement development in the Khabur headwater region during the second millennium BC. Rafał Koliński emphasizes the need for surveys of textual sources in order to identify settlements during the age of the Assyrian trade colonies. He attempts to correlate the textual with the archaeological data, the latter with an emphasis on the distribution of pottery styles in the early second millennium BC. This specific contribution to the question of political space is the author's holistic approach to the reconstruction of the communication routes that fostered the advent of the Samsī-Addu kingdom and other subsequent hegemonies in the upper Mesopotamian area.

The papers by Karlheinz Kessler and Andrzej Reiche confront us with totally different data from various built environments; however, both studies reflect the trends toward political integration in the mid-second millennium Mittani state. The recently discovered texts from Tell Hamdiye/Taidu, presented by Kessler, provide insights into the multilateral relations of this supposed capital, as well as its internal administration. The picture of far-reaching governmental influences which arises from this documentation can be compared to the account of rural Mittani settlements in Reiche's paper. In terms of their material culture and architecture, these sites show the mixture of standardized functional forms and diacritic elite markers – such as richly furnished graves – in a sphere of apparently restricted political control. The papers of Dominik Bonatz and Brian Browntake different approaches to defining structures of political governance during the late second millennium BC. Using the recent excavations at Tell Fekheriye as a case study, Bonatz reviews the transition from the Mittani to the Middle Assyrian period on the basis of architectural sequences as well as iconographic and textual sources. The internal restructuring and administrative processes that become visible through an in-depth analysis of these data are combined with external sources in order to clarify the picture of emerging and changing political spaces in this area. Whereas this paper is mainly about the outset of the Middle Assyrian state, Brown's contribution gives an account of the later part of the Middle Assyrian period. As in Bonatz's paper, one of his central concerns is also the definition of the Assyrian state. Settlement patterns and ceramic sequences

provide the starting point for a discussion about the political and cultural reach of the Middle Assyrian state apparatus.

The mechanisms of the Assyrian imperal expansion in upper Mesopotamia are also at issue in Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum's contribution. Arguing for a better understanding of the geopolitical landscape, her paper is addresses the problem of mapping out geo-referenced indications of governance structures transmitted within the textual record from the Middle Assyrian state administration. In confrontation with the archaeological evidence from excavations and surveys some methodological problems raised by the evidence, i.e., localization, functional contextualization, and interpretation of the Middle Assyrian settlements, are also discussed.

The three contributions in section II shift the focus to the upper Tigris region. Although otherwise quite different in emphasis, all signal the contingent, ever-fluid nature and significance of political space. Nicola Laneri's paper is the most theoretically oriented of the three. It argues for alternative models of political order such as those framed in the theories of 'heterarchic' societies. The author is mainly interested in the small-sized settlements of the Middle Bronze Age in the upper Tigris valley like Hirbemerdon Tepe, which were apparently organized in a heterarchical system of political and social relationships. This observation, as disputable as it might be, provides a heuristically interesting point of departure point for investigations into emerging urbanism and the impacts of expanding polities in the later part of the Middle Bronze Age and the subsequent Late Bronze Age. Indeed, the paper by Peter Bartl attempts to delimit the signs of urbanization in this area by comparing the evidence from two 'middle-sized' settlements: Giricano and Ziyaret Tepe. He includes environmental and subsistence issues in his analysis and thus reconstructs the patterns of small-scale autonomous polities before the advent of the Mittani and Middle Assyrian hegemony.

Salat Tepe is another significant and extensively excavated site in this area which has yielded a continuous architectural and ceramic sequence for the Middle Bronze Age. Tuba Ökse's account of this site and its environment takes a close look at the cultural patterns that arise from a distinct regional milieu. Changes in this pattern become visible during the Mittani period occupation at Salat Tepe but cannot be followed up, as the site was abandoned during the Middle Assyrian period.

As the political space became associated with the rise of new political powers in the upper Tigris region during the second half of the second millennium BC, settlement patterns and developments in material cultures underwent some significant changes. At sites like Üçtepe, Ziyaret Tepe, and Giricano, affiliations with the settlement systems south of the Tur Abdin were extremely strong in this period but towards its end already became diffused with new forms of local culture. At the workshop in Berlin, Andreas Schachner discussed how to seek out archaeologically hegemonic vs. regional patterns of governance during a period of intensified highland-lowland relations. His paper unfortunately could not be included in this volume but the basic evidence for discussion has already been published elsewhere (Schachner 2003).

Likewise, in section III, the contribution by Anacleto D'Agostino links the evidence of material culture and settlement patterns to the question of expanding territorial control. D'Agostino provides us with a comprehensive comparison of the archaeological sequences north and south of the Tur Abdin/Mazı Dağı mountain range during the second half of the second millennium BC. His attempt to describe different 'core-periphery' relationships by means of patterns of settlements and the composition of regional ceramic assemblages significantly adds to the interpretation of written documents from a number of administrative sites and in a way alters the picture of strict political control.

Dealing with the evidence of a single text from Tell Barri/Kahat, the contribution by Mirjo Salvini confronts us with a very specific perception of the wide reach of political dominion. While the author's

main concern is the chronological dating of this text, its subject – the hunt of the Assyrian king in the mountainous periphery of his realm – reflects on-going territorial claims at the end of the Middle Assyrian period. The apparent contradictions between this document and other archaeological sources that attest to the decline of Assyrian power in the region points to the subjectivity of ancient sources, which should always be evaluated in relation to the full set of archaeological data at hand.

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