

Tell Fekheriye in the Late Bronze Age: Archaeological Investigations into the Structures of Political Governance in the Upper Mesopotamian Piedmont

o. Introduction

After four seasons of intensive fieldwork the renewed excavations at Tell Fekheriye have yielded new archaeological, iconographic, and textual evidence which relates to two important phases in the history of the upper Mesopotamian piedmont: the end of the Mittani state and the beginnings and consolidation of the Middle Assyrian territorial state. This new material also contributes to ongoing discussions about the identification of Tell Fekheriye with the Mittani capital Waššukanni and the subsequent Middle Assyrian district center Aššukanni respectively.

Therefore, this article has two main objectives: one is to give some insight into the results from the recent excavations as far as the Late Bronze Age periods are concerned. The other is a first attempt to interpret these results in a broader geopolitical sense, and to investigate the structures of political governance which are materially manifested in the archaeological remains from Tell Fekheriye during these periods.

1. Landscape and environment

Tell Fekheriye lies on the southern fringe of the Syrian border town Ras al-'Ain at the western end of the Khabur River basin. Both, the modern town and its ancient counterpart have profited from their special hydro-geological location (fig. 1). The Arabic name Ras al-'Ain derives from the Akkadian *rēš ina'* and the Roman-Byzantine Rhesaina which of both mean 'the head of the spring' and refer to what is actually a natural phenomenon, the many spring-lakes in the surrounding area. The karst springs of Ras al-'Ain are among the largest in the world. Their water issues from seven springs immediately to the north and northeast of Tell Fekheriye and a further six springs only 1 km to the south.² Together, they combine to form the effective head of the Khabur. This river is the main eastern drainage for the water-basins lying south of the Karaçadağ – Tur Abdin line (in modern Turkey). Running eastwards it collects more water from minor tributaries or *wadis* before breaking to the south, now flowing along the eastern flanks of the Jabal 'Abd al-'Aziz to join the Euphrates. With this richness of surface water and an average precipitation of 400 mm, the area around Ras al-'Ain/Tell Fekheriye forms a highly fertile landscape with an im-

1 The term is first recorded in the Annals of Adad-nirari II (911–891 BC) which mention that the Assyrian king received the tribute of Abi-salāmu of Bīt-Baḥjani in 'Sikāni at the head of the of the spring of the Khabur', *Sikāni ša rēš ina Hābūr* (RIMA2, 153, A.O.99.2, 101–102).

2 Burdon and Safadi 1963, 58, fig. 3. The karst springs were still active until the 1960s when Burdon and Safadi carried out their hydro-geological study of the Ras al-

'Ain area. They calculated an average annual discharge of 1219 million m³. Thereafter, the increased use of pumps for the irrigation of cotton, vegetables, and other summer crops and the drainage of water to float the Tishrin Dam south of Hassa'ke have dramatically altered the picture. Today most of the karst springs are collapsed and the river bed of the Khabur near Tell Fekheriye has been completely dried up.



Fig. 1 | Aerial view of the Ras el-'Ain/Tell Fekheriye area with the headwater of the Khabur based on a CORONA satellite image from the 1960s. Note that the digital elevation of the landscape is slightly exaggerated in order to stress the geographical feature. The dotted line indicates the outlines of the Tell Fekheriye site.

mense potential for agriculture and stock farming. Therefore, it is not surprising that settlement at this place began very early in history.³

The continuance of water throughout the year and the impressive *scenario* at the karst springs must have shaped the early landscape giving Tell Fekheriye a numinous meaning. A center of religious cult probably already existed here in the late third millennium BC.⁴ Conclusive evidence for this cult is provided by the late 9th century bilingual inscription on the statue of Hadad-Yis'i found at Tell Fekheriye during construction work in 1979 (Abou-Assaf *et al.* 1982). The statue dedicated to the Aramaean storm-god Hadad (Adad in the Assyrian version of the inscription) in Sikāni, the name of the Aramaean/Neo-Assyrian settlement at Tell Fekheriye. An epithet of the storm god mentioned in line 16 of the Aramaic inscription and line 25 of the Akkadian inscription calls him 'Lord of the Khabur', making it clear that the power of the regional storm-god was associated with the source of the Khabur. It has been suggested that the Hadad of Sikāni may have been an Aramaean hypostasis of the Hurrian Tešsub of Waššukanni who is mentioned among other divine witnesses in the 14th century Šattiwaza treaty.⁵ The possible correlation of

3 Note also the nearby Tell Halaf only 2.5 km west of Tell Fekheriye. Tell Halaf is well known for its Halafian, i.e., Pottery Neolithic occupation while recent excavations at Tell Fekheriye confirm the existence of a Pre-Pottery Neolithic settlement at this site.

4 An Ur III period administrative text (Reschid 1971: no. 14,17) identifies Sikāni with the goddess of the Khabur (^dVaburitum Siganki) making it most plausible that the Sikāni of the late third millennium BC has to be located

at the same place as the Iron Age Sikāni, i.e., at Tell Fekheriye (Müller-Kessler / Kessler 1995, 240–241).

5 Dion 1985, 142. For translation of the Šattiwaza treaty (Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazkoi I) see Beckman 1996, 37–49. The 'storm-god, Lord of Waššukanni' is mentioned in § 14 and § 11 respectively of the two documents which together constitute a single diplomatic treaty between Šuppiluliuma I, Great King of Hatti, and Šattiwaza, King of Mittani.

both gods with each other would be another argument among many connecting the Mittani period Waššukanni with the Iron Age Sikāni at Tell Fekheriye. However, its importance as religious center is not yet mirrored in the finds from Late Bronze Age contexts at Tell Fekheriye although personal names bearing the storm-god as a theophoric element occur quite frequently in the local onomastic of the Middle Assyrian texts.⁶ Altogether it seems quite reasonable to infer that there was a long-running cult dedicated to the storm-god at Tell Fekheriye, and the persisting importance of this cult center is obviously rooted in the religious perception of its water-rich natural environment. Any political authority dealing with Tell Fekheriye or being properly based there would have been involved in the dynamics of a sacred landscape. Therefore, the religious-phenomenological background should be kept in mind for the archaeological reconstruction and the historical understanding of the settlement development at Tell Fekheriye.

2. Excavations and topography

The three previous archaeological operations at Tell Fekheriye were all short-lived: the American excavation under the direction of Calvin W. McEwan in 1940 (McEwan *et al.* 1958), Anton Moortgat's soundings in 1955 and 1956 (Moortgat 1956; 1957; 1959), and the joint Syrian-German project under the direction of 'Abd el-Masih Bagdo and Alexander Pruß in 2001 (Pruß / Bagdo 2002). Encouraged by the nevertheless important results of these excavations and based on the long-standing assumption that Tell Fekheriye ought to be identified with one of the major historical sites in northern Syria a new joint Syrian-German excavation project was launched there in 2005.⁷ That year an extensive geodetic survey of the mound was undertaken to update and amend the topographic plan, which was based on Max von Oppenheim's survey of the site in 1929. Four seasons of excavation followed in 2006, 2007, 2009, and 2010. These investigations confirm the significance of the site for the following periods: the Pre-Pottery Neolithic, the Late Bronze Age, the Early Iron Age, the Neo-Assyrian period, the Roman-Byzantine, and the early Islamic periods. Each of these periods is attested in the archaeological record of the current excavations.⁸ Their focus, however, lies in the Late Bronze Age periods (Mittani and Middle Assyrian) and the Late Bronze – Early Iron Age transition. As for the political history of the upper Mesopotamian piedmont these periods are not only the most relevant but also the most intriguing in our efforts to identify Tell Fekheriye with either Waššukanni/Aššukani or some other central place in the realm of the Mittani and Middle Assyrian polities.

In 2009–2010 the excavations have concentrated on the western slope of the main mound where layers that include Middle Assyrian architecture lay close to the modern surface (Areas C and D). There is no evidence for a Neo-Assyrian occupation in this area, which is instead well documented at the north-east corner of the site (see the topographical plan on fig. 2). Larger parts of a *būt ḫilāni* type Neo-Assyrian

6 Dion 1985, 142, referring to the texts published by Güterbock in the publication of the American excavations at Tell Fekheriye in 1940 (Güterbock in McEwan *et al.* 1958, 86–90).

7 The project of the Freie Universität Berlin and the Directorate of Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic is directed by the present author, professor of the Institute of Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology at the Freie Universität Berlin, and Dr. 'Abd al-Masih Bagdo, Director of the Department of Antiquities and Museums

in Hassaëke. It is under the kind sponsorship of the Director of Antiquities and Museums in Syria, Dr. Basam Jamous, and the Director of Excavation, Dr. Michelle al-Maqdissi. From 2006–2010 the fieldwork is carried out in collaboration with the Slovakian Archaeological and Historical Institute (SAHI) which also gives financial support to the project. Since 2009, it is generously sponsored by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

8 The preliminary results from the 2006 and 2007 excavations are published in Bonatz *et al.* 2008.



Fig. 2 | Topographical plan of the area of the upper mound at Tell Fekheriye.

‘palace’ were excavated there by the American team in 1940 (McEwan *et al.* 1958, 6–10, 20, pls. 6B–9, 22–23) and later partly reinvestigated by the excavations in 2001 (Pruß / Bagdo 2002, 314–318, figs. 2–3) and 2006 (Bonatz *et al.* 2008, 96–102, fig. 4). It is unclear why that apart from this monumental building and the aforementioned statue of Hadad-yis’i, the king of Guzana and appointed Assyrian governor, no other significant remains from this period have yet been found. The layout of the Neo-Assyrian town may therefore have been remarkably different from that of the Middle Assyrian period, since traces of this period can be recognized all over the main mound of Tell Fekheriye. This observation as well as the search for the temple of the storm-god, which has not yet been located, requires further investigation.

As for the current excavations the topographical situation on the western slope of the main mound and on the terrace at its foot provide good conditions for the investigation of the Late Bronze Age settlement, which in this part of site clearly exhibits features of an important administrative quarter for both the Mittani and Middle Assyrian periods. The area of the terrace is approximately 200 m in length and between 20 and 30 m in width. The modern surface runs along at an average height of 355.50 m a.s.l.

while the steep slopes to its east reach a maximum height of 363.40 m a.s.l. This sharp gradation of the terrain was reinforced by modern terracing in order to gain new fields for agriculture. The next gradation to the west was caused by the construction of the paved road which crosses the site from north (the direction of Ras al'Ain) to south. This road actually marks the border between the upper mound (*ca.* 12 ha) and the large lower mound or 'lower city' (*ca.* 78 ha) to its west. Three small soundings (F 1–3, see fig. 2) carried out in 2010 at the edge of the upper mound have demonstrated that the Byzantine buildings which were situated in this area were later flooded and consequently filled with thick alluvial deposits. Hence the bases of the Byzantine limestone walls today lie about 5.50 m under the modern surface (*ca.* 352.00 m a.s.l.). This realization significantly alters the picture of the ancient topography of the site. The difference in elevation between the Middle Assyrian occupation level at the western edge of the main mound and the Byzantine occupation in the 'lower city' would have been at least 7 m and probably more since we can expect a deeper horizon for the 'lower city' in the second millennium BC. Until now we have not been able to determine whether the Middle Assyrian town or any earlier settlement stretched into the area of the 'lower city' nor can we recognize any sort of boundary between the two areas such as a city wall. However, what has become clear is the considerable height of the Late Bronze Age upper mound, which can now be seen as a true citadel. One might add to this observation that small remains of Middle Assyrian architecture were also unearthed in the deep sounding of trench B in the northeast of the upper mound during the excavations in 2006 and 2007 (Bonatz *et al.* 2008, 104–107, figs. 8–9). The Middle Assyrian walls appear here on the same level, i.e., 355.00 m a.s.l., as the buildings to the west. This situation indicates an east-west extension of the Middle Assyrian town in the northern part of the site over roughly 250 m.

3. The Middle Assyrian houses

As mentioned above, the remains of Middle Assyrian architecture on the terrace at the western edge of the upper mound start to appear directly underneath the modern surface. Only a few structures such as Islamic wells, deep Byzantine stone foundations and several Roman kilns are built above or interrupt the layers of Middle Assyrian houses. Remains of these houses were excavated in the trenches C I–IV in the northern part of the terrace, in trench C V in the southern part, and in the lowest part of the stepped trench D at its southern end (see the topographical plan on fig. 2). They exhibit a continuous building density over at least 110 m with buildings aligned along the same north-south axis. As the architectural remains and their associated finds in trenches C I–IV are the most illuminating, these will be dealt with here in more detail.

At least two architectural units have been defined in this area; the northern House 1 (already excavated in 1940) and the southern House 2 (figs. 3–4). Both buildings directly abut each other with their exterior southern (House 1) and northern (House 2) walls respectively. The western facades run approximately along the same line and have exactly the same length, i.e., 16 m. So far only the western sections of the houses have been excavated, therefore the complete building-plans have not yet been reconstructed. Nevertheless, the principle architectural features can be recognized and set in comparison to each other. A bathroom paved with fired mud-bricks and including a northern drainage is situated in the northwestern part of both buildings. The smaller western room units, to which each bathroom belongs, are separated by a thick wall from the central rooms or courtyards. In both cases a large rectangular representative room lies to the south. The passageway from the central courtyard to the representative room

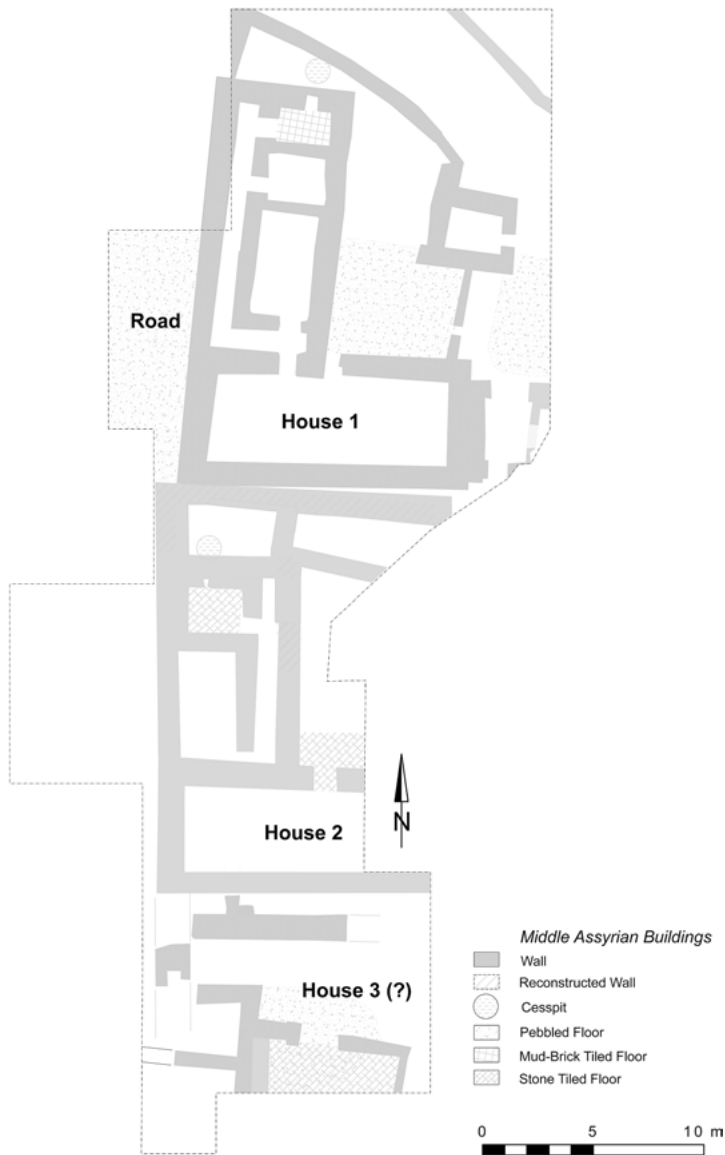


Fig. 3 | Schematic plan of the Middle Assyrian Houses in excavation trench C.

in House 2 is particularly remarkable. Here a circular threshold made of ceramic with a central hole for a doorpost was found.

The situation south of House 2 still lacks a clear interpretation since only a small area has been excavated and its architectural connection to other parts of the site is not yet fully clarified. Two or three smaller rooms in the west border a central room or courtyard unit with two different types of pavement; a pebbled floor in the north and a stone tiled floor in the south. Here we are either dealing with an extension of House 2 or, more probably, a third separate building unit in the row of houses on the western terrace.

The similarities between the Middle Assyrian houses show that they were constructed according to the same floor-plan. Differences, on the other hand, become apparent with the renovation of the walls and floors and alterations in different sections of the buildings. The complex stratigraphy which resulted from these architectural changes comes to light in several parts of the building.



Fig. 4 | Aerial view over the excavated area at the western slope of the main mound (Trench C).

The American excavations and follow-up investigations by Pruß in 2001 have documented two main building phases for House 1 (McEwan *et al.* 1958, 4–6; Pruß / Bagdo 2002, 321–322), while recent excavations have identified further stratifications in different parts of the building. These allow a relative chronological division of the numerous finds (pottery, seal impressions, and tablets) which will be discussed further below. The newly excavated parts of the building, i.e., the economic area with ovens in the north, the eastern courtyard and the suggested entrance in the southeast of the building reveal up to four different floor-levels, demonstrating a continuous use and reuse of space to which the material found there provides functional and historical information. The recent excavations have also yielded new information about the organization of space outside of building. A diagonal enclosure wall was exposed, which separates House 1 from an undeveloped space to the north (see fig. 7). One could imagine a street in this area but the loose earthen terrain here is different from the thick layers of pebbles mixed with pottery in front of the western facade of the house complex, which do seem to represent the pavement of a roadway. In any case, the row of houses does not continue further than House 1. The interruption of architecture instead makes way for a passage to the inner area of the site.

The finds from different areas of the Middle Assyrian houses 1 and 2 include hundreds of clay lumps (see selection on fig. 11) with and without seal impressions and about 60 complete and fragmentary clay tablets (see selection on fig. 10). For both groups find contexts are in almost all cases tertiary as the sealings have been broken and discarded after use and the tablets thrown away in waste deposits. However, the disposal of most of these objects apparently happened next to their original location (see below). Therefore, they provide interesting insights into the administrative duties of the houses'

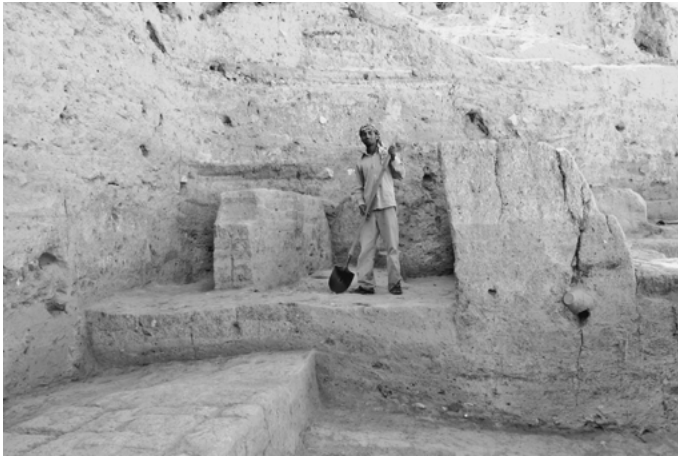


Fig. 5 | Walls and foundations of Middle Assyrian House 1 (entrance area?) in the southeaster corner of trench C II. The foundations clearly follow the outlines of the terraced walls of the previous monumental building.

residents. In connection to the pottery finds they also indicate that the storage and distribution of goods took place here. Other examples of the typical standard Middle Assyrian pottery are related to the preparation and consumption of food. This evidence speaks in favor of an official residential quarter situated at this part of the site. As for the individual activities in this area and its external relations more conclusions will be offered in the second part of this article once the question of the ownership of seals and texts in Middle Assyrian Tell Fekheriye has been addressed.

4. The Mittani building periods

The levels under the Middle Assyrian House 1 were first sounded in 2007 (see Bonatz *et al.* 2008, 114–115, fig. 14) and afterwards extensively exposed in 2009 and 2010. It has turned out that the foundations of House 1 were laid more or less directly over an older, much more monumental building structure. In order to construct a horizontal platform for the new building the broad mud-brick walls of the older monumental building were abraded and the rooms filled with compact material. Therefore the foundations of House 1 also follow the terracing of the former building, which slightly rises to the east (fig. 5). The gradation of the building terrain also required further fillings. The objects, especially Middle Assyrian clay tablets, discarded within this fill, point to a certain interval between the abandonment of the monumental building and the construction of House 1. Any observations relating to this temporal interval are important since they may answer the question of how the Assyrians conquered and transformed the site. This issue will be addressed in more detail in the second part of this article.

From an architectural point of view the structures of at least two building periods older than the Middle Assyrian House 1 overbuild provide the clearest evidence so far for a Mittani presence at Tell Fekheriye. The building of the younger phase is an imposing structure with walls up to 4.4 m in width and large rectangular rooms up to 6.5 m in length (figs. 6–7). Four symmetrically arranged rooms have been identified thus far, but only one room was excavated down to its floor-level. Here the walls reach a preserved height of 1.80 m. The considerable height of the walls is furthermore indicated by a collapsed wall which covers nearly the whole width of the southeast room which measures 3.6 m (fig. 6). This collapsed wall may be related to the deliberate dismantling of the building which otherwise shows no traces of a violent destruction.

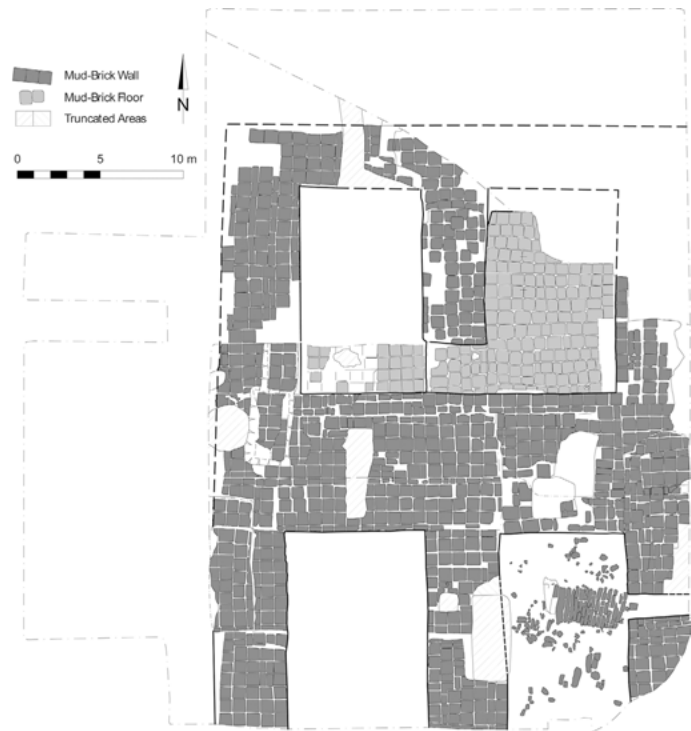


Fig. 6 | Plan of the unearthed parts of the probably Mittani period monumental building in trench C I/II.



Fig. 7 | The monumental building in trench C I/II. At the bottom of the excavated room on the right appear the walls of the earlier Mittani building period. The diagonal walls on the left are remains of the Middle Assyrian period once bordering the area of House 1 to its north.

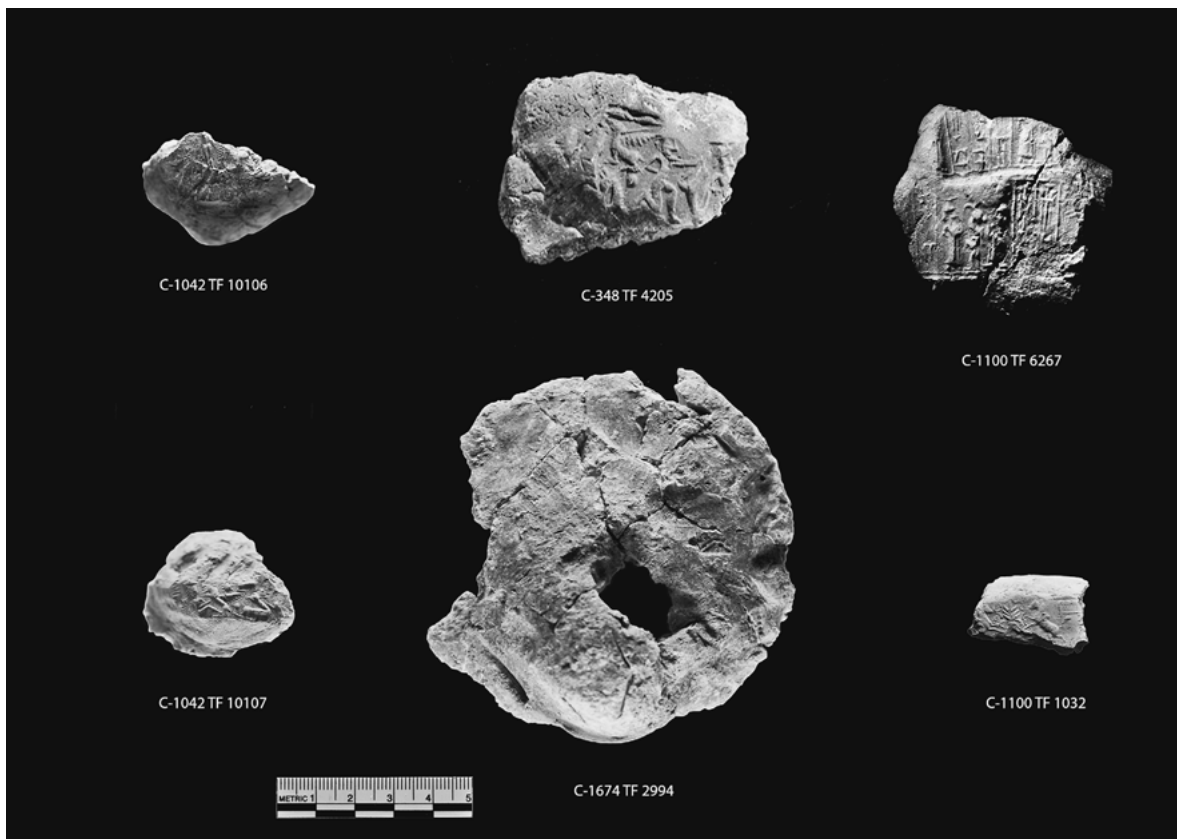


Fig. 8 | Collection of Mittani seal impressions.

The dimensions of the monumental building are obviously larger than those of the Middle Assyrian house. Only its western facade is nearly in line with the latter building. To the north, south and east it extends into areas which have not yet been excavated down to this level. As for the connection with an older building period, the walls of the monumental building clearly overbuild previous walls which are distinctly narrower and have a different orientation. Two rooms of the older building period have been partly excavated in the sounding below the floor of the south-western room of the monumental building (fig. 7). One of these rooms has a floor paved with bitumen covered mud-bricks on which two bone needles and a pot with a wavy-shaped rim were found. The architecture of the older building period has also been exposed in the western part of the same trench, where it protrudes below the front of the monumental building. The area was later filled and covered by the 'street' in front of the western facade of Middle Assyrian House 1.

The Mittani date of both building periods is confirmed by the associated finds such as Nuzi-type potsherds, transitional Khabur ware, red-edged bowls, incised and incrustated ware typical for the Middle Jezirah I und II periods, and about 60 seal impressions on clay lumps. The stylistic variety of the seals range between Common Style, 'Mittani-Kirkuk', and a few pieces related to the Elaborate or Dynastic Style (fig. 8). Some of the seals bear an inscription (e.g., TF 6267). These finds come from different strata, i.e., the fill deposits under the Middle Assyrian walls, floors, and the 'street', the fill of the older Mittani building period and from the floors and pits of the same phase. Due to the chronological nature of the various pottery and glyptic styles the two building periods represent the long settlement duration of the Mittani town. The function of the buildings in this part of the site is furthermore partly explained by the evidence

of the sealed clay lumps which were either used as jar stoppers or as *cretulae* on door-pegs (fig. 8). They demonstrate administrative and storage activities for both building periods. However, one of the questions which requires further investigation is why we see such a dramatic change from the rather modest architecture in the older phase to the impressive monumental architecture of the younger phase.

In conclusion, the sequence of building activities in the northern part of the excavation area C (trenches C I–IV) mirrors a continuous process from the early Mittani period until the Middle Assyrian period. The general character of it as a residential area with administrative functions does not change over time but the architectural context is remarkably different. The change from a monumental form of architecture to a relatively small scaled and standardized architecture is especially significant for the transition from the late Mittani to the Middle Assyrian period.⁹ The end of the Mittani occupation is not marked by any visible destruction level, hence it is difficult to determine whether the Assyrians possibly reused parts of the older building or if they immediately started to restructure the whole area.¹⁰ As for the end of the Middle Assyrian occupation, signs of abandonment are provided by several double-pot and mud-brick graves which cut through the floors of the houses and often follow the orientation of their walls. These show that the area was used as a graveyard shortly after people had left their houses. The evidence of the graves and the related question of the Late Bronze Age–Iron Age transition at Tell Fekheriye will be discussed in another article (see Bartl / Bonatz forthcoming). Instead the following part of this article focuses on the validity of the archaeological finds for the historical reconstruction of the rise of the Middle Assyrian hegemony in the area of Tell Fekheriye and beyond.

5. The end of Mittani and the rise of the Middle Assyrian state

In the 15th and early 14th century BC the state of Mittani in north Syria was one of the main political powers beside Egypt, Ḫatti, and Babylonia. Within the realm of the Mittani kings a state emerged that exhibited the beginnings of a federal structure, including semi-autarchic principalities such as Alalah and Qadeš (Kinza) in the west, Kizzuwatna in the northwest, as well as Arrapha and, presumably, Assur in the southeast (Kühne 1999, 210–218). None of the political centers in the Mittani heartland have yet been identified with certainty but it is generally agreed that two of the capitals are to be localized in the Khabur headwater region, Taidu (Tell Hamidiye?) in its eastern part and Waššukanni in its western. The importance of Waššukanni as royal city of Mittani can be seen foremost in Hittite sources: the so-called *res gestae* of King Šuppiluliuma I recounted by his son Muršili, and the treaty between Šuppiluliuma and his Mittani protégé Šattiwaza.¹¹ The second document in particular provides the most useful historical information about the destruction of the Mittani state by the Hittite Great King and the rise of rival Assyrian power in the mid 14th century BC.

Several of the main events recorded in the Šattiwaza treaty relate to the city of Waššukanni. From here, Tušratta, Mittani's last independent ruler, fled from the approaching Hittite king (Beckmann 1996, 39, no. 6A § 3). Shortly after he was murdered in a palace coup and one of his sons, Šattiwaza, had

9 Probably more can be read into this strikingly different scale of architecture once other areas of the Mittani monumental building have been exposed and an estimate the amount of labor input into this possible public building becomes feasible.

10 Epigraphic and iconographical finds related to this question will be discussed below.

11 For a résumé of the sources see del Monte 1992, 187 and recently Crasso 2009, 222–224. For the editions of the mentioned texts see Güterbock 1956; Beckmann 1996, 35–80.

to seek refuge at king Šuppiluliuma's court. In the meantime, the successor of the rival line, Šuttarna III, forced his efforts towards the throne of Mittani. He entered an alliance with Assyria (probably under its king Aššur-uballit I (1353–1318 BC)) and the land of Alše in order to attack Šattiwaza and his Hittite allies. It seems, however, that a fairly high price had to be paid for this support. In the Mittani version of the Šattiwaza treaty, the appointed Hittite vassal later accuses his former opponent Šuttarna of wasting all the treasures which his father had accumulated in his palace, i.e., in Waššukanni (Beckmann 1996, 44, no. 6B § 1). To his shame Šuttarna was even compelled to return a door of gold and silver which Sauš-tatar, Šattiwaza's great-great-grandfather, had taken as prestigious loot from Assur to his palace in Waššukanni (Beckmann 1996, 44–45, no. 6B § 2). From this point of view it becomes clear that Assyria was no longer regarded as a subordinate of Mittani but rather as a strong force which made its own conditions for a military alliance. More than that, it was the first moment in history that Assyria was able to politically interfere in the Mittani core.

While Šuttarna and the Assyrian army were passing through the Khabur basin from the east, the Mittani-Hittite coalition began their march from Carchemish in the west.¹² On their way to the east Šattiwaza and Piyaššili, the King of Carchemish and son of Šuppiluliuma I, subdued the cities of Harran and Irrite, thereby covering approximately half the distance to the western arm of the Khabur where the confrontation with the enemy was probably expected. In Irrite they received the message that the Assyrian army had already besieged Waššukanni but withdrawn before Šattiwaza and Piyaššili themselves arrived (Beckmann 1996, 46, no. 6B § 6). The historical fiction in the Šattiwaza treaty leads us to believe that thereafter the Assyrians also refused any direct confrontation with Šattiwaza and his strong Hittite ally. Further military operations were carried out at the cities of Pakarripa and Nilapšini in the vicinity of Waššukanni but did not result in a battle.¹³ It seems that the Assyrians withdrew and that Šuttarna was left to his fate.

The relevance of these historical events and localization seen from the Hittite perspective do not stem from the possible but still hypothetical identification of Tell Fekheriye with Waššukanni, but rather from the geostrategic position between these conflicting parties that this site undoubtedly held. Tell Fekheriye obviously lies within the radius of cities within which the clash between the Hittites and the Assyrians was expected to take place. It must have been situated in the core region of the political struggle at the end of the Mittani era and may consequently bear signs of change which followed these events. With the archaeological evidence at hand we can indeed assume that Tell Fekheriye was among the cities of the Mittani rump state under Hittite control in the second half of the 14th century BC. Since the Assyrians turned back and finally conquered the whole Khabur basin at the beginning of the following century, Tell Fekheriye was probably not a site unknown to them. The previous Assyrian engagement in the Šuttarna-Šattiwaza affair should accordingly be seen as a harbinger of the forthcoming expansion which therefore can be understood as a well planned enterprise.

The conquest of the territories in northern Syria started with Adad-nirari I (1295–1264 BC).¹⁴ He is the first Assyrian king who claimed to have destroyed (ca. 1270 BC) the cities of Mittani from Taidu to Irrite, including Waššukanni (RIMA1, 131, A.O.76.1.8–11; 136, A.O.76.3.26–37). It is possible that in this

12 It is probable that Šuttarna while planning his coup was based in Taidu, i.e., in the eastern part of the Khabur basin. The city is mentioned in the Šattiwaza treaty as place where he had impaled the noblemen of the Hurrians (Beckmann 1996, 45, no. 6B § 2). In the *res gestae* of Šuppiluliuma it is said that when the Assyrians heard that the King of Carchemish was advancing towards Mit-

tani, they sent their army to Taidu in order to help Šuttarna (Güterbock 1956, III, BoTU 44 ii, 33–39).

13 Beckmann 1996, 46–47, no. 6B § 6. For the location of Pakarripa and Nilapšini in the western Khabur basin see also Crasso 2009, 225 with map on p. 227.

14 The absolute dates follow the ten year shortened reign of Aššur-dan I (Boese / Wilhelm 1979).

time at Assyrian conventional political phraseology overstates the extent of destruction caused by Adad-nirari's campaign. In the beginning, the Assyrian king may have tried to impose a system of tribute which initially was not very effective. After the death of Šattuara, king of Ḫanigalbat (the Assyrian designation for the Mittani rump state), his son Uasašatta apparently stopped sending regular tributes to Assur. This was considered a revolt against Assyria and justified Adad-nirari's military expedition (RIMA I, 136, A.o.3.4–16). Taidu, the royal city of Uasašatta, was conquered and his whole family clan deported from the destroyed city of Irrite to Assur (RIMA I, 136, A.o.3.26–51). Despite this victory, Šalmaneser I (1263–1234 BC), Adad-nirari's son and successor, felt compelled to recapture the cities from Taidu to Irrite (RIMA I, 184, A.o.77.1.81–85). The list of subdued Mittani cities mentioned by Šalmaneser is not as long as that of his father. For example Kaḫat (Tell Barri), Nabula (Girnavaz), and Waššukanni are missing from this list. Does this mean that these cities were no longer among the rebels and had already been successfully 'assyrianized'? The historical records still lack consistency and therefore need to be aligned with the archaeological data and textual finds from primary contexts.

Archaeological evidence for the western expansion of the Middle Assyrian state or 'empire' has recently been compiled by Aline Tenu.¹⁵ Her thorough study shows that, among the sites with Middle Assyrian remains in the Khabur headwater region, only Tell Hamidiye (Taidu?), Tell Barri (Kaḫat), Tell Amuda (Kulišinaš), Tell Brak (Nawar) and Tell Fekheriye have yielded conclusive evidence for an Assyrian occupation as early as the time of Šalmaneser I (Tenu 2009, 94–108). Epigraphic evidence confirming this date is few and far between: one brick inscription from Tell Hamidiye, four tablets from Tell Amuda and one tablet from the American excavation at Tell Fekheriye.¹⁶ For Tell Brak two post-Mittani destruction layers are said to correspond to the campaigns of Adad-nirari I and Šalmaneser I in the Khabur headwater region, although Nawar is not listed as one of the conquered cities in their royal annals.¹⁷ The only place with a continuous chrono-stratigraphic sequence of late Mittani – early Middle Assyrian occupation is Tell Barri.¹⁸ A basalt mortar with an inscription of Adad-nirari I which is the oldest known document for the Assyrian presence in this region was found at this site. The inscription confirms that Adad-nirari had built his own palace at Tell Barri, which is in line with the inclusion of Kaḫat among his conquests in the king's annals (Salvini 2004, 147; 2007, 307, 318, no. 293).

In conclusion, the evidence for an early Middle Assyrian presence in the Khabur basin is not overwhelming. It is indeed very scarce in comparison to the much better documented administrations at Tell Fekheriye, Tell Chuera (Ḫarbe), and the *dunnu* in Tell Sabi Abyad at the Balikh during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1198 BC). Therefore, the new finds from Tell Fekheriye are promising as it seems they may fill some gaps in the reconstruction of the initial phase of the Assyrian colonization in this region.

6. The Middle Assyrian texts from the 2007, 2009, and 2010 seasons

During the excavations at Tell Fekheriye in 2009 and 2010 a total of 51 Middle Assyrian texts and text fragments were recovered from a single depositional context (loc. 1035/1199) below the northeastern rooms of House 1 in Area C I–II (figs. 9–10). They were discarded in this area as the terrain was filled

15 Tenu 2009. For a useful discussion of the term 'empire' in relation to the Middle Assyrian territorial state, see *ibid.* 25–27.

16 For the *līmu* date belonging to the reign of Šalmaneser I on the tablet from Tell Fekheriye see Güterbock in

McEwan *et al.* 1958, 86, 10:13 and the discussion of the new text finds below.

17 Oates, *et al.* 1997, 152–153; Tenu 2009, 108.

18 Tenu 2009, 99–100; see also the contribution of d'Agostino in this volume.



Fig. 9 | Three Middle Assyrian tablets of different size at the moment of their discovery in trench C I/II (locus C-1035).

with compact soil, broken or smashed mud-bricks and potsherds in order to build a solid foundation for the floor of the subsequent architecture. Due to this stratigraphic relationship the tablets predate the erection of House 1 but must have been discarded later than the Mittani monumental building, which at this time had already been demolished for the restructuring of the whole area.

The tablets are unfired and several were in a very fragile state of preservation, suffering from the humidity of the terrain and salt efflorescence in the clay. Nevertheless, after careful cleaning and consolidation significant parts of the script can be read. Eighteen tablets yield almost complete texts, the others more or less fragmentary. Because their translation has just begun any textual inferences have to be considered very preliminary.

The textual formats are different in size and content. The larger tablets measure up to 28 cm in length and up to 24 cm in width what is an unusually large format for Middle Assyrian texts (fig. 10, TF 6077, TF 6343). The spacing of both inscribed sides in three vertical columns already indicates some kind of administrative list. The first textual analysis by Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum indeed confirms that these documents list the distribution of large amounts of grain to families and cohorts of male workers. Both groups are employed by the local palace as laborers and are under the supervision of its officials. Among the smaller tablets are juridical documents and letters. Three of them were found within their unopened and sealed clay envelop. The letters are comparable to the 'letter orders' found at Tell Chuera (Harbe) (Jakob 2009, 8–9). One letter (TF 6375) contains the orders of an official called Qibi-Aššur who might be identical with the first *sukkallu rabiū* ('grand vizier') and King of Ḫanigalbat appointed by Šalmaneser I.¹⁹ The Land of Ḫanigalbat is mentioned in a letter (TF 6341) which reports on a boat that was capsized in a river (the Euphrates?). Other toponyms which have been gathered from the texts are Waš-šukanni, Taidu, Kurda, Alu-ša-Sîn-rabi, Assur, and Ninua. They prove that Tell Fekheriye was part of the regional and supraregional Middle Assyrian communication system but are not yet sufficient evidence for the identification of the site itself. Indisputable, however, are the chronological conclusions drawn from the *līmu*-dates on some of the texts. The eponym Mušabšiu-sibitti who is mentioned on TF 6375, and who was already recognized on one of the administrative texts (F 273) found in the same area in 1940, can be dated to the first third of the reign of Šalmaneser I, i.e., around 1250 BC.²⁰ If we use this date as a fixed point for the entire deposit of clay tablets some basic observations can be made. We find

19 For comments on this text I also wish to thank Helmut Freydank.

20 Güterbock in McEwan *et al.* 1958, 86, 90, text no. 10:13; Saporetti 1979, 83 (with references); see also Freydank 1991, 191, 194.

a fully developed state administration in the earlier reign of Šalmaneser I at Tell Fekheriye. The fact that some of the texts relate to a ‘palace’ raises the possibility of a central archive which has to be localized in the vicinity of the actual discard-spot. The Assyrian colonization of Tell Fekheriye is furthermore attested in the onomastics of the texts. These show that more than half of the personal names are written in Akkadian, the rest in Hurrian and some other unknown ethno-linguistic affiliations. Some of the Assyrian names seem to confirm a local patronym as they use, for example, ‘Khabur’ as a topical element of the name. All in all the textual evidence points to a well established Assyrian power at Tell Fekheriye during that time and this leads to the assumption that the occupation of the site began even earlier.

As for the later Middle Assyrian period, the depositional context in which the tablets were found connects them to the phase of upheaval after which the whole area received a new architectural layout. Forty additional texts and text fragments were found scattered in the area of the subsequent Middle Assyrian houses 1 and 2. In combination with the previous tablet finds from the American excavation in 1940, the *līmu*-dates on these texts provide firm evidence that both houses had been in use mainly during the later reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I.²¹ An important and already published text fragment from the excavation of House 1 in 2007 belongs to a letter addressed to a person who is designated as someone from Aššukanni (Chambon in Bonatz *et al.* 2008, 108, TF 3168). The name of the *līmu* on the same text is Eru-apla-id-dina who can probably be identified with an eponym at the end of the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (Saporetti 1979, 118–119; Freydank 2005, 52). Another eponym mentioned on a document found in House 2 (TF 4772) is Sarniqu who can be dated to either the middle or end of Tukulti-Ninurta’s reign (Saporetti 1979, 121, with references; Freydank 2005, 52). These texts along with a great number of seal impressions on clay lumps (see below) confirm the continuation of official administrative activities among the different architectural units, which presumably served as the residences of high-ranking officials. The new building structures pertaining to the time of Tukulti-Ninurta I indeed reflect a planned and well organized transformation of the administrative and residential quarter in this part of the site. It is tempting to study this change in the urban plan not only as an internal settlement process but also to assess it from an external perspective which may provide a conclusive historical background for such changes.

7. The administration of the west during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I

During the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I the western part of the Middle Assyrian territorial state was controlled by some high-ranking officials who generally descended from branches of the royal family (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1999, 215–222). One of the most well-known figures in this context is Aššur-iddin who followed his father Qibi-Aššur as *sukhallu rabiū* (‘grand vizier’) and *šar māt Ḫanigalbat* (‘King of the Land of Ḫanigalbat’). The texts from Tell Sheikh Hamad (Dūr Katlimmu) on the Lower Khabur shed important light on his activities as the administrator of Assyria’s western territories (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 19–29). Several of the letters he received while based in Dūr Katlimmu were sent from his dele-

21 For the 11 published texts from the American excavation see Güterbock in McEwan *et al.* 1958, 86–91. The fact that one text (no. 10) bears the name of the aforementioned eponym Mušabšiu-sibitti does not contradict the dating of House 1 to the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. It has already been remarked by Průš that in the publication of the Oriental Institute several of the tablets were assigned by mistake to floor 2 of the House 1 and that their original

find context could indeed have been from a level under this house (Průš / Bagdo 2002, 322; also see Bonatz *et al.* 2008, 108). The *līmu* Aššur-nadin-apli mentioned in text no. 9 is in line with the later date of the building (Güterbock in McEwan *et al.* 1958, 86; for the date of this eponym and its probable identification with the son of Tukulti-Ninurta I see also Saporetti 1979, 116–117).

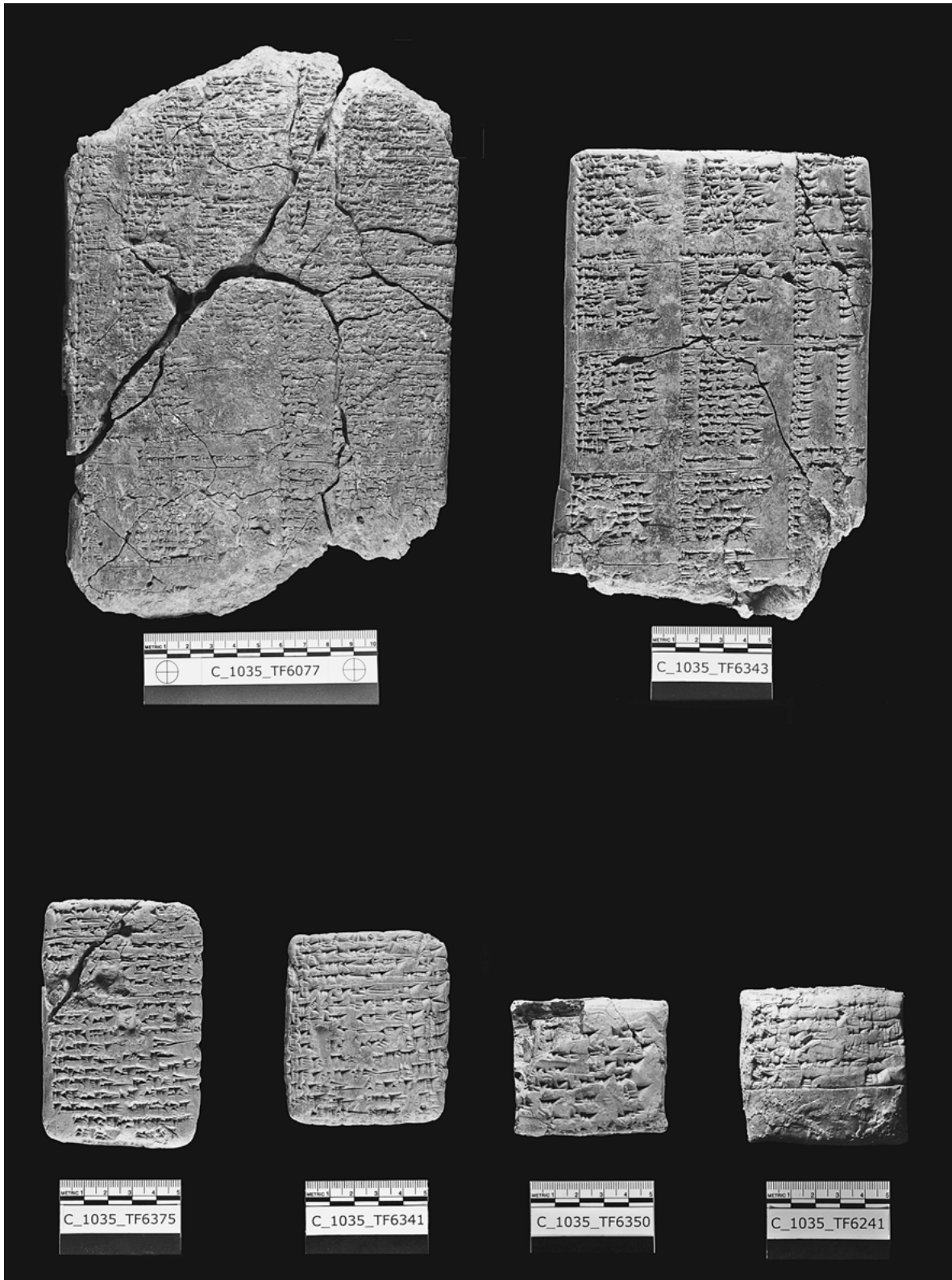


Fig. 10 | Collection of Middle Assyrian tablets from locus C-1035.

gate in Aššukanni, Sîn-mudammeq (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 29–32). This person probably held the title of a *sukallu* (‘vizier’) and also acted as *bēl pāhete* (‘district governor’) of the *pāhutu* (‘district’) that belonged to Aššukanni (cf. Jakob 2009, 4). His correspondence with Aššur-iddin is one of the most important sources for the history of the upper Mesopotamian piedmont in the 13th century BC. They reflect the critical moments in the political governance of this region. Two letters, for example, report about difficulties with refugees, controlling the local semi-nomadic populations (i.e., the Suteans) and other enemies who joined forces in the mountains, fighting the locust plague and famine and the notorious problem of insufficient labor forces and military (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 94–98, text no. 2; 106–108, text no. 3). While Sîn-mudammeq often felt himself compelled to explain his helplessness to his superior Aššur-iddin he concurrently acted quite the contrary and independently as a strict authority who sent his own orders to subordinates in the district town of Ḫarbe (Tell Chuhuera).²² Sîn-mudammeq’s correspondence relates to fortifications and building activities, the provision of itinerant officials and their horse carriages, the recruiting of additional troops from the circle of the *Ilku*-conscripts and to various administrative regulations, and these activities show that he was acting as civil and military coordinator of the region (Jakob 2009, 4–5).

From the perspective of the Ḫarbe texts it seems probable but again not conclusive that Tell Fekheriye can be identified with Aššukanni (Jakob 2009, 8). Both sites lay approximately 74 km away from each other, a distance which the couriers in Middle Assyrian times might have been able to cover in one day.²³ This point, however, is crucial for the localization of Aššukanni. Together with Ḫarbe and Saḫlala, which can be identified with Tell Sakhlān about 50 km west of Tell Khuera, Aššukanni belonged to a chain of important relay stations on the main east-west route connecting the towns of Assyria’s north-western territories. The correspondence of Sîn-mudammeq unmistakably points out that a courier was expected to make the trip between Aššukanni and Ḫarbe or Ḫarbe and Saḫlala in one day (Jakob 2009, 45–46, text no. 5). Even if a distance of more than 70 km per day would be unrealistic in this context, Aššukanni still has to be located east of Ḫarbe because Saḫlala definitely lies west of it. Since speculations about route distances therefore cannot solve the problem of identification further evidence must be gathered from the archaeological sites under investigation.

8. The administration at Tell Fekheriye during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I

Three of the texts found by the American team mention the name Aššur-iddin (Hans G. Güterbock in McEwan *et al.* 1958, 87, texts nos. 3, 4, 9) who, according to Cancik-Kirschbaum, can be identified with the ‘grand vizier’ (*sukhallu rabiū*) known from the Tell Sheikh Hamad texts (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 23). The *limu*-date of one of the Tell Fekheriye texts shows that at this time Aššur-iddin still held the title of *sukhallu* and that he might therefore have started his career in this region before moving to the lower Khabur as *sukhallu rabiū* (cf. Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 24). One document from Tell Sheikh Hamad (DeZ 2529) and a letter from Tell Chuhuera (TCH 92.G.218) attest that he later returned to the northern districts to carry out administrative duties in Waššukanni and Ḫarbe as well. The letter was sent by Sîn-mudammeq to Ḫarbe announcing the arrival of Aššur-iddin, while the document from Tell Sheikh

22 Most of Sîn-mudammeq’s letters are addressed to Suti’u, the *ḫazi’ānu* (‘mayor’), in Ḫarbe (Jakob 2009, 42–53, texts nos. 2–15).

23 Jakob (2009, 46) who also refers to the 80 km route distance, which following the calculations of Kühne was the daily radius of couriers in the Amarna period (Kühne 1973, 118).

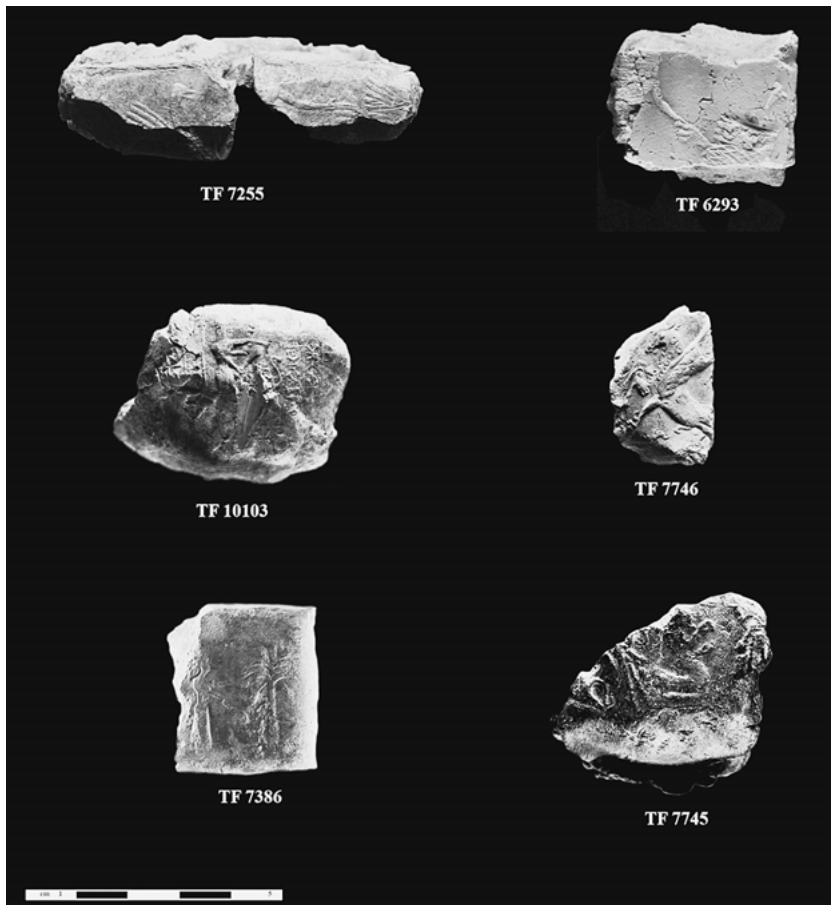


Fig. 11 | Collection of Middle Assyrian seal impressions.

Hamad reports the early collaboration between him and Šin-mudammeq in Waššukanni (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 23; Jakob 2009, 52). Again we are inclined to develop different scenarios, one including the identification of Tell Fekheriye with Waššukanni/Aššukanni, the other excluding it.

The fact that Aššur-iddin was among the main authorities in the administration of Middle Assyrian Tell Fekheriye is probably confirmed by the glyptic evidence from House 1. About 50 seal impressions on clay lumps found in the upper deposits of the northern part of this house bearing the same seal design, can be identified. There is only one well preserved example (fig. 11, TF 7746), and from the area of House 2. The nearly complete reconstruction of the seal shows a contest between a winged human-headed lion and a winged bull with a small reclining winged calf on the base between the two opponents (fig. 12A). The triangular composition and the plastic modeling of the figures are typical for the Middle Assyrian mature style. Impressions of the same seal have already been found during the American excavations in the context of House 1 (Kantor in McEwan *et al.* 1958, 73, pl. 71, design XI) and on the aforementioned document from Tell Sheikh Hamad (DeZ 2529), both of which deal with the administrative affairs of Aššur-iddin and Šin-mudammeq in Waššukanni. This document makes it quite plausible to identify the owner of the seal as Aššur-iddin.²⁴

²⁴ Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 22. The text is still not edited but discussed *ibid.* The drawing of the impressions of this seal on DeZ 2529 kindly shown to me by Hartmut Kühne confirms the correspondence with the impres-

sions of the same seal found in Tell Fekheriye. That Šin-mudammeq who is also mentioned on DeZ 2529 can be excluded as seal owner is evident from the fact that his seal bears another design (see below).

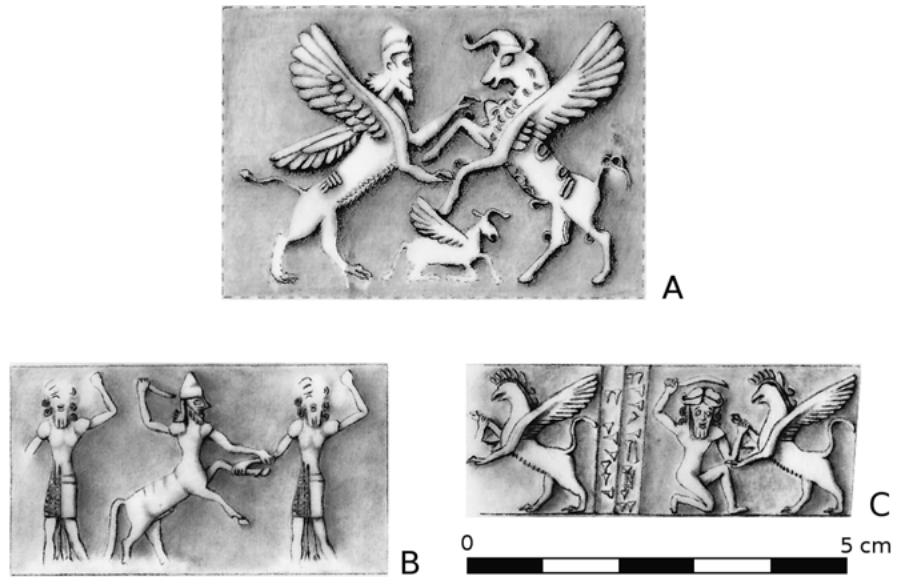


Fig. 12 | A. Reconstruction of Middle Assyrian seal from many fragmentary impressions on clay lumps; B. Reconstruction of seal impression on tablet TF 6405; C. Reconstruction of seal impression on tablet TF 6350 (see also fig. 10) (drawings by Abdallah al-Hamid).

The clay lumps from Tell Fekheriye probably bear Aššur-iddin's seal have cord marks on their backs and seem to have mainly functioned as stoppers/*bullae* attached to jars. It is hard to decide if these containers were sealed and stored locally or if they had been transported from abroad and were opened after their arrival in Tell Fekheriye. Whichever the case, the relation of Aššur-iddin to Tell Fekheriye becomes a strong argument for the identification of this site. It seems that, especially in connection with his counterpart Sîn-mudammeq who followed Aššur-iddin as *sukhallu* in Waššukanni, we find supporting evidence for Tell Fekheriye being the place of interaction between both officials.

The seal of Sîn-mudammeq has been identified on two documents from the recent excavations, a broken clay envelope with the positive imprint of the once included letter on its inner side (fig. 11, TF 7255) and a fragment of a *bulla* with cord-marks on its back (fig. 11, TF 6293). The seal impression which is almost completely preserved on the clay envelope depicts an ostrich hunt. One tall and two smaller ostriches are being chased by a male hunter who holds a spear in his raised right hand while his left grasps for the tail of the bigger ostrich. The same seal design is impressed on eight documents, seven clay envelopes and one ration list, found among the Middle Assyrian tablets in Harbe (Tell Chuhera). These documents undoubtedly prove that the seal owner is Sîn-mudammeq (Janisch-Jakob 2009, 185, seal motif 3).

In general, the glyptic evidence strongly supports the interpretation of houses 1 and 2 as places of central administration with officials involved in the economic and civil affairs of the Middle Assyrian state. A total of 180 seal impressions on clay lumps and 16 impressions on tablets and envelopes have been found in the area of both houses. So far 22 different seal designs can be identified (for a selection see fig. 11). In stratigraphical terms the earliest seals are those impressed on the tablets from locus C-1035/1199 under House 1, which, as already mentioned, dates to first half of the reign of Šalmaneser I. Two of the seals impressed on clay envelopes as well as the documents they still contained are strikingly similar in style and composition. The first case is a naked, kneeling *lahmu* or *Sechslackiger Held* fight-

ing against a griffon (fig. 12C, impressed on TF 6241 and fig. 10, TF 6350), in the second case the same *la/mu* is standing combat with a centaur (fig. 12B, impressed on TF 6405). The design of the *la/mu* shows strong similarities to the same kind of heroic figure on one of the seals of Babu-aḥa-iddina, the ‘chancellor’ under Šalmaneser I (Weidner 1959–60: figs. 2a–c). The visual impact of such images points to the wide reach of a political governance in which they act side by side with the textual means of political authority.

In the context of locus C-1035/1199 no other seal impressions on objects other than the tablets were found. The deposits (loc. C-916, 926, 1404/1191/1674) above the tablet context, however, yielded a total of 106 seal impressions on clay lumps and fragments of clay envelopes. The material was found mixed with a large amount of pottery fragments and animal bones, most likely the waste from the economic and kitchen area of House 1. Several of the clay lumps also show the rim impression of the jar to which they had been affixed. Indeed rim fragments from jars matching these types of sealings have been collected from the same context. They provide evidence for the use of sealed pottery containers in the area of House 1. Other clay lumps with seal impressions were clearly attached to door pegs. They complete the picture of an administrative area in which the controlled storing and distribution of not yet definable commodities took place. It may also be significant that the impressions of Šin-mudammeq’s seal and – with question mark – Aššur-iddin’s seal were also found in this context. This reinforces the idea that both officials were engaged in the administration at Tell Fekheriye at the same time even if we have to admit that Šin-mudammeq’s seal on an envelope (TF 7255) indicates that this document was sent from elsewhere. The impression of the same seal on a *bullā* fragment (TF 6293) attests to its other use as means of authorizing the circulation of goods.

Further seal impressions from the same deposits bear similar typical Middle Assyrian designs, i.e. combat between monsters, lions, or other animals and heroes (e.g., fig. 11, TF 10103). One of the motifs (TF 2980, not depicted here) is closely related to the seal of Šin-mudammeq and apparently manufactured by the same seal-cutter. The same ostriches also appear but are being attacked by a lion which takes the position of the hunter depicted on Šin-mudammeq’s seal. The only distinctive difference is the representation of humans who seem to pick fruits from a date palm. This design, which exists in at least two different versions with one or two figures at the date palm (e.g. fig. 11, TF 7386), is often found on oblong clay lumps attached to jar rims.

Some seals also bear inscriptions which may contain the name of the seal owner but are not yet deciphered (figs. 11, 12C). Even without exact epigraphic evidence the range of motifs produced in a high quality Middle Assyrian style is remarkable. They testify to the different activities of Assyrian officials in connection with the administration of House 1 and the adjacent House 2 where further seal impressions, in less quantity and with different designs have been found.²⁵ Some of the seal impressions come from room deposits which are stratigraphically later than those containing the bulk of the material in houses 1 and 2. For stylistic and iconographic reasons they still range among the glyptic repertoire developed during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. For example, a seal impression depicting a ritual scene with a kneeling man and an omega symbol as additional element (fig. 11, TF 7745) is typical for this period (cf. Matthews 1990, 111).

In conclusion, all textual and iconographic evidence for administrative activities in houses 1 and 2 culminate during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. Given the rather late date of those documents definitely

25 As mentioned before the only parallel find is one impression of the presumed Aššur-iddin seal (fig. 11, TF 7746).

assigned to the period of this king, it is possible to postulate that the construction and organization of the administrative buildings in this area of the site did not take place at the beginning of his reign. This, however, would leave us with an interval of more than three decades between the Šalmaneser I period texts from the deposits under the House 1 and the erection of this building. Although it cannot be excluded that the occupation of these houses lasted beyond the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta there is no proof for a date after his death in 1198/1197.²⁶ The fate of Sîn-mudammeq also remains a matter of debate in this context. He was apparently involved in the dispute over the succession of Tukulti-Ninurta but since his assumed opponent Ilī-padā emerged victorious from this conflict and became *sukhallu rabiu* and *šar māt Ḫanigalbat* himself, it seems quite probable that Sîn-mudammeq's political career ended at this point in time.²⁷ Might these events have negatively affected the settlement development at Tell Fekheriye? The loss of control and consequent lack of organization through a strong authority like Sîn-mudammeq could be one explanation for the abandonment of the houses 1 and 2 and the subsequent use of the area as a burial ground.

9. Summary

The location of Tell Fekheriye at the head of the Khabur probably gave rise to the early religious importance of the site. In the second half of the second millennium BC a political center developed at this site, which at least on a regional level fulfilled an important function in the administration of the Mittani and subsequent Middle Assyrian states. The architecture and associated finds from the earlier period remain limited in their historic validity but nevertheless testify to a representative seat of government. With the following Middle Assyrian occupation the evidence for a centralized administration becomes abundant and interpretable in relation to the political affairs of a growing state. In both cases the political relevance of the site can also be understood because of its favorable geostrategic location at the center of territorial expansion.

Tell Fekheriye is situated in the middle of the open plains which form the most northern extension of the great Mesopotamian plain. The Tur Abdin (or Kašiyāri mountains mentioned in Assyrian texts) lies 50 km to the north of Tell Fekheriye, the Tigris and Assyrian heartland 270 km to the east, and the Euphrates with the royal city of Carchemish 220 km to the west. The whole area forms the actual piedmont zone from which the core of the Mittani state emerged in the second millennium BC and in which the foundations of a new territorial state were laid after the Assyrian conquest. From an economic point of view the Assyrians, who started to cross the Kašiyāri mountains consolidating the northern frontier of their realm as early as the reign of Šalmaneser I,²⁸ would have seen the piedmont as a rich agrarian hinterland that also provided access to the resources of the Anatolian mountains. They built up a system of

26 The chrono-stratigraphic distribution of pottery which may contribute to this question is currently under investigation.

27 This conclusion is suggested by Jakob (2009, 6) and furthermore stressed by Wiggermann's discussion of the seal and official correspondence of Ilī-padā found in his private farmstead (*dunnu*) at Tell Sabi Abyad (Wiggermann 2006). One letter sent to his steward in Sabi Abyad, Mannu-ki-Adad, shows that Ilī-padā was absent in Assur in occasion of Tukulti-Ninurta's funeral and that he was worried about the loyalty of his steward who

seemed to have been tempted to follow the interests of Sîn-mudammeq (*ibid.*, 94–95). At this time, Ilī-padā and Sîn-mudammeq were obviously political rivals fighting for the extension of their private domains in the west-Syrian Jazirah.

28 Ziyaret Tepe (Tušhan?), Giricano (Dunnu-ša-Uzibi), and Üçtepe in the upper Tigris region north of the Tur Abdin were probably brought under Assyrian control during the reign of Šalmaneser I (e.g., Radner 2004, 72–73; 2006).

districts (*paḫutu*) in this area with cities (*ālu*), fortified agrarian domains (*dunnu*) and fortresses (*birtu*) following the urban plan and communication routes of the Mittani period.²⁹ The main difference, however, was the imposition of centralized governance from an outside capital that replaced a state organization developed from a local milieu. In the 12th century BC the Assyrian territorial state weakened as local authorities became stronger, independently acting politic agents. Some of the districts consequently turned into small clientele states with autonomous kings but maintaining elements of Assyrian culture.³⁰

Several aspects of the uncovered archaeological evidence at Tell Fekheriye fit into this geopolitical framework. The occupation of the preexisting Mittani town by the Assyrian power is well documented in the excavations at the western slope of the site. Whether the Mittani structures and the established forms of local administration were reused at the beginning of the Assyrian hegemony still needs to be investigated. A fully developed Assyrian state administration accompanied by distinct forms of Assyrian material culture is substantiated for the earlier reign of Šalmaneser I. Several decades later a visible functional restructuring of the area took place during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I and resulted in two or probably more uniform administrative residences. At this time some high ranking Assyrian officials seem to have been involved in the administration of the city and temporarily based there.

We still need to understand how many more people were actual responsible for the upkeep of the city and what was their relationship to grassroots social groups and indigenous populations. The aforementioned texts from Dūr-Katlimmu, Ḫarbe, and Fekheriye itself provide information about the ongoing perilous state in this area in terms of economic crises, demographic decline rather than growth, labor supply, and hostile environments. These difficulties in the local governance are yet not mirrored in the archeological record even if environmental studies and regional surveys may help to clarify at least some of these points in future. So far, the material culture attests to the wide reach of political control during the main part of the 13th century but from a regional perspective, the political space of governance remains for most of the time heavily contested. After the death of Tukulti-Ninurta political changes in the region may have also lead to the abandonment of the administrative area. However, an Assyrian or ‘assyrianized’ population continued to live elsewhere in the city, as is evident in the graves from the post-occupation layers of the Middle Assyrian houses 1 and 2. Does this shift in the use of urban space at Tell Fekheriye reflect a process of decentralization attested elsewhere in the 12th century BC?

In conclusion, the presumed function of the city as one of the headquarters of the Assyrian territorial expansion is confirmed by the archaeology finds and framing factors such as location, tradition and historical setting of the site. Much of the recently unearthed information from the Mittani and Assyrian presence at Tell Fekheriye speaks in favor of its identification with Waššukanni/Aššukanni but also leaves open the possibility for an identification with other places which still have to be considered as central for the political landscape of the upper Mesopotamian piedmont.

29 E.g., Liverani 1988; Cancik-Kirschbaum 2000, 6–7; Kühne 2000, 274. The view that Assyria adopted much of its administrative structures from the previous Mittani state to which the capital in Assur was once submissive has recently been stressed by Postgate (2011, 90–92).

30 See Cancik-Kirschbaum 2000 and the article of Brown in this volume.

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