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Settlement Patterns of the Middle Assyrian State: Notes toward an Investigation of State Apparatuses*

0. Introduction

This short paper presents the preliminary results of my research into the settlement patterns of the Middle Assyrian state from approximately 1200 to 1050, a period that sees the state contract from its maximum extent back to the traditional Assyrian heartland centered around the city of Assur. The data presented here derive from two main sources, archaeological surveys in Syria, Iraq, and Turkey over the past several decades and written documents from excavated Late Bronze Age (*ca.* 1600–1200) sites. This project was begun as part of preparations for the Tell Fekheriye Area Survey, which is scheduled to be carried out in the framework of the Freie Universität's excavations at Tell Fekheriye led by Dominik Bonatz.

An investigation of this type raises many questions, such as the nature of the ancient state, the means of power and control at its disposal, and the relationship of state extent with settlement patterning. This article focuses on the presentation of data, touching only briefly upon larger issues, which I deal with in a longer article (Brown 2013). Nevertheless, the time has come for a discussion of exactly what we mean when we talk about the Assyrian 'state' (not to mention any Assyrian 'empire' at this time); this short article will hopefully be a modest contribution to this conversation.

1. The state

The issue of how to define 'the state' has been discussed in great detail in the scholarly literature of the past century. A wide variety of perspectives is available for the general and comparative analysis of polities (see, for example, the contributions in Hay *et al.* 2006).

Many of these viewpoints have been developed by various followers of Max Weber and Karl Marx, with the former focusing on the mechanisms of state control (Hay / Lister 2006) and the latter on the state's function in ensuring the domination of the upper class over subordinate economic classes (Hay 2006). More recent contributions have sometimes synthesized or attempted to bridge the two points of view (Kelly 2000; Hay 2006)

More problematic for our current purposes is the fact that most of this type of theoretical work on the state, aligned more closely with a political science perspective (as opposed to an anthropological one), has been devoted to its modern incarnations, with relatively little attention devoted to the state

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in the ancient world (though see contributions such as Feinman / Marcus 1998 and Yoffee 2005). Although it is easy enough to point to some specific features that set ancient states apart from their modern counterparts (e.g., lack of well-defined and policed borders), there are still few in-depth examinations and comparisons between the two. Nevertheless, while there are certainly important differences, the fact that the same term can be used to describe both sets of polities indicates that there should also be significant structural similarities that tie the two together.

Examining these similarities in detail is a task for another time. For the purposes of this paper I'd like to use the 'classic' definition offered by Weber: a state is "a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory" (Gerth / Mills 1991, 78; emphasis in the original; see also Weber 1978, 54). Weber offers several qualifications of this definition that are important to note. He makes it clear that control over this violence is limited to only a part of the 'human community' making up the state: the "state is a relation of men dominating men [*sic*], a relation supported by legitimate (i.e., considered to be legitimate) violence" (Gerth / Mills 1991, 78). Furthermore, the use of physical force need not be exercised directly by the state or its direct administrative apparatus ('administrative staff' – Gerth / Mills 1991, 80–81) – it may be employed by other agents at the state's pleasure (Gerth / Mills 1991, 78). But states rest on more than violence alone – physical coercion is not the "sole, nor even the most usual, method of administration" within political organizations (Weber 1978, 54), including the state. What makes the state peculiar is the fact that its violence has legitimacy attached to it, a 'right' allowing for its use. Thus, in Weber's basic formulation, three factors are emphasized: violence, not necessarily conspicuous but nevertheless always available and underpinning everything else; territory; and an ideology or ideologies that serve both to permit and restrict the application of the first within the second. This is the general concept attached to my use of 'state' in this brief discussion of the later Middle Assyrian polity.

2. Historical background

Our sources for Assyrian history at this time consist of royal inscriptions (RIMA 1 and 2), found mostly at the capital cities of Assur and Kar-Tukultī-Ninurta, numerous administrative and economic documents found both in the Assyrian heartland and at several sites in Syria and Turkey (Güterbock in McEwan *et al.* 1958; C. Kühne 1995; 1996; Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996; Wiggermann 2000; Radner 2004; Röllig 2008; Jakob 2009; for general studies, see Faist 2001; Jakob 2003), and archaeological materials, including architecture, small finds like cylinder seals, some artwork and, above all, the ubiquitous mass-produced and standardized pottery found throughout the region (Pfälzner 1995; 1997; 2007; Duistermaat 2008; Tenu 2009). As is usually the case when integrating textual and archaeological evidence, the data offered by these sources do not always lend themselves to constructing a seamless narrative of the history of the Assyrian state during the 13th century and beyond. Nevertheless, a general outline can be presented.

The standard or consensus history of the Middle Assyrian state may be briefly sketched as follows;[1] it is based largely on the royal inscriptions, with some additions from other written sources. In the reign of Aššur-uballit I (1353–1318)[2], Assyria regained its independence, freeing itself from the control of the

1 Full accounts may be found in Harrak 1987; Cancik-Kirschbaum 2003; van de Mieroop 2007.

2 All dates are BC. Dating follows that of Jakob 2003, 571. For simplicity, I am adopting the lower of the two possible date ranges, which is separated by a gap of ten years from the higher, for Assyrian kings prior to Ninurta-tukul-Aššur (r. 1133).

Mittani state. Then, beginning in the early 13th century, during the reign of Adad-nirari I (1295–1264), Assyria began a period of expansion from its traditional heartland around the city of Assur, taking over large areas of the Mittani state in North Syria, by this point a kingdom dependent upon the Hittite state. This process continued through the reigns of Šalmaneser I (1263–1234), who pushed farther into Syria and finally destroyed the remnants of Mittani, and Tukultī-Ninurta I (1233–1197), who defeated the ruler of Babylon. At its height, the Assyrian state minimally would have extended from the edge of the Zagros mountains in the east to the Balikh River (or, according to some researchers, even to the Euphrates) in the west, and from the upper Tigris basin in the north to the city of Dūr-Katlimmu on the lower Khabur River and Babylonia in the south (fig. 1).

After Tukultī-Ninurta's death, Assyria entered a period of decline, according to the consensus history (see, for example, Wilkinson / Tucker 1995, 58–60; Neumann / Parpola 1987; van de Mieroop 2007). The exact reasons for this are not entirely clear: there is evidence for political uncertainty, climate change (Weiss 1982; Neumann / Parpola 1987) seems to have played a large role, and the severe turmoil that the larger region was undergoing at this time, leading to the destruction of the political powers of the Hittite kingdom and Ugarit, among others, may also be connected.[3] After a period of weakness, Assyria experienced a brief revival under the dynamic leadership of Tiglath-pileser (1114–1076) and possibly Aššur-bēl-kala (1073–1056). Following this brief interlude, the extent of the Assyrian state continued shrinking back to its 'core' area until the late 10th century, when a succession of kings began large-scale military campaigning and started reincorporating areas lost during this 'dark age'. The period from this point onward is usually referred to as the Late or Neo-Assyrian period, which lasts until the destruction of the state between 612–609.

3. Middle Assyrian settlement pattern: the data

Settlement patterns can provide insights into political control through space (see Renfrew / Bahn 2000, 178–182) and thus provide a means of starting a discussion of the power and extent of the Middle Assyrian state. Much new information has been provided in the last two decades through excavation, textual analyses and, above all, surveys carried out in Syria, southeastern Turkey, and the Iraq Jazira. These archaeological and textual data can provide us with a clearer way of conceptualizing the degree and extent of Assyrian control over territory and regions, an issue which has already attracted some debate (e.g., Liverani 1988; Postgate 1992 see discussion in Tenu 2009, 27–31).

Surveys yielding evidence for occupation during the Middle Assyrian period[4] have been carried out in the Lower Khabur (H. Kühne 1974/1977; 1978/1979; 2000), the Balikh valley (Lyon 2000 and refs.),

3 Elements of older explanations invoking the 'Sea Peoples' as a destructive agent in the eastern Mediterranean and the Aḫlamu or Aramaeans throughout the general region, but especially between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and up into southeastern Turkey, still have support, though Neumann and Parpola (1987) make a good case that any conflict between the Assyrians and Aramaean tribes was probably a result and not a cause of regional instability.

4 Most of the surveys carried out since the late 1990s have relied upon Pfälzner's groundbreaking work on Middle Assyrian ceramics, in particular Pfälzner 1995. He has been able to provide an absolute chronology for Middle Assyrian pottery by correlating stratified deposits with dates offered by associated tablets. His chronology (1995, 235–236; 2007, 236–237), adopted here, is as follows (mA= "mittelassyrisch"): mA I – from the mid 13th century/*ca.* 1200; mA IIa – 1200 to *ca.* 1180; mA IIb – 1180–1160; mA IIC – 1160 to 1120; mA III – 1120 to 1050. Thus, mA I pottery corresponds to the height of the Middle Assyrian state (through the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta I), while the mA III phase is related to what is usually considered to be a period of 'decline' (see Historical Background, above, and below).

the western upper Khabur basin (see Anastasio 2007 and refs.), the vicinity of Tell Hamoukar (Ur 2002a; 2002b), the Tell Beidar area (Wilkinson 2000), the Iraq Jazirah (Wilkinson / Tucker 1995), the Zammar region in Iraq (Ball 2003), and the upper Tigris basin (Algaze 1989). Some work, with ambiguous results (see below), has also been done in the mid-Euphrates valley (Geyer / Monchambert 2003; see also Tenu 2009, 182–195). Excavation at Shiukh Fawqani, on east bank of the Euphrates River at the Syrian-Turkish border, has also yielded Middle Assyrian pottery (Capet 2005), though the significance of this is also unclear. A few sites have not yet yielded archaeological evidence for Middle Assyrian occupation but can be securely identified on the basis of textual information, such as Harran (probably modern Altinbasik) and Tuttul, probably the same town well-known from Middle Bronze sources (Röllig 1997, 285) located at Tell Bi'ā at the confluence of the Balikh and the Euphrates. Notably absent from the regions in which surveys have been carried out are the Assyrian heartland, in the area of the great cities of Assur and Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, and the eastern part of the upper Khabur basin,[5] an area containing important urban sites and Assyrian administrative centers like Kaḫat (modern Tell Barri) and Amasakku (itself not yet identified).

Based on this information, as well as the textual remains, I have assembled several maps of all the sites known to me that can be counted as having been part of the Middle Assyrian state during the reigns of Šalmaneser I and Tukultī-Ninurta I (i.e., mid- to late-13th century, at the height of Assyrian power)[6] with reasonable certainty (figs. 1–7). No attempt has been made at this point to present these 151 sites in any kind of rank-size hierarchy, but the vast majority of the settlements should be understood as falling within the 'village' category, or less than *ca.* 5 ha in area. Nor have I included any of the Babylonian cities (e.g., Babylon, Dur Kurigalzu), though we should keep in mind the brief (*ca.* 20 years) Assyrian control over southern Mesopotamia in the second half of the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta.

Five qualifications must be stated up front. First, by 'reasonable certainty', I mean settlements that meet one of three criteria: are attested in textual sources and whose locations are secure (e.g., Harran), have their own archives linking them to Assyrian political control, or are in the vicinity of such sites and have provided evidence of a connection via the 'official' or 'administrative' pottery (Pfälzner 2007, 257). Second, it must be stressed that the usual caveats apply when relying upon ceramics to provide information on any kind of corporate membership, including in a state (see, for example, Wilkinson / Tucker 1995, 62; Emberling 1997; Pfälzner 1997, 340). Peter Pfälzner believes (2007, 257) that the 'administrative' Assyrian pottery is closely related to the Middle Assyrian political system in the 13th and 12th centuries. However, there are several areas (Shiukh Fawqani on the Euphrates, the mid-Euphrates region, and the upper Tigris) where things may be a little more complex; we should not rule out the possibility that we may see a site (or part of the population thereof) that is culturally Assyrian, but not politically Assyrian. Third, we must also keep the reverse in mind – that there may have been sites not predominantly, or even at all, culturally or ethnically Assyrian, but which were nevertheless part of the Assyrian state system. For example, there is mention of a "dunnu (fortified agricultural settlement) of the Subareans (= Hurrians)" in a text from Tell Sabi Abyad (Wiggermann 2000, 192); Frans Wiggermann points out that they may very well have kept their own traditions, such as pottery manufacture, which would have obvious implications for survey-based evidence (cf. Lyon 2000: 94). With the massive

5 Meijer (1986) focused on this area in the 1980s, but his methodology (grouping the various periods of the Late Bronze Age together) precludes using the results for our purposes here.

6 I am combining the reigns of these two rulers both to simplify the discussion and because the pottery sequence is not fine enough to permit a distinction.

forced movements of people from various regions attested in the Assyrian records of this time (see, for example, Harrak 1987, 251–252), the Sabi Abyad instance is probably not an isolated case. Fourth, from the point of view of data collection, not interpretation, recognition of sites may be reduced by the low visibility and preservation of the ceramics themselves (Wilkinson / Tucker 1995, 59–60), especially before Pfälzner's work, as well as subsequent destruction or covering-over of smaller settlements (Lyon 2000, 100). Finally, no effort has been made at this point to address the 'contemporaneity problem' – that is, not every site assigned to a particular phase will necessarily have been occupied during the entire phase (for discussion, see Dewar 1991; Kintigh 1994).

It is more difficult to trace a similar settlement pattern by the end of the following century, though some general trends can be sketched using the evidence provided by archaeological investigation as well as texts. If we assume that there is a relation between extent of settlement and extent of state power, then the decrease in number of previously inhabited sites indicates that a substantial contraction of state power had occurred over the intervening century. By the mid- to late-12th century, the presence of the Assyrian state in some areas appears to have waned or disappeared entirely, as indicated by destruction of administrative buildings and/or the absence of mA III ceramics. The more westerly regions show this process well. At Tell Chuera, level 3, which contained a monumental building identified as a palace (in which the archive there was found), comes to an end sometime after the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta (see C. Kühne 1995, 206); the cause of its destruction is not clear, though the excavators mention mudbrick debris between it and the subsequent level 2 (Klein 1995, 188) and rule out any kind of conflagration (C. Kühne 1995, 203). The excavated structures of level 2, though built along the same orientation as the palace, appear to have been well-to-do houses rather than any kind of administrative structures (Klein 1995, 186). No texts have been found in this level to date. Though the excavators provide no clear dating proposal, it must date to sometime in the early 12th century. In any event, the change from administrative structure to private houses and the lack of textual remains indicates a change in the function of or activities at the site in the early 12th century. After an unknown amount of time, the structures of level 2 went out of use; the heavily eroded buildings of the succeeding level 1 were apparently constructed according to a different orientation (Klein 1995, 185). Putting a date on the abandonment of the site is difficult, but Pfälzner (2007, 235, n. 73) notes that there is no indication of mA III pottery from the site. This would mean that any Assyrian state presence, at the latest, had ended there by *ca.* 1120, and probably earlier.

A similar dynamic is seen a little farther to the west, at Tell Sabi Abyad. Level 6, the largest and longest-lived level at the site, appears to have been neglected or even abandoned at some point in the early 12th century (Duistermaat 2007, 52, 55 and 124–126). The following level 5, built largely according to the same plan as its predecessor, was short-lived, lasting only until approximately 1180 (a period of around 15 years) before meeting its end in a conflagration (Duistermaat 2007, 53, 124–126). Level 4 marked the beginning of a different type of settlement: the central tower and other administrative buildings were apparently abandoned and very few texts were still being produced here, though, based on the presence of a kiln, pottery still was. The end of this level probably dates to around 1125 (Duistermaat 2007, 56–57, 124–126); the excavators believe that the site was still connected with the central Assyrian administration based on the texts (Duistermaat 2007, 57), though it is difficult to evaluate this claim because the texts have not been published. It is impossible to say with certainty whether the entire Balikh valley fell out of the Assyrian state orbit by this time, though in view of the difficulties of Tell Sabi Abyad, formerly an administrative node in the settlement chain along the river, this is not an unreasonable assumption. In fact, I would go further and suggest that we can generally assume that smaller, village-type settle-

ments in the vicinity of destroyed and/or abandoned administrative nodes were themselves at that point no longer part of the Assyrian state, even if they remained occupied.

It thus appears as if the westernmost sites of the Middle Assyrian system, along the Balikh valley and at Tell Chuera, were no longer a part of it by the mid-late 12th century. A few other major settlements may have gone a similar route. Waššukanni, most likely to be identified with Tell Fekheriye, is no longer mentioned in lists of districts sending *gina'u* (regular offerings) to the central Assur temple after the reign of Ninurta-apil-ekur (*ca*. 1181–1169; Freydank 1997, 51), though mA III pottery probably appears at the site (personal observation, September 2008) and there is no clear destruction of the Middle Assyrian levels there (Szuchman 2007, 67). The evidence from the lower Khabur is a little clearer, though not unequivocal. There are indications that the former 'capital' of Assyrian Ḫanigalbat, Dūr-Katlimmu, may also have met its end by the mid-12th century (but see here H. Kühne 1995, 75; Jakob 2003, 12–13, who sees the city continuing as a district until at least the early 11th century). Room A of Building P, a storage complex that was probably part of the head official's palace there, was initially destroyed by fire shortly after the death of Tukultī-Ninurta; somewhat strangely, it appears to have remained open and been used as a garbage dump, even though the rest of the structure was repaired and reused (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 7–8 and refs.). Building P's final end, also through fire, came in the second third of the 12th century (*ibid*.). Dūr-Katlimmu's satellite settlement, the waystation of Umm Al Aqrebe, also apparently goes out of use by the mid-12th century – at least, no mA III pottery has been found there (see Pfälzner in Bernbeck 1993, 80–81; H. Kühne 1995, 75; cf. H. Kühne 2000, 274; Pfälzner 2007, 233).

At present, the evidence thus indicates that numerous and important settlements within the Middle Assyrian state had been destroyed or abandoned by the late 12th century. A map of the settlement pattern of the Middle Assyrian state *ca*. 1100–1050 might thus omit the sites along the Balikh River, the lower Khabur River, and a large part of north-western Syria (west of Tell Fekheriye) that could be assigned to Assyrian control a century earlier. The process of Assyria's shrinkage back to its core area around the confluence of the Tigris and Zab rivers was already well under way, a process that would only be temporarily halted (if even that) during the reign of Tiglath-pileser I in the late 12th–early 11th centuries.

4. Discussion

The discussion of these data may begin with some general observations about overall trends of Middle Assyrian settlement in northern Syria and southeast Turkey. In many areas in which surveys have been carried out, the total number of sites as well as the total area occupied declined from the preceding Khabur and Mitanni periods into the Middle Assyrian period, leading to a "significant thinning" of settlement with "[s]ubstantial voids of unoccupied land," as Tony Wilkinson and David J. Tucker put it (1995, 59) in the case of settlement pattern changes from the Khabur through the Middle Assyrian periods. This dynamic is seen in the Tell Hawa region (Wilkinson / Tucker 1995, 59–60), the Balikh valley (Lyon 2000, 99–102, fig. 8), the Khabur valley south of Hassaeke (Morandi Bonacossi 1996, 19, n. 13, figs. 4–5), and perhaps the upper Tigris basin (see Roaf / Schachner 2005, 121, Appendices 1 and 2). Only the Tell Hamoukar region presents a possible exception (Ur 2002a, 74–75, figs. 14–15).

Furthermore, Middle Assyrian settlement is largely confined to pre-existing Mittani-period sites, a trend especially apparent at larger settlements (cf. Anastasio 2007, 140–141). To my knowledge, only two new foundations (i.e., not located directly upon a former Mittani site) can be pointed out with certainty.

One is Tell Umm Aqrebe in the Wadi Ajij, east of Tell Sheikh Hamad, which was most likely established to serve the specialized function of a way station on the Dūr-Katlimmu–Assur route (Pfälzner 1995, 224).[7] The second is Tabetu (Tell Taban), on the upper part of the lower Khabur, which appears to have been founded directly on top of an Old Babylonian-period settlement (Numoto 2008, 55). This lack of new foundations points to a larger trend of limited large-scale improvements and, especially, modifications to the landscape throughout the conquered regions. Some important capital projects can be identified, mostly involving administrative and religious buildings. The construction of palaces is attested, archaeologically for example, at Dūr-Katlimmu (Building P: Pfälzner 1995, 106–107) and textually at Taidu (reign of Adad-nirari I; Grayson, in: RIMA1: 128), while Šalmaneser rebuilt the temple of the storm god at Kaḫat (RIMA1 A.0.77.16; Donbaz / Frame 1983), among other projects. In addition, a canal running along the eastern bank of the Khabur may have been excavated at this time (see discussion in Fales 2010, 72–76). But these examples represent the only large-scale, centrally organized construction activities at this time, according to our current sources. The main focus of improvement, instead, was in the central Assyrian area, at the old city of Assur and, by the middle of Tukultī-Ninurta's reign, at the massive Kar-Tukultī-Ninurta across the river, a city of at least 240 ha (Dittmann in Nashef 1992, 310) that was built de novo.

In terms of the overall Middle Assyrian settlement pattern in Syria and southeastern Turkey at the end of the 13th century, there are thus three noteworthy features: a general decrease in settlement in the areas the Assyrians conquered and administered; sites that were occupied tended to be located on older Mittani establishments; and little major infrastructural improvement over the landscape of the conquered territories. New foundations, apart perhaps from small agricultural establishments in direct association with towns or villages, are almost non-existent. There remains, nonetheless, a degree of settlement continuity, a feature of the Late Bronze Age already recognized by Wilkinson and Tucker (1995, 59). This perhaps also implies continuity between the Mittani and Middle Assyrian periods in the economic and administrative networks to which these settlements belonged (cf. Postgate 1982, 311–312; Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 26).

The upper Euphrates River valley and the mid-Euphrates region present more complex and equivocal evidence. Excavations at Tell Shiukh Fawqani, near the Syrian-Turkish border (Capet 2005), Tell Fray, on the big bend area of the Euphrates (Pfälzner 1995, 202–204), and the well known site of Mari (Jean-Marie 1999), and survey work along the mid-Euphrates valley (Geyer / Monchambert 2003; Tenu 2006) have yielded some evidence, primarily pottery, of an Assyrian presence. Problems arise, however, when considering these sites and areas as part of the Assyrian state. Pfälzner's concept of the 'administrative' Assyrian pottery derives in part from the fact that it appears in areas known through written sources to have been part of the Assyrian state (e.g., Pfälzner 2007, 232, 257). For none of these locales, though, do we have clear evidence that they were ever incorporated into the Assyrian state (though see Liverani 1988, 89). Claims of Assyrian control to the Euphrates are a common motif of royal inscriptions from the reign of Adad-nirari I onward, but the historicity of these accounts is often dubious. Tukultī-Ninurta reports deporting 28,800 'Hittites' from 'beyond the Euphrates' (see Harrak 1987, 238–239), but he does not mention founding a settlement there (Capet 2005, 387) and, in strong contrast to deportations from other regions, none of these alleged 'Hittite' deportees turn up in the known administrative texts (Harrak 1987, 238–239).

7 Pfälzner (*ibid.*) also notes that Tell Amuda/Kulišinaš may also be a new foundation by the Assyrians.

The one site on the upper Euphrates where 'administrative' pottery has definitely been found, Tell Shiukh Fawqani, lacks any substantial architecture and is clearly, at most, a very brief, transitory focus of activity on the part of the Assyrians (Capet 2005, 379, 387). At Tell Fray, some unpublished Assyrian texts and pottery were excavated, but a bulla of Hattušili III (*ca*. 1267–1237) was also found there (Mackinson 2002/2005, 38–39), casting doubt on whether the site was ever actually brought into the Assyrian system or whether it remained part of the Hittite sphere (or had another status; see Szuchman 2007, 40 and refs.). Aline Tenu (2006) presents a detailed argument that the mid-Euphrates was conquered in the late 13th century by Tukultī-Ninurta and that a line of fortresses erected beginning in the 11th century defended the southern flank of the state. But there is little apart from the pottery to support this, and at most of these sites, the number of Assyrian ceramic forms is often matched by those with better parallels to Kassite materials (Tenu 2006, 225, 233), or even outnumbered, a situation seen at Mari (Pons / Gasche 1996). We simply do not know to which polity these fortifications should be assigned.

At the moment, therefore, I am inclined to view the settlements in the Balikh valley as representing the farthest western extension of the Middle Assyrian state, though the possibility cannot be ruled out that isolated sites were also located a little farther to the west, between the Balikh and Euphrates valleys (Luciani 1999; 2001). To the south the limit would be defined by Dūr-Katlimmu and, for a brief time, the great Babylonian cities after the defeat of Kaštiliašu IV by Tukultī-Ninurta. The upper Tigris valley, centered on the approximately 30 ha city of Tušan, located at modern Ziyaret Tepe (Matney 1999), appears to be the northernmost extent of Assyrian state power. The eastern limit is a little more difficult to establish; it may be that Tell Bazmusian, located at the foothills of the Zagros mountains, was one of the easternmost Assyrian centers of this time (see Anastasio 2007, 94).

Examination of the map of Middle Assyrian settlement also indicates large areas where no sites are to be found, including the steppe zone delineated by Jabal Abdul Aziz in the north, the Euphrates to the west and south, and the Khabur to east, the Tur Abdin (the ancient Kašiari mountains) and the Tigris River valley between Cizre and the Batman Su basin. None of these regions have been surveyed as intensively as areas on the alluvial plain, so the jury must remain out on whether more than a handful of Assyrian sites were ever established there. However, survey work along the stretch of the Tigris north of Cizre has yielded little evidence of settlement (Algaze 1989, 248; Parker 2003, 548; see also Ökse 2008), perhaps due to the rugged topography and the difficulty of navigability in this area (see Radner 2006, 274); the general lack of Assyrian settlement in this area continues into the Late Assyrian period (Parker 2003, 551).

No similar large-scale surveys producing relevant data have, to my knowledge, been carried out in the Tur Abdin and the steppe between the Khabur and the Euphrates, but we nevertheless have indications that these areas were neither 'empty' (cf. Upham 1992) nor ever brought under actual Assyrian control in the Late Bronze Age, despite the claims in royal inscriptions concerning the conquest of the Tur Abdin (see Radner 2006, 283–284 for discussion and refs.). I reserve full discussion and defense of this position (which has important implications for how the Assyrian ruling class exerted political control over such a large area) for my longer article (Brown 2013), but the main reason to exclude these two areas from Assyrian state control is because they were inhabited and largely controlled by populations who were not part of the Assyrian state and whom the Assyrians did not recognize as subjects. In the case of the Tur Abdin, we have written evidence, in the form of internal administrative records, that forces hostile to Assyria, namely remnants of the destroyed Mittani state, actually held the greatest extent of these mountains. Several letters from Dūr-Katlimmu (nos. 3, 4, 7, 8 – Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996) concern military operations on the part of 'enemies' against Assyrian targets in the western upper Kha-

bur area. These enemies, plausibly identified as Hurrians by Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum (1996, 37–38) and thus presumably elements from the old Mitanni state, were capable of simultaneously threatening multiple areas of the Assyrian state, from the Subnat River in the east to the town of Ḫarbe (Tell Chuera) in the west (Letter 4). The Tur Abdin would be an area that best fits the description of such a base of operations for these 'enemies' (though see Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 38). Thus, this mountainous area appears to have remained outside of Assyrian control, despite the claims of the royal sources.

The steppe region between the Balikh and Khabur rivers presents a similar case, though one characterized by a very different dynamic vis-à-vis the Assyrian state. Though relatively inhospitable, this too was no 'empty space'; rather, it was populated primarily by semi-nomadic pastoralists organized into various tribes known in part to the Assyrians as 'Suteans' (see Szuchman 2007 for discussion and refs.). While the Suteans are often treated as having been part of the Assyrian state system or at least as recognizing the ultimate suzerainty of the Assyrian crown (see, for example, Postgate 1981, 52; Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 38–40), there are other indications that the Assyrians themselves did not see the Suteans as part of their state. From the point of view of the economy, goods (usually livestock) purchased from Suteans were subject to what could be compared to a 'customs tax' (see Postgate 1981, 51; Faist 2001, 191; Dercksen 2003, 542–543; Jakob 2003, 170–171, n. 10, 12). From a more 'political' point of view, a document from Tell Sabi Abyad (T04–37) records a regional magnate signing a formal treaty with notables from a Sutean tribe to the effect that the Suteans would not aid the enemies of Assyria (Duistermaat 2007, 380; Szuchman 2007, 41).[8] Based on this evidence, I suggest that there is little reason to believe that the Suteans, and the land they controlled, were ever part of the Assyrian state (or to think, as Duistermaat [2007, 259–260] states it, that they were some 'other' people who happened to live in Assyrian 'provinces').

At this point we can reconsider how we model or represent the extent of the Assyrian state – that is, how we map it. In general, maps of the Assyrian polity sometimes appear to take the maximum extent of reported military action as the baseline for its borders (see, for example, Anastasio 2007, fig. 5).[9] But I would argue that such a representation is a too-modern view of the ancient reality (see Smith 2005, 837). We must be careful to distinguish between state control, as defined above, and the limits of military action and related phenomena, such as deportations. As Michael Mann points out (Mann 1986, 9–10, 142), networks of military power always extend farther outwards from a center of power than any political networks. I suggest that settlement patterns be used as the beginning point of a discussion of Assyrian state power and of a cartographic representation of the polity, rather than to simply fill in space on a map generated largely on the basis of royal propaganda.

Archaeological research by various scholars at the Oriental Institute indicates that the residents of a medium- to large-sized tell in the third and second millennia would have normally cultivated fields up to about 5 km distance (Wilkinson 2007). Wiggermann's analysis of the Sabi Abyad texts and the results of the Balikh valley survey (2000, 183–185) indicates a similarly sized 'catchment area' (including pastur-

8 Some Sutean notables are also recorded (T93–3) as having been the guests of honor of an official at Tell Sabi Abyad (Duistermaat 2007, 380); in other instances, they appear to have served in some capacity as informants for the Assyrians – see Szuchman 2007, 114.

9 That these kinds of representations of the ancient state can and do influence interpretation may be seen in Jakob's surprise (2003, 172) that tax on a horse imported from Nairi was only assessed in the town of Karana and not at the 'border' – as if the Assyrian 'border' would have been as well-delineated as a modern one and manned by officials inspecting goods coming in and out. This episode, in fact, illustrates two important features of the Middle Assyrian state: local-based networks of knowledge, and town-based – or more accurately, cultivated-area-based – political control, with large and sometimes porous spaces between interstices.

age for animals), within a 3.5–4 km radius from the Tell. In addition, the study of Andreas Schachner and Karen Radner for the Giricano area in the upper Tigris (Radner 2004, 118–119) yields results between those of Wilkinson and Wiggermann. These limits of agricultural cultivation would have been the areas most subject to intensive state control.

But we should allow for Assyrian soldiers to move outward from these settlements to enforce the central authority's will in the adjacent areas. In theory, an army, carrying its own provisions but without a substantial number of pack animals, might be able to march for about three days (see the discussion of Mann 1986, 138–141). With a movement rate of about 25 km per day (*ibid.*), we might envision Assyrian state control extending outwards about 75 km from settled areas. But in practice in the Middle Assyrian period, a number of factors argue against even such a modest extension of state control. I have argued above that at least some of such spaces were under the control of people outside of the Assyrian state. In addition, there appears to have been chronic shortages of labor in the western areas (cf. Jakob 2003, 33). Taking these considerations into account, it is difficult to see Assyrian state control in the west and north intensively exercised much farther than the limits of cultivation.

An examination of the survey results from the Iraqi and Syrian Jazirahs indicates that, despite the thinning of settlement that Wilkinson and Tucker found, sites were still relatively dense in these areas, located about 5–6 km from each other and sometimes as close as 1 km.[10] Anastasio's analysis indicates a somewhat more dispersed settlement pattern in the western upper Khabur region. In these areas, as well as the Assyrian heartland, we can postulate a dense, extensive territorial coverage at the end of the 13th century. It is difficult to generalize this dynamic, though: as the work in the Zammar region along the Tigris north of Nineveh demonstrates (Ball 2003, 15–16), settlement may have been sparse even in fertile areas not too far away from major Assyrian centers. In contrast to the expressions of extensive 'territorial' control in northern Iraq, the Syrian Jazirah and, to a lesser extent, the western upper Khabur, the settlements in the Balikh and Khabur valleys appear confined to the river basins, chains of sites connected by their respective waterways, while the upper Tigris centers form a small island, not contiguous with the rest of the state. The map in fig. 8 shows this view of the physical extension of the Assyrian state *ca.* 1210, while fig. 9 models the state a century later. In both cases, the shaded areas should not be understood as indicating actual borders, but rather the maximum area in which the Assyrian authorities were able to exercise intensive state power.

5. Conclusion

The Assyrians were able to expand their state over an extensive geographic area but, to employ Mann's terminology, its institutionalized political and economic power could only be expressed intensively in limited areas: territorially over a region that comprised the Assyrian core, the Iraqi Jazirah, and perhaps the upper Khabur basin, but elsewhere only in corridors defined by natural communication routes (rivers) or in isolated towns and their dependent *dunnus* and villages. The extensive form of their political power was indeed extensive – more so than any state that had existed in the Near East up to that point – and the points within it provided staging places for the projection of military power farther outwards, a dynamic that Mario Liverani (1988) identified over two decades ago. But this extensiveness

10 Note again, however, the issue of contemporaneity mentioned earlier.

came at a price, whereby only a relatively small area could be intensively controlled (i.e., put under state control).

It should be stressed that even this 'minimal' view of the extent of the Assyrian state does not capture the tenuousness of control in some areas indicated by both the texts and archaeology. Ḫarbe (Tell Chuera) and the surrounding area appear as the target of attack by hostile forces in several letters from Tell Sheikh Hamad (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, letters 4 and 6); letters 3 and 22 indicate problems with securing enough soldiers for adequate defense measures as well as popular unrest in the conquered areas. At Tell Sabi Abyad, the first and largest Assyrian settlement there (represented by level 6) lasted only about 30 years (*ca.* 1225–1197), apparently being abandoned at about the time Tukultī-Ninurta was assassinated (Duistermaat 2007, 52, 124). Level 5 began shortly thereafter and lasted until *ca.* 1180, at which time it was destroyed by a violent fire, while level 4, lasting perhaps until *ca.* 1125, contained the ruined structures of the preceding settlement (Duistermaat 2007, 53, 124). Thus, settlements, and potentially even large areas, could have fallen out of the Assyrian system, then been reincorporated before any major changes to the material culture would have become apparent.

I will discuss some of the exact mechanics of Assyrian control in Brown 2013. For now, I conclude by saying that as more research, both archaeological and textual, is carried out, this picture is sure to change in details. But the main points – limited extensive territorial control, large and sometimes porous areas between nodes of settlement, nearby adjacent areas that were never part of the state, and discontiguous territory (cf. Smith 2005) – constitute some of the standard features of the ancient state, including the Assyrian polity in the Middle Assyrian period.

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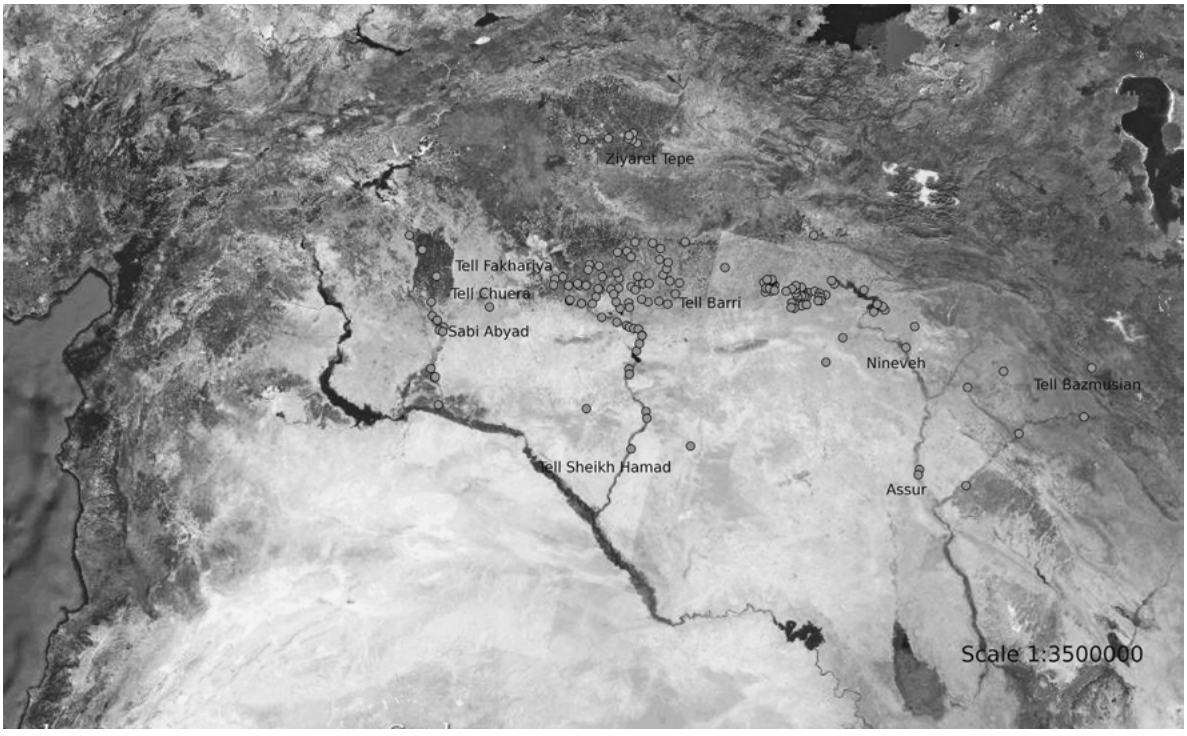

Fig. 1 | Overview of the Near East with identified Middle Assyrian sites. All maps in this article were created by the author using Quantum GIS (version 1.6.0, *Copiapo*) and the Google Layers plug-in.

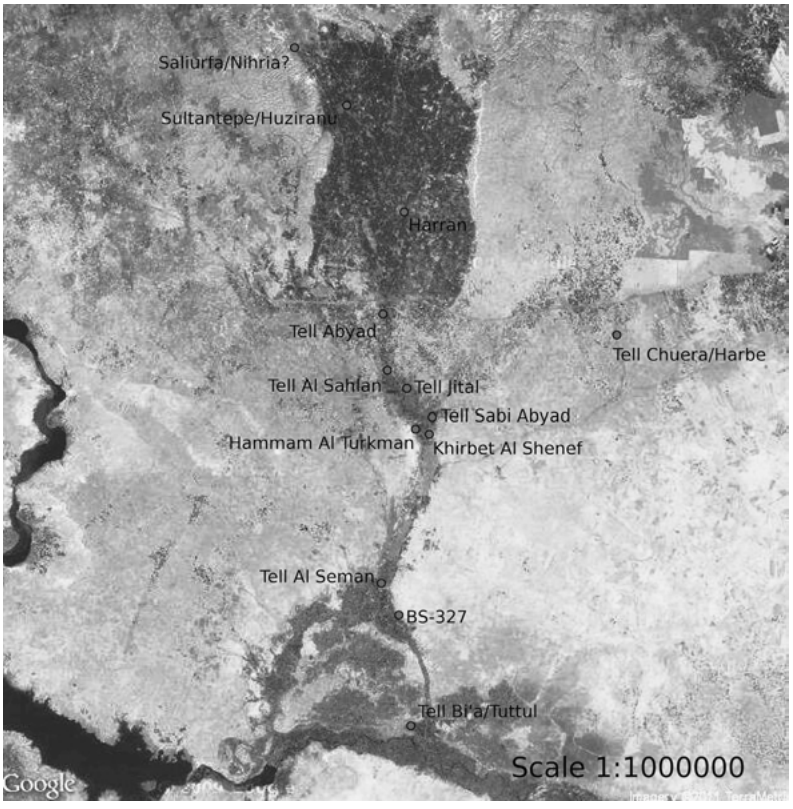

Fig. 2 | Balikh valley area (based on Lyon 2000).

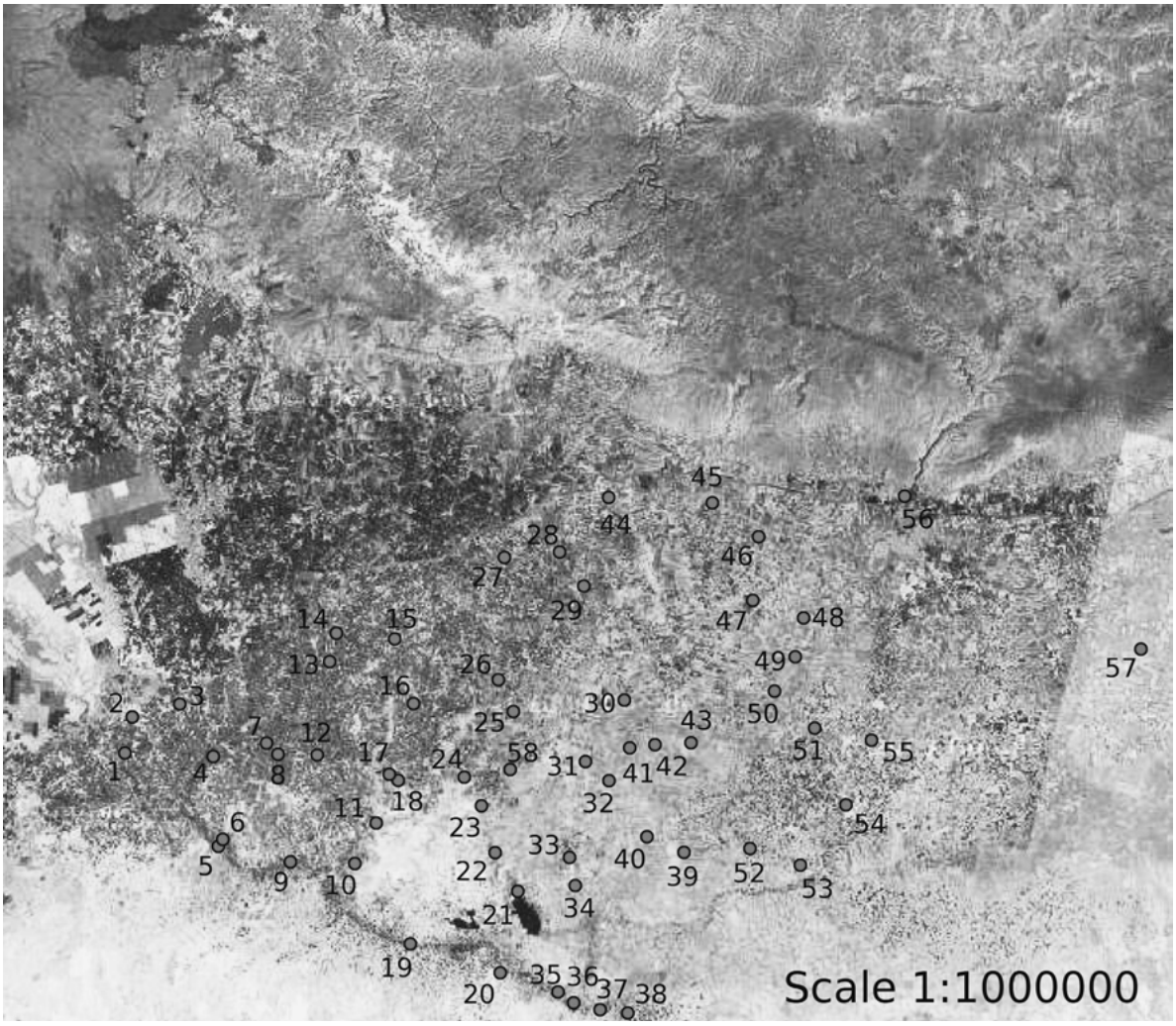

Fig. 3 | Upper Khabur River basin area. Sites (based on Anastasio 2007):

1: Tell Qattina
2: Tell Fekheriye
3: Tell Aluq Sharqi (?)
4: Tell Jamous
5: Tell Jash
6: Tell Umm Assafir
7: Tell Dawdiya
8: Tell Barair Kabir
9: Tell Ourhafa
10: Tell Ashnane Sharqi
11: Ain Al Abd
12: Tell Al Ward Sharqi
13: Tell Harmal
14: Tell Arada
15: Tell Dabash
16: Tell Al Hour Rarbi
17: Tell Bugaz
18: Tell Razal Tahtani
19: Tell Rommane
20: Tell Majdel
21: Tell Abu Hujaira 3
22: Tell Jamil
23: Tell Beidar
24: Tell Hassek
25: Tell Hanua
26: Tell Dibak
27: Tell Kdih
28: Tell Qattine
29: Tell Baqar
30: Tell Julama Tahtani
31: Tell Effendi
32: Tell Bati
33: Tell Berguil Bowz
34: Tell Aswad Tahtani
35: Tell Mujarja
36: Tell Gara
37: Tell Raghman
38: Hassaka/Magrisi
39: Tell Nurek
40: Tell Atah
41: Tell Fatme
42: Tell Awquir Fawqani
43: Tell Farho
44: Ain Al Qard
45: Tell Amuda/Kulišinaš
46: Tell Mozan
47: Tell Hil Wirhane
48: Tell Ahmar
49: Tell Gwor Dyane
50: Tell Arbid
51: Tell Guire Zil Kabir
52: Tell Kurdis
53: Tell Brak
54: Tell Barri/Kahat
55: Tell Hamidiye/Taidu
56: Girnavaz/Nabula
57: Tell Mohammed Diyab
58: Tell Hatun.

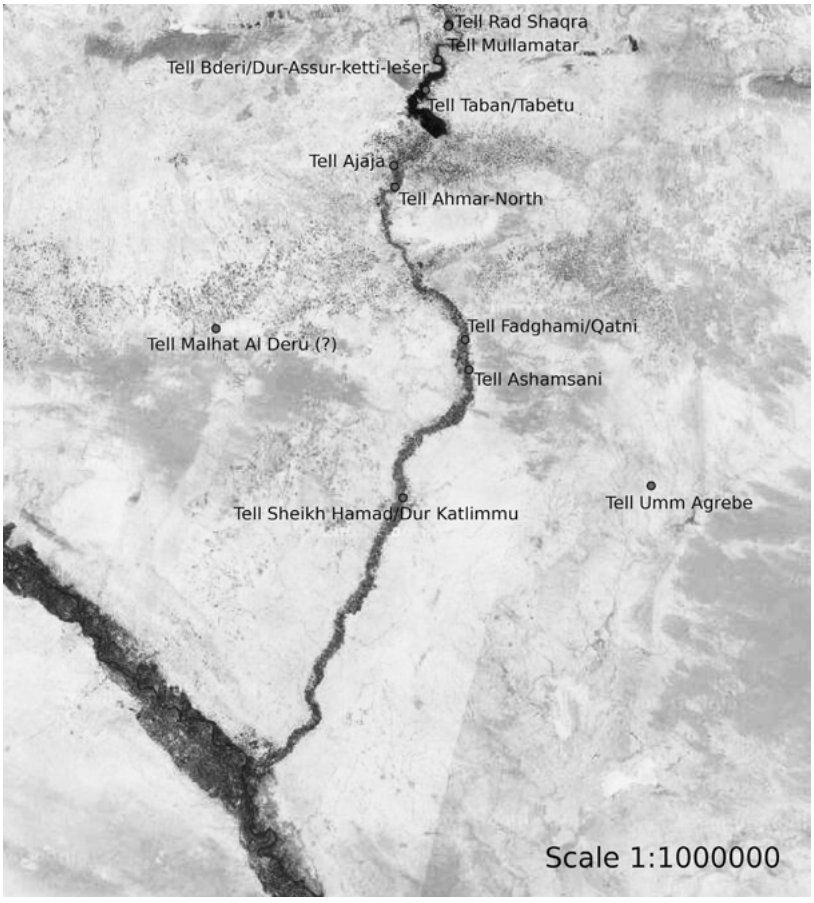

Fig. 4 | Lower Khabur area (based on Kühne 1974/1977, 1978/1979, 2000 and Morandi Bonacossi 1996).

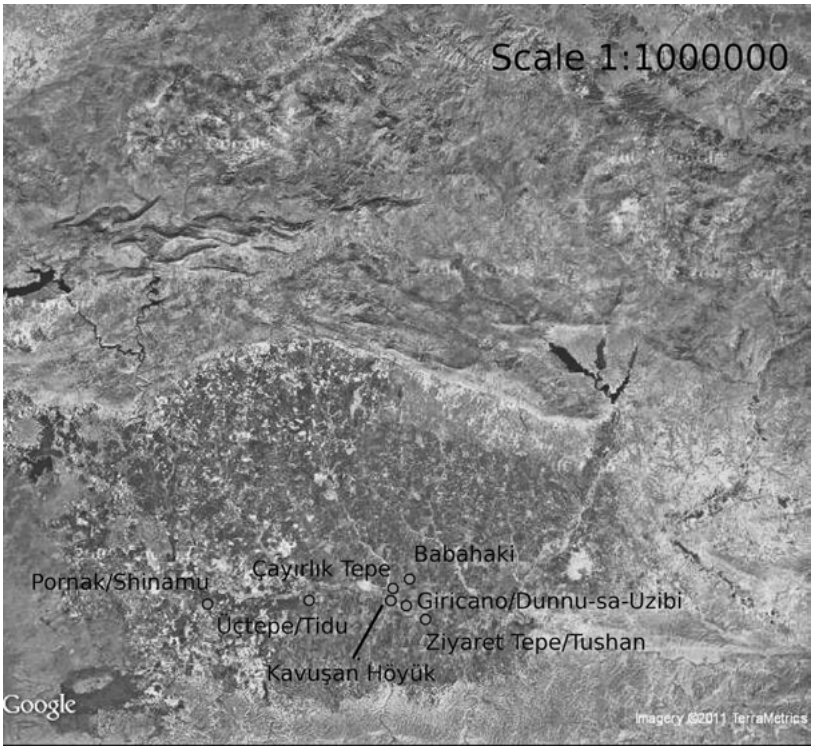

Fig. 5 | Upper Tigris area (based on Algaze 1989 and Roaf / Schachner 2005).

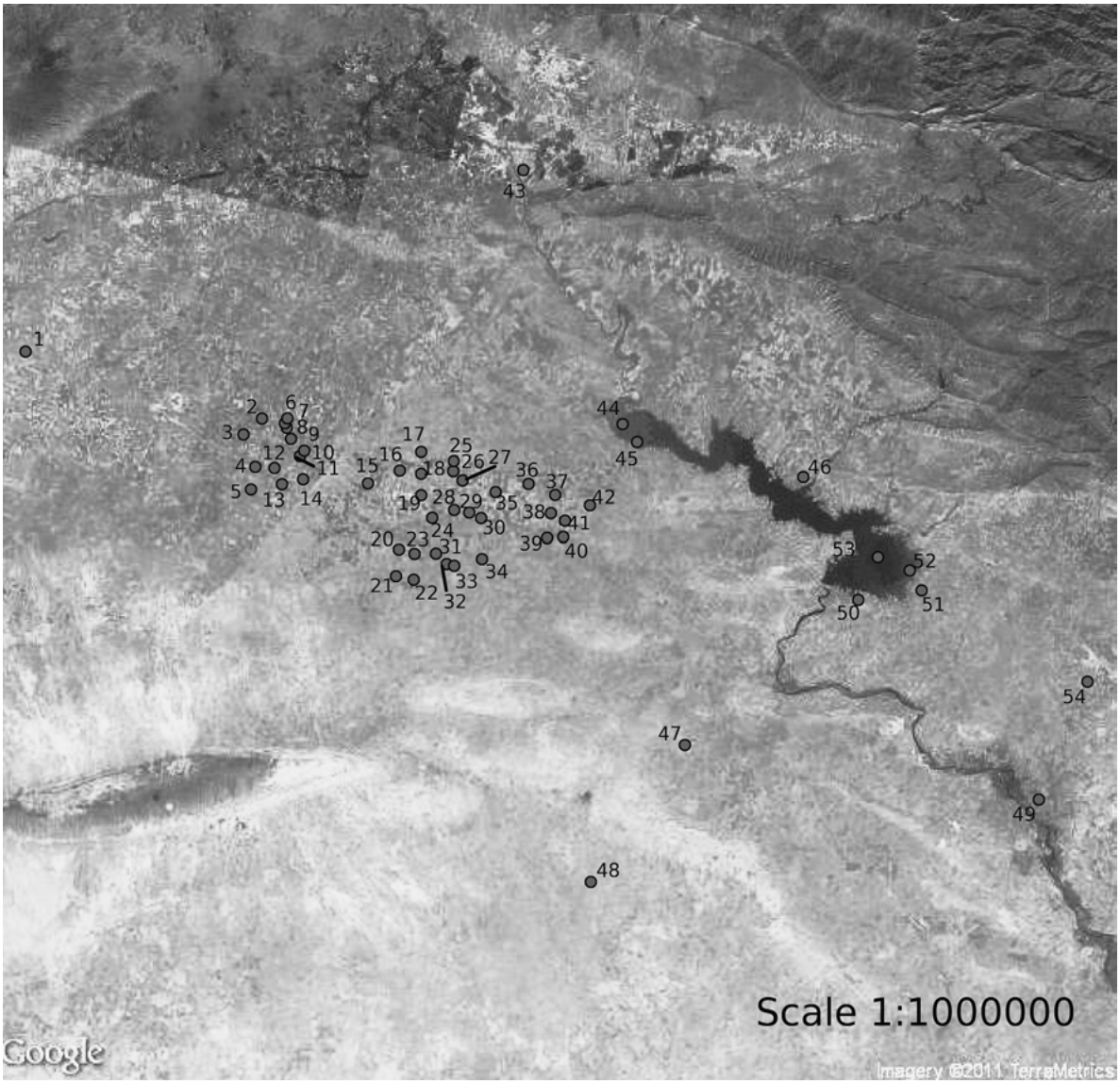

Fig. 6 | Syrian and Iraqi Jazirah areas. Sites (based on Wilkinson / Tucker 1995; Röllig 1997; Ur 2002a; 2002b; Ball 2003); THS stands for Tell Hamoukar Survey:

1: Tell Mohammed Diyab
2: THS 52 + 53
3: Tell Tamr (THS 55 + 4)
4: Nasiriya (THS 48)
5: Tell Naur (THS 59)
6: THS 9
7: THS 10
8: THS 27
9: Tell Al Sara (THS 8)
10: Khirbet Al Trob (THS 40)
11: Khirbet Al Abd (THS 16)
12: THS 42
13: Umm Adham (THS 44)
14: THS
60 15: Hawa 157
16: Hawa 160
17: Hawa 155
18: Hawa 131
19: Hawa 126
20: Hawa 140
21: Hawa 138
22: Hawa 99
23: Hawa 108
24: Hawa 105
25: Hawa 73
26: Hawa 30
27: Hawa 29
28: Hawa 71
29: Hawa 19
30: Hawa 20
31: Hawa 110
32: Hawa 121
33: Hawa 115
34: Hawa 69
35: Tell Hawa
36: Hawa 10
37: Hawa 37
38: Hawa 42
39: Hawa 45
40: Hawa 51
41: Hawa 48
42: Kharaba Tibn
43: Basorin
44: Tell Durdara
45: Khirbet Karhasan
46: Nemrik
47: Tell Abu Mariya/Apqu
48: Tell Al Rimah/Karana
49: Nineveh
50: Tell Mohammed Arab
51: Hatara
52: Tell Anza
53: Tell Jikan
54: Tell Billa/Shibaniba.

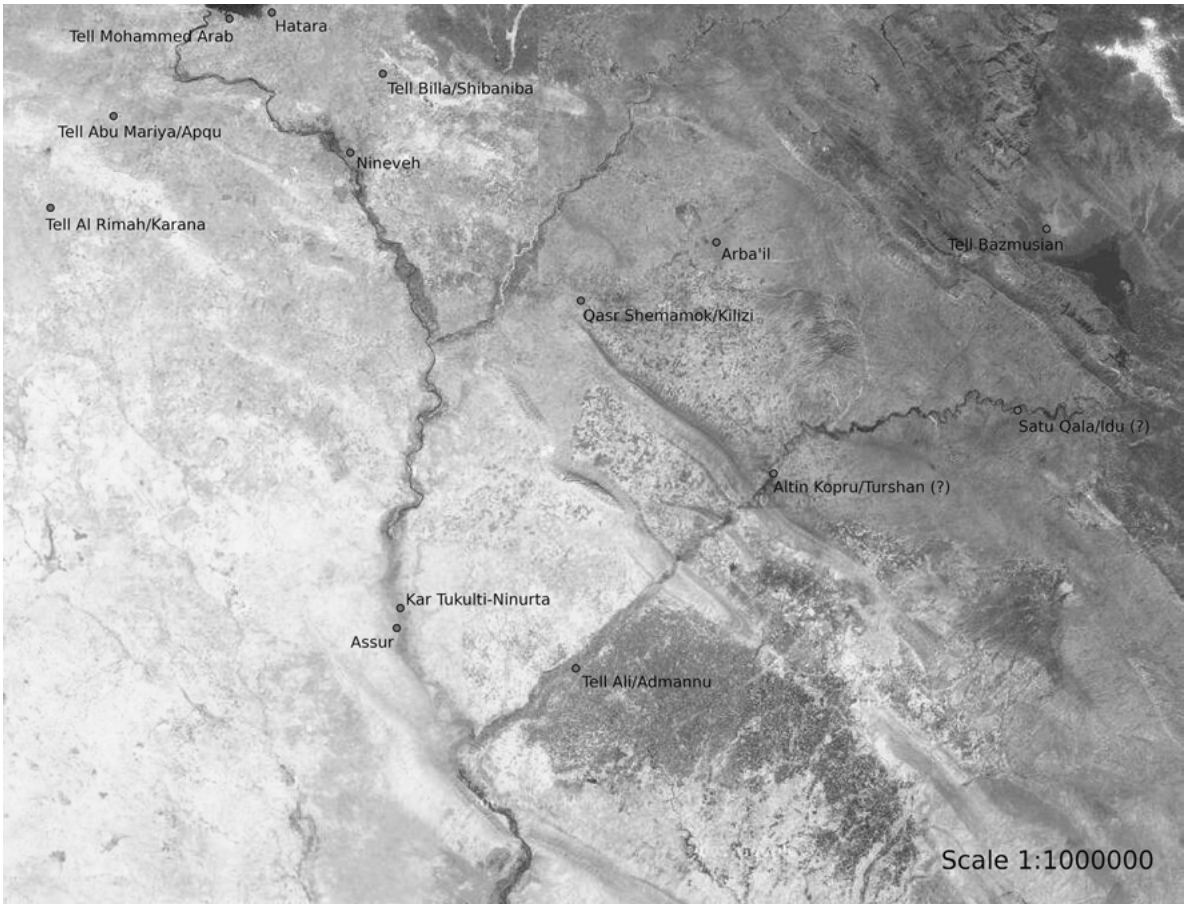

Fig. 7 | Assyrian heartland.

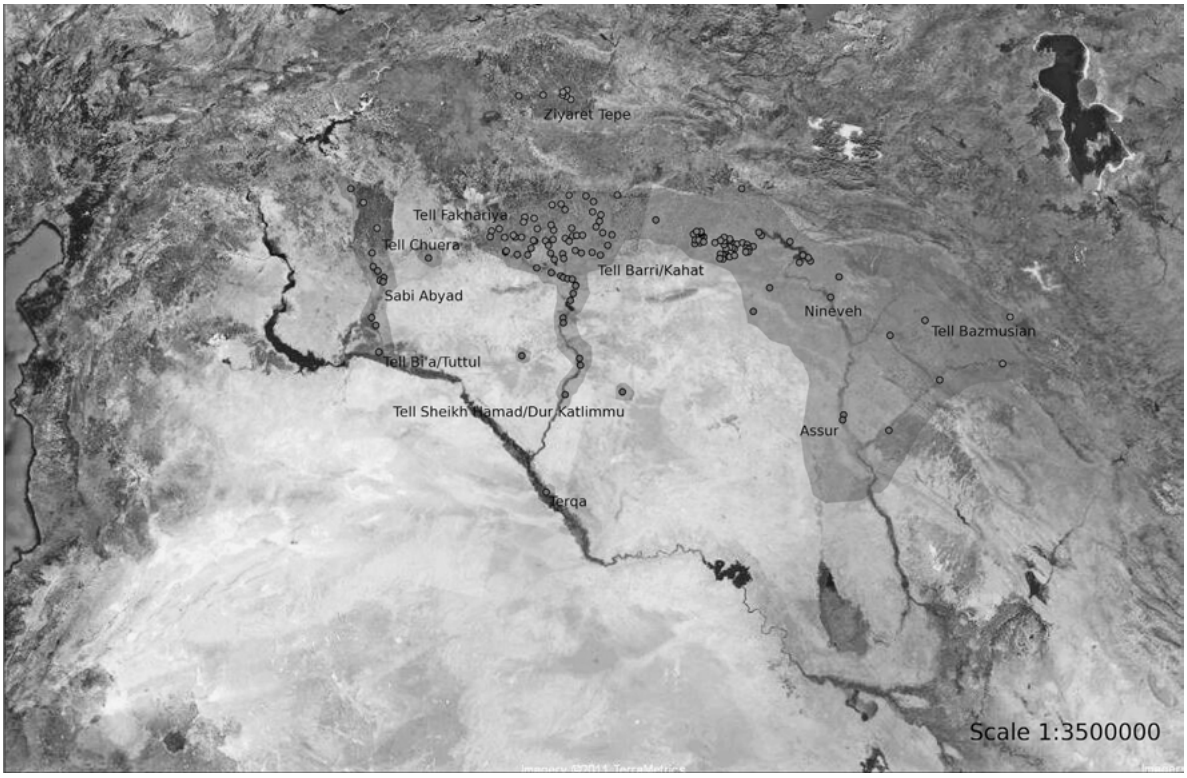

Fig. 8 | Maximum extent of the Assyrian state, end of the 13th century.

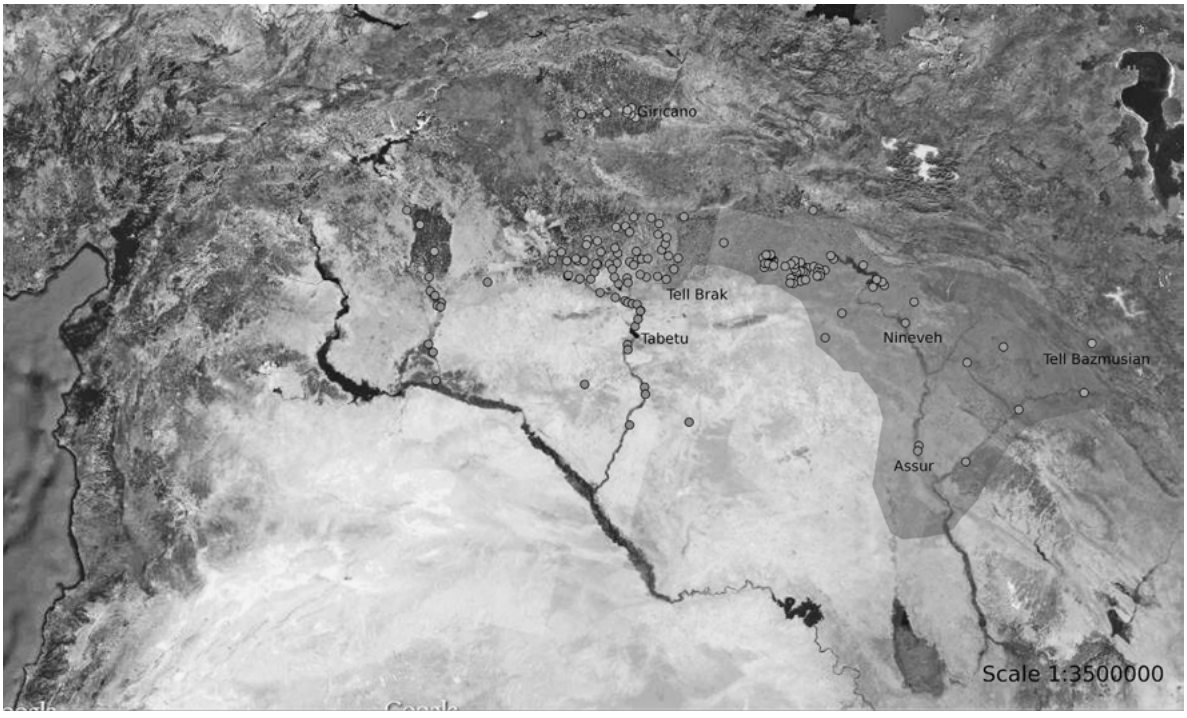

Fig. 9 | Maximum extent of the Assyrian state, end of the 12th century.