

THE HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE<sup>1</sup>

David Kertai

*This article aims to re-evaluate the history of the Middle Assyrian Empire by looking at new archaeological data and by critically re-examining the textual evidence. Special attention will be given to concepts like 'Empire', the 'rise' and 'fall', and related models of social organisation.*

**Introduction**

The Middle-Assyrian Empire flourished during the Late Bronze Age (*ca.* 1350-1200<sup>2</sup>), after it took over the territory of the Mittani Empire. It was centred around the ancient capital of Aššur, in the north of present day Iraq (see map). In the south lay the Babylonian Empire of the Kassite dynasty. Most of central Turkey and the western part of Syria belonged to the Hittite kings. The Middle-Assyrian period was succeeded by the Neo-Assyrian Empire of the Iron Age (*ca.* 935-612) after a historically unclear period. Most descriptions of the Middle-Assyrian Empire share a few suppositions (e.g. Postgate 1992, 249-251; Liverani 1998). They locate the heydays of the Middle-Assyrian Empire in the 13th century, that is during the reigns of Adad-nirari I (1295-1264)<sup>3</sup>, Šalmanassar I (1263-1233) and Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233-1197). They see the succeeding 12th century as a period of decline. During the reign of Tighlat-pileser I (1114-1076) the Empire is restored to its former glory one last time. After this short-lived revival a second period of decline commences, which is only reversed when the Neo-Assyrian kings begin to assert themselves.

This view may reflect the biases in our knowledge. Until a few years ago there was little information on the period after the 13th century<sup>4</sup>. Archaeologically

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on my Bachelor thesis at the faculty of Ancient Culture with Assyriology at the Free University in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. I would like to thank my supervisors dr. Jan Paul Crielaard and Peter Akkermans for their contributions. A special thanks goes out to my teacher Assyriology Frans Wiggermann for sharing his insights. As always, all mistakes are of my own making.

<sup>2</sup> All dates are BC.

<sup>3</sup> Dates of the Assyrian kings are based on Boese/Wilhelm 1979.

<sup>4</sup> For a history of Middle-Assyrian excavations see: Warburton 1985; Pfälzner 1995; Koliński 2001, 65-81.

there was no excavation with material from these later periods except for the capital city of Aššur (Miglus 1996). Textual data had a similar bias to the 13th century. Without excavations the chance of finding texts was slim.

There are also some underlying theoretical suppositions in this view on the Middle-Assyrian history. The reconstruction is based for a large part on diplomatic correspondences and the royal inscriptions of the Assyrian kings (for these see Grayson 1987; 1991). The problem with these texts is that most events are only mentioned in a single source. Other points of view are not preserved. The diplomatic correspondence has the added problem of dating. It is very rare to find complete names of kings preserved. These historical sources vanish after the 13th century.

The royal inscriptions were mostly found in Aššur and should therefore cover the entire period. This is not the case. Not all kings produced royal inscriptions, at least they are not known to us, and their length can vary considerably. The most elaborate are those of Šalmanassar I, Tukulti-Ninurta I, Tighlat-pileser I, and Aššur-bel-kala (1073-1056). These texts weren't written as objective histories, but as ideological and propagandist devices. Still the emphasis has often lain on their historical aspects rather than on their ideological side (e.g. Harrak 1987). These texts are more suggestive than objective and should be treated critically.

The historiography of the Middle-Assyrian Empire is entrenched in our modern concepts of historical developments. Most studies either finish at the end of the Late Bronze Age or start with the Iron Ages. The labels "Bronze Age" and "Iron Age" marks these periods off as separate. This distinction is enhanced by the separation into a Middle- and a Neo-Assyrian Empire, where the Middle-Assyrian Empire coincides with the Late Bronze Age and the Neo-Assyrian Empire with the Iron Age. It is usually assumed that one can talk of a Middle- and a Neo-Assyrian Empire, but what distinguishes them and when the one ends and the other commences is unclear. The end of the Middle-Assyrian Empire is set at different dates by scholars (Pfälzner 1995).

Why the Middle-Assyrian Empire should have come to an end follows from the view of history as being a linear unfolding of rising and declining empires. There are five objections to this view. First, the concept of empire is often used in its modern nation-state connotation. This usage focuses too much on the borders of an empire and its expansion and shrinkage. The territorial boundaries become the main defining trait of an empire and military campaigns its most important aspect. Secondly, the emphasis on the borders neglects the internal structure of the empire. It would seem that the only relevant changes visible are found in the extent of the empire. Thirdly, the context in which empires existed is often neglected. The Assyrian decline of the 12th century is often explained by the weak kings of this period. This correlation is not necessary. External conditions can make even the most talented king inept to act. A fourth critique is that changes between subsequent empires tend to be highlighted were

as changes within empires are downplayed. Changes are constant and happen throughout the existence of an empire not only between succeeding ones. Lastly, there seems to be no indication that the Assyrian kings themselves saw a break in the history of their empire.

To look for a more suitable definition of an empire I will use the definition given by the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary<sup>5</sup>. The dictionary gives six meanings of which number five and six are relevant to us. The fifth meaning describes an empire as 'an extensive territory ruled over by an emperor, or by a sovereign state'. The sixth meaning needs to be added, stating that an empire is 'a sovereign state'. An empire in our case will be defined as "a territory ruled over by an emperor, who is sovereign". This makes an empire primarily a personal possession of its monarch. One of the main question then becomes how do those areas belong to the king? This is clearly different from modern times. Modern (European) kings do not own the countries where they are king of, nor would these lands cease to exist if the royalty vanished. An Assyrian Empire without an Assyrian king is inconceivable.

The traditional view on the Middle-Assyrian Empire needs to be reconsidered. This is made possible by several excavations of the last decade, which have provided knowledge on the history of the Assyrian Empire up to the reign of Aššur-bel-kala (*ca.* 1050). For the first time we have some archaeological information coming out of Turkey. Our understanding of the Syrian part of the empire has also greatly expanded. This will be combined with a re-examination of the existing data, such as a critical look at the royal inscriptions.

This article does not want to prove that there were no periods of decline during the Middle-Assyrian period. What It will argue is that the decline did not lay in the territorial extent of the empire. The territory belonging to the Assyrian kings remained remarkably constant from *ca.* 1250 until *ca.* 1050. What changed was the way these territories belonged to the king. Territories can belong to a king in several ways. It can be in direct possession, ruled over by client-kings, or fall into its sphere of influence. These and other possibilities of territorial control provide different ways of organising an empire. These differences have consequences for the royal economy and thereby for the power each king can assert. What we will see is that during the 12th century the territories belonging to the Assyrian king became more indirectly governed.

### **The landscape of the Assyrian Empire**

The area of Babylon and Assyria is commonly known as Mesopotamia. It designates the area between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and their alluvial plain in Iraq. Both rise not far from each other in the Taurus mountains of eastern Turkey. The Tigris flows in a south-eastern direction towards Iraq. The

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<sup>5</sup> The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, third edition revised with addenda (1972), 602.

Euphrates flows in a south-western direction taking a longer route through Syria towards Iraq. Both rivers meet around Bagdad. The area between the Tigris and the Euphrates is also known as the *Jezira*. The Middle-Assyrian history mostly evolved in this area. The Assyrian “home-land” lay east of the Tigris and thereby outside the *Jezira* proper. The border with Babylonia was likewise situated east of the Tigris along the Lower Zab river not far from the capital Aššur.

The *Jezira* can be geographically separated in two parts. The border is somewhat similar to the present-day Turkish-Syrian border. Its northern part consists of the Kašijari mountains in the east (Kessler 1980, 22-78) and the barren basalt plateaus in the west. Its north-eastern border is formed by the Upper Tigris region. This name designates the Turkish part of the Tigris river east of the city Diyarbakır, but in this article it will only designate the valley east of Diyarbakır where all Assyrian excavations are located. The Kašijari mountains are a relatively small mountain range with a somewhat Mediterranean appearance. South of this area stretches the Syrian plain. This is to a large extent a steppe area. The Assyrian Empire has justly been called a “steppe-bound empire” (Kühne 1995, 69). This plain is intersected by two rivers, although creeks is perhaps a more accurate description. In the west flows the smaller Balikh, its plain extending north into Turkey (Lyon 2000, 97; Wirth 1971, 109). East of it runs the bigger Habur river. The Habur is usually divided into a northern Habur-triangle and a southern part twisting towards the Middle-Euphrates (Wallburton 1985, 13; Lyon 2000, 91). The Middle-Euphrates designates the Syrian part of the Euphrates. An extremely important, but invisible, border is the line south of which rain fed agriculture is impossible. This line fluctuates each year to a considerable extent. A considerable part of the Syrian plain has no guaranty for sufficient amounts of rain.

Before we continue some general remarks should be made. With the present state of our knowledge a complete reconstruction of the Middle-Assyrian Empire is not possible. We have almost no information on the regions east and northeast of Aššur. Inside the *Jezira* several blank spots still exist. Almost nothing is known from the Turkish parts of the *Jezira* as well as from the steppe area in Syria.

### **Adad-nirari I (1295 - 1264 BC)**

The military activities of Adad-nirari I are known from his own royal inscriptions (RIMA I: A.0.76.1/3), the later synchronistic chronicle, chronicle P (ABC 2100/22)<sup>6</sup> and three Hittite texts (KBo I 20, KUB XXIII 102 and KBo I 14, for

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<sup>6</sup> Chronicle 22 (= P) is written between 1157 and 783, 1/3 has survived. Chronicle 21 (= the synchronistic) is written in the same period, 2/3 has survived. Both chronicles are written

these see Mora/Giorgieri 2004; Hagenbuchner 1989). These sources mention two battles with the Babylonians and two with the kings of Mitanni.

Archaeologically, it is difficult to date the transition between the Mitanni- and Assyrian occupation. Several Mitanni cities seem to have been abandoned before Adad-nirari I's campaign. A break in settlement history is visible in Hammam et-Turkman, Tell Sabi Abyad, Tell Mohammed 'Arab, Tell Brak, and Tell ar-Rimah. The occupation seems to have been continuous in Aššur, Tell Barri, Tell 'Ağağa, Tell Taban, Tell al-Hamidiya, Tell Mohammed Diyab, and perhaps in Tell Fakhariya (Pfälzner 1995, 173-215; 224). In the Balikh valley there seems to have been a decrease in settlement in the 14th century in connection with traces of burning (Lyon 2000, 92), but settlements are also simply abandoned: 80% of the Mitanni sites is no longer occupied in the Middle-Assyrian period (Lyon 2000, 102-103). That several of the known Mitanni sites were abandoned before Adad-nirari I's campaign might also be indicated by his royal inscriptions. Known Mitanni sites in the south of the Jezira such as Tuttul, Hammam et-Turkman (Mitanni name unknown), Tell Bderi (Mitanni name unknown) are not mentioned. This could indicate a selectiveness in his royal inscriptions, but could also indicate that these cities were no longer inhabited. Tell Brak *Nawar* (for the reconstruction of this name see: Oates, Oates and McDonald 1997, 141-143) is also missing from the royal inscription but his grandson Tukulti-Ninurta I stated that it was plundered by Adad-nirari I.

### Mitanni

Adad-nirari I's royal inscriptions were the first to mention military deeds (de Odorico 1994, 72). His royal inscriptions mention campaigns against two Mitanni kings. The first king to battle Adad-nirari I was Šattuara I.

*'When Šattuara, king of the land Ḫanigalbat, rebelled against me... I seized him and brought him to my city Aššur. I made him take an oath and then allowed him to return to his land. Annually, as long as (he) lived, I regularly received his tribute within my city, Aššur.'*

(RIMA 1, A.O.76.3: l. 4-14)

Rebellion implies an pre-existing status of subordination. The vassal status of Šattuara I is a-priori assumed in the text. Harrak thinks Šattuara I actually committed hostile acts by attacking Assyrian traders, messengers or border cities (Harrak 1987, 100). These actual hostilities are not necessary. Šattuara I's

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in Babylon. Chronicle P is considered the more reliable one. The synchronistic chronicle is very Pro-Assyrian and occasionally errors when it comes to names (Grayson 1975, 51-61; 157-169; 170-177).

unwillingness to accept his presupposed subordination should have been enough reason for action. It is striking that there is no mention of military action in this campaign. The text only mentions ‘I seized him’. It would seem unlikely that Šattuara I came voluntarily to the capital of Aššur.

*‘...Uasašatta, his son, revolted... I captured by conquest the city Taidu... I took and brought to my city Aššur, the possessions of those cities... I conquered, burnt (and) destroyed the city Irridu... The great gods gave me to rule from the city Taidu to the city Irridu... I imposed upon (them) corvée. But as for him, I took out from the city Irridu his ‘wife of the palace’, his sons, his daughters, and his people.’*

(RIMA 1: A.O.76.3: l. 15-51)

Wasašatta was an Assyrian vassal at the moment he became king. Apparently unhappy with the situation he asked the Hittite king for help. Wasašatta payed the Hittites for their help, but to the joy of Adad-nirari I, the Hittites kept the money without coming into action (RIMA 1: A.O.76.3). The royal inscription makes a stark contrast between both campaigns. As Harrak correctly pointed out, vassal status and destruction are the consequences Assyrian enemies can expect from their hostilities (Harrak 1987, 136). We can add to this that the punishment was inherent in the status of the rebel. The independent king became vassal whereas the rebellious vassal was destroyed. The rebellion of the vassal Wasašatta demanded a severe punishment. The capital of Taidu and seven other cities were captured<sup>7</sup>. Only Irridu is explicitly destroyed. As the fate of Wasašatta is not mentioned, we can assume he managed to escape.

In the last years of Adad-nirari I’s reign Hattusili III took the Hittite throne<sup>8</sup>. In their, apparently, first correspondence they discussed the question of the city Turira (KBo I 14)<sup>9</sup>, based on a letter the Mitanni king wrote from Turira to the Hittite king. The Mitanni king claimed possession over Turira. The only known king to have been in a position to write letters at this stage was the fleeing Wasašatta. But the Mitanni king was no longer in a position to discuss matters of ownership. Hattusili III writes to Adad-nirari I “*Turira is mine or yours, and the affair of Turira is no concern of the king of Hanigalb*” (KBo I 14, r.obv. 6-19, Harrak 1987, 73). If Adad-nirari I did not intervene Hattusili III would do

<sup>7</sup> The location of Taidu is a difficult geographic questions, because it is located in the Upper Tigris region during the Neo-Assyrian period, but it lies in the Ḫabur-triangle during the Middle-Assyrian period. Taidu was first located at Tell Brak (Oates/Oates/McDonald 1997, 43). It is now equated with Tell al-Hamīdīya. Taidu most certainly presents two distinct cities: te’de en tidu (see especially Mayer 1986, 236, but also Kessler 1980; Nashef 1982, 256-257 describes it as a single city).

<sup>8</sup> Dates of the Hittite kings are based on Bryce 1998.

<sup>9</sup> The location of this city is unknown but should be somewhere in the region of the city Carchemish.

it himself. This means the initiative lies with the Assyrian king. We do not know the end of this story as Adad-nirari I died shortly thereafter and Turira is not mentioned in any other known source.

### **Babylonia**

Adad-nirari I fought with two Babylonian kings. Both wars took place south of the Lower Zab, only a short distance from the capital Aššur. According to chronicle P the Babylonian king Kurigalzu II defeated Adad-nirari I at the city of Sugaga (ABC 22: iii 20-22), but the details, dating and reliability of this text is uncertain (Brinkman 1970: 301-303). The second battle is mentioned in the Synchronistic chronicle. This war took place somewhat more east at the city of Ugar-sallu. The Babylonian king Nazi-marrutaš lost his army camp and retreated (ABC 21: i 24-31). The border was established along the Lower Zab, which meant it stayed where it had been before the wars commenced.

In his royal inscriptions Adad-nirari I mentions a border which extends in a south-western direction towards the Euphrates and was therefore more ambitious. We could presume a third unknown war with the Babylonians pushed the border in a south-western direction, but no such war is known. The royal inscriptions probably exaggerated the position of the border, which remained close to Aššur along the Lower Zab river.

The Assyrian presence in the Jezira was minimal during the reign of Adad-nirari I. During Šattuara's kingship one campaign was undertaken which apparently did not take him further west than the Khabur. Whether the Assyrian military presence expanded after the defeat of Wasašatta is unknown. This second campaign seems to have been more extensive and took the Assyrians across the Jezira towards the Euphrates. Until now there has been no evidence of an Assyrian administration in the Jezira during the reign of Adad-nirari I. He did however build a palace in Kahat (tell Barri; di Salvini 2005) and perhaps one on the ruins of Taidu (Odorico 1994, 72). Both are located along the river Jaghjagh in the Khabur-triangle.

### **Šalmanassar I (1263 – 1233 BC)**

Adad-nirari I was succeeded by his son Šalmanassar I. The most important texts on his military campaigns are the royal inscriptions A.0.77.1/3, the Hittite letters KBo XVIII 24, KUB XVIII 99, and KBo I 10/KUB III 72 and the Assyrian text KAV 119. Šalmanassar I does not appear in the Babylonian chronicles. Šalmanassar I's military presence in the Jezira was more substantial, but most campaigns were undertaken to the east and north of the Jezira. The impression of a more active king is partly due to the more elaborate nature of his royal inscriptions. From his reign onwards royal inscriptions start with the first campaign of the reign, but with Šalmanassar I it is not yet completely possible to place the successive campaigns in time (de Odorico 1998, 72).

## Mitanni

According to his own royal inscriptions Šalmanassar I first years were taken up by campaigns in the northeast against Uruatri<sup>10</sup>. The next section of his inscriptions describes the battle against Mitanni were Šattuara II had become king. The text can be separated into two parts. the first part describes a campaign in an area that is described as follows: “*When I marched to Mitanni I opened up the most difficult of paths and passes*“ (RIMA 1 A.0.77.1). The second part starts with ‘At that time’ and continues with a copy of Adad-nirari I’s conquest of the Mitanni cities.

The question is what Šalmanassar I copied from Adad-nirari I. Did he redo Adad-nirari I’s campaigns or only copied parts of his royal inscriptions? The answer depends on where we locate the Mitanni Empire of Šattuara II. The common supposition is that Šattuara II re-conquered the territory of his father and that Šalmanassar I was obliged to re-conquer the Mitanni territories in a campaign that mimicked Adad-nirari I’s. I would argue against this. There is no external evidence that supports a Mitanni take-over of the Syrian plain. The campaign in the first part cannot be a geographical description of the Syrian plain. The difficult paths can only be located in a mountainous region, such as the Kašijari or further north. This would indicate that the remainder of the Mitanni Empire was located in the Kašijari mountains or further north.

If this reconstruction is valid then we should look for indications of a Mitanni Empire north of the Kašijari mountains during this period. Two letters from the Hittite capital Hattuša provide more information (IBoT I 34 and KBo I 20, see Hagenbuchner 1989; Mora/Giorgieri 2004). In these letters the Mitanni king had again turned to the Hittite king for help. The texts describes Mitanni as belonging to the Hittites. This submissiveness seems to indicate the difficult position of the Mitanni king and should be seen as an attempt to receive the necessary support (Harrak 1987, 244; Hagenbuchner 1989).

A Mitanni name is not preserved in these letters, but it is assumed that it concerns the Mitanni king Šattuara II (Hagenbuchner 1989, 168-169). IBoT I 34 mentions that the Mitanni king resides in Šimanu, which is in the Upper Tigris valley (Kessler 1980, 79-84). KBo I 20 provides more indication for Mitanni territorial possessions in the north. The Mitanni king complains that the king of the northern kingdom of Šubarū had taken several Mitanni cities during a war with Adad-nirari I. As Adad-nirari I took possession of the Syrian plain the Šubarū gains should be located more north. That was between Šubarū and the Syrian plain, somewhere in the region of the Upper Tigris.

After Šalmanassar I defeated Šattuara II, the Upper Tigris region will have

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<sup>10</sup> This is the first mentioning of Urartu, the later first millennium Empire.



become part of the Assyrian Empire. This is also indicated by the text KAV 119. This mentions four missing *huradu*-persons in the context of the city Šimanu in the Upper Tigris region (Postgate 1971, 500). Excavations at the small site of Giricano (*Dunnu-ša-Uzibi*), at the northern edge of the Upper Tigris region, provide archaeological evidence for a Mitanni occupation of the Upper Tigris region. There is no break between the Mitanni and Middle-Assyrian layers (Schachner 2002, 151). Schachner presumes that the Middle-Assyrian occupational layers present a period of 120-160 years. This is based on the idea that a mud-brick construction would last 30 to 40 years. The Middle-Assyrian occupation has a terminus ante quem of *ca.* 1070. This would yield a begin date between 1230 and 1190. This seems to contradict their dating of the start of the Middle-Assyrian occupation to the reign of Šalmanassar I as these dates fall into the reign of his successor Tukulti-Ninurta I (Schachner 2004). Since the period of Middle-Assyrian occupation is somewhat arbitrary we can only say that apparently the Mitanni occupation extended late into the 13th century.

All this seems to indicate that there remained a Mitanni Empire north of the Syrian plain where Adad-nirari I had campaigned. Šalmanassar I's campaign could therefore be located north of the Syrian plain. This would have been a continuation of the Mitanni campaigns started by Adad-nirari I. The copying of Adad-nirari I's text might indicate that Šalmanassar I saw his campaign as an extension of the campaigns of his father.

The question is how far these campaigns took Šalmanassar I. The Hittite letter KBo XVIII 24 seems to provide an answer. The Hittite king praised the battles of Šalmanassar I and acknowledged the loss of former Hittite cities: 'Westwards you have advanced and have conquered the cities which were captured by the weapons of Šuppiluliuma and were tributary to the deity.' (Harrak 1987, 139). This probably does not refer to proper Hittite territory, but to the conquests of Mitanni, as all these cities could have been considered Hittite property after they were captured by Šuppiluliuma.

The real issue of the letter concerned the north-western city of Malatya. The Hittite king accused Šalmanassar I of having conquered that city, thereby indicating its belonging to the Hittite king. Šalmanassar I challenged him to send a trustworthy person to establish that this has not been the case (rev. iv 11-17: Harrak 1987, 139). The Hittites were clearly afraid of an Assyrian attack on Malatya, an important crossing of the Euphrates. The Hittite king asks an oracle for a decisive answer "*Whether the king of Aššur in this [year] will not come to the city Malitiya... Whether the king of Aššur in this year will not come to build...*" (KBo XXII 264, rev. iii 11-14, iv 8f, Hawkins 1987, 64)<sup>11</sup>. Since Šal-

<sup>11</sup> Hawkins assumes it concerns Adad-Nirari because he is mentioned in a broken section (ii 19). Historically it seems difficult to see Adad-Nirari forming a serious treaty to the city of Malatya. Hagenbuchner equates this text with Šalmanassar (1989, 163-164: §1.8).

manassar I does not mention Malatya in his inscriptions is likely that his campaigns halted somewhere in the vicinity (Hawkins 1987, 64-65). With Šalmanassar I the entire Jezira seems to have become Assyrian property. We never hear from the Mitanni kings again.

### **Assyrian administration**

Šalmanassar I is usually mentioned as the initiator of an administrative system in the conquered Mitanni territories. At least it is during his reign that such a system becomes apparent (Jacobs 2004). His work seems to have been concentrated along the Khabur river (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 28; Radner 1998, 49-51).

The administration of the empire became more elaborate during this period by the creation of several new provinces and the introduction of the position of the Vizier and Grand Vizier. The Grand Vizier, also known as the ‘king of Hanigalbat’, became the most important person in the administrative hierarchy besides the king. The Assyrian Grand Vizier governed the western part of Assyria. The first Grand Vizier Qibi-Aššur was part of the royal house, as Šalmanassar I was his uncle. His exact role is unknown. Information on the functioning of the Grand Vizier only appears with his son Aššur-iddin at the end of the reign of Šalmanassar I (Jacobs 2004, 56-65). Subordinate to the Grand Vizier stood the Vizier (Jakob 2003, 57-59; Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 29). The rest of the territory was divided into provinces ruled by governors (*bel pahete* see Jakob 2003, 117-118). From this period the only known provinces were located along the Khabur<sup>12</sup>.

From the Upper Tigris region no texts is known that mentions a *bel pahete* (governor) throughout the Middle-Assyrian period. This remains an unsolved hiatus. The only indication for an administrative system in the Upper Tigris region is formed by an eponym from the reign of Šalmanassar I mentioning Ištar-idaia the *šaknu* (governor) of Tušhan (Stelenreihen 99, Freidank 1991, 194). A position which is similar to the *bel pahete* (Machinist 1982, 30; Jacobs 2003, 131-140; Postgate 1995, 3). The excavations in this region have not progressed sufficiently to reconstruct the history of the region (Matney 2003, 177-178).

The administration was probably populated by the elite from Aššur. “...large, extended families of wealth, holding estates and involved in a web of commercial relations, who have ties with, if they are not actually part, of the government.” (Machinist, 1982, 29).

### **Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233 – 1197 BC)**

In his royal inscriptions Tukulti-Ninurta I mentions that his kingship started

<sup>12</sup> Dur-Katlimmu. Taidu, Naḥur, Amasakku, Šuduḥu en Waššukanni. See: Hrrak 1987, 190-197; Jakob 2003, 111-117; Cancik-Kirschbaum, 2000: 6, footnote 6. The economic and administrative texts concern the same area (Hrrak 1987, 191-192).

with battles close to home. These campaigns took place in the mountains and valleys east of Aššur. In the succeeding year five fortified cities of Katmuhu were attacked. This region east of the Kašijari mountains had broken the peace with the Assyrians. Tukulti-Ninurta I's next campaign would bring him north in the footsteps of Šalmanassar I. This expedition could be the occasion of the battle with the Hittites at the city of Nihrija.

### The Hittites

The battle at Nihrija is described in most detail in a letter written to the king of Ugarit (RS 34.165). It is commonly attributed to Tukulti-Ninurta I, but there are some peculiarities. The sender does not write as "Great King", something Tukulti-Ninurta I certainly was. Secondly, sending letters to vassals of another "Great King" was rare and Ugarit had been a Hittite vassal from the days of Šuppiluliuma (Hagenbuchner 1989, 165, footnote 31). The letter deals with a battle at Nihrija between the Hittite king Tudhaliya IV and an Assyrian king. It is usually assumed that it concerns Tukulti-Ninurta I (Singer 1985, 104; Hagenbuchner 1989, 165; Hawkins 1995, 87; Bryce 2005, 316-318; Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 36-37) although Šalmanassar I cannot be ruled out (Cifola 2004, 13).

*Now T[udhaliya king of] Ha[tti] wrote the following to m[e saying]: "Why did you conquer and capture [the merchants (?) of] my all[y?] Come, let us fight!... At that time I mustered my soldiers and my chariots. (But) before I reached the city Taidu (?) Tudhaliya, the Hittite king, sent another messenger of his to me holding two hostile tablets and one friendly tablet. (r. 12-30a) ...I stationed my [...] troops in the city Šura; they marched a distance of 120 double-hours against the [...] troops of the king of Hatti. (rev. r. 20b-26a) ...I won a great victory...*

(Harrak 1987, 141-142: rev. l. 26b-39)

The meeting with the Hittite messenger, who carried three messages, resulted in a strange theatrical situation. The first two messages were hostile and anger the Assyrians, but after three days a third message was presented in which Tudhaliya IV assured the Assyrians of his good intentions. In the meantime the Hittites had settled in Nihrija. Tukulti-Ninurta I took his troops north via the city of Šura in the Kašijari mountains. After which they moved on 120 "double-hours". The story ended in a Hittite defeat.

In a letter (KBo IV 14), probable send to Ehli-LUGAL, king of Išuwa, Tudhaliya IV complains about the lack of support at the battle of Nihrija:

*'When it was difficult for me, you were keeping yourself in some way aloof from me, you were not at my side. Did I not drive/ride out of the city Nihrija alone? Then it appeared as*

*the enemy took away from me the Hurrian land, was I not completely alone in the city Alatarma?’*

(KBo IV 14 r. ii 7ff., Harrak 1987, 218)

In several Hittite sources from this period a war between the Hittites and Assyria is mentioned (Harrak 1987). It is tempting to match this with the battle at Nihrija. A sentence from Tukulti-Ninurta I's own royal inscription '*I uprooted 28.800 Hittites from beyond the Euphrates in my accession year*' (RIMA 1: A.O.78.23 / A.O.78.24) has also been seen in this light, but nowadays it is accepted that this sentence is a later insertion into the inscription (Galter 1988, 219). The number of 28.800 is in any case mainly symbolic as it duplicates the number of 14.400 in Šalmanassar I's royal inscriptions<sup>13</sup>. Singer thinks this late addition reflects a reluctance on the Assyrian side to mention the victory over the Hittites. Mentioning this would have hampered the good relations Tukulti-Ninurta I was trying to foster with the Hittites (Singer 1985, 104). This seems unlikely, as defeating the Hittites can hardly be called a successful building up of good relations (Galter 1988, 231). A latter date for this battle might explain its earlier missing from the inscriptions (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 37), although after 1209 Tudhaliya IV would no longer be king.

### **Babylonia**

Tukulti-Ninurta I battled the Babylonians twice. The result of the first battle with the Babylonian king Kaštiliaš IV has not been preserved (ABC 21, ii 1\*-2\*). The second battle was successful for the Assyrians. Tukulti-Ninurta I takes the Babylonian king hostage after which he occupies the city of Babylon. Assyrian governors are installed. The occupation lasted seven years (ABC 22, iv 3-8. see also Cifola 2004, 12-13; Galter 1988, 220-225).

### **The Jezira**

As Tukulti-Ninurta I does not mention any campaigns in the Jezira one could presume things were tranquil inside Assyrian territory. This does not seem to have been the case. In the letters of Dur-Katlimmu the situation in the Jezira appears problematic at several occasions (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 28-45). During the time of the Babylonian campaign Tukulti-Ninurta I undertook a personal campaign towards Hanigalbat (=Mitanni). The nature of this campaign is unknown and it is far from clear where Hanigalbat should be located, but it appears to be a territory already under Assyrian dominion (Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, 33). Several letters mention hostile groups under the generic term *nakru*. Usually the context is in the north-western part of the Jezira<sup>14</sup>. We come across

<sup>13</sup> See Galter 1988, 217-219 for the theories on this sentence; 227 for the way Tukulti-Ninurta tries to surpass his father Šalmanassar.

<sup>14</sup> Nihrija, Išua and Kumāhu (Nr.8:54'ff heavily damaged context), Nihrija (Nr.4:1'), Arazīqu and Kumāhu (Nr. 3:10ff.)

a group of 1500 hostile persons in the area between the Balikh and the Khabur (Nr. 3:10ff.), that is in the middle of the Jezira. This group moved in a northern direction where they plundered two cities, one of which was Harbe (Tell Chuera), with the ultimate aim to destroy settlements east at the river Šubnat (Nr. 4:1'ff., for location see Liverani 1992, 34). These texts are important because they show that in the reign of the most powerful Middle-Assyrian king hostile troops were able to roam the Jezira quite freely.

### **Middle-Euphrates**

According to Harrak the occupation of Babylon led to the Assyrian control of the Euphrates up to Carchemish (Harrak 1987, 257). Such an Assyrian control over the Euphrates is debatable. The most important arguments for such a dominance come from the bend in the Euphrates river south of Carchemish.

The excavations at the site of Tell Fray have yielded texts from the reign of Šalmanassar I, one from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I and one bullae from the Hittite king Hattušili III. The archaeological context however does not support an Assyrian control over Tell Fray (Pfälzner 1995, 202-204). The Assyrian kings of the 13th century do not mention any campaigns along the Middle-Euphrates.

Information also comes from the site of Emar. This Hittite vassal was probably occupied during the period of 1310 till 1187. The written sources from Emar mention several attacks before the final destruction (Adamthwaite 2001, 57).

The text mention one, perhaps two, attacks by Hurrian troops under the heading of a Hurrian king and two, possibly three, attacks by the tarwu (Adamthwaite 2001, 268-280). The identification of both groups presents difficulties. The tarwu are not known from other sources (Adamthwaite 2001, 271-272). The title of Hurrian king usually refers to the Mitanni king (Kühne C 1999), but we saw that no such king existed anymore at this point as far as we can tell and certainly not in the vicinity of Emar. Adamthwaite suggests that this king refers to the Grand Vizier of Assyria, who used the title of King of Hanigalbat (Adamthwaite 2001, 268-270), but it seems unlikely that the Grand Vizier would attack and plunder a Hittite vassal. The perpetrators of the last attack, which would destroy Emar, have not made themselves known to us.

Further east at the confluence of the Balikh, the Middle-Assyrian town of Tuttul can be located. The texts from Tell Sabi Abyad mention a province there. At the site of Tell Bi'a (Tuttul) however not a single Middle-Assyrian sherd was found, but the region can still be considered under Assyrian control (Wiggermann 2000, 172).

### **Assyrian administration**

It is difficult to separate the end of Šalmanassar I's reign from the beginning of the reign Tukulti-Ninurta I. We know that during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I a widespread administrative system was functioning in the Jezira, but as to when this was introduced we remain in the dark. This is due to the lack of administrative texts from the reign of Šalmanassar I.

We know more provinces from the period of Tukulti-Ninurta I than from the preceding reign of Šalmanassar I. Except for the region of Tuttul at the confluence of the Balikh, The Middle-Euphrates does not seem to have been part of the Middle-Assyrian administration (Koliński 2001, 71-72). The the most western part of the Assyrian administration was formed by Balikh valley. The main excavation of this period along the Balikh is the *dunnu* of Tell Sabi Abyad (Akkermans 2006). A *dunnu* is a fortified farmstead, this particular one was possessed by the Grand Vizier himself (cf. Wiggermann 2000). The Balikh-valley can feed 2400-6000 people, depending on the land and irrigation use (Wilkinson 1998, 81). The 900 people connected to the *dunnu* of Tell Sabi Abyad formed a substantial part of this (Wiggermann 2000, 184-191).

### **The 12th century (1196 - 1115 BC)**

The reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I ended tragically. His son Aššur-nadin-apli was part of a conspiracy that leads to the dead Tukulti-Ninurta I. Why such an apparently successful king would have fallen to a such a conspiracy is unknown. Lambert came to the hypotheses that Tukulti-Ninurta I would have been a son of a Babylonian slave. Tukulti-Ninurta I would have made promotion in the Assyrian army before being adopted as heir by Šalmanassar I. His predilection for Babylon would have caused his final demise (Lambert 2004, 198-202). This hypotheses is flowery but also quite speculative.

After the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I commenced the period that is usual described as a period of decline. it is clear that the amount of royal inscriptions decreases during this period. The demise of economic texts and building activities point to a demise in the Assyrian economy. This decline cannot be separated from the international events. We are in the middle of the so-called Crisis Years (Ward/Joukowsky 1992). The Hittite Empire collapsed and cities such as Hattuša, Emar, and Ugarit were destroyed. With this the main external sources on the history of the Middle-Assyrian Empire cease to exist.

The only remaining textual corpora are the texts from Aššur and the Babylonian chronicles. The chronicles only deal with the relations between Assyria and Babylon. To some extent this might reflect reality. With the demise of the Hittite Empire the only major empire bordering the Assyrian territories was the Babylonian one. With regard to Babylon there does not seem to have been a decline in the Assyrian activity. Almost all kings campaigned against the Babylonians, like the kings before them. The pre-occupation with Babylon might however be more representative of our sources then the actual campaigns undertaken by the Assyrian kings. As the Assyrian kings kept fighting the Babylonians there is no a-priori reason to assume they did not fight in other regions. We are not in a position to know the extent and success of campaigns in other parts of the Empire.

Within the royal house short reigns succeeded long ones. Tukulti-Ninurta I's son Aššur-nadin-apli reigned from 1196-1194. he was succeeded by his son

Aššur-nirari III (1193-1188). Little is known from these reigns. Aššur-nirari III was succeeded by his son Enlil-kudurri-ušur (1187-1183). When the Grand Vizier Ili-padda died in 1183 his son Ninurta-apil-Ekur needed to flee (Mayer 1996, 540). He was supported by the Babylonian king and probably by the elite from the capital city of Aššur, because they delivered Enlil-kudurri-ušur to the king of Babylon (Llop/George 2000-2001, 9, MS A<sub>2</sub> r. 6' – 7'). Ninurta-apil-Ekur (1182-1170) succeeded in claiming the Assyrian throne with Babylonian help (ABC 21, ii 3-8). Foreign support usually has a price. Whether this was the case is unknown. During Ninurta-apil-Ekur's reign the position of Grand Vizier is abolished.

Ninurta-apil-Ekur was the one most removed from the royal lineage to have taken the throne during the Middle-Assyrian period. He came from a royal line that had been separated since the time of Adad-nirari I (Jacobs 2004, 64), but he was also the son of the second most important person of the empire. One could almost call this the start of a new dynasty.

The *dunnu* of Tell Sabi Abyad seems to have lost its privileged position and was set afire and destroyed around 1180. The complex fell into decay. After a while the complex is brought back into use with a lower intensity (Akkermans 2006; Wiggermann 2000, 175).

Ninurta-apil-Ekur's son Aššur-dan I (1169-1134) became one of the longest reigning Assyrian kings. The synchronistic chronicle mentions Aššur-dan I fighting with the Babylonians early in his reign. Aššur-dan I conquered the cities Zaban, Irriya en Ugar-sallu (ABC 21, ii 9-12). This gives the impression that these border towns along the Lower Zab river had become Babylonian possession. The Elamites end the long reigning Kassite dynasty of Babylon in 1160. Around the year 1155 the Elamites appeared at the city of Arraphe (Mayer 1995, 228). The city was apparently re-conquered before the end of Aššur-dan I's reign (Llop/George 2000-2001, 15).

According to the Assyrian kings-list two sons of Aššur-dan I fought for the throne after Aššur-dan I died. In the first instance Aššur-dan was succeeded by his son Ninurta-tukul-Aššur. He reigned only one year after which he was chased away to Babylon by his brother Mutakkil-Nusku. It is striking that even though Ninurta-tukul-Aššur is often mentioned in the archive from Aššur, he is only mentioned king three times (Mayer 1998, 541). Further information on the battle for the succession is given by the text MS A<sub>2</sub> (Llop/George 2000-2001, 1-19). This text sheds a different light on the events. It appears that Ninurta-tukul-Aššur never fled to Babylon, but retreated to the city of Sišil in the neighbourhood of the Babylonian border. The role of the Babylonian king is not clear. The Babylonian king made an appointment with Mutakkil-Nusku to battle at the city of Zaqqā, probably located along the Euphrates (Llop/George 2000-2001, 12-13; Nashef 1982, 281). Mutakkil-Nusku did not show up, perhaps because it was not possible to leave Aššur during this time of war.

We never hear from Ninurta-tukul-Aššur again and may therefore presume he lost the battle. Mutakkil-Nusku was succeeded by his son Aššur-reša-iši I

(1132-1115) in the same year. The Assyrian chronicle fragment 3 mentions the Babylonian king Ninurta-nadin-šumati proceeded up to the city of Arbail (ABC fragment 3: iv 9-21). This appears to be the first time a Babylonian king succeeded in crossing the Lower Zab river. The attack was beaten off. The synchronistic chronicle deals with the battle between Aššur-reša-iši I and the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (ABC Chronicle 21, ii 3-9). The battle in Zaqqa took place after all, which meant it was Assyrian territory in the meantime. Aššur-reša-iši I defeated Nebuchadnezzar twice according to this very pro-Assyrian and unreliable chronicle. The latest text from Tell Sabi Abyad might have been written around 1125, but this is unclear. The complex might have remained in use until part of the eleventh century (Akkermans 2006, 209). This period shows some involvement from Babylon with the dynastic issues of the Assyrian Empire. It was with Babylonian help that Ninurta-apil-Ekur was able to take the throne. The Babylonians also intervened in the succession of Aššur-dan I. Their support of Ninurta-tukul-Aššur was however unsuccessful.

### **Assyrian administration**

The abolishing of the Grand Vizier's position cannot have increased the Assyrian ability to govern the Jezira, as it was the Grand Vizier who seems to have been responsible for this (Jacobs 2004, 56-65). Although a causal connection is improvable, this problem might have been resolved by giving some local governors more independence. What we see from this time onwards is the coming into existing of a looser administrative structure besides the Assyrian provincial system. Some governors might have started to present themselves somewhat more independently from this time onwards.

In a text, which is dated around 1150, but could date to the period after 1080 (Maul 2005, 15), several high officials bring gifts to Aššur<sup>15</sup>. The governors of the provinces Šadikanni and Qatnu along the river Khabur are mentioned, beside men without title. These are Adad-apla-iddina the Tabētaen, a Katmuhian, a Ruqahaeen, a damaged name and a Hanaen. All were probably client-kings that stood outside the provincial system (Postgate 1988, 99-100; Cancik-Kirschbaum 2000, 7; Jakob 2003, 12).

The Aššur-archive 6096, from the year 1133, mentions several provinces in the Assyrian territory around Aššur and in the region of the Khabur river (Postgate 1988, 100; Llop/George 2000-2001, 13-15). Again cities are mentioned, which do not seem to have a governor, but who are according to Postgate "strictly internal officials" (Postgate 1988, 100). It concerns the cities Arraphe, Suhu, several Suteans and the leader of Ṭabetu, who is called king onetime. Calling Mannu-lu-ju king of Ṭabetu does not seem to have had any consequences for his support of the Assyrian king (Kühne 1995, 74-75; Maul 1992, 48). Adad-

<sup>15</sup> Postgate, J.N. 1988, 99 (BM 122635, Iraq 32. 1970); Maul, S.M. 1992, 48. It is unclear whether the date of Maul is only based on the supposition that Adad-apla-iddina was a for-father of the kings of Mari or whether other arguments are present.



šuma-iddina from Suhu sends sheep to Aššur, but it is unclear in which capacity he is acting (Llop/George 2000-2001, 15). The mentioning of the city Sutiū points to the north-western region around Harbe (Llop/George 2000-2001, 13: footnote 90).

What does this mean for the territorial extent of the Middle-Assyrian Empire during this period? Although some looser forms of government have evolved, the Assyrian territory around the capital Aššur and the region along the river Khabur were still part of the Assyrian administration. There is no information on other regions of the empire, such as the river Balikh and the Upper Tigris region.

The only information on the Balikh comes from the excavation of Tell Sabi Abyad. This site seems to have been occupied during this period, but no texts can clearly be dated to this period (Akkermans 2006, 209). In the Upper Tigris region there is no indication of Assyrian administration throughout the Middle-Assyrian period. The excavations of the Upper Tigris region provide little information, but do indicate continuous occupation (Sachner 2004; Kóroğlu 1998). In the following period the Assyrian kings still seem to have considered the Balikh as theirs, but to which extent these lands provided income for the king will remain unknown until new evidence is found.

### **Tiglath-pileser I (1114-1076)**

Aššur-reša-iši I was succeeded by his son Tiglath-pileser I. This king is often credited with restoring the Assyrian Empire. It is however unclear what needed to be restored. We are much better informed on the deeds of this king by his extensive royal inscriptions (de Odorico 1994). His campaigns had an unprecedented geographical reach. We do not know what made these campaigns possible were his predecessors seem to have been incapable.

‘In my accession year: 20.000 Mušku with their five kings, who had held the lands Alzu and Purulumzu... captured the land Katmuhu’ (RIMA 2: A.0.87.1: r. i 62-88) ‘I marched to the rebellious and insubmissive city Milidia of the land Hanigalbat. ...I did not storm that city...’ (RIMA 2: A.0.87.1: r. v 31-41)

This campaign seems to have taken him far into the Taurus mountains. The presence of his inscriptions at Yoncalı form an indication of this (Rothman 2004, 135-136). The “uppersee” formed the border of his campaign. This sea was probably identical to the Black Sea, a translation with lake Van is improbable as this would be to southern. It is unlikely that such a long journey would have aimed a conquering land. A marauding expedition, were people and goods were taken away, seems more likely. Tiglath-pileser I is also credited with being the first Assyrian king to have reached the Mediterranean Sea.

‘I marched to Mount Lebanon. I cut down (and) carried off cedar... I received tribute from the lands Byblos, Sidon, (and) Arvad. I rode in boats of the people of Arvad (and) travelled successfully a distance of three double hours from the city Arvad... I killed at sea a naḥīru, which is called a sea-horse.’ (RIMA 2: A.0.87.3: r. 16-25)

It is unclear why Tighlat-pileser I didn't have to fight to receive tribute. The whole expedition makes more sense if it is seen as a trading mission. Tribute can easily be an euphemism for trade (Liverani 2004, 217; 219). Seeing this as a military campaign is problematic as there is no mention of any hostile army. It would also seem unwise to go on a touristy sailing expedition when one is in hostile territory. The text makes it clear that the catch of the *nāhir* forms the core of the royal inscriptions (de Odorico 1994, 89-91). A basalt replica is made of it to decorate the palace at home. What animal is meant by a *nāhir* is unknown, although de Odorico's suggestion of a Narwhal (de Odorico, de 1994, 93) seems unlikely as the Narwhal only occurs within the Arctic circle. In a later text the *nāhir* is replaced by the gift of a female ape and a crocodile (RIMA 2: A.0.88.4 r. 24-30). On his return to Aššur, Tighlat-pileser I battles the king of Carchemish.

Tighlat-pileser I is also the first king to have mentioned crossing the Euphrates. 'I have crossed the Euphrates twenty-eight times, twice in one year, in pursuit of the *Ahlamu*-Aramaeans.' (RIMA 2: A.0.87.4: r. 34-36). Again it would appear not be about territorial gains. Tighlat-pileser I only mentions the killing of enemies and the taking of spoil. The unorganised nature of the enemy is indicated by the fact that Tighlat-pileser I needs to repeat his campaign 27 times. The *Ahlamu*-Aramaeans do not seem to have possessed cities or kings. It is only at mount Bešri at the other side of the Euphrates that Tighlat-pileser I was able to conquer six cities of the *Ahlamu*-Aramaeans. The success of these military campaigns against such a nomadic people can only have been very limited. Such groups would have been much more flexible and quicker than the Assyrian army. The repetitive nature of these campaigns seems to indicate that there was no clear enemy to destroy. Sader supposes that the texts refers to small villages or camps, which were rebuild 28 times (2001, 65). However it would seem more logical for the *Ahlamu*-Aramaeans to relocate their camps to a different region in stead of waiting for Tighlat-pileser I to come a destroy it over and over again.

Tighlat-pileser I fought with the Babylonians twice. In the first campaign Tighlat-pileser I conquers cities along the Lower Zab river. Again demonstrating the stability of this border. This campaign seems to have been unsuccessful (de Odorico 1994, 96). In his second campaign Tighlat-pileser I plundered the important Babylonian cities of Dur-Kurigalzu, Sippar, Babylon and Opis (RIMA 2: A.0.87.10).

The campaigns of Tighlat-pileser I were still outside the Jezira. This seems to indicate that the Jezira is still Assyrian territory. Only the region of Katmuhu needed to be re-conquered. The general goal of his campaigns was the pacification of the *Ahlamu* and the collection of tribute, plundering, and trade. What is also interesting is the lack of organized enemy armies in the areas were Tighlat-pileser I campaigned. This view of a still Assyrian Jezira seems supported by a temple archive from Aššur. This archive mentions 27 provinces all located along the river Khabur and the region around Aššur (Postgate 1988, 96-101. The small map is reprinted in Postgate 1995, 14). The reconstructed territorial border leaves

the Balikh valley and the Upper Tigris region out. We will see that the Upper Tigris region should still be considered as part of the Empire. On the history of the Balikh valley our information ceases with the decline of Tell Sabi Abyad. However there is some evidence to suggest that Tighlat-pileser I conquered parts of the Euphrates valley just south of Carchemish (Makinson 2005, 33-41; Eidem/Putt 2001). If true this would certainly mean that the Balikh valley was still under Assyrian control. The later king Šalmanassar I III (858-24) mentions three cities in this region as having been build by Tighlat-pileser I. It concerns the cities of Pitru, Til-Barsip, and Mutkinu (RIMA 3: A.0.102.2: ii 35b-40a, A.0.102.6: i 57-ii2; Radner 2005; Eidem/Putt 2001).

During this period we come across another king of Ṭabetu (Maul 2005). This Aššur-ketti-lešer is another generation of “kings of Mari”. His inscriptions are found north Ṭabetu in Tell Bderi (Maul 1992; Ohnuma/Numoto 2001; Ohnuma/Numoto/Shimbo 2000; Ohnuma/Numoto/Okuda 1999). The 2005 field season yielded another approximately 150 tablets to be published later (Numoto 2006). Aššur-ketti-lešer builds a fort at this former Mitanni city in the year 1096. he calls it after himself Dur-Aššur-ketti-lešer. He seems to have also conquered the city of Adališhu (Tell Rad Shaqra?), were he builds a palace (Kühne 1995, 74). The end of this dynasty is unknown. The hypotheses that these conquests would anger the Assyrian kings is unlikely as the dynasty remains in power (Maul 1999, 52-53). This line of reasoning supposes that the Assyrian kings would be unhappy with these ambitious vassals. This cannot be proven. Apparently in some cases it was more opportune to leave the local administration to client-kings. The position of these client-kings between local governors in the archives might indicate that the distinction between the two is not big. The pottery from Tell Bderi indicates that the king of Mari continued the “official” Middle-Assyrian pottery-tradition as found at Dur-Katlimmu (Kühne 1995, 74). In the end what might have mattered most was the receiving of the tribute.

#### **Aššur-bel-kala (1073-1056)**

The inscriptions of Tighlat-pileser I's son Aššur-bel-kala are extensive. Aššur-bel-kala is most known for his campaigns against Aramaeans throughout the Empire. He was the first Middle-Assyrian king to have mentioned campaigns inside the Empire in his royal inscriptions. Earlier kings always campaigned in rebellious regions outside the Empire and in borderlands. The Aramaeans do not seem to have been organized into big armies and there is no mention of any Aramaean king. The Aramaeans are always mentioned as contingents located next to Assyrian cities. Aššur-bel-kala battles the Aramaeans at Dur-Katlimmu, in the Upper Tigris region, in the Kašijari mountains, and in the region of Harran. Along the Khabur he battles a king of Mari twice (RIMA 2: A.0.89.1 r. 14'- 16' and A.0.89.2 ii 5'- 11').

This kingdom / vassal in Mari is a recurring entity in the twelfth century. It is only in the last years that some light has been shed on this dynasty (Maul 2005).

Aššur-bel-kala battles Tukulti-Mer king of Mari and Hana, which is located west of the river Khabur. Tukulti-Mer gives Ilu-iqiša as the name of his father. This dynasty could perhaps be connected to the Hanaean found in Aššur archives of 1150 as discussed above (Cancik-Kirschbaum 2000, 7). It is a bit puzzling to find another king of Mari. These names do not fit the known dynastic-list of the kings of Mari from Ṭabetu. Maul suggests that we are dealing with two distinct kingdoms (Maul 1992, 54).

How should we interpret this sudden incursion of Aramaeans into the Empire? Some would argue that this indicates the final crumbling of Assyrian power. Whereas Tighlat-pileser I was able to keep the Aramaeans outside Assyria proper, Aššur-bel-kala was not. I will argue that this view is misleading. We saw that even during the heydays of the Middle-Assyrian Empire, that is during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, the Assyrians weren't able to keep hostile groups from infiltrating.

We have no information on the spread of the Aramaeans in the 12th century. The reasons for them not being mentioned in earlier inscriptions seems to be more related to the Assyrian topos of the king who only fights outside the Assyrian territory. A true Assyrian king apparently does not campaign in territory which is already his. It is not so much that there is no mention of Aramaeans in the Jezira during the 12th century in any of the royal inscriptions, there are hardly any royal inscription and none of them mention the Jezira. This topos changes with Aššur-bel-kala, who campaigns throughout the Jezira. I would argue that the message of his inscriptions is not the spread of the Aramaeans but that he would protect all Assyrian territory. This indicates that these cities were still part of the Assyrian Empire. Aššur-bel-Kala does not need to battle the Aramaeans inside any of these cities. They are always found next to them. The Aramaeans have spread themselves throughout the Empire in groups where they apparently waited for Aššur-bel-kala's army to arrive. Perhaps it would have been advisable for them to flee the river valleys at the arrival of the Assyrian army.

With the exception of the Balikh, most of the Assyrian territories was still in Assyrian hands. This would still include the entire Khabur-valley and the Upper Tigris region. This is also indicated by new excavations at Giricano in the Upper Tigris region (Schachner 2004) and at Tell Bderi (Maul 1992) and Tell Barri in the Khabur-triangle (Pecorella, Benoit 2005), which found Assyrian occupation up till Aššur-bel-kala's reign.

Even though there is no prove for an Aramaean incursion, Aššur-bel-kala's royal inscriptions do seem to indicate growing problems for the Assyrian king. It seems reasonable to assume that Aššur-bel-Kala would have rather continued fighting outside his own territory as the kings before him did.

### **The Upper Tigris region**

Aššur-bel-kala fought in the Upper Tigris region during his reign. He battled the Aramaeans next to Šimanu in the west of the valley. This area was occupied during this period. The last phase in Giricano consists of mA III pottery with

almost no local forms (Schachner 2004, 5; 12-13; for the classification see Phälzner 1995, 234-238). The cities Tušhan and Šimanu (probably) were occupied during this time (Radner 2004, 71; RIMA 2 A.0.89.7 iii 9-14). There is no known province in the Upper Tigris. The region is not mentioned in any of the known lists of provinces. This might be explained either by the incompleteness of these list or by the fact that this region had a different mode of government. Aššur-bel-kala mentions a *pahatu* (district) of Šimanu, which might indicate the existence of a *bel pahate* (governor) (RIMA 2 A.0.89.7 iii 9-14). During Aššur-bel-kala's reign Dunnu-ša-Uzibi (Giricano) is abandoned. The last texts from Giricano are dated to the eponym of Ili-iddina (1069-1068). 15 texts were found, 11 of which bore this eponym (Radner 2004, 51-52). This eponym is also found on his royal inscriptions that mention the Aramaean campaigns (Grayson 1991). This dates the texts to the year after which Aššur-bel-kala fought in the region. Apparently his success was not lasting. After the abandonment there is no occupation for some fifty years (Schachner 2004, 5, footnote 15).

After ca. 1050 a new kind of pottery appears in the Upper Tigris region. This so-called 'groovy pottery' is found throughout eastern Turkey. In Iraq and Syria only one excavation has yielded 'groovy pottery'. The appearance of 'groovy pottery' in this area is taken as the end of the Assyrian presence (Roaf/Schachner 2005). It is dangerous to connect pottery to people, but the spread of this material culture is not similar to anything which could be called Aramaean material culture as found in Syria. This is a bit strange as Aššur-bel-kala only mentions battling Aramaeans in the Upper Tigris region. This discrepancy should not surprise us. We saw that royal inscriptions often enhance enemies by locating them everywhere or by indicating they were helped by other kings. This should warn us against trying to fit the Aramaeans into the history of the Upper Tigris region, although erasing them with any kind of certainty is also impossible as they do appear in the Neo-Assyrian period in the west of this region (Grayson 1996).

Bartl proposed to equate the makers of the 'groovy pottery' with the Mušku. These are the people who were chased north from Katmuhu by Tighlat-pileser I. She latter revised her opinion (Bartl 2001, 398), because the spread of this pottery does not coincide with the area were the Mušku are expected to have lived. Roaf and Schachner propose to see this pottery as overlapping with the north-easterly from the Tigris living Nairi. Aware of the theoretical difficulties of pots-and-people arguments they argue for an overlap instead of an equation (Roaf/Schachner 2005, 115-123).

As always there was the meddling with the Babylonians. Aššur-bel-kala conquered the cities around the important city of Dur-Kurigalzu (RIMA 2: A.0.89.7 iii 4b – 8a). He made peace with the Babylonian king Marduk-šapikzeri. Aššur-bel-kala was the one how chose the next Babylonian king. Aššur-bel-kala married the daughter of the new king and took a big dowry to Assyria. This seems a nice way to plunder the riches of Babylon.

## Conclusion

In this article the concept of 'empire' has been defined as "a territory ruled over by an emperor, who is sovereign". This means that the Middle-Assyrian Empire was primarily the possession of the Middle-Assyrian kings. The history of the Middle-Assyrian Empire is therefore first of all the history of the territory that belonged the Middle-Assyrian kings. The territorial structure of the Middle-Assyrian Empire is defined by the way these territories belonged to them. This 'belonging' seems to have taken several forms and regions have belonged to the king in different measures.

New information has contributed to the extension of our knowledge in time and geographical extent. It questions the idea of a 'golden' 13th century and a later period of decline. New texts from the royal correspondences and secondary literature have made a critical reading of the royal inscriptions possible. The concept of 'belonging' is important in this respect. The royal inscriptions and the general historiography of the Middle-Assyrian period are unclear on the way regions belong to the Assyrian king. The royal inscriptions suggest that Assyrian kings always were in full and direct control of all Assyrian territory. This article has tried to demonstrate that the Assyrian kings used a range of methods of possession, among which are plundering and client-kings.

The relation between the king and the region that belonged to him should be defined in time and place. The most important difference is between regions fallen under the sphere of influence of the Assyrian kings and the regions that could be counted as possession. The precise border of the Assyrian Empire is unknown for all Middle-Assyrian kings. This even includes the Jezira where the Assyrian possessions in the present-day Turkish regions are largely unknown.

Up to the reign of Šalmanassar I it is unclear how regions belonged to the Assyrian king. Without administrative texts or other indications of Assyrian administration the difference between the sphere of influence and possession will remain unknown. The Assyrian sphere of influence grew during the reign of Adad-nirari I, until large parts of the Syrian plain were part of it. Even if this resulted in full possession it seems that he did not do much with these territories. The only region where his activities are found so far are along the river Jaghjagh, in the north of the Khabur-triangle, where he builds palaces in the city of Kahat and perhaps in Taidu. This is the closest region from the already possessed regions in the east of the Jezira.

During the reign of Šalmanassar I the entire Jezira seems to have become royal possession. These possessions were however managed by the Grand Vizier, who had a Vizier and several governors to his aid. All in all a select group who's most important members were probably members of the royal family. The most elaborate evidence for an Assyrian administration comes from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. But the situation never became tranquil. During Tukulti-Ninurta I's reign hostile groups were able to travel through the Jezira.

The 'golden' years of 13th century came late in the century and were less tranquil than perhaps expected from the royal inscriptions.

There is no indication for drastic changes in the size of the Assyrian possessions in the twelfth century. The Jezira remained the property of the Assyrian kings, but throughout the period its economic value seems to have decreased up to the point that the river Balikh was only used for royal hunts. The administrative structure of the Empire changed. It seems that the Assyrian kings started managing the Jezira less directly. The position of the Grand Vizier was abolished and we see the emergence of client-kings. These continued to pay tribute and remained under the authority of the Assyrian kings, but they were able to position themselves somewhat more independently. The system of governors remained functioning. Tighlat-pileser was one of the most prolific kings, but there is no indication that he had to re-conquer lost Assyrian territory besides the region of Katmuhu. He plundered and traded throughout an extremely big region, but there is no indication that these territories became true Assyrian possessions. For a short period the Assyrian territory might even have extended to the western shore of the Euphrates just below the Hittite city of Carchemish.

During his successor Aššur-bel-Kala the largest part of the Jezira was still in Assyrian hands. What changed is the type of campaigns undertaken by the Assyrian king. Aššur-bel-Kala was the first king since Šalmanassar I who campaigned inside the Jezira. This was probably due to a real trait, because it was during his reign that most Assyrian settlements, where we have information on, were abandoned.

The proceeding period is the second period of decline. In this case the decline does seem real, but this period remains a true 'dark-age'. This decline cannot in itself form the end of the Middle-Assyrian Empire. The Assyrian monarchs remained in power and the later kings did not perceive themselves as belonging to a different empire. The artificiality of the distinction between the Middle- and Neo-Assyrian periods is shown by the many suggestions for separating between the two. If an empire is seen as the territory belonging to the king, as I stated, then an empire can only come to an end if the kings disappear. No such thing happened. No new dynasty entered the scene, all Assyrian kings were family of the former kings<sup>16</sup>. One could look at cultural differences to define an empire, but can one define a cultural change important enough to start speaking of a new period? Cultural changes are constant and happen throughout the existence of an empire not only between succeeding ones. In my view there is no good ground to divide the Assyrian empire into a 'Middle' and a 'Late' period, except for the fact that in our historiography a Neo-Assyrian period has to commence.

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<sup>16</sup>The only exception being Ninurta-apil-Ekur, a member of the royal family, but the son of the Grand Vizier Ili-padda.

Unfortunately this division is too much part of the historiography of the period to be dropped. If we want to call part of this period Middle-Assyrian, we should at least extend it to the reign of Aššur-bel-Kala. This extends the Middle-Assyrian period 150 years beyond the Late Bronze Age until approximately 1050. The Middle-Assyrian Empire sees constant changes in its internal organisation, but its territory seems to have been remarkably constant from Šalmanassar I up to the reign of Aššur-bel-Kala.

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David Kertai  
 Seminar für Ur- und Frühgeschichte und Vorderasiatische Archäologie  
 Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg  
 Marstallhof 4  
 D-69117 Heidelberg  
 dkertai@yahoo.com

